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 (Post-Graduate Class of 2020)

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Ábhar / *Subject***:** EDF684

Léachtóir / Teagascóir:
*Lecturer / Tutor***:** Course co-ordinator (Bernadette Wrynn) & Supervisor (Fiona Nic
Fhionnlaoich)

Sprioclá / *Due date:* 25/09/2020

Teideal an tionscadail / *Assignment title***:** Self-Study Action Research Thesis (EDF684)

Líon na bhfocal / *Word Count:* 21,729 (including 'The Beginning of a Life-Changing
Moment', 'The End of a Life-Changing Moment and the Beginning of a Life-Changing
Practice' and all tables and graphs)

Líon leathanach / *Number of pages***:** 193

Aon ábhar eile sa tionscadal / *Any other material in the assignment***:**

Dearbhaím gur <u>mise amháin / mise mar bhall grúpa</u> (cuir ciorcal timpeall na rogha a bhaineann
leis an tionscadal thuas) a rinne an saothar seo. Aithním go soiléir aon chabhair a fuair mé ó aon
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THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND
MAYNOOTH

Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education

M.Ed. (Research in Practice)
2019 - 2020

How can I engage collaboratively with my pupils to enhance their enjoyment of Oral Irish?

Yvonne Helen Vanston

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

Date: September 2020

Supervised by: Fiona Nic Fhionnlaoich

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following people, without whom I would not have been able to complete this research. I am indebted to all of them.

I would especially like to acknowledge the tremendous support and guidance of my supervisor Fiona Nic Fhionnlaoich whose insight and knowledge was invaluable throughout the research process.

My two critical friends, validation group members and teaching colleagues for their constant support, encouragement and the provision of critical lenses into the research. The co-participants in this research – my pupils and their parents – have also been positively engaged, tolerant and collaborative.

Thank you to my wonderful parents Harry and Mary and of course my ever-supportive godmothers Ann and Helen for all the proof-reading, encouragement and for their belief in me.

Last of all, I wish to acknowledge the support shown by my partner Darren. He has been invaluable as a patient listener, editor, proof-reader, sounding board and above all has supported me through the 'swampy lowlands' (Schön, 1983: 42) of Self-Study Action Research.

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Declaration

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Abstract

Research is limited on the teaching of OI (especially in English-medium schools) at this time of curriculum change in Self-Study Action Research.

My research set out to investigate the gap in my knowledge and teaching of Oral Irish. I wanted to utilise more collaborative, child-centred and autonomous methods in order to enhance engagement, enjoyment and accountability in this subject. In order to achieve this I engaged my pupils in choosing topics to learn about in Oral Irish and enabled them to teach their peers and their parents as part of school and home work. I developed a website to help my pupils in their home learning and they were held accountable for this through the means of blogging their activities.

Before beginning this research, my values of collaboration, confidence and self-belief were not being lived in my practice. However, my approach has since been transformed from a didactic style and I am now living closer to these through the use of collaborative and autonomous teaching methods.

Data collation was qualitative in nature through various tools such as questionnaires, reflective journals, observations and website statics. The findings discovered that a collaborative Oral Irish approach to homework contributes to increased engagement from pupils, pupil choice allowed for increased enjoyment of Oral Irish, and autonomous teaching approaches to Oral Irish can foster accountability within pupils.

Through using my living standards of judgement (Whitehead, 2005), I can conclude that I improved my practice while helping increase pupil engagement in OI which enhanced their enjoyment of this within and outside of school. I generated my own 'living theory of education' (Whitehead, 1993) about OI teaching and learning within and outside of the classroom. Lastly, I lived closer to my values of collaboration, confidence and self-belief which boosted my own confidence and self-belief in my practice as well as enjoyment derived from my practice.

This research thesis is the story of how I got to the present moment, where I can confidently say that I have generated my own epistemology of practice and developed my claim to knowledge.

The Beginning of a Life-Changing Moment

Before beginning I would like to give you a background story as to why I chose this research as it is one close to my heart. This story follows one pupil's experiences of learning Irish in primary school and the impact this had on her transition to secondary school. Growing up this child loved all aspects of school, except the learning of Irish. She enjoyed the subject in the junior classes but as she progressed through school, and the language became primarily based on rote learning, she became more disengaged, was lacking confidence and prioritised other subjects over Irish. She then made the transition into secondary school where Irish became harder and the work load more challenging. This child felt uncomfortable and anxious in this honours class. Consequently, filled with self-doubt, she asked her secondary school teacher if she could drop down to ordinary level. The child had given up on her dreams of becoming a primary school teacher. This is a story that is told by many pupils across Ireland, it is not unique to this child and it provided the basis as to why I chose this research area.

Chapter 1 Introduction

This thesis examines one year's work of cyclical action and reflection in order to improve my teaching of Oral Irish (OI). In this chapter I begin by providing the research questions which underpin this study. I then provide a brief overview of the focus and aims along with a general outline of the study. Next, I contextualise and provide the potential contributions of my study. These areas are examined for their relevance to my own practice, my school and the wider educational community. Lastly, I provide an outline of the chapters to follow.

1.1. Research Questions

The main question that underpins this study is as follows - *How can I engage collaboratively with my pupils to enhance their enjoyment of Oral Irish?* Developed from this are the following sub-questions:

1. *How can I make Oral Irish homework more interesting for my pupils?*
2. *How can I encourage my pupils to use Oral Irish outside of school in a meaningful way?*
3. *How does a more engaging approach impact enjoyment in Oral Irish learning in the classroom?*

1.2 Focus and Aims of the Study

In this thesis I show how I scrutinised and evaluated my practice, through a Self-Study Action Research (SSAR) methodology. On a small scale, I established the optimum way to collaboratively engage my pupils in their learning of OI in order to enhance their enjoyment of it. I also immersed myself in prominent educational theory surrounding the fields of collaboration and partnerships, while examining the literature on autonomous teaching methods and other engaging methodologies for language learning. In writing this thesis, I adopted a critically reflective stance towards my practice which surrounds the SSAR paradigm.

The general aims of my study were:

- To improve my practice in OI by helping increase pupil engagement in order to enhance their enjoyment of the learning experience within and outside of school.

- To generate my own 'living theory of education' (Whitehead, 1993) about OI teaching and learning within and outside of the classroom.

- To live closer to my values of collaboration, confidence and self-belief.

My main living standards of judgement were:

- Accountability - To afford my pupils the opportunity to take ownership of their learning in order to make it more interesting

- Engagement - To nurture collaborative learning environments in order to provide meaningful learning experiences which encourage the use of OI outside of school.

- Enjoyment - To create more engaging activities for my pupils to enhance their enjoyment in OI learning.

As noted above, one of the main aims of this research was to live closer to my values. My educational values of collaboration, confidence and self-belief were deeply rooted in this research. I value collaboration because I want my pupils to learn the skills of working in partnership as a team in order to develop supportive environments founded upon respect and dialogue. Secondly, I value confidence, to enhance my pupils' resilience in overcoming obstacles in their learning and development. Thirdly, I value self-belief because I hope that by encouraging growth in pupils' confidence, they will not doubt themselves but will trust their own abilities in order to develop to their full potential. When I look back on my past teaching, I realised that I was merely a 'living contradiction' (Whitehead, 1989) regarding my values and practice. I thought I was living out my values in my daily practice, but in reality, I was doing the opposite by discouraging collaboration and using methodologies such as rote learning, which did not develop my pupils' confidence and self-belief. These values and concerns helped establish a set of critical living standards of judgement. This criteria is used throughout the research to ensure that I was living to my values in order to demonstrate research integrity.

1.3 Format of the Study

My study is divided into three main themes developed from the sub-questions –
engagement, enjoyment and accountability – and involves two main action-reflection
cycles. Initially, as part of cycle one, I set out to encourage collaboration between
myself, my pupils and their parents by engaging pupils in teaching their peers and
parents OI. My aim here was to expose my pupils to more meaningful OI experiences in
order to enhance their enjoyment of learning, and to encourage the use of OI outside of
school. I changed my practice by increasing engagement and enjoyment in my pupils'
class work and homework. This was achieved through heightened collaboration, pupil
autonomy, and technology which aided pupils in teaching their parents. This cycle took
place from the 13th of January 2020 to the 14th of February 2020.

After this cycle I reflected on the initial findings. Subsequently, I decided to
change my focus for the second research cycle (24th of February to 12th of March 2020).
Here I concentrated on pupils developing their own lessons in preparation for teaching
their peers and parents. Pupils researched the vocabulary for their chosen topics and
blogged frequently, describing their new learning and engagement. Upon further
reflection and using my living standards of judgement, I noticed my lack of attention to
a minority of pupils who continued to struggle with OI in class and at home. Thus, I
focused on differentiation within the teaching and learning of OI. Pupils began
differentiating their homework and differentiated the teaching of their parents so that all
were comfortable within their learning and confident in their abilities. As noted in

social cognitive theory, self-confidence is essential for pupils' motivations to achieve (Zimmerman, 2000; Bandura, 2001).

1.4 Contextualisation and Potential Contribution of the Study

1.4.1 Personal Background

As a child, I was provided with support that taught me the importance of hard-work and self-belief. During my eight years of primary school, I recall enjoying learning, working hard and aspiring to become a primary school teacher. However, somewhere along the way I lost my sense of self-belief in, and enjoyment of, using the Irish language.

Transitioning into secondary school my love of learning grew. However, one area that caused anxiety and concern, was my ability in the Irish language. I despised the fact that I was not getting the top grades in Irish and therefore, felt little motivation to try and improve the situation in which I found myself. I distinctly remember lacking confidence and motivation to collaborate with my peers during group work for fear that they would notice my lack of Irish communication skills. Putting my fears aside, I persevered in my learning of Irish throughout secondary school and my dreams of becoming a primary school teacher came true.

I have now been a primary school teacher for over four years. Although initially daunted by the prospect of teaching Irish, I once again grew to love teaching the subject and wanted my pupils to have this same love for speaking the language.

1.4.2 Potential Contribution to My Practice

Before commencing this research I was concerned that my didactic teaching was negatively affecting my pupils' engagement and enjoyment of OI. When it came to other subjects I used fun and innovative methodologies to enhance pupils' enjoyment of learning. However, when it came to OI, I reverted back to the way I was taught, enacting an "apprenticeship of observation" (Lortie, 1975: 61). I was focusing on a set of tried and tested strategies (Tomlinson, 1999), using rote learning and textbooks in times when I felt indecisive or uncertain in how to teach OI. Reflecting on this, I now realise I was using this practice in order to gain the maximum results of achievement possible, regardless of the cost this had on pupil enjoyment.

When afforded the opportunity to pilot the Primary Language Curriculum - PLC (DES2, 2019), I took it as an opportunity to improve my teaching of OI. I developed resources for the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) toolkit, and examined areas of collaboration and student autonomy as methodologies for teaching oral English. I then used a transfer of skills method (Ó Duibhir & Cummins, 2012) to allow my pupils use their new skills in OI. The positive evaluations of pupils, the NCCA and colleagues, furthered my interest in teaching OI as I discovered the benefits of increased collaboration and autonomy in learning.

Following this, I engaged with SSAR which in turn provided many potential contributions to my practice. Firstly, the research could allow for new levels of understanding my pupils' capabilities in OI and the level of ownership they took. Secondly, rich discussions and reflective journaling had the potential to provide

unexpected outcomes regarding pupils' views on OI. Furthermore, collaboration between my pupils, their parents and me provided space to nurture and develop educational partnerships. Thus, by engaging in this research I was enacting change in my practice. Throughout this dissertation these claims will be addressed with evidence using criteria set from my standards of judgement.

1.4.3 Potential Contribution to My Workplace

The research was based in a single-sex National School that is located in an urban area. Pupils came from a range of diverse backgrounds and this brought about a rich culmination of cultures and opportunities for learning. I was a mainstream sixth-class teacher of 27 pupils at the time of research.

     The school's recent main focus was to improve the teaching and learning of oral language in both English and Irish. As part of the School Improvement Plan, information was gathered on the views of oral language learning in school and at home. In response to this plan, a team of colleagues and I piloted the PLC (DES2, 2019) and developed resources for this. Simultaneously, the school's homework policy was under revision with the consensus in favour of activities which promoted partnerships and communication. I hope that the experience gained from this research and the changes made to my practice (as interrogated throughout this thesis) will benefit the school in developing these plans.

1.4.4 Potential Contribution to the Wider Educational Community

The policy context which surrounded this study lies in the move from the 1999 curriculum (DES1b) to the implementation of the PLC (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2019). Similar in nature, both curricula have a main focus on communication with the exception that the new curriculum is based on an integrated approach to language learning. Many aims of the PLC (DES2, 2019) were underpinned in my research and centred on the communicative element of language learning. Addressing the aims in a practical, engaging and meaningful way, provided a framework for my pupils to communicate in OI within and outside of school. Through sharing this research with other teachers, the initiative could potentially benefit them in implementing the PLC (DES2, 2019).

1.5 Chapter Outlines

In *Chapter One* the main focus of my SSAR and the rationale for undertaking it was presented. Illustrated was the background and relevance of this work to my own practice and various other contexts.

Chapter Two provides definitions for collaboration, partnerships and OI. It contextualises the theory which underpins my SSAR by providing a background of the Irish language as examined through the changes to curriculum and methodologies. A picture is painted of the attitudes of teachers', pupils' and parents' in relation to the

language. Lastly, a benchmark is then set through examining minority language teaching abroad as this promotes the argument for more confidence boosting, autonomous and child-centred approaches in learning.

Chapter Three looks at the methodology of SSAR and the rationale as to why I chose to complete a SSAR project. Next, a description of the research design and data collection methods are presented. A case for the use of thematic analysis is put forward before concluding with a consideration of validity, reliability and ethics in the research.

Chapter Four discusses the findings in the research carried out. The messiness of data collection during school closures is acknowledged and an outline is provided for how the research would have been executed had the opportunity for data collection not been suspended. Lastly, goals for future practice are highlighted and evolving values analysed.

In *Chapter Five* conclusions and recommendations are offered, and learning outcomes for pupils and myself are proposed. The significance of SSAR for my practice, my school and the wider educational community is illustrated. Further limitations of the research are described, before providing recommendations and ways in which I hope to disseminate my work.

1.6 Conclusion

This chapter briefly describes the context, rationale and focus of my study. It also outlines the potential contributions that this study may have on my own and others'

practices. The next chapter will explore the research questions in more detail by

defining the key concepts and contextualising them in the literature.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

Tír gan teanga, tír gan anam

(A nation without a language is a nation without a soul)

2.1. Introduction

The literature review begins by defining collaboration, partnerships and meaningful OI use within this study. The Irish language will then be contextualised. Next, curriculum and methodological changes will be investigated along with attitudes towards the language and the barriers to acquisition. The teaching of minority languages in other countries will then provide examples of best practice for the Irish context.

2.2 Definitions and Justifications

2.2.1 Defining and Justifying Collaboration

One of the fundamental criticisms of literature regarding collaboration was that it suffered from a lack of conceptual clarity (Little, 1990). Within the plethora of definitions, there were several components that described the nature of collaboration – a

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shared responsibility and goal, joint work, and interdependence (Little, 1990; Cook & Friend, 1991; Welch & Sheridan, 1995), equality (Cook & Friend, 1991; Welch & Sheridan, 1995) and that it is voluntary in nature (Cook & Friend, 1991). Although there was little agreement on one definition for collaboration in the literature, the above key components allowed me to develop my understanding of the term within my context. In this research, collaboration took the form of inclusive, nurturing partnerships between the teacher, pupils and parents working together as equals to help pupils succeed in their OI learning. Pupils were the focus of this form of collaboration and led interactions within their environments. When pupils work together in environments that encourage mutual respect, they can support one another in their learning, allowing them to feel confident to express themselves and thus, allowing creativity to flow (Figueiredo, 2008; Largo, 2017; Sousa, et al., 2019). Collaboration can create opportunities for students to develop ideas and new learning (Figueiredo, 2015; Moriarty, 2017).

2.2.2 Defining and Justifying Partnerships

Many varying, and sometimes conflicting definitions and terminology exist in literature such as 'parental involvement', 'parental engagement' and 'partnerships' (Kavanagh 2013; Kavanagh & Hickey, 2013; Harris & Robinson, 2016; O'Toole et al., 2019). I decided to use the term 'partnerships' instead of involvement and engagement, as partnerships in education emphasise the agency of the school, family and community, in children's learning (Epstein & Sheldon, 2016). In order to acknowledge the power

relations at play between pupils, parents and myself, I utilised partnerships built upon

equality and inclusivity hoping to increase the collaboration, engagement and

enjoyment of language learning for my pupils.

Theoretical Stance - Bioecological Systems Theory

Nestled within the Bioecological Systems Model of Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006),

partnerships form the foundation of learning. Represented as a set of concentric circles

with the child at the centre, this framework prioritises the importance of contextual,

bioecological and temporal factors in children's learning.
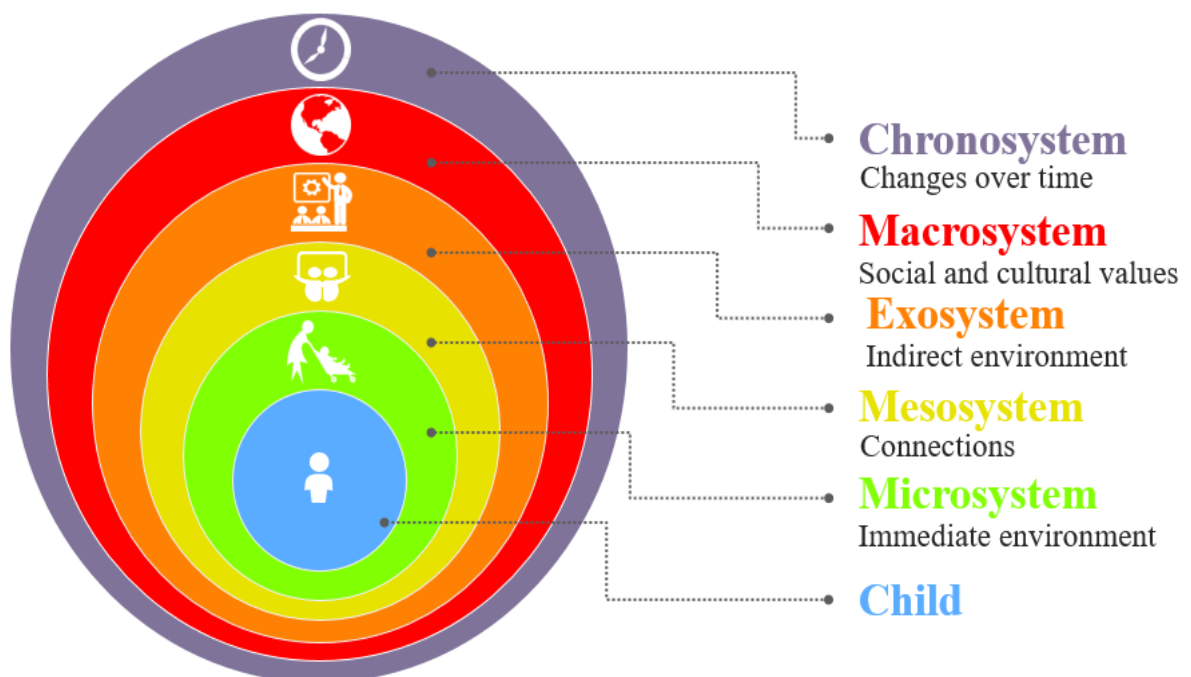
Figure 2.1 Bioecological Systems Model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979)

Closest to the child, the microsystem emerges as the interactions and relations between the child and their immediate environments (Berk, 2000). Leading on from this, the mesosystem reveals itself as the interconnections between these environments of home, school and community (Higgins, 2008). Subsequently, the exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem emerge as highlighted in Figure 2.1. In this study, I focused on the micro and mesosystems which were entwined in partnerships between pupils, their peers, parents and I. As described by Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006), partnerships should not be limited to dyadic interactions but should develop at different levels of the ecological environment, the microsystem, the exosystem and the mesosystem. This points to the central role of relationships between children and their parents, as well as pupils and their teachers (O'Toole, 2017) in children's learning and development. Thus, a core function of schools needs to be the promotion of language learning within the home, school and community environments.

Language Learning Partnerships

Partnerships between pupils and parents, pupils and teachers and indeed pupils and their peers can have many benefits for language learning. Research has indicated that parental partnerships are a fundamental element of effective education for all children (Epstein, 2001; Hornby 2000, Harris & Goodall, 2008; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Wilder, 2014). One area of research that has not been sufficiently explored is parental partnerships in the learning of Irish as a second language. A reason behind this most likely relates to parental partnerships centring on pupils learning Irish within Irish

speaking communities (Nic Fhlannchadha & Hickey, 2019). Therefore, there is a need to examine studies of minority language acquisition abroad.

Fortunately, there are various studies on minority language acquisition that can be drawn upon. Collaboration and the nurturing of partnerships encourage engagement in language learning (Gathercole & Thomas, 2009; Ciriza, 2019) and improve parent and teacher morale and relationships (Ciriza, 2019). In Wales, it was reported that regardless of home language background in bilingual communities, pupils developed an equivalent, mature command of English, but their command of Welsh was directly associated with the level of Welsh spoken at home and at school (Gathercole & Thomas, 2009). Additionally, a study on the Basque language indicated that when lower-proficiency parents were empowered to adopt child-led interactions, effective language learning was nurtured in the home environment (Ciriza, 2019). While these studies are not directly linked to OI learning in my context, both provided the reasoning as to why the nurturing of child-led collaboration and partnerships was beneficial for my pupils' language learning.

Nevertheless, some barriers exist to parental partnerships in the language learning context. As highlighted by Goodall (2018), many schools perceive parental partnerships as elusive where struggles for power come into play. She paints a picture of an oppressive historical school system, the aforementioned 'banking concept of education' (Freire, 1970) and exemplifies a teacher of domination, an authoritarian figure - all knowing and powerful. Yet, her outdated views on modern parental partnerships leave room for criticism. In today's society schools make a conscious effort to use language accessible to all (Kavanagh & Hickey, 2013) instead of the incomprehensible jargon noted by Pearson (2014).

Furthermore, research on partnerships between pupils and teachers and pupils and their peers' in minority language learning contexts has centred on collaborative environments where pupils are treated as equal partners. In these environments pupils can actively partake by sharing experiences and taking on roles in their learning (Mitnik et al., 2009). In the climate of increased distance learning, one thing was clear, there was a shift of power and expertise towards pupils' and home environments during school closures (Burke & Dempsey, 2020; Xia, 2020) and it is hoped that these partnerships will endure into the unpredictable future.

2.2.3 Defining Meaningful Oral Irish

At its most basic level, oral language is communication between two or more people and involves speaking and listening. Oral Language is a structured medium of communication in which each individual child is enabled to evaluate, describe and control their experience. It is the primary way in which children locate themselves in the world, and express themselves with it and within it culturally (Cregan, 1998, cited in Archer et al., 2012). Thus, for this thesis my understanding of meaningful OI was directly related to oral language.

When defining meaningful use of OI in this study it must be acknowledged that this meaning was of course contrived, confined and controlled. The topics of discussion were focused, the tasks were part of structured homework and the use of OI did not happen organically and naturally. Instead they were organised and implemented by the researcher. However, the learning and use of OI in this study took a step towards being

more meaningful in that topics were chosen by pupils and the emphasis on conversations at home encouraged use outside of school.

2.3. Background of the Irish Language

Since its establishment in 1922, Ireland has remained a bilingual state in both an official and constitutional sense. Recognised in the Republic of Ireland as the first official language, the newly independent state aimed to maintain Irish as the main language of the Gaeltacht, and to revive it as a general language elsewhere (Walsh, 2016). Within the revitalisation efforts, new initiatives were established to promote OI in schools. These included the teaching of infant classes through the medium of Irish (Irish National Teachers' Organisation, 1941; Coolahan, 1981) and the teaching of Irish as a compulsory second language subject to pupils (Walsh, 2016). Longstanding and substantial state support may have helped encourage and maintain the use of OI (Hickey & Stenson, 2016) in schools and had some levels of success in its efforts with the development of the PLC (NCCA, 2019). Nonetheless, the Central Statistics Office (CSO, 2016) figures painted a different picture regarding the extent to which Irish was spoken outside the education system.

A major criticism of these language policies was the majority focused on school-based revitalisation of OI rather than pursuing meaningful domains outside of education. The CSO (2016) found that almost one third of 10 to 19 year olds stated that they could not speak Irish while over one in four Irish speakers (n=421,274) in the country (n=1,760,000) said that they never used Irish. Many studies concurred with

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these findings stressing that schools perhaps often bear the entire burden of language revitalisation (Ó Laoire & Harris, 2006; Harris, 2007, cited in Conrick & Howard, 2007) and that low levels of motivation for learning and using OI among pupils was linked to the dearth of opportunities to use of OI outside of the education system (Harris et al., 2006; Ó Giollagáin & Mac Donnacha, 2008, cited in Nic Pháidín and Ó Cearnaigh, 2008; Department of Education and Skills – DES2, 2015; Ó Giollagáin & Charlton, 2015). While some of these studies focused on immersion education, they are noteworthy for my study as the lack of meaningful use of Irish outside education can be even more of a challenge when promoting OI outside of English-medium schools.

Therefore, there is a need to progress beyond Irish as a mere 'school-based subject' to the creation of spaces for meaningful interaction outside of schools. In response to this focus on Irish in the education system, a 20-Year Irish Language Strategy (Government of Ireland, 2010) was published with the aims of transferring this burden from the school alone to the wider community. Although an action plan was put in place with annual reporting built in, recent findings suggested that less of an impact was made in the way of language revival outside Gaeltacht and communities than was originally forecast (Rodrigues & Cuffe, 2017). Teachers are committed to the role they play in promoting Irish (Dunne, 2019), however they need to be given the means and support with which to do this (Moriarty, 2017).

2.4 Changes to Curriculum and Methodologies

Strongly communicative in nature, the Primary School Curriculum (Department of Education and Science – DES1, 1999b) was reported to have led to an increase in pupils' enjoyment of Irish lessons (NCCA, 2008). Yet, these findings were generalised as they related to the teaching methodologies used and integration of subjects rather than the curriculum content in Irish itself which may have positively impacted the results. Almost half of the teacher responses in this research found that pupil's enjoyment and interest in Irish were attributed to the methodologies and resources used to teach Irish such as drama and games (NCCA, 2008). In contrast, the inspectorate (DES1, 2007) reported a significant reliance on textbooks with regard to teaching and planning for Irish lessons in this curriculum and highlighted the negative effects this had on teachers' practice and pupils' learning. This opinion was reiterated by teachers who felt that due to curriculum overload and difficulty navigating the curriculum, their practice and planning had become primarily text-book based and was affecting their pupils' enjoyment of the language (NCCA, 2008).

There has been a move beyond the division of languages into categories in varying contexts (Blackledge & Creese, 2010; Baker, 2011) towards translanguaging or use of languages as an integrated communication system in order to boost confidence in language use (Auer, 2010; Gorter, 2015; Moriarty, 2017). This move is mirrored in the PLC (DES2, 2019) where English and Irish are now integrated in the learning process. In a move away from textbooks, teachers in the United States drew upon pupils' existing knowledge of language learning in other languages to provide meaningful

opportunities for learning (García & Kleifgen, 2010). The establishment of meaningful contexts for the use of OI outside of school still remains a major struggle within the education system (Devitt et al., 2016). Moreover, little attention has been paid to partnerships in children's learning of OI throughout the PLC (DES2, 2019) as a way of encouraging language use outside school. Although engagement in consultation with the public was incorporated into the development of this curriculum, parents felt their voices remain largely under-represented in consultation groups (O'Toole et al., 2019).

2.5 Attitudes towards Irish

2.5.1 Teachers' Attitudes

There are some inconsistencies between teachers' attitudes towards Irish and its teaching. Reports indicate that primary teachers' and pre-service teachers' attitudes are primarily positive and this plays a vital role in promoting the language among pupils (Harris et al., 2006; Dunne, 2019). On the surface, this positivity seems promising and given that one of the key contributing factors in pupils' motivation to learn a language is the enthusiasm of their teachers (Dörnyei, 2005), these outlooks are central to encouraging language revival. Despite this, satisfaction derived from the teaching of Irish in English-medium schools portrays a differing outlook. Enjoyment derived from teaching Irish fell significantly from 80.3% in 1985 to 55.4% in 2002, while 15.6% of teachers felt disappointment or great disappointment with the teaching of Irish (Harris

et al., 2006). Many teachers reported that their pupils were more positively disposed to learning foreign languages due to lessons focusing on conversations which had a use outside of school (Coady, 2001). This further highlights the lack of meaningful environments for OI use outside of the education system for both teachers and pupils.

Various findings suggest discontent in teaching Irish may be related to a teacher's perceived lack of proficiency in OI with 25% of 6th grade teachers in English-medium schools classing themselves as weak second language users (Harris et al., 2006). Likewise, the confidence teachers have in using and speaking the language can have a major impact on their disposition towards teaching Irish (Dunne, 2019) along with, the lack of quality, age-appropriate resources with which to teach (NCCA, 2008). It is well established that teachers play a crucial role in establishing and maintaining pupils' motivation to learn a language (Harris, 2007; Dörnyei, 2018). Therefore, teachers' attitudes in relation to the teaching of Irish needs addressing.

2.5.2 Pupils' Attitudes

Past reports show that pupils can be both negatively and positively disposed towards the Irish language when examined in isolation. It is no surprise that pupils' presented negative attitudes towards Irish in comparison to other subjects (NCCA, 2008). Although in the minority, it is significant that a substantial amount of pupils expressed anxiety and a lack of confidence in speaking Irish in class while some pupils reported having little or no support and encouragement from parents with Irish homework (Harris et al., 2006). Pupils viewed Irish lessons and materials as boring, old-fashioned

and repetitious and desired more modern, fun and realistic approaches with a greater emphasis on conversations and games (Harris et al, 2006). While these results are noteworthy, the study of Harris et al. (2006) is not longitudinal due to residing with a 6th grade cohort rather than following them as they developed and progressed through primary school. Another limitation to the study is that the data is outdated and came before the Primary School Curriculum (DES1, 1999b) in Irish was fully implemented.

In contrast, a more recent finding provided a counter-argument by portraying primarily positive views of pupils' learning Irish. Interestingly, the Growing Up in Ireland longitudinal study found that 74% of pupils were positively disposed towards the learning of Irish with pupils stating that they either sometimes or always enjoyed Irish (McCoy et al., 2012). This result may indicate that motivation for Irish has grown since the introduction of the 1999 curriculum (DES1a), despite a declining language proficiency (Harris et al., 2006). Similarly, over 40% of children regarded the language as an identifying feature of being Irish (Waldron & Pike, 2006). As illustrated by the words of a child - "[it] means that you can learn the Irish language and speak English" (Waldron & Pike, 2006: 237). It is not surprising that some children portrayed uncertainty towards the relevance of learning the language and its meaningful use outside of the education system.

2.5.3 Parents' Attitudes

As with teachers' attitudes, a dissimilarity must be emphasised between attitudes towards Irish and attitudes towards using Irish. The transmission of minority languages

from parents to their children can be dependent upon the resources available, and parents' attitudes towards that language (Ó hIfearnáin, 2013; Armstrong, 2014). While many parents showed positive dispositions towards the learning of Irish (Harris et al., 2006; Nic Fhlannchadha & Hickey, 2019), numerous parents also perceived themselves as not having the ability to speak Irish adequately to their child (Harris et al., 2006). Consequently due to a lack of confidence, a substantial percentage of parents (75.4%) in English-medium schools reported rarely, if ever, speaking Irish to their children (Harris et al., 2006). Research on language ideologies has found similar disparities between parents' positive stances towards minority language use and their daily interactions with their children in this language (Horner, 2007; Kirsch, 2012; Ciriza, 2019). In order to promote the use of OI among parents and pupils, a shift in thinking must occur by restoring confidence and motivation within learners and their parents to allow them enjoy and use the language in meaningful ways outside school. While there is a gap in recent knowledge on the promotion of OI and more current methodologies for the teaching of OI, there is ample research abroad. In order to encourage the enjoyment and use of OI in a meaningful way outside of school we must look to these studies.

2.6 Teaching of Minority Languages

2.6.1 Boosting Confidence and Self-Belief

While the teaching of a language through the medium of that language is promoted in the instruction of minority languages, the tolerance of errors produced by learners to promote confidence and self-belief must also be promoted (Yule, 2014). A language-learning environment that provides support and encouragement to try to use whatever second language skills a pupil has, as opposed to one that fixates on the errors, corrections and a failure to be perfectly accurate, can motivate learners and increase their confidence (Yule, 2014). As promoted in the Primary School Curriculum (DES1, 1999b) when pupils are confident in their language learning their engagement and enjoyment can increase (Noels et al., 1996), along with their motivation and self-confidence (Dörnyei and Skehan, 2003). Correspondingly, Hummel (2013) conducted a small-scale study on French native-speaking students who participated in a community service-learning project in an English-speaking minority community. The results from this study indicated that active community involvement led to greater linguistic self-confidence and self-belief in their second language skills. Thus, in my research I endeavoured to boost Pupils' confidence and self-belief, in order to increase engagement and enjoyment in OI.

2.6.2 Technology

In line with Froebelian principles of creativity, play, social relations, discovery and inquiry (Froebel, 1887, cited in Bruce, 2012), many successful methodologies of minority language teaching exist and we have much to learn from these in our Irish context. Methodologies promoting a playful and creative use of minority language learning in collaborative contexts can indeed motivate and engage pupils in their language learning (Moriarty, 2017). The use of technology is fast becoming a widely used tool in the area of language learning that can provide learners with the autonomy to learn a language outside of the classroom (Lai, 2017). While some research provides convincing arguments for the use of technology to promote language learning outside of educational settings (Lai, 2017: Panagiotidis et al., 2018: Henry & Lamb, 2020), a dearth of concrete practical examples of successful implementation of technology is evident in this literature. It is of course important not to lose sight of the possible negative influences attached to technology use in language learning – such as communication hesitations and disparities in the competence levels of pupils interacting together (Kern 2014; White et al., 2016), and a lack of technical abilities (Lee et al., 2018) – but it is clear that technology can have positive effects on motivation for minority language learning outside of educational settings. Thus, in my study technology is used as a tool to aid the teaching and learning of OI at home to motivate pupils and encourage engagement with homework.

2.6.3 Autonomous Teaching Methods

Autonomous teaching methods can motivate and engage pupils in their language learning once employed in a collaborative, supporting environment (Dam, 2011). Learner autonomy is the product of interactive, collaborative processes which depend heavily on the teacher's expertise to help shape and lead this (Little, 2003). It is a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making and independent action in collaboration with others (Fenner, 2006). As noted by Dam (2011), freedom of choice in language learning can allow pupils accept responsibility for their learning, gain confidence in social forms of learning and develop autonomy in their life-long learning.

Autonomous teaching methods can have various benefits in the language learning classroom. Not only do learners become more skilful in their language learning but it teaches them how to learn (Sifakis, et. al, 2006), it develops positive attitudes towards co-operation and initiative-taking (Sifakis, et al., 2006), enhances problem-solving skills (Fenner, 2006), and pupils become co-creators of knowledge (Sifakis, et al., 2006). While Yagcioglu (2015), examined multiple approaches on learner autonomy in her language lessons with older students, her study provided benefits of autonomous teaching methods applicable to this study – increased student positivity, enthusiasm and engagement in language learning and increased accountability and proficiency. Autonomy is central to minority language learning and language learner autonomy. It involves the teacher giving their pupils choice in their learning. However, choice in learning must be meaningful and not directed by textbooks or other learning programmes as can be the case in many schools (Fenner, 2006). Likewise, the amount

of choice given to pupils' in their language learning must be acknowledged along with the amount of scaffolding required to enable pupils to make qualified choices in their learning if these methods are to be successful. An autonomous teaching approach can be time-consuming to establish (Fenner, 2006), however, the benefits to language learning may outweigh these initial challenges.

2.6.4 Child-Centred Learning

Methodologies which are child-centred can take into account the holistic development of the child and are essential both for effective learning and for establishing a positive attitude towards the new language (Tinsley & Comfort, 2012). Pupils' environments provide many opportunities for language learning. Child-centred pedagogies have been reported to improve some pupils' language proficiency in reading and writing in Ugandan schools (Akello et al., 2015). While not directly relating to oral language, the results provided some positive findings for a child-centred approach to language learning in my context while stressing the importance of promoting child interactions and participation for learning success. Likewise, in the Welsh context, child-centred approaches to learning, it seems, led to increased language development and creativity in the minority language (Power et al., 2018). Although this study centred on younger children and the introduction of a new child-centred curriculum in Wales, it provided results that showed favourable outcomes in language learning relating to this research context. Therefore, it was hoped that by employing more child-centred approaches to my teaching, pupil engagement and enjoyment would increase.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter aimed to address the research questions within the literature. Through reviewing the literature on collaboration and partnerships it was found that enjoyment, engagement, confidence, self-belief, creativity and the use of minority languages outside of school increased. Next, the background of the Irish language was provided to contextualise my research in this time of curricular change. Attitudes towards Irish were also examined to address the issues and development in OI teaching and learning, and this further contextualised my study. Then, minority language contexts provided an example of best practice for my teaching where boosting confidence and self-belief led to increased motivation, engagement and enjoyment. Equally, the use of technology in these contexts was shown to increase motivation and engagement in homework, while autonomous and child-centred approaches allowed pupils take ownership of learning, gain confidence and helped establish positive attitudes towards the language. The next chapter will describe the intervention, research paradigm and data collection involved in this study.

Chapter 3 Research Methodology

Is fearr Gaeilge bhriste, ná Béarla cliste (Broken Irish is better than clever English)

3.1 Introduction

My SSAR project set out to improve my teaching of OI in order to enhance pupils'

enjoyment of learning and using the language. Taking into account my values of

confidence, self-belief and collaboration, the SSAR paradigm enabled me to address the

fundamental concerns that I had regarding my practice as discussed. Firstly, I hoped

that taking action to change my teaching of OI would motivate my pupils in their own

learning and enjoyment of the language. Therefore, I thought that a SSAR methodology

which is committed to improving education through a change in one's practice would

facilitate this. Secondly, as aforementioned, I hoped to resolve the apparent

contradictions between my aspirations of how I felt I should teach and the lived reality

of my practice.

In this chapter I will outline the SSAR paradigm used in my research and justify

why I chose to complete an Action Research (AR) Masters. I will then explain the

research design and interventions for both cycles one and two of my research. Next, I

will outline the data collection methods used and the ways in which I analysed the data.

Finally, I will reflect on the ethical considerations when engaging in SSAR.

3.2 Research Paradigm

Before I outline my SSAR methodology, it is import that I justify why I chose to engage with an AR-based Masters. Regarded as a "living theory" (Whitehead, 1989), AR is drawn from lived experiences of the researcher and focuses on the researcher improving some aspect of their practice. As described by Bassey (1990:20), research "*entails systematic, critical and self-critical enquiry which aims to contribute to the advancement of knowledge*". My undergraduate dissertation required the completion of desk-based research which gave little room for engagement or the enactment of change. Thus, when choosing a Master's programme, freedom, full researcher engagement and the ability to enact change were my main requirements and a SSAR methodology was the perfect fit.

3.2.1 Self-Study Action Research Paradigm

Established out of the profound social changes that followed World War Two, AR has emerged as a valued methodology for research today. In the promotion of educational emancipation, Stenhouse (1975) called on teachers to critically assess their situation while taking on an active role in the process of research. Strongly aligned with my value of collaboration, a SSAR (Loughran, 2007; Pine 2009; Samaras 2010) methodology allowed me to examine my teaching practices through reflection and collaboration with others.

Interwoven within my values of collaboration, self-belief and confidence, a SSAR approach inspired the co-creation of knowledge for both my co-participants (pupils and parents) and I. This co-participation held the key to transformative possibilities within learning for all participants, and this is why I saw its value within my research. As highlighted by McNiff (1988:4), it is "research with, rather than research on" and this displays the collaborative nature in which I was able to share my enquiry with pupils.

An explicit goal of SSAR is to initiate continual professional development while possibly enacting change for others in the future. As highlighted in Figure 3.1 below, SSAR is a cyclical process involving cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting.
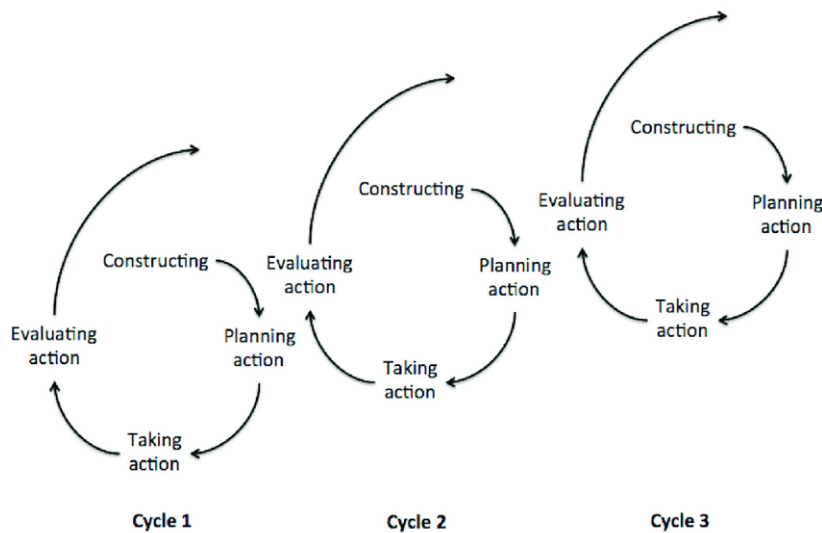
Figure 3.1 Action Research Cycles (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010:10)

Presented as an evolutionary process, SSAR is a form of continuous reflecting on and analysis of our own practice with a view to enhancing it (Mellor, 1998, Roche, 2007,

McNiff, 2013). To begin, I pinpointed the area I wanted to improve in my teaching of OI which was to use more collaborative approaches in order to increase pupils' engagement and enjoyment of their learning. I then created a plan to utilise more autonomous teaching methods in order to encourage this, both in school and at home. Next, my pupils and I planned the action which was to engage them in teaching their peers in class and their parents as part of homework. Following this, we took action by engaging with our plans. Lastly, we collated and analysed the data, reviewing the success levels of our actions. This evaluation developed into the second cycle where a focus on a differentiated practice to teaching OI was employed. SSAR provided me with a vehicle in which to evaluate my practice in the light of my values.

3.2.2 Limitations of the Paradigm

Although within a revival in education (Burns & Edwards, 2014), SSAR has evolved and is presently evolving through turbulent times and has received some criticism (Foster,1999; Hiebert et al., 2002). Controversially, Hiebert et al. (2002) noted that teachers were regarded as incompetent in the area of SSAR and could not therefore, engage in such a transformative process. Foster (1999) reported that teacher AR was littered with insufficient evidence that provided unconvincing causal claims. Contrastingly, Clayton et al. (2008), found that scientific research, can be favoured over AR due to its quantifiable reliability. In contrast, many teachers felt that it was their professional belief that acted as a catalyst for critical reflection and the generation of theory within learning communities which contributed to the knowledge base of the profession (Glenn et al., 2017). This is my view and the reason why I chose SSAR as

my method of inquiry. It is also essential that practitioners incorporate external perspectives into the process to obtain full benefits (McNiff, 2013). For this reason, I made myself the focus of study while I regarded my pupils and their parents as co-participants.

3.2.3 My Value Systems

The values that underpinned my AR methodology were mirrored by those that underpin my work as a teacher. I sought to improve my educational practice and the quality of my teaching in OI to afford my pupils opportunities for increased collaboration, engagement, autonomy and accountability within their learning to enhance their enjoyment. My values of collaboration, confidence and self-belief in learning were maintained throughout this project by positioning my practice at the heart of my inquiry. This was executed in partnership with my co-participants and colleagues in order to improve my pupils' educational experiences. I valued my co-participants and colleagues within this research and I therefore afforded them the respect and equality they were entitled to.

3.3 Research Design

3.3.1 Research Site

The research took place in my mainstream classroom with 24 sixth class pupils. There was one English as an Additional Language (EAL) pupil in this class. With this child and their parents, I ensured full understanding of the research through oral explanations and examples.

3.3.2 Research Participants

As previously acknowledged, it was essential that my values were mirrored within my methodology. My objective was to fully include all co-participants within the research as co-constructors of knowledge and afford my pupils the opportunity to take ownership of their learning. This was in line with McKernan (1991) who emphasised the importance of including practitioners, participants and the researchers themselves in all phases of the inquiry. I sought to conduct my research in a collaborative environment where partnerships were nurtured and valued, similar to the theorists Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) and McNiff (2013, 2017) who regarded collaboration as an essential feature of practitioner-based AR. Parents participated in the research by acting as teaching and learning partners to support their children's learning. They assisted by providing support with homework activities.

The principal and assistant principal of the school acted as my critical friends, both whom I met regularly to critically discuss, interrogate and validate my claim to knowledge. My critical friends were also part of my validation group. These eight members consisted of colleagues who expressed an interest in my study and who joined the group voluntarily. This group gathered a few times a month to provide critical feedback on various aspects of my research and critique my claim to knowledge. Although school closures suspended the collection of data during cycle two, my validation group members remained in contact via email and provided much needed interrogation of my findings.

3.3.3 Description of Intervention

Once all permissions and access were granted and my critical friends and validation group in place, I planned my research. Firstly, I held a meeting with my critical friends and then distributed baseline questionnaires to co-participants. I then held my first validation group meeting which provided critical feedback and advice on gathering data from co-participants.

Following this, I presented my SSAR project to my pupils, allowing time for critical feedback. We had constructive and honest conversations around my practice of OI and pupils' views on their learning of OI in school and at home.

From numerous discussions with pupils surrounding choice and freedom in their learning, I decided to utilise more autonomous teaching methods in their OI class and home work. We decided, that each pupil would be accountable for their learning at home and that they would take ownership of this. We began by brainstorming ideas and

topics that pupils would like to focus on for OI such as their Confirmation and school musical production. Once we had our themes in place, we formed word banks of vocabulary surrounding these topics as a class. It is worth noting that all pupils engaged with the research interventions but data was only collected from those who gave explicit ethical consent for it to be used. Drawing on research from Kemmis and McTaggart (1990) who highlighted the importance of the spiral nature of engaging with this methodology, I decided to include two research cycles to allow for a change in practice and further reflection.

3.3.4 Action Research Cycle One

Using an adapted Gradual Release of Responsibility Model (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983) as part of my practice, we began the intervention (See Figure 3.2). The model allowed my pupils to become comfortable with their OI learning before teaching their peers and bringing this learning home to teach their parents. Firstly, I used focused instruction. This involved explicitly teaching pupils the vocabulary and conversation starters they needed to interact with others using a PowerPoint with visuals as a tool. We played whole-class games such as 'describe it' and 'word tennis' to further instil learning. We then progressed onto guided instruction where pupils practised and modelled their conversations in whole-class settings. Next, we focused on collaborative learning where more autonomous teaching methods were used to allow pupils teach their peers the new vocabulary and conversation starters using the PowerPoint for guidance. Lastly, I increased the amount of autonomy I was giving pupils, by getting them to teach their parents this new learning as part of their homework. They replicated

the steps used in class by firstly teaching the vocabulary, progressing onto conversation starters, playing games to reinforce learning and then holding conversations with their parents.

Teacher Responsibility

	Teacher does 'it'
Focused Instruction	
Guided Instruction	Teacher and pupil do 'it'
Collaborative Learning	Pupils do 'it' together
Independent Learning	Pupils bring their learning home and do 'it' with parents

Pupil Responsibility
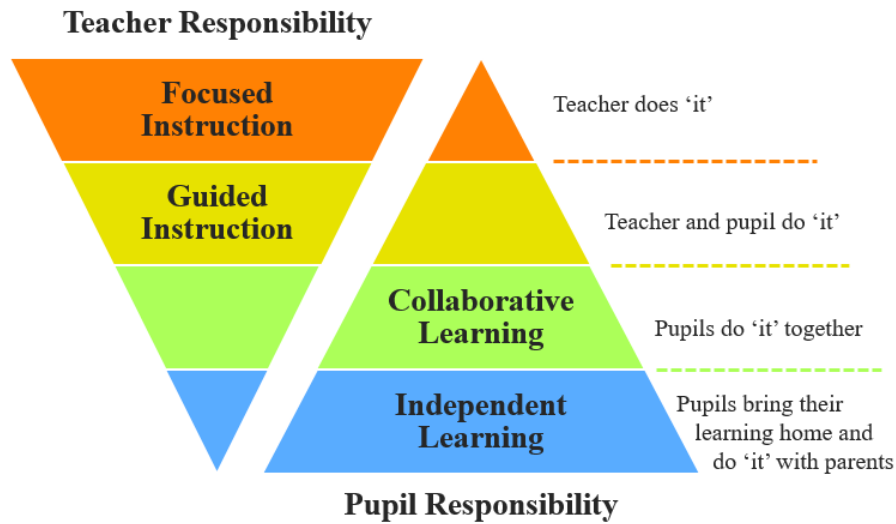
Figure 3.2 Adapted Gradual Release of Responsibility Model

(Pearson & Gallagher, 1983)

At all times in the research the full use of Irish was promoted. However, in order to build pupil confidence, code-mixing was utilised when peers taught one another and their parents. Pupils used as much Irish as possible to teach the vocabulary and have meaningful conversations. Keeping my values in mind, it was important to allow them to use some English words to help with comprehension and not damage their confidence.

Resources for the conducting of these conversational tasks at home were available in pupils' Irish copies and on a class Weebly account which I designed. On

this website, the new vocabulary to be learned in PowerPoint and video formats was uploaded, along with sample conversations and audio recordings of these to help with pronunciation. I also included online dictionaries, songs, rhymes, games and activities that we played in school on this website to help pupils teach and learn the vocabulary. This account was available to my class only via a password protected link on the school website.

Lastly, pupils shared feedback on their learning at the end of each week in blog format on the website. They replied to one blog post through Irish and commented on their peers' posts which allowed for collaboration and a growth in confidence while using Irish. Blog posts were teacher reviewed before being posted to ensure the safety of all pupils.
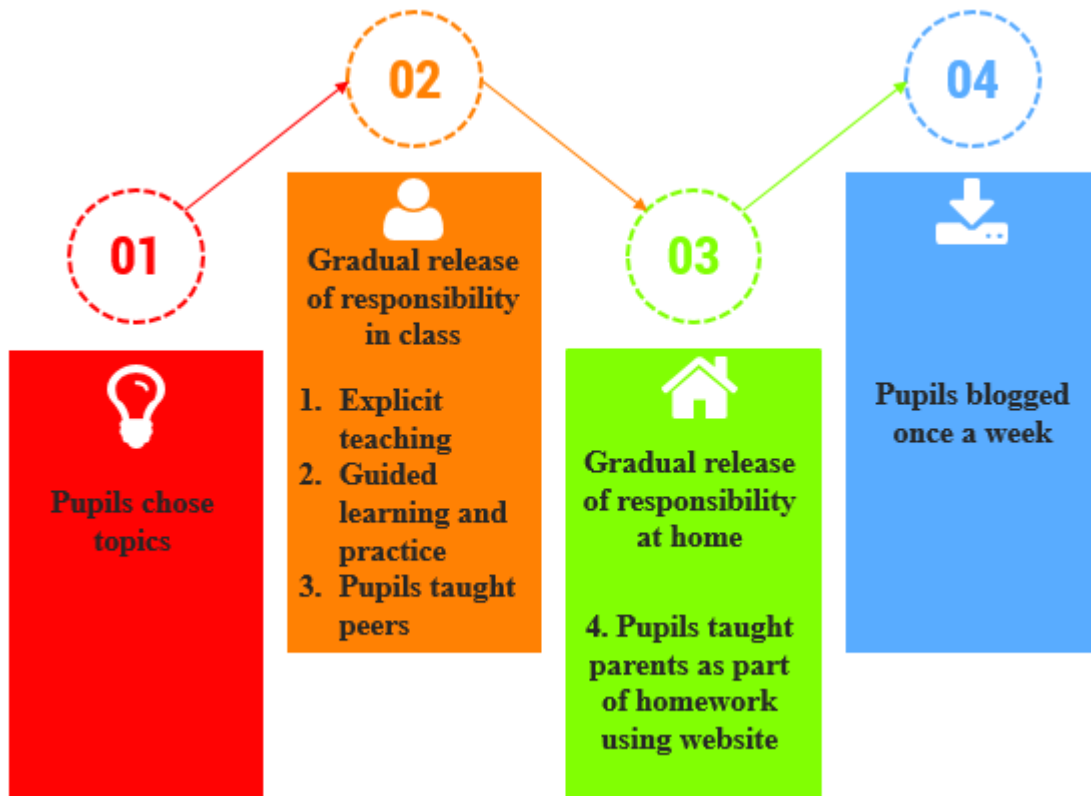
Figure 3.3 Action Research Cycle One

3.3.5 Action Research Cycle Two

Before making changes to my practice for cycle two, interim questionnaires were

distributed to parents and pupils. This looked at how they now viewed their learning of

OI and if any of their opinions or previous thoughts had changed. Throughout cycle two

I met regularly with my critical friends and validation group to discuss and critique my

claim to knowledge using my standards of judgement to facilitate this.

In cycle two I continued using a gradual release of responsibility model to teach

my pupils and as part of homework. To enhance autonomy, pupils created their own

lessons and taught them in class. This involved pupils researching the vocabulary they needed to teach their chosen topic, practising the conversation starters they would use to teach their peers and then teaching their peers in small groups for a period of five minutes. Pupils then gave oral feedback on their peers' mini-lessons before a new pupil would become the 'teacher' and the process of teaching and evaluating the mini-lesson would recommence.

Furthermore, following discussions with my validation group during cycle one, and upon reading pupils' interim questionnaires, I decided to differentiate my website and the homework to allow all pupils to access the activities at a comfortable level. This meant that pupils began at the same stage of learning and teaching the Irish vocabulary to their parents for homework and then progressed onto the next stage, when they felt comfortable.

From research cycle one, I found it challenging to see how much work my pupils were actually doing at home. I felt that by writing only one blog post per week, my pupils were becoming repetitive in their responses and I was unsure of how much homework they were actually doing. Therefore, for cycle two I decided to hold my pupils more accountable for their learning. This was achieved by asking pupils to write three blog posts per week, one in class and two at home, responding to varying questions which myself and other pupils posed.

Although this cycle was cut short, I succeeded in collecting valuable data on the changes made to my practice. My values were evident as I aimed to create learning spaces which involved pupils working in collaboration with their peers and parents in order to enhance their enjoyment, motivation, engagement and ownership of their language acquisition.
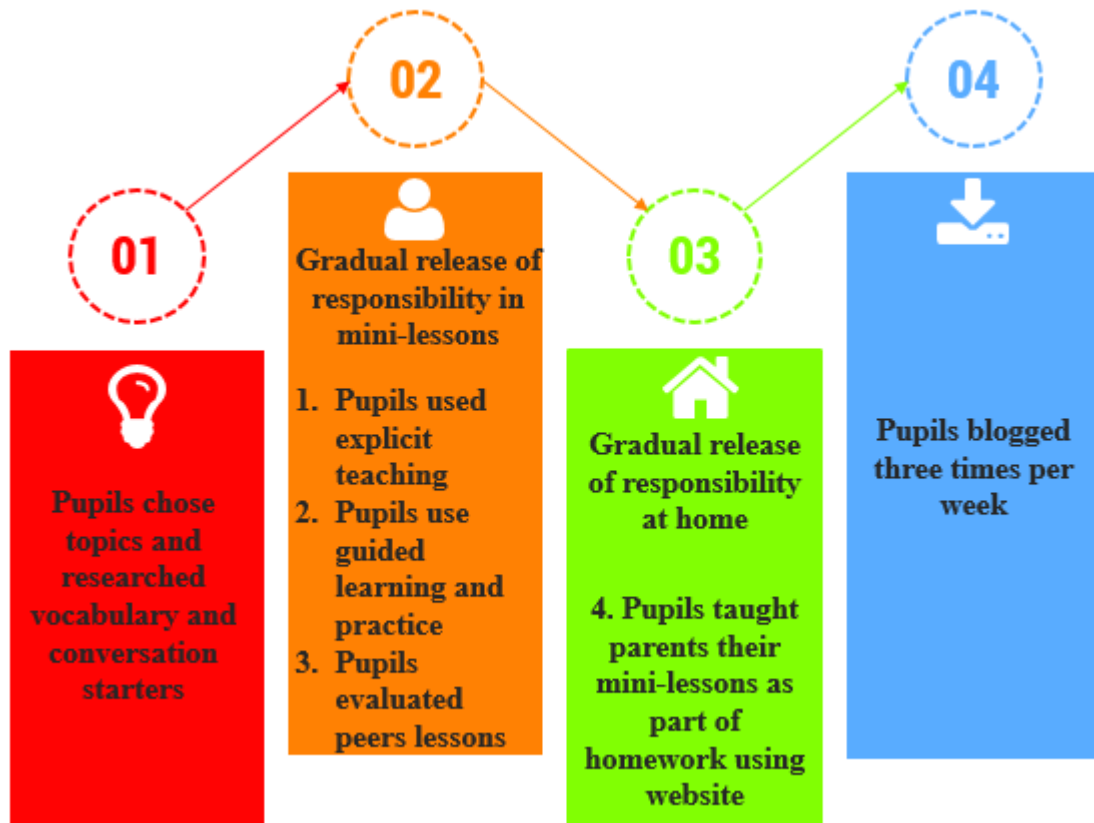
Figure 3.4 Action Research Cycle Two

3.4 Data Collection

3.4.1 A Qualitative Approach

Before beginning my research it was imperative that I critically reflected upon and answered the following questions from Sullivan et al. (2016:78-79): '*Why do I collect data*?', '*What kinds of data can I collect?*' and '*How can I show others what is*

happening?'. If I take the first question - '*Why do I collect data*?', my answers were as

follows - to verify the authenticity of my teaching, for evidence of changes to my

practice, to assess how closely I was living to my values and finally to generate findings

to support my claim to knowledge. Regarding the second question - '*What kinds of data*

can I collect?', I took a qualitative approach to data collection with some data collected

being numerical in order to establish a strong basis for my claim to knowledge.

Qualitative data was observable and innate in nature, rather than measurable. I will

outline the instruments used below. The last question – '*How can I show others what is*

happening?', forced me to prove the validity and credibility in the findings I generated

from the data. It acknowledged the triangulation methods and forms of analysis used in

order to provide evidence of critical reflection.

3.4.2 Data Collection Instruments

Reflective Journals

One of the ways I gathered data was by keeping a reflective journal. Here I documented

my reflections using a notebook and typing the reflections in a password protected

Word document every evening. My personal reflective journal acted as a space to

encourage inner dialogue, a window into my own pedagogical views and actions

(Loughran, 2006). Throughout the research I frequently used meta-reflection as a way

of assessing whether I was living to my values.

In the same way, my pupils engaged with reflective journaling. They were

provided with A4 manuscript copies which they decorated and these were kept in a

locked press each night. Pupils were given 10 minutes at the end of each school day where they could write reflectively. These data collection instruments enabled me to scrutinise my practice through the lens of my pupils and my own autobiographical lens (Brookfield, 1995, 2017) in order to add to the triangulation of data.

Observational Notes

I also used observational notes as a means of gathering data. Here, I observed my pupils in class as a whole, in small working groups, pair work and individually over the research cycles. The observations made were based on the creations of Schön (1983) - 'reflection-in-action' and 'reflection-on-action'. For my 'reflections-in-action' I used post-it notes to jot down quick observations noted throughout the school day on teamwork and engagement. For my 'reflection-on-action' time was allocated each evening to reflect on my observations of the day. Here I also used methods of reflexivity and meta-reflection (Winter, 1996) like with my reflective journaling. My aim was to conclude whether the changes I introduced in my practice in developing pupil tutoring strategies at home were having an impact on the engagement, enjoyment and self-motivation of the children to learn OI in class and at home. This data collection tool allowed me to evaluate my practice and the validity of my observations through reflective journaling and sharing them with my validation group and critical friends.

Questionnaires

Baseline and interim questionnaires were prepared for both pupils and parents (see appendices 2. and 3.) to complete before each research cycle. Questionnaires for the end of cycle two (see Appendix 4.) were also prepared but I was unable to utilise these. Through use of varying questionnaires, I was able to compare and contrast the data from pupils and parents in order to triangulate it. The main areas I wanted to gain information on within these questionnaires were my pupils' levels of motivation to learn OI within and outside of school and their enjoyment of OI in school and at home.

Feedback

Feedback, both oral and written, from critical friends and validation group members provided valuable insights for my data collection process through the lens of my colleagues' perceptions (Brookfield, 1995). These colleagues were not only a source of evidence for the change occurring in my practice but also a source who validated the changes in pupils' and parents' thoughts. They also assessed the validity of my claim that the changes made to my practice enhanced my pupils' enjoyment of OI in a dialogical environment that was both frank and honest (Hopkins, 2014 cited in Sullivan, 2016).

Finally, as previously stated, I created an OI website to aid my pupils in their learning and use of OI at home. The website acted as a tool where I set educational tasks for my pupils to complete at home, with pupils replying to the class blog using Irish as the medium. The sole quantitative data within this research was the website statistics which allowed me view the number of unique visitors to the site and the number of page views on a daily basis over both research cycles. Although research was curtailed, this tool allowed me monitor engagement levels with the website beyond school closures and enabled me to assess the significance of this initiative in future practice.

3.5 Data Analysis

In order to carefully analyse the data collected, I decided to use Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006). While it ran the risk of not capturing nuances in data interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2006), it allowed for flexibility in interpretation and enabled me to approach data gathered in an organised fashion, providing me with a step-by-step approach as highlighted in Figure 3.5 below.

Figure 3.5 Phases of Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006:87)

3.6. Validity and Reliability

The SSAR methodology I used in this research is based on validity and reliability. I demonstrated this through offering my research for validation by drawing on two of Shipman's (2014) questions – '*Is the research reliable?*' and '*Is it credible?*'. To ensure reliability, I constantly reassessed my methods, findings and writing to guarantee that they reflected the reality of my research context and data collected. I also ensured that I did not change quotations from co-participants and colleagues within this thesis, even where minor errors occurred so as to authentically share feedback. For credibility

purposes, I examined how I conducted the research within the framework of knowledge surrounding my area of research. I looked to Habermas' (1976) criteria of social validity when ensuring validity and rigour in my research – Am I speaking comprehensively, truthfully, authentically and appropriately when carrying out my research? In ensuring credibility, it was necessary for me to open my research to public scrutiny. This scrutiny and critical assessment came from co-participants, critical friends, my validation group and supervisor.

Similarly, as part of this research my critical living standards of judgement, which were formed from my values, remained at the heart of my research, to form social validations. My criteria ensured that I afford my pupils the opportunity to take ownership of their learning in order to make it more interesting. I also nurtured collaboration in order to provide meaningful learning experiences which encouraged OI use outside of school. Additionally I created more engaging activities for my pupils to enhance their enjoyment of OI. As noted, SSAR is a transformative process where values about teaching and learning are brought under public scrutiny (Sullivan et al., 2016). In order to triangulate my data, showing validity and reliability, I enlisted the help of other standpoints to study and scrutinise it (Cohen et al., 2007). Although this research was small-scale, context-based and aimed to develop my own practice, it was still imperative to show validity and rigour in my findings to ensure authenticity and give voice to my findings.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles continuously permeated all aspects of my research and I reflected upon my responsibilities as an ethical researcher while being mindful of the well-being, development and anonymity of my participants at all times. I adhered to Maynooth University Guidelines when seeking approval of the Froebel Department ethics committee in relation to the conducting of my SSAR project, privacy and storage of data, publication and dissemination. I carefully observed school policies, data protection regulation guidelines, and Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2017), ensuring that all of these were met throughout my research. Copies of my ethical statement were available for all participants, along with information sheets, letters of consent, and a letter of permission from the school board of management to conduct my research (see Appendix 5.).

3.7.1 Principles of Informed Consent and Assent

Having gained all relevant permissions from the gatekeepers, board of management and school principal, I discussed my research with the relevant groups of co-participants informing them of their role and the nature of the research. This involved the provision of adequate information about the project's aims, methods and potential outcomes in accessible forms for all. The above documents and information were explained orally to

my pupils using appropriate language so that they could, with the guidance of their parents, give their consent to be involved in the research (Bourke & Loveridge, 2014). I ensured that comprehension was gained from all informed through the translation of permission letters and presentations of information to colleagues and pupils before receiving consent or assent. In line with the United Nations convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the right remained with my students themselves to give consent to participate in the research (Holmes, 2014). This process was on a voluntary participation basis with the right to withdraw without suffering any negative consequences.

3.7.2 Data Storage

In line with the Data Protection Act (Government of Ireland, 2018), I have collected and retained the minimum amount of personal data. All data collected was stored in a locked press in school. It will continue to be stored securely for a minimum period of 10 years. Likewise, all digital data was stored on a password encrypted hard drive and will be stored in the same locked press for the same duration. The findings of my research which are published in this thesis may be used for educational research contexts such as presentations and publications in the future as explicit ethical consent was given.

3.7.3 Confidentiality and Anonymity

I have implemented guarantees of confidentiality and anonymity, by including the use of pseudonyms and have removed direct identifiers to minimise any risk to co-participants. Additionally, there was the potential that participants may have disclosed information which could be viewed as a child protection issue. It was clearly stated in the letter of information to parents that confidentiality and anonymity could not be guaranteed should these issues arise and that information would be shared on a 'need to know' basis with the Designated Liaison Person. Each child was therefore assigned a unique identification code. Should a child protection issue be identified, I was, and still am, legally bound to identify the pupil at risk and inform the Liaison Person. Therefore the unique codes ensure speedy identification of participants. Once all the data was collected, all sections of information had been pieced together and the data had been screened for child protection issues, the registers detailing pupils' names and codes would be destroyed in line with university guidelines. Child protection guidelines were closely adhered to along with guidance from TUSLA and I ensured accuracy with all information gathered.

3.7.4 Vulnerability

With this type of research, there is the potential to cause emotional distress or feelings of self-consciousness and embarrassment, thus, impacting one's self-esteem (Morrow, 2011 in Sulivan et al., 2016). Due to the nature of SSAR pupils may have felt vulnerable when using their OI at home. This vulnerability did not sit well with my

values and I was not prepared to risk pupils' wellbeing as a result of not putting appropriate measures in place in this research. Therefore, all materials used by pupils to teach OI to their parents were prepared in class so that they felt comfortable. Equally, I informed pupils of appropriate ways to conduct themselves on the blog and when teaching their peers. This ensured that these environments were safe learning spaces by guaranteeing that all content was teacher reviewed before it was displayed or used. The aim of this research was to boost enjoyment, motivation, confidence and self-belief in using OI, therefore regular conversations and a comment box were in place to ensure that the research wasn't damaging in any way.

Correspondingly, issues of power dynamics and acquiescence came into play in my SSAR. Throughout modules in this course we were encouraged to critically analyse our views of power in education and SSAR. This is echoed by Brookfield (2009) when he called for a questioning of power relations to unearth hegemonic aspects of power. Hence, I was conscious of minimising an imbalance of power that may have existed between myself and co-participants (Dalli & Te One, 2012; Welikala & Atkin, 2014). In this, co-participants and colleagues may have felt pressure to participate in the research. Their responses may have been impacted by my role as a teacher and may have responded in a manner they thought I would like. However, in order to acknowledge these power struggles, I continuously discussed and stressed the voluntary, honest nature of this research with all participants. I did not want my co-participants and colleagues to be mere reporters (Broch, 2014), but rather, co-participants whose voices and thoughts were heard, respected and acted upon.

3.8 Conclusion

I have aimed to show, in my discussion of this methodology chapter, issues of power and a didactic teaching style in which I engaged with, reflected upon and overcame. To summarise the methodology, my research was conducted within a SSAR paradigm and I engaged in reflective practice. The evolving nature of my cyclical research was commensurate with my values. I enabled my pupils to articulate their opinions and ensured that they became co-creators of their OI knowledge. While researching, I used my living standards of judgment to ensure its validity and reliability. I illustrated the data collection tools for triangulation and justified their purpose while adhering to ethical guidelines. The following chapter highlights the findings and discusses these within themes of engagement, enjoyment and autonomy.

Chapter 4 Findings and Discussion

Cleachtadh a dhéanann máistreacht (Practice makes perfect)

4.1. Introduction

In a SSAR project the researcher sets out to enhance and learn about certain aspects of their own practice but often find that other areas of their practice are unveiled, waiting to be investigated and improved. In chapter two, the literature on collaboration and partnerships was reviewed in order to enhance enjoyment of language learning and meaningful use of OI within and outside of school. I also examined how more engaging methodologies impact enjoyment levels. In this chapter I will report and discuss my findings in light of this literature, along with the messiness of data collection, implications for research cycle two and the possibility of future research. The data gathered during cycle one and two will be presented and discussed under the following key findings: *A collaborative OI approach to homework contributes to increased engagement from pupils*, *pupil choice allowed for increased enjoyment of OI*, and *autonomous teaching approaches to OI can foster accountability within pupils*.

4.2. Overview of Research

My overarching research question was as follows - *'How can I engage collaboratively with my pupils to enhance their enjoyment of Oral Irish?'* - My main focus was a change in my practice in order to enrich my pupils' learning experiences. A general aim of the study was to generate my own 'living theory of education' (Whitehead, 1993) about OI teaching and learning within and outside the classroom. I also endeavoured to live closer to my values of collaboration, confidence and self-belief. Lastly, I wanted to make OI homework more interesting for my pupils, to encourage their use of OI outside of school in a meaningful way through using more engaging methodologies to enhance enjoyment.

4.2.1 Setting the Scene

Initial indications revealed that the majority of pupils and their parents did not enjoy their OI learning. Parents recalled their own learning of Irish stating – "*... I remember hating Irish lessons in primary and secondary school as it was all about memorisation and drilling*" (Parent22) and "*I hated the way Irish was taught when I was young and disliked it as a subject ...*" (Parent13, Baseline Questionnaires, January 2020). Evolving from their memories of learning OI, parents expressed a clear level of dissatisfaction with Irish when they were in school.

As noted in chapter two, partnerships are often a key element in language maintenance – if it is not nurtured in the home environment, then it cannot be nurtured elsewhere (Clyne & Kipp, 1999). It seemed there may have been a transmission of attitudes towards OI from parents to pupils in initial findings. Pupils felt that it was *"...hard and boring*" (Pupil2) and "[they didn't] *enjoy it as much as other subjects*" (Pupil4, Baseline Questionnaires, January 2020). Pupils also reported finding OI difficult, feeling frustrated and worried when learning and using OI –"*I'm worried I won't be as good as the others in secondary school*" (Pupil17), "*I feel anxious when speaking Irish out loud in class. I'm not good enough*" (Pupil9) and "*I find it really difficult and I get frustrated when I can't do it right*" (Pupil6, Baseline Questionnaires, see Appendix 6.). These initial findings were in line with those of Harris et al. (2006).

4.3 Analysis and Discussion of Findings

4.3.1. Engagement

The Development of Meaningful Nurturing Partnerships with Parents can Encourage the Use of Oral Irish Outside of School Contexts

Data gathered from baseline questionnaires showed that pupils did not use OI outside of school.

Comparison of Pupils' and Parents' Perceptions of Children's Oral Irish Usage Outside of School						
		Everyday	A few times a week	A few times a month	A few times a year	Never
Pupils	Baseline	0	9	4	6	6
	Interim	10	12	2	0	0
Parents	Baseline	0	2	3	4	11
	Interim	8	8	2	0	0

Table 4.1 The use of Oral Irish Outside of School (Baseline and Interim

Questionnaires)

As noted in Table 4.1, no pupils reported using OI outside of school every day, nine

reported using Irish a few times a week, four used it a few times a month, six reported

using OI a few times a year and six never used OI outside of school. Unsurprisingly,

these results highlighted a need for an evaluation of my practice. If I wanted pupils to

use OI in more meaningful ways, I had to change my practice.

Equally, zero parents reported that their child used OI outside school every day.

However, a disparity between the pupils and parents perceived use of OI is evident in

Table 4.1 with only two parents reporting usage of OI outside of school a few times a

week, three stating its use a few times a month and four noting use a few times a year.

Yet, the most interesting disparity lies with 11 parents reporting that their child never

used OI outside of school compared with six pupils stating they did. Regardless of the

evident disparities which may have been caused by pupils' eagerness to please the

teacher, the results were quite unfavourable. They were, however, in line with previous

reports from the CSO (2016) as discussed in chapter two. They also concur that the

establishment of meaningful contexts for OI use outside of school remains a major struggle within the education system (Devitt et al., 2016).

The results of the baseline data prompted a reflection on my encouragement of OI outside of school. Through this reflection, I amended my practice to live closer to my values by using more collaborative, child-centred approaches and encouraging partnerships. The findings from interim questionnaires and reflective journals showed an increase in the use of OI outside of school (see Table 4.1). From these results there was a clear increase in OI use outside of school with more pupils (n=10) and parents (n=8) reporting its use every day compared with zero pupils and parents reporting its use before beginning the project. Likewise, zero participants stated that they used OI a few times a year and never used it compared to the baseline questionnaire where the majority of responses lay in these categories. My findings related in some ways to previously discussed findings from minority language contexts. Although these studies didn't engage pupils in teaching their parents, they did note that the use of collaborative teaching methods helped develop more nurturing partnerships with parents and this may have enhanced language use in the home (Gathercole & Thomas, 2009; Ciriza, 2019). Within this project, I found that by developing more meaningful collaborative partnerships, the use of OI outside of school contexts can be encouraged. Thus, through teaching their parents, pupils were more engaged in OI homework activities.

Meaningful Partnerships were Nurtured which Increased Collaboration

Various comments from co-participants, validation group members and my own reflections related to the collaborative aspect of this project. Upon analysing baseline data from the questionnaires it was evident from parents (n=15) and pupils (n=18) that the majority of pupils completed OI homework individually. As previously highlighted, data reflected that only a small percentage of Irish adults felt comfortable with their competence in Irish (Harris et al., 2006; Darmody & Daly, 2015; CSO, 2016; Nic Fhlannchadha & Hickey, 2019). This may be a factor as to why parents were not involved in their child's Irish homework. Another factor potentially was that I did not actively encouraging this collaborative engagement.

Nevertheless, this research seems to have led to an increase in partnerships and collaboration that inculcates my values. Within the interim questionnaire fewer parents (n=3) and pupils (n=4) noted that homework was completed individually. They commented that "*I sit at the kitchen table with my mum and use the website to teach her. We then have a conversation together based off what we've learned*" (Pupil5), "*I am learning loads and having fun teaching my parents*" (Pupil18), "*I'm enjoying learning from my daughter*" (Parent3) and that "*I enjoy the time spent one-to-one with her*" (Parent2, Interim Questionnaires, February 2020 – see Appendix 7.).

Data obtained was further supported by validation group members who commented that:

[There was] an impressive level of engagement by pupils, parents and family members which was recorded in the questionnaires, reflective journals and blog

posts. Collaboration between the teacher and parents, parents and pupils, and

indeed collaboration with staff was clearly evident throughout this project.

(ValidationGroupMember2)

Another commented that I had moved "*from a hierarchical style of interaction to a*

more dialogical approach which enhanced engagement" (ValidationGroupMember1).

These results reflect those mentioned in chapter two that found by nurturing

partnerships, and increasing collaboration with parents, pupils' engagement in the

learning of the Basque language improved (Ciriza, 2019).

Another unexpected finding noted by pupils was the enjoyment derived from

spending time with parents. Regardless, this finding was one that I value most and in

essence depicts the importance of relationships and communication in children's lives.

This was exemplified by some pupils when they illustrated that - "I like spending time

with [my parents]. It's special time where we can work together." (Pupil5) and the fact

"that I'm now getting to talk to my mum a lot more is nice" (Pupil18, Interim

Questionnaires, February 2020). This finding was mirrored by those of Burke and

Dempsey (2020) during Covid-19 where participants felt that school closures would

provide positive extra time with loved ones. It must be cautioned however, that this

finding may not be due to the intervention itself but rather the fact that time was set

aside each evening where parents and pupils worked together and communicated.

Collaborative learning spaces also created opportunities for students to create resources,

and share ideas and new learning, thus, engaging and motivating pupils in their

learning. As previously noted in chapter two, when pupils work together in a space of

mutual respect, they can support each other allowing them to feel more comfortable and

confident to express themselves (Figueiredo, 2008; Largo, 2017; Sousa, et al., 2019).

Family Members Other Than Parents Became Embedded Into the Context of the

Research

One of the most surprising results discovered was that family members other than parents became embedded into the context of the research. This collaboration with wider family communities not only increased engagement with OI, but encouraged its use outside of school and increased its meaningfulness in the confines of homework. Evidence of this was found when parents noted "*She teaches her grandparents the oral Irish for homework*" (Parent4), "*My daughter teaches her brother and sister the Irish and then we play the games together at the end. The games can get quite competitive!*" (Parent5), and "*She teaches myself and her younger sister the words, questions and answers and then gets us to play the games to practice them. We all really enjoy the games*" (Parent11, Interim Questionnaires, February 2020). Likewise, pupils highlighted their engagement with family members other than parents (see Appendix 8.). While most responses to family collaboration were positive, a limitation was that I neglected to include feedback from family members in the data to make comparisons. In future data collection methods I would include feedback from these sources. Although much research has been conducted within the area of parental partnerships into children's language learning (Nic Fhlannchadha & Hickey, 2019; O'Toole et al., 2019), little research has been conducted on the role that family members, other than parents, have in developing language learning for children. There is a further lack of research into the role family members have in promoting the use of Irish as a second language outside of school.

Main Finding on Engagement

As noted above, within the finding of engagement there were three sub-findings. These were as follows - *the development of meaningful nurturing partnerships with parents encouraged the use of OI outside of school contexts*, *Meaningful partnerships were nurtured which increased collaboration* and *Family members other than parents became embedded into the context of the research*. From this my overall finding was that *a collaborative OI approach to homework contributes to increased engagement from pupils*. In order to live closer to my value of collaboration I focused on child-centred methodologies that encouraged this within and outside of the classroom. I changed my practice throughout this project allowing pupils the freedom to engage collaboratively with their peers, parents, and other family members to align with my standard of judgement on engagement.

4.3.2 Enjoyment

Pupils Became More Motivated in Their Learning and Use of Oral Irish

A criterion of this project was to increase pupil enjoyment of OI in order to encourage the use outside of school by creating more engaging activities. Prior to beginning the first cycle of the research, pupils seemed disillusioned with OI homework where 70.83% of pupils (n=17) stated that they disliked it. Although expected, the results left

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me feeling "*guilty that I hadn't changed my practice sooner*" (Researcher, Reflective Journal Entry, 15th January 2020). Feedback from one of my critical friends points to similar perspectives on OI homework within my practice - "*the use of textbooks for homework has caused pupils to become unmotivated and I don't blame them. I would not be interested in learning spoken Irish from a book*" (Researcher, Reflective Journal Entry, 15th January 2020). Upon meta-reflection, I noticed the contradictory nature of my teaching practices – valuing one thing and enacting another. These reflections, though conflicting, were supported by previous studies which found that teachers were over reliant on textbooks (NCCA, 2008).

Within the baseline data, pupils and parents strongly voiced the need for meaning and relevance in OI learning. Parents favoured enjoyable learning activities for their children through suggesting "*subjects to talk about … [and] Irish programmes they would watch and ask them questions about them*" (Parent15), "*She would enjoy having conversations and doing activities that were of interest to her rather than chatting about the same themes each year*" (Parent11) and to "*make it as fun as possible*" (Parent18, Baseline Questionnaires, January 2020). This yearning for meaning and choice in OI homework was also felt by pupils who stressed the need for more relatable conversational topics such as "… talking about stuff in relation to me, what we're doing in school, hobbies and more …" (Pupil12), talking "in a group, working on projects" (Pupil11) and "showing worksheets or projects to the class and explaining them in Irish" (Pupil24, Baseline Questionnaires, January 2020 - see Appendix 9.).

From this initiative, it was found that giving pupils the autonomy to choose enjoyable and purposeful activities increased enjoyment of OI. As noted, "*I liked that we have had the freedom to pick what topics we get to teach because I have chosen*

topics that are of interest to me" (Pupil17), "*I am learning loads and having fun because I get to choose nice topics when teaching my parents*" (Pupil6) and "*I think making it modern is a big help ...*" (Pupil3, Interim Questionnaires, February 2020). These reflections from pupils on the changes made within my practice provided some evidence of increased enjoyment of OI when given choice in their learning. The reflections also revealed evidence of the creation of some-what controlled meaningful learning environments based on pupils chosen topics.

Moreover, all parents stated that their child enjoyed OI homework in interim questionnaires, while all parents noted that they themselves also enjoyed completing OI homework with their children. The majority of pupils now responded more positively to the initiative with 22 pupils stating that they liked OI homework. It was found that these child-centred methodologies which gave autonomy to pupils enhanced this enjoyment. Pupils stated that – "*it's ... fun ... as well as it having interesting topics to talk about which I have helped chose. I like having control of that and my homework*" (Pupil11, Reflective Journal Entry, 6th March 2020). Equally, one parent noted – "*She enjoys taking ownership of her learning and teaching us to speak the language now that it is manageable*" (Parent16, Interim Questionnaire, February 2020). Autonomous teaching methods which gave pupils the freedom to take control of their learning in school and at home in a supportive environment, appeared to encourage pupils' accountability in their learning. These findings concur with those previously noted by Cook-Sather (2010) and Little, Dam and Legenhausen (2017). Indeed, the findings from this research correspond with those of Dam (2011) also, in that autonomy and choice in language learning can lead to increased enjoyment. I found that providing controlled meaningful opportunities for choice within OI allowed pupils to take an active role in this learning.

Therefore, pupil choice potentially increased enjoyment of OI. Nevertheless, ensuring this enjoyment may have had its pitfalls as I noted that pupils "*constantly switched to speaking English when teaching their peers*" (Researcher Observation, Reflective Journal Entry, 28th January 2020). I found it difficult to find a balance between maintaining self-confidence, by not enforcing the full use of Irish, and ensuring pupil progress throughout.

Pupils Gained Self-Belief and Confidence in Their Learning and Use of Oral Irish

As mentioned in chapter two, self-belief and confidence are very important aspects of not only language learning but learning in general.

Comparison of Parents and Pupils Rating of Oral Irish Levels					
	Excellent	**Very Good**	**Good**	**Fair**	**Poor**
Pupils	0	0	16	5	3
Parents	0	1	7	11	1

Table 4.2. Baseline Comparison of Pupils' Perceptions of Oral Irish and Parent's Perceptions of their Child's Oral Irish Level

While the majority of students (n=16) originally rated their proficiency in OI as good, only five pupils described their OI as fair and three as poor (see Table 4.2). On the surface these results seem quite positive and I was surprised with pupils' perceived

confidence levels in their OI abilities. Yet, there was an inconsistency between pupils and parents responses. Only one parent stated their child's level of OI was very good, while seven parents thought their child's OI was of a good standard compared to 16 pupils stating this. Similarly, 11 parents felt their child's OI was fair in comparison to five pupils who felt this, thus, portraying an overall lack of confidence from parents in their child's OI ability.

One reason for the differing opinions may have been due to not providing suitable self-assessment scales with examples so that pupils and parents could assess OI proficiency. When analysing the comments from pupils, it became clear that this was the case as they were unsure of how to rate their proficiency in OI stating responses such as "*between good and very good*" (Pupil1), "*ok*" (Pupil16), "*good/fair*" (Pupil3), "*IDK (I don't' know)*" (Pupil18) and "*in between good and fair – IDK*" (Pupil24, Baseline Questionnaires, January 2020). The messiness of SSAR is illustrated by my neglect to explain how to assess proficiency. This highlighted a challenge for my pupils and provides a stimulus for changes I would make to cycle three and future research beyond the scope of this study.

Nevertheless, to enhance my pupils' self-belief, confidence and enjoyment in OI further, I provided them with greater choice in their activities. From the changes implemented in cycle one, all parents (n=18) thought their child's level of OI had improved since beginning the initiative, while 11 parents felt that their child was now comfortable with their OI homework. Subsequently, five stated that their children were coping with their OI homework (see Appendix 10.) and the remaining two parents felt that their children were still experiencing difficulty with OI at home. A similar response was found from students with 22 pupils agreeing that their confidence in OI had

improved since beginning the research due to the autonomy they had in their home learning (see Appendix 11.). Thus, providing evidence of my standard of judgement in enjoyment being achieved. Likewise, one validation group member noted the following in her reflection, "*It is a great credit to the success of the intervention that pupils were comfortable to integrate other curricular areas e.g. Science Blast into their learning*" (ValidationGroupMember2, Feedback, 24th March 2020). While Hummel (2013) was investigating the effects of community engagement on second language learning in older students, the link between increased self-confidence and increased enjoyment were visible. My study also confirmed that confidence and self-belief in language learning may have increased enjoyment. Thus, I found that pupils gained self-belief and confidence in their learning and use of OI through the inclusion of more autonomous teaching methods in my practice.

The Website Took on a New Role in the Research Brining Enjoyment to Pupils Learning

The increase in choice given to pupils, it seems, led to increased motivation, enjoyment and engagement with OI (see Appendix 12.). A surprising aspect of the results was pupil engagement with the website as part of their homework. Looking at website statistics, it was noted that high levels of engagement were sustained over the project's timeline.
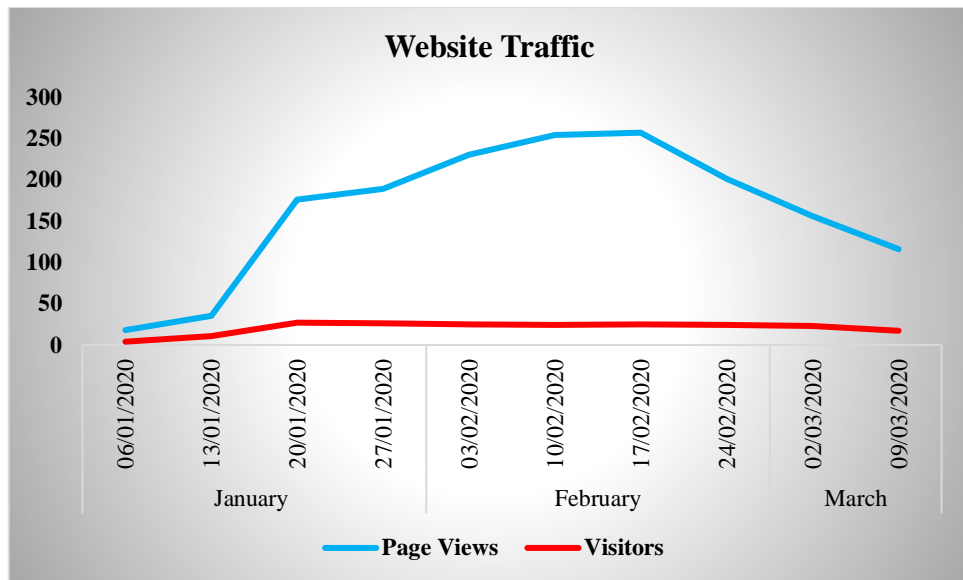
Figure 4.1 Website Traffic

As illustrated in Figure 3.6 above, unique visitors to the website remained relatively

stable throughout the timeline of the project (as denoted by the red line) with almost all

pupils engaging with the website each day. Likewise, page views never hit below 116 in

a week. The number of page views highlighted in this figure decreased due to

Confirmation, a school critical incident and unprecedented school closures. Pupils

continued to engage with the website during weekends (see Figure 4.2 below) and

beyond these closures (see Appendix 13.).
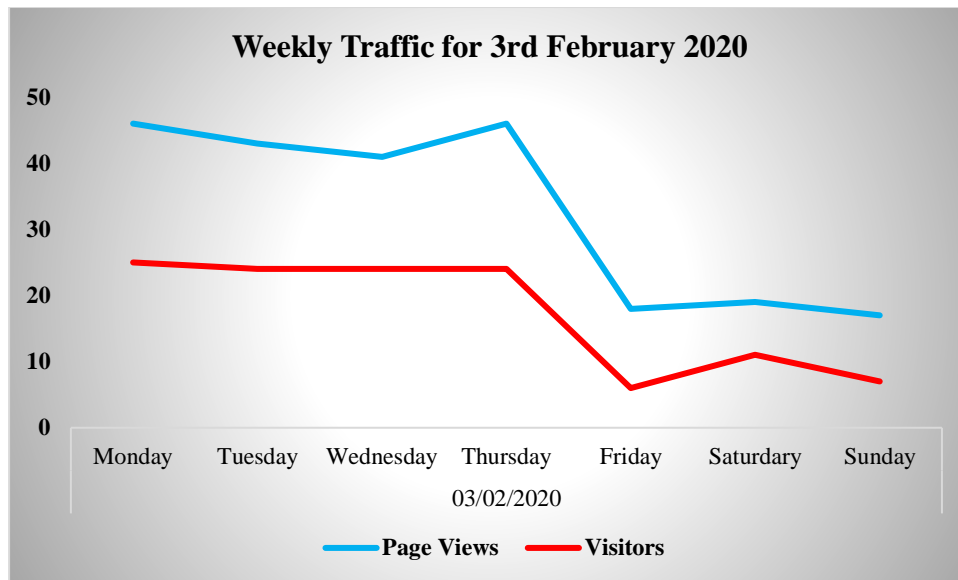
Figure 4.2 Weekly Traffic to Website (Week of 3rd February 2020)

   Initially, I feared that these high engagement levels with the website might

overshadow the changes made to my teaching. I felt as though the website had taken

over the project and "*became the sole reason for my pupils heightened enjoyment of OI*

homework" (Researcher, Reflective Journal Entry, 20th January 2020). Yet, I now

realise that the website was developed from the changes I made to my teaching

approaches and it firmly aligns with my values of encouraging collaboration, self-belief

and confidence in school and home environments. As aforementioned, Lai (2017) found

that technology can provide pupils with freedom in their learning. In this research it was

noted that through using more autonomous teaching methods the website brought

enjoyment to my pupils' learning of OI and increased engagement with OI homework.

Main Finding on Enjoyment

As noted above, three sub-findings were discovered in my data -*pupils became more motivated in their learning and use of OI*, *pupils gained self-belief and confidence in their learning and use of OI* and *the website took on a new role in the research bringing enjoyment to pupils learning*. From this my overall finding was that *pupil choice allowed for increased enjoyment of OI*. In order to live closer to my values of I focused on methodologies that encouraged these within and outside of the classroom through autonomous teaching methods. Changes were made to my practice throughout this project which allowed pupils take control of their learning both in school and at home.

4.3.3 Accountability

Pupils Became More Aware of Differentiated Approaches to Learning

From analysing the data, the approach to teaching OI in this research seemed to improve pupils' ability to access OI at home at a level which pupils were comfortable. The majority of pupils' (n=21) and parents' (n=16) comments supported this idea. Pupils stated that "*This new way makes talking in Irish easier and I know how to teach myself and my parents to speak it at home. I can choose what I want to do to help me learn.*" (Pupil1, Reflective Journal Entry, 9th March 2020) and "*I hope we use this way of learning Irish in secondary school because it's a fun and easy way to learn …*"

(Pupil11). While feedback received was mostly encouraging, some pupils and parents experienced difficulty with the level of content provided. These comments (n=5) pointed to the lack of clear differentiation given within this approach to OI at home. Some parents (n=2) acknowledged that their children were still finding OI challenging after engagement with cycle one. In the same way, one parent of an EAL child expressed that they felt their child's confidence in teaching OI for homework had not increased (see Appendix 14.). The same parent expressed a similar feeling with regards to their own confidence in OI stating that they "*were unsure if* [they] *had gain confidence Irish speaking*" (Parent3, Interim Questionnaire, February 2020) as they were also learning English at the same time. When asked what changes could be made to the OI homework approach one parent requested it be simplified. Likewise, pupils (n=3) had similar outlooks on OI homework stating that they were unsure if their OI had improved and asked for easier homework (see Appendix 15.).

The findings demonstrated some uncertainty and unease with the OI homework project after cycle one. This suggested that a small minority of co-participants were not comfortable with the process involved in completing OI homework and felt the level was too difficult. Thus, the changes to my practice were not benefitting all pupils and parents. I clearly neglected to differentiate the approach for all learners. This was further highlighted by one of my validation group members when remarking that "*maybe you could differentiate the website for ease of access for all children. Then you may be actively instilling your values while catering to the needs of all children*" (ValidationGroupMember1, Feedback, Reflective Journal Entry, 14th February 2020). I was not content to leave some children struggle with OI homework. Drawing upon the

criteria for my standards of judgement, I differentiated my approach to homework for cycle two.

One observation I documented found the changes for cycle two to be quite positive for one EAL pupil who "*explained that it has eased the pressure she feels to complete all tasks and to a high standard*" (Researcher, Observation, 9th March 2020 - see Appendix 16.). This provided evidence of my criteria being achieved. Similarly, this pupil noted the following within her reflective journal:

> I used to not like Irish because I only came to Ireland in 5th so was way behind everyone else. This way of learning has give me the chance to learn from start. I know a lot more word now than I did before.
>
> (Pupil3 – Reflective Journal Entry, 10th March 2020)

Upon reflection, the lack of differentiation was going against my values of confidence and self-belief unknowingly during cycle one. It must be acknowledged that while the changes made to cycle two had a positive impact on this particular pupil, further differentiation is required for my practice.

Pupils Took Ownership Both of Their Own and Their Parents Learning

A key criterion of my standards of judgement involved enhancing my practice to include more autonomous teaching methods. Evidence gathered from my co-participants responses and reflections indicated that more autonomous teaching methods encouraged pupils to take ownership both of their own and their parents

learning. Noteworthy, preceding engagement with the project, five pupils revealed a desire for accountability and assessment of their progress. Initially, I noted this desire but aimed for accountability relating to engagement with OI rather than evaluation of progress of learning as this was not the intended goal of the project. However, while developing the project I pondered over how I could evaluate my pupils' accountability in line with my values:

> How can I check that my pupils are completing the OI homework and engaging with the project? Certain aspects are out of my control but I need to come up with some way of measuring this accountability … It is time to hand over the baton and allow my pupils the freedom to take charge of their own learning in an accountable manner. I feel more blogging is the answer.
>
> (Researcher, Reflective Journal Entry, 29th January 2020)

While 22 pupils reported gaining enjoyment from the intervention, they also learned from what others said in blog posts. Likewise, engagement with this aspect of the project was relatively successful with 23 pupils responding to three questions each week (see Appendix 17.). Many pupils (n= 17) posted responses to the blog without prompt on weekends (refer to Figure 3.7), during the February mid-term and continued to post responses during school closure (see Appendix 13). Therefore, when autonomy was encouraged within OI learning, pupils took ownership and showed increased levels of accountability, hence, providing evidence of achieving my criteria for accountability. At a basic level, this aligns with previously mentioned findings from Dam (2011).

Furthermore some pupils noted feeling co-responsible for the success of their parents learning and use of OI stating "*I make up tests for myself and my mam each week and we keep a leader-board*" (Pupil4, Reflective Journal Entry, 4th March 2020) and "*I have been able to make tests for myself and my parents … and we do it on every Friday to see how much we've learnt from the week. We have a leader-board and I am WINNING!!!!!!* ☺" (Pupil8, Reflective Journal Entry, 9th March 2020). Pupils were beginning to reveal the important principles of developing learner accountability and autonomy (see Appendix 18.) due to more autonomous teaching approaches. Parents also found their children were showing increased accountability towards their OI homework. Indications from parents suggested that by taking ownership, children's motivation and enjoyment in learning increased - "*she has taken ownership of her Irish homework and has taken on the role of the teacher at home*" (Pupil9, Interim Questionnaire, February 2020 - see Appendix 19.).

However, pupils reported a challenge in showcasing their work and learning. In this, pupils felt accountable for their parents learning. One pupil stated the following – "*I struggled to show how my mum was improving so maybe if there were suggested tests that we could do and that would help show this*" (Pupil10, Interim Questionnaire, February 2020). Interestingly, results showed that pupils reverted back to their knowledge of how to show and measure learning, that is, testing. Pupils created leader-boards and completed 'Friday Tests' with their parents in order to show that both they and their parents' were learning. I utilised these tests in a self-differentiated manner every week over past years but these findings made me question their meaning and existence. Thus, the findings suggest that the project was somewhat successful in

fostering within students a sense of ownership and accountability through the means of more autonomous teaching methods.

Main Finding on Accountability

As noted above, two sub-findings were discovered in my data - *pupils became more aware of differentiated approaches to learning* and *pupils took ownership both of their own and their parents learning*. From this my overall finding was that *autonomous teaching approaches to OI can foster accountability within pupils*. In order to live closer to my values, I encouraged my pupils to take ownership of their learning and become accountable for this achieving one of my standards of judgement.

4.4 Messiness of Data Collection

4.4.1 Challenges

Acknowledging and Sharing Power

Power, is a prospect which is created through the interaction of relationships (Foucault, 1994), one that can be dominating (Giddens, 1993), or one that is created from interaction with others to enact positive changes. In the beginning, I was fearful of

sharing my research with co-participants, critical friends and validation group members, and hence, providing them with the power to scrutinise it. This fear may stem from my own struggles with confidence and self-belief in my teaching and abilities. Yet, throughout the research I grew to enjoy sharing my work with these groups. On one occasion, I noted that "*I feel as though I have been able to strengthen my relationship with parents through this project and I am less afraid of judgement*" (Researcher, Reflective Journal Entry, 3rd March 2020). I realised that scrutinising my practice was not an accusation of my mistakes but rather enabled collaboration and a realisation that I was not alone in my practices. I noticed that the sharing of power and dialogue in an honest setting can be extremely valuable (O'Toole, 2017; O'Toole et al., 2019) for validation within SSAR.

Encouraging Participation

Parental partnerships are a major feature in both the establishment and development of new policies, resources and practices within schools. However, I was cognisant of the barriers that may have existed to the participation of parents in this research such as time constraints (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018), technical constraints (Burke & Dempsey, 2020), language barriers (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018), and parents feeling overwhelmed or intimidated (O'Toole, 2016). Therefore, before beginning my data collection I asked co-participants, critical friends and validation group members for feedback on my proposed research to assess what would be feasible. After addressing

these challenges, parental engagement levels and their commitment to the research varied.

4.4.2 Barriers to Data Collection

Location of Data Collection

Within this research, parental questionnaires had to be completed outside of school. This meant that it was not guaranteed that questionnaires would be returned. Although stressing the voluntary nature of the research, I had no option but to send a reminder to parents about returning questionnaires during cycle one.

Relying on co-participants to evaluate the impact of changes to my practice on their child's learning and enjoyment of OI was problematic. In many cases, parents and pupils were not fully aware of the curriculum standards, school policy or as highlighted by Rossi et al. (1999) the impact it had on them as individuals. In addition they may have been reluctant to overly criticise their previous learning of OI. Therefore, caution was exercised in attributing the opinion of co-participants to the whole class population throughout both cycles.

Researcher Fatigue

As the research developed I reflected on the amount of time spent collecting baseline data, creating resources and developing the website. Due to fatigue, I found it difficult to persevere with the standard I set for myself. Zhou (2012) highlighted similar findings in that teachers engaged in research found it exceedingly difficult to prepare for and give lessons each day due to the workload set out from the beginning. However, I used my reflections at this time to serve as a learning curve and decided to focus on the long-term sustainability of my project rather than creating a short-lived 'victory narrative' (MacLure, 1996: 293).

4.4.3 Unexpected Decisions Taken

Adjustments to Critical Friend and Validation Group Meetings

Like the response of schools during closures (Burke & Dempsey, 2020; Doyle, 2020), I swiftly moved my communication with critical friends and validation group members to email. Before closures, meetings were held on a regular basis with my colleagues. However, once schools closed I was left with no option than to email group members as permission was previously granted for this. Although, it prevented rich discussions to take place, it did allow for critical feedback on my claim to knowledge.

Suspension of Data Collection before the End of Cycle Two

Due to school closures, I was unable to collect final sets of data from cycle two of my SSAR project. I was disheartened by this as I was unable to gather audio recordings of the children's overall thoughts on the project or collect final questionnaires from co-participants. However, this closure resulted in accessing and using data which may not have been noticed if the suspension of data collection had not occurred. I was able to verify and validate my previous findings and criteria, to some extent, by using data sourced from my website.

4.5 Proceeding with the Research

Based on the outlined data, I proposed to continue with cycle two for two more weeks. I then planned on gathering data from co-participants, critical friends and validation group members in the form of questionnaires and audio recordings of informal interviews with pupils. Sample proposed questionnaires and informal interview questions can be found in the appendices (see Appendix 4.).

Following this, I have outlined a proposed plan for engagement with cycle three. My main focus for this cycle is self-assessment and evaluation for my pupils and the figure presented in Appendix 1. shows a progression in the steps taken and those to be taken in the future. This area was noted by many pupils in previous cycles. One such pupil stated - "*A good teacher would give homework to learn and speak with the person*

learning to see how they are progressing. The students should feel engaged and should feel like they're learning and making progress" (Pupil19, Reflective Journal Entry, 26th February 2020). As discussed, I decided not to focus on this area for the purposes of this study. Nevertheless, I do feel it holds importance and I therefore plan to afford my pupils (albeit a different cohort) the opportunity to self-assess and evaluate their OI learning in the form of portfolios and learning logs. In line with Dam (2011), I propose to offer my pupils the opportunity to evaluate and grade their own learning before they receive the results. I then propose to have pupils create OI tests to be carried out with their peers. This denotes a continuation of my values by providing pupils with more collaborative and confidence-boosting environments in which to learn.

Additionally, I was asked by my principal to develop an action plan for our School Improvement Plan based on OI. This proposed plan (see Appendix 1.), I believe, would be sustainable for my colleagues and may also foster engagement, enjoyment, autonomy and accountability among pupils. I propose to discuss my findings with all colleagues and then in line with my values, collaboratively develop a plan for the implementation of the project in a sustainable manner.

4.6 Future Practice

4.6.1 Rationale for Future Data Collection Methods

Above, I have highlighted the data collection methods proposed for cycle three and beyond. I have proposed the use of audio recordings to allow for capturing pupils' feelings and thoughts more clearly than those captured in reflective journals. Although a time consuming process, I feel that by using audio recordings pupils would be provided with a 'think-aloud' method to help them articulate their opinions. Similarly, expression and use of voice could be captured though audio recordings which may provide a clearer interpretation of the feedback. Moreover, Flynn (2017) highlights that data collected from pupil insights into learners voices reflected links between wellbeing, feeling valued and being heard.

The proposed use of questionnaires for both pupils and parents would further validate my claim to knowledge. Bias may arise from the way individual questions and questionnaires are designed, and how questionnaires are administered (Choi & Pak, 2005). Nevertheless, questionnaires provide instruments for displaying a progression of learning and insights. It is hoped they would display a timeline of changes in thinking and opinions which may enhance triangulation. Additionally, by including these forms of data collection in future research they could prove my research to be more rigorous and valid.

4.6.2 Changes to Data Collection Informing Future Practice

At the beginning of cycles one and two I completed a post-it survey with my pupils. This involved asking pupils a question and having them write a one word reply. Questions centred on describing their feelings towards OI. Pupils provided the words I was hoping for without prompt. However, I felt uneasy with my hope for pupils to provide pre-conceived words during this survey. Secondly, I felt that the rich reflections given by pupils in their reflective journals and questionnaires were more beneficial in providing a rationale for findings on pupils' thinking. Therefore, I decided not to continue using the post-it survey for cycle three.

4.7 Analysis of Evolving Values and Practice

4.7.1 Emerging Changes and Revelations in My Values

When beginning the SSAR journey in August I was unsure of my core values. I knew there were many floating on the surface but my central values lay submerged in the murky waters of the "swampy lowlands" (Schön 1983: 42) waiting to be revealed. For me, the mess surrounding the articulation of my values posed a challenge. I struggled to find a handful of words to accurately describe these. Nonetheless, in line with the insights from Tannehill and MacPhail (2014), I needed to be challenged in order to explore and articulate my values through meaningful experiences in the research. With

questioning from my supervisor, I began the journey of allowing my values emerge

from these waters and was ready to jump into the unknown, reminded by McNiff and

Whitehead that I must be prepared to commit to the "risk of creating a new future"

(2011: 35).

As my SSAR project developed I became immersed in reflexivity and I began to

realise that the "self is a product of social processes, not their origin" (Young, 1988:

10). In this, my values became clear. Indeed, my environment, and interactions with my

pupils, their parents, colleagues and past experiences of my own schooling helped shape

my values. Once exposed on the surface of the waters, my values of collaboration,

confidence and self-belief helped form my living standards of judgement, allowing me

to critique my practice. It follows therefore that this SSAR process has changed me as a

person and developed my values.

4.8. Conclusion

As previously mentioned, the three main findings from my SSAR project were as

follows - *a collaborative OI approach to homework contributes to increased*

engagement from pupils, *pupil choice allowed for increased enjoyment of OI*, and

autonomous teaching approaches to OI can foster accountability within pupils. All

three findings have formed my claim to knowledge in this research with my criteria

providing validity to this claim. Although a messy process, the research and data

analysis provided new learning and changes in my values and practice. They provided

evidence that I lived closer to my values and will permit me to continue engaging in

research to allow for continued learning. I will discuss these findings and their

implications for future practice in further detail in the next chapter.

Chapter 5 Conclusions and Recommendations

Ní neart go cur le chéile (in union there is strength)

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter the research background, the literature and knowledge gained, and the methodology used along with a discussion of the findings are reframed. It brings together all strands of the research in order to make a claim to knowledge informed by my standards of judgement. The significance of this study is also outlined along with its limitations and future directions.

5.2 Research Overview

My study focused on the following main question – '*How can I engage collaboratively with my pupils to enhance their enjoyment of Oral Irish?*'. Subsequently, I wished to make OI homework more interesting for my pupils, encourage them to use OI outside of school in a meaningful way and use more engaging approaches to enhance enjoyment of learning in the classroom. Therefore, the general aims of the study were to improve my practice in OI by helping increase pupil engagement in order to enhance

their enjoyment of the learning experience within and outside of school. I also wanted to generate my own 'living theory of education' (Whitehead, 1993) about my OI practice. Lastly, I aimed to live closer to my values of collaboration, confidence and self-belief. My main criteria guided my actions throughout the research. They included - affording my pupils opportunities to take control of their learning to make it more engaging, nurturing collaborative learning environments to provide, albeit controlled, meaningful OI learning experiences in home-settings, and creating more engaging homework activities to enhance enjoyment in the classroom.

In cycle one, I utilised more autonomous teaching methods to encourage pupils to teach their parents OI for homework. Pupils were supported in their teaching and learning in the classroom, in their decision-making of topics to study, in the development of games, and through the use of the customised OI website. I also held my pupils accountable for their home learning through the means of blogging. In cycle two, I used more differentiated approaches in OI. I also increased the autonomy given to pupils in their classroom learning by encouraging them to develop and teach their own lessons to peers. However, due to school closures, data collection in cycle two was suspended prematurely.

A qualitative approach to data collection, was adopted. Themes and findings which were discovered in the data were augmented and critiqued with theory and literature. Reliability, validity and ethical considerations were all acknowledged and respected. In order to ensure this, I enlisted the help and guidance of two critical friends and a validation group who critiqued my claim to knowledge and helped triangulate data.

5.3 Overview of Findings

As aforesaid, before changing my practice in OI, there were discrepancies between my daily practice and the way I aspired to teach. I had been subjecting my pupils to the way I was taught in school, using rote learning techniques and a didactic style, an over-reliance on textbooks and not contextualising OI for my pupils. By changing my approach, pupils participated in actively teaching their parents and peers OI. From this, they gained confidence, enjoyed having more autonomy in their learning, and gained higher levels of engagement and enjoyment in OI. With this in mind, I will now discuss my conclusions through the themes of my findings.

Engagement

It was found that a collaborative approach to OI homework contributed to increased engagement from pupils. Therefore, this collaboration between myself, my pupils and their parents encouraged pupil motivation in and commitment to their learning. Pupils approached me with great enthusiasm, sharing games and weekly tests they created. Pupils also shared creativity in their work through making resources with their peers and parents.

The development of nurturing partnerships with parents encouraged OI use outside of school contexts. Actively and collaboratively engaging parents in their children's OI homework offered an opportunity to increase mutual respect and

understanding between co-participants and I. Parents also acquired new insights about their children such as their creativity, their ability in OI and the growing motivation their children had in this.

Similarly, the nurturing of authentic partnerships increased collaboration and co-operation. Nurturing partnerships encouraged the development of essential social skills in OI and pupils developed different relationships within their peer group, with their parents and with their teacher. Pupils were afforded the opportunity to recognise, acknowledge and commend their own and others' achievements through this child-led approach.

Lastly and most surprisingly, family members other than parents became embedded in the context of this initiative. Although most literature surrounds the role of parents in their child's education, other family members provided great support to pupils. Grandparents and siblings proved popular in this regard and further encouraged engagement with OI in home learning.

Enjoyment

The autonomous teaching approaches implemented into my practice allowed for increased enjoyment of OI by pupils. By giving my pupils more freedom in choosing topics to study, and games they wanted to play, pupils' OI enjoyment of OI increased. It was acknowledged by pupils that the increase in choice allowed OI to become more modern and relevant to their daily lives and interests.

I can also conclude that pupils became more motivated in their learning and use of OI through more autonomous teaching methods. Pupils and their parents reported using Irish more outside of school. As a result of their increased enjoyment of OI pupils were proposing ways of speaking the language in the local environment.

Likewise, pupils gained more self-belief and confidence in their OI through this initiative. Pupils reported heightened confidence in their abilities and believed that they were now capable of success in OI. Pupils felt less fear speaking during OI lessons and instead took on the task of teaching their peers.

The OI website took on a new unexpected role in the research by bringing enjoyment to pupils' learning. Pupils enjoyed engaging with the blog and learning from other pupils' comments, they used the website as a means of helping them learn and teach their parents.

Accountability

Autonomous teaching approaches in OI can foster accountability within pupils. Pupils felt accountable for their parents learning as well as their own. They took ownership of this learning and actively searched for ways of demonstrating progress in learning and achievement.

From this, pupils became more aware of differentiated approaches to learning highlighting a lack of flexibility in my OI initiative. This displayed a neglect in ensuring that each child was developing to their potential but was rectified in cycle two.

Correspondingly, pupils took ownership of their own learning by creating tests and assessments. They created learning logs and acknowledged that they wanted to show if their teaching at home was making an impact on their learning of OI.

5.4 My Claim to Knowledge

By answering the above research questions through my findings, my SSAR achieved the general aims set out previously. I improved my practice by helping increase pupil engagement in OI which enhanced their enjoyment of this within and outside of school. I generated my own 'living theory of education' (Whitehead, 1993) about OI teaching and learning within and outside of the classroom. Correspondingly, I lived closer to my values of collaboration, confidence and self-belief which boosted my own confidence and self-belief in my practice as well as enjoyment derived from my practice.

The aims of this research were achieved through providing evidence of my criteria for standards of judgement. I afforded my pupils the opportunity to make choices in and take ownership of their learning in order to develop their interest of OI. Evidence of this was highlighted in interim questionnaires and reflective journals where co-participants acknowledged the enjoyment they were experiencing from the freedom of this process. A second criterion was ensuring that I nurtured collaborative learning environments in order to provide authentic learning communities to encourage the use of OI outside of school. The data illustrating the increase in frequency of use of OI outside of school provides evidence that this was achieved (as shown in Table 4.1). The final criterion of creating more engaging activities for my pupils so as to enhance their

enjoyment in OI learning was validated through their sustained engagement with the website (as shown in Figure 4.1). Thus, in enacting my standards of judgement, I can make a claim to knowledge.

I claim that I know more about collaboratively teaching OI in order to help increase my pupils' enjoyment of it. In conducting this research I have demonstrated to myself that my practice in OI is best when using collaborative, autonomous teaching methods which give pupils the responsibility to lead their learning. As stated, I previously used a more didactic approach to teaching OI. Nevertheless, in encouraging my pupils to teach their peers and parents, I have transferred that power back to pupils. This has been extremely beneficial to pupils in building their confidence and self-belief in their OI abilities while also increasing their enjoyment of the subject. Thus, I now know that the "raison d'être of liberation education" (Freire, 1970: 66) lies in affording pupils freedom and choice in their learning.

This thesis helped me begin making new knowledge explicit for myself. I will continue my learning journey as I change and adapt my approach with each new cohort of pupils I teach.

5.5 Significance of the Research and Future Directions

5.5.1 Personal Significance of the Research

One of the main ways that the learning outcomes from this study have impacted my practice is through my engagement in reflection. I distinctly remember our first lecture on this course when we were informed of reflective practice. I recall thinking that it would mirror the reflection I did during school placement where I regurgitated reflective sentences on various teaching approaches. Frankly, I reflected because it was a requirement not because I wanted to. However, the fact that I now place active reflection at the top of my learning outcomes, proves how wrong I was. For the first time in my career I am formally evaluating my practice, and acknowledging vulnerabilities I feel. As already stated, I was not living fully to my values. I aspired to values of collaboration, confidence and self-belief in my practice. Yet, I feared practitioner vulnerability when encouraging partnerships in classroom activities. Through reflections on my practice, my own schooling and with the help of module EDF682, I discovered that power is not always negative. I began the process of challenging my ideas of power and discourse in order to exercise liberation in my classroom. Consequently, I recognised that power sharing within the classroom can become empowering for the teacher, their pupils and parents. I have overcome vulnerabilities and I have articulated and made explicit my values.

Beginning my research I was reluctant to give learners more freedom in their learning. I feared a lack of complete control in the classroom and was unsure of how to

plan for this. Therefore, I turned to Little (2004) who described learner empowerment, learner reflection and appropriate target language use as the three main principles of learner autonomy. This learning guided the changes made to my practice and will help me in making future changes. I now place more trust and respect in my pupils as co-constructors of knowledge after experiencing the impact this can have on pupil motivation, enjoyment and engagement in OI learning.

5.5.2 Significance of the Research for My Workplace

As outlined in Chapter One, my workplace is developing a school improvement plan in oral language and their homework policy. I have been approached by the principal to share my research with colleagues in order to have a staff discussion on the possibility of implementing a similar approach to OI across the school. Although my research findings are specific to my class context and findings, and only reflect a short time-frame, I am convinced that pupils' confidence and engagement in, as well as enjoyment of OI would grow if such an initiative was embedded in school plans and policy.

I intend to include a class and home initiative to teaching OI in the syllabus of each class in my school. I would be willing to assist and guide any colleagues who are willing to implement this initiative. Not only do I believe this would be valuable within school practice, but it may also prove valuable if further school closures were to occur. Indeed a conversation with my validation group shows signs of support for this initiative for an in-school and distance-learning platform (see Appendix 20.).

5.5.3 Significance of the Research for the Wider Educational Field

A small bank of literature comparatively reflects the role child-centred learning in

partnership with others plays in children's learning. Examples include – a current

Doctor of Philosophy research being undertaken in Trinity College Dublin

on empowering student and parent engagement within the Irish language. Additionally,

there are publications from the NCCA and National Parents Council on parental

partnerships in children's learning (O'Toole et al., 2019), and publications on the role

of home-learning during school closures caused by Covid-19 (Andrew et al., 2020;

Burke & Dempsey, 2020; Doyle, 2020; Darmody et al., 2020; Xia, 2020). This thesis

may contribute to the growing body of knowledge about child-centred partnerships and

collaboration, be it language learning or learning in general.

Likewise, teachers in Ireland are currently undergoing in-service training in the

implementation of the PLC (NCCA, 2019), the aims and objectives of which underpin

this thesis. I have kept in contact with the education officers who developed this

curriculum and hope to share my research with them to further support teachers in this

implementation regarding OI.

5.6 Further Limitations of the Research

A lack of previous research on the topic of collaborative partnerships in children's

learning of OI in English-medium schools is evident. Not only is there a gap in this

knowledge, there is also a gap in current research on the impact of home-learning

within OI in English medium schools and ways of encouraging OI outside of education

contexts. This gap in previous literature made research more difficult and meant that I

had to draw upon literature in foreign and Irish-medium contexts to gain insight into my

research area.

Another limitation of this study is sample bias and the power struggles that may

have been at play. As previously mentioned, pupils and their parents may have wanted

to please me, by writing responses that they felt I wanted to hear. Although, I reassured

them throughout the research that I valued their honesty in responding to the questions I

posed, it is impossible to know if there was some level of bias within their answers.

A further limitation that must be offered is the recognition that I was nested very

much within the assemblage of my experiences as pupil, student-teacher, teacher and

from piloting the PLC (NCCA, 2019). It posed the challenge for me to look at the raw

data and not my preconceived ideas and expectations. However, with the help of my

supervisor, critical friends and validation group I continually questioned the validity

behind my interpretation of data and attempted to honestly portray the data in this

study.

5.7 Recommendations

There is a need to address the lack of current research on OI in English-medium schools

for further development in the area of partnerships in this environment, especially with

the current implementation of the PLC (NCCA, 2019). Similarly, school closures have

focused research on the value and implications of home-learning. This is an opportune

time to examine the impact of collaborative partnerships on OI learning for pupils.

If engaging with this research again, I would ensure to give adequate time in

recording pupils' responses, preferably in video format once granted ethical permission.

This may help eliminate bias in pupils' answers and could capture responses

authentically as I would be able to hear any hesitations and uncertainty in their replies.

As noted by Whitehead (2010), I would be able to use methods of 'empathetic

resonance' or ways of communicating an energy-flowing feeling of the instant presence

of pupils in communication. Using video recording as a means of data collection would

prove to clarify values, energy and emotions conveyed by my pupils.

In future, I would recommend that the researcher surrounds themselves with a

team who critique interpretations of the data in order to ascertain rigour and validity. I

found my supervisor, critical friends and validation group invaluable in this process and

this ultimately led me to question my own thoughts and portrayals of the findings in my

research.

5.7.1 Further Recommendations and Future Directions

The introduction of the PLC (NCCA, 2019) offers a significant opportunity to address

the issues which have restricted the engagement of primary pupils in their enjoyment

and use of OI both in Irish primary schools and in the home setting. As discussed,

attitudes towards teaching and learning Irish were generally unfavourable, while many pupils reported rarely, if ever speaking Irish at home. With this up-to-date, relevant and highly communicative curriculum, these previous impediments have been identified. This study is an ideal way of addressing the issues regarding OI in primary school.

Over the past number of years conditions have improved considerably in Irish teaching with the help of technology. However, as noted during school closures, there is still a fear from some educators in the provision of Irish home-learning as it is felt that it is too difficult, may cause anxiety or it may be taught wrong (Burke & Dempsey, 2020). Yet it must be asked, if further school closures were to occur in the future, are we prepared as educators to merely let our fears override pupils' learning of OI? I am certainly not. I have seen first-hand the benefits that come from encouraging child-led OI learning in the home environment. I believe that the provision of an initiative such as mine, presents an unprecedented opportunity to fully resource, support and implement the teaching of OI using the PLC (NCCA, 2019).

5.8 Dissemination of the Research

In order for this research to be of benefit to others I hope to disseminate it in different ways. Firstly, I have shared my research with my colleagues but I now hope to share my research with our current parent cohort in order to gain feedback on implementing the initiative into our school improvement plan. Likewise, I hope to share this research with the wider educational community. I have already been in contact with another researcher who is currently conducting a doctor of philosophy in Trinity College Dublin

in a similar area to mine. We have discussed literature and I hope to now share my findings with her. Secondly, I hope to share my research with the NCCA educational officers who helped us pilot the PLC (NCCA, 2019) in our school. Likewise, I would feel very privileged to share my research at TeachMeets, NEARI-meets and other research meetings.

5.9 Conclusion

This SSAR intended to improve the learning experience of pupils but it was in fact an account of my own learning journey. I have discovered that educational theory can be best understood by developing my own theory. It gave me the enthusiasm to go back into the classroom, after a long-awaited time of distance learning, to once again teach from the heart. I am now equipped with the tools not only to teach better, but to live better.

The End of a Life-Changing Moment and the Beginning of a Life-Changing Practice

I would now like to return to the story I began with, about the pupil who struggled with Irish. She had just asked to drop down to ordinary level Irish. However, with the encouragement of one secondary school teacher who never gave up on this child, the pupil began to enjoy the subject again, became more confident and even went on to become a primary school teacher.

That pupil was me.

This teacher became the inspiration behind my research project today. I did not want history to repeat itself and I wanted my pupils to enjoy learning Irish, to confidently spread the language through collaboration and above all have self-belief in their abilities.

"It was the belief of that one teacher who helped shape the way in which I interact with my own students today, allowing for education as a means to freedom of voice (Adapted from Freire, 1972)."

(Vanston, 2019, Reflective Task 1 – EDF682, 5th September, 2019)

Appendices

Appendix 1. Overview of Research Cycles and Proposed Cycles

Stage	Cycle 1	Cycle 2 Incomplete	Cycle 3 Future Research	Cycle 4 School Improvement Plan
Pre-Intervention	• Baseline questionnaires	• Interim questionnaires • Evaluation of changes	• Discussion with pupils, parents and colleagues on hopes for Cycle 3	• Discussion with colleagues on hopes for SIP • Collaboration between class levels for planning and implementation
Intervention	**Engagement with project** - Gradual Release of Responsibility Model (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983)	Engagement with project using same **model and changes** implemented	Engagement with project using same **model & changes** implemented	Engagement of **whole school with project for SIP** using **adapted model** with colleagues and pupils
Data Collection	• Reflective journals • Post-it survey • Observations • Feedback from • critical friends and • validation group • Website blog and statistics	(Same as cycle 1) **Intended data not gathered:** • Audio recordings • Final reflective journal entries • Questionnaires post-intervention	(same as cycle 1) With the addition of **pupil portfolios (Dam, 2011)** to document self-evaluation and assessment	• Reflective journals (pupils and colleagues) • Observations • Pupil portfolios
Post-Intervention (Evaluation)	• **Differentiation** – • **Increased pupil accountability & autonomy**	• Self-evaluation and assessment by pupils	• Feedback • Changes implemented to project for SIP	• Questionnaires on school website • Staff meeting discussions

Appendix 2. Baseline Questionnaires

Baseline Questionnaire - Pupils

<u>Action Research Survey (Pupils)</u>

Learning of Oral Language in Irish

When thinking about your oral language in Irish i.e. listening and speaking

please answer the following:

1. When I'm learning Irish I prefer to: (please tick one box)

Listen	Speak	Read	Write

2. How would you describe your oral language in Irish? (please tick one box)

Excellent	Very good	Good	Fair	Poor

Other (please specify):

_____

---

3. Do you like oral language in Irish? (please tick one box)

Really Like	Like	It's alright	Dislike	Strongly dislike

Please explain:

_____

_____

_____

4. What do you find easy in oral Irish?

_____

_____

_____

5. What do you find difficult in oral Irish?

_____

_____

_____

6. Give examples of things you do that help you learn and use oral Irish …

_____

_____

_____

7. How often do you use Irish outside of school?

Everyday	A few times a week	A few times a month	A few times a year	Never

8. Do you like oral language homework in Irish? (please tick one box)

Yes	No

9. Describe what it looks like when you are doing oral Irish homework …

_____

_____

_____

10. If you could make any changes to oral Irish homework what would you do?

_____

_____

_____

11. Any other comments

_____

_____

_____

Baseline Questionnaire – Parents

Action Research Survey (Parents)

Learning of Oral language in Irish

When thinking about your child's oral language in Irish i.e. listening and speaking please answer the following:

1. How would you describe your child's oral language in Irish? (please tick one box)

Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor

Other (please specify):

_____

2. Do you think your child enjoys speaking Irish? (please tick one box)

Yes	No

Please explain:

_____

_____

_____

3. How often do you speak Irish at home outside of homework? (please tick one

box)

Everyday	A few times a week	A few times a month	A few times a year	Never

4. Homework in the area of Oral Language in Irish is valuable to my child's

language development? (please tick one box)

Yes	No

5. How does your child find Oral Irish homework? (please tick one box)

Easy	Comfortable	Coping	Challenging	Extremely challenging

6. Do you feel that you are able to help your child with their oral Irish homework? Please explain

_____

_____

_____

_____

7. Describe how your child completes their oral Irish homework …

_____

_____

_____

8. If you could change the approach to oral language homework in Irish what would you do?

_____

_____

_____

9. Any other comments

_____

_____

_____

Appendix 3. Interim Questionnaires

Interim Questionnaire - Parents

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<u>Action Research Survey (Parents) C2</u>

Learning of Oral language in Irish

When thinking about your child's oral language in Irish i.e. listening and speaking please answer the following:

1. Do you think your child's level of oral Irish has improved since beginning this initiative?

Yes	No

Please explain:

_____

_____

2. How does your child find oral Irish homework now? (please tick one box)

Easy	Comfortable	Coping	Challenging	Extremely challenging

</div>

3. Do you think your child enjoys oral Irish homework? (please tick one box)

Yes	No

Please explain:

_____

_____

4. Do you enjoy engaging in oral Irish homework with your child? (please tick one box)

Yes	No

Please explain:

_____

_____

5. My child has gained confidence in teaching me Oral Irish during homework? (please tick one box)

Yes	No

6. I have gained confidence in speaking Irish during homework? (please tick one box)

Yes	No

7. Do you feel that you are better able to help your child with their Oral Irish

   homework? Please explain

   _____

   _____

   _____

8. Describe how your child completes their Oral Irish homework now …

   _____

   _____

   _____

9. If you could change the approach to oral language homework in Irish what

   would you do?

   _____

   _____

   _____

10. Any other comments

   _____

   _____

   _____

Interim Questionnaire - Pupils

<div style="border: 1px solid black;">

<u>Action Research Survey (Pupils) C2</u>

Learning of Oral Language in Irish

When thinking about your oral language in Irish i.e. listening and speaking please answer the following:

1. Do you think you have improved your Oral Irish since the beginning of this term? (please tick one box)

Yes	No

Other (please specify):

_____

2. Do you think your confidence in speaking Oral Irish has improved?

Yes	No

Other (please specify):

</div>

_____

3. Do you like Oral Irish homework? (please tick one box)

Really Like	Like	It's alright	Dislike	Strongly dislike

Please explain:

_____

_____

_____

4. What do you find easy when engaging with Oral Irish homework?

_____

_____

_____

5. What do you find difficult when engaging with Oral Irish homework?

_____

_____

_____

6. Give examples of things you do that help you teach, learn and use Oral Irish during homework…

_____

_____

_____

7. Describe what it looks like when you are doing Oral Irish homework …

_____

_____

_____

8. If you could make any changes to Oral Irish homework what would you do?

_____

_____

_____

9. Any other comments

_____

_____

_____

Appendix 4. Proposed Questionnaires at the End of Cycle Two

Proposed parent questionnaire for the end of cycle two

Action Research Survey (Parents) C3

Learning of Oral language in Irish

When thinking about your child's oral language in Irish i.e. listening and speaking please answer the following:

1. Do you think your child's level of Oral Irish has improved since beginning this initiative?

Yes	No

Please explain:

_____

_____

2. How does your child find Oral Irish homework now? (please tick one box)

Easy	Comfortable	Coping	Challenging	Extremely challenging

---

3. Do you think your child enjoys Oral Irish homework? (please tick one box)

Yes	No

Please explain:

_____

_____

4. Did you enjoy engaging in cycle two of our Oral Irish homework project with your child? (please tick one box)

Yes	No

Please explain:

_____

_____

5. My child has gained confidence in teaching me Oral Irish for homework during cycle two of our project? (please tick one box)

Yes	No

6. I have gained confidence in speaking Irish for homework during cycle two of our project? (please tick one box)

Yes	No

7. Do you feel that you are better able to help your child with their Oral Irish

   homework? Please explain

   _____

   _____

   _____

8. Describe how your child completed their Oral Irish homework during cycle

   two …

   _____

   _____

   _____

9. If you could change the approach to oral language homework in Irish what

   would you do?

   _____

   _____

   _____

10. Any other comments

   _____

_____

_____

Proposed pupils questionnaire for the end of cycle two

Action Research Survey (Pupils) C3

Learning of Oral Language in Irish

When thinking about your oral language in Irish i.e. listening and speaking please answer the following:

1. Do you think you have improved your Oral Irish since the beginning of this term? (please tick one box)

Yes	No

Other (please specify):

_____

2. Do you think your confidence in speaking Oral Irish has improved?

Yes	No

Other (please specify):

_____

3. Do you like Oral Irish homework? (please tick one box)

Really Like	Like	It's alright	Dislike	Strongly dislike

Please explain:

_____

_____

_____

4. What did you find easy when engaging with cycle 2 of our Oral Irish homework project?

_____

_____

_____

5. What did you find difficult when engaging with cycle 2 of our Oral Irish homework project?

   _____

   _____

   _____

6. Give examples of things you did that helped you teach, learn and use Oral Irish during cycle 2 of your homework project …

   _____

   _____

   _____

7. Describe what it looked like when you were doing Oral Irish homework during cycle 2 of the project …

   _____

   _____

   _____

8. If you could make any changes to Oral Irish homework what would you do?

_____

_____

_____

9. Any other comments

_____

_____

_____

Appendix 5. Ethics and Consent Forms

Yvonne Vanston,

National University of Ireland Maynooth,

Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education,

Mariavilla,

Maynooth,

Co. Kildare.

(address of chairman of board of management & school removed below for

confidentiality purposes)

…….,

……,

...……,

…….,

.……,

9th October 2019

Dear Mr . …….. (name of chairman of board of management removed for

confidentiality purposes),

I am writing to enquire about conducting action research in the school during this academic year. I am undertaking a Master's of Education (Research in Practice) at Maynooth University, supervised by Fiona Nic Fhionnlaoich. In my research project, *How can I engage collaboratively with parents to promote the learning of Irish for their children?* I will aim to improve my practice by promoting the use of Irish outside of the school.

The research will take place with my current 6th class and my research will focus on empowering my pupils to teach Irish to their parents. This research will be in line with the New Primary Language Curriculum and will be aided by my knowledge from piloting this curriculum over the past two years. I will focus on the area of oral language and I aim to engage my pupils in meaningful activities to promote spoken Irish outside of school.

The commitment from the school would be to allow me to conduct research within my regular language teaching lessons throughout the second term. Having gained explicit consent from parents, guardians, pupils and staff to conduct my research, I would use various data gathering methods such as the use of audio-recordings of pupils engaged in whole class and group discussion, observations, a reflective journal and I will conduct content analysis of work samples.

In advance of conducting the research, I will apply for ethical approval from the Froebel Department Research and Ethics Committee. Following this, I will circulate letters, information sheets and consent forms to all parents/guardians of children in my class. Parents/guardians will be asked to confirm in writing that they consent to their child's participation in the study. Following this, assent will be sought from the children. All participants will have the right to withdraw from the research at any stage in the process.

All participants, including pupils, parents, staff and the school, will be made anonymous in all research reports. The data collected will be kept strictly confidential, available only to my supervisor and myself, and not used other than specified without the further consent of all involved being obtained. Once approved by my supervisor, I can send you a copy of the leaflets, presentation notes and letters for parents and pupils.

If you have any queries concerning any aspect of the research, please do not hesitate to contact me by phone on 0876646231 or by email at yvonne.vanston.2020@mumail.ie. I would be grateful if you would complete the consent form below, and return it to me in the stamped addressed envelope enclosed in this letter.

Thank you for your time and attention. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

yvonne vanston

Yvonne Vanston

How can I engage collaboratively with parents to promote the learning of Irish for their children?

Yvonne Vanston

Maynooth University – Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education

School Address …… (removed for confidentiality purposes)

Chairman of board of management …… (removed for confidentiality purposes)

☐   We do not wish for our school to participate in this project.

☐   We would like to find out more about this project.

☐   We would like our school to take part in this project.

Please return this form in the stamped addressed envelope enclosed

with this letter.

Thank you for your help.

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 a student on the Master of Education programme at Maynooth University. As part of my degree I am carrying out a research project. The focus of my research is based on engaging my pupils in meaningful activities to promote spoken Irish outside of school and whether this leads to an improvement in spoken Irish and an increase in confidence in speaking Irish.

In order to do this, I intend to carry out research in the classroom by empowering my pupils to teach Irish to their parents. This research will be in line with the New Primary Language Curriculum and will be aided by my knowledge from piloting this curriculum over the past two years.

The data will be collected using observations, reflective journals, a daily teacher journal, audio recordings, questionnaires and teacher designed tasks and tests. The girls will be asked their opinions through discussing how confident they feel about speaking Irish and if they enjoyed teaching their parents Irish at home.

Your daughter'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 daughter will be allowed withdraw from the research process at any stage and she will be made aware of this throughout the research phase.

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 daughter to give permission for 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 yvonne.vanston.2020.mumail.ie.

Yours faithfully,

Ms. Vanston

Child's name …………………….

I am trying to find out how children best learn spoken Irish in primary school and how I can help children become more confident in speaking Irish. I would like to find out more about this. I hope to watch and listen to you when you are in school along with engaging in conversations around speaking Irish. I also hope to write down some notes about your learning.

Would you be ok with that? Pick tick 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 that I have sent home?

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

Maynooth University Froebel Department of

Primary and Early

Childhood Education

Roinn Froebel Don Bhun- agus Luath-Oideachas

Ollscoil Mhá Nuad

PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

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

have been answered. I voluntarily agree to the participation of my child in this study.

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

Parent / Guardian Signature: _____

Parent / Guardian Signature: _____

Date: _____

....

Name of Child: _____

Child's signature: _____

Date: _____

Maynooth University Froebel

Department of

Primary and Early

Childhood Education

Roinn Froebel Don Bhun- agus Luath Oideachas

Ollscoil Mhá Nuad

Information Sheet

Parents and Guardians

Who is this information sheet for?

This information sheet is for parents and guardians.

What is this Action Research Project about?

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

What are the research question?

- How can I engage collaboratively with parents to promote the learning of Irish for their children?

What sorts of methods will be used?

- Observation, reflective journals, reflective notes, questionnaires, teacher designed tasks and tests and audio-recordings

Who else will be involved?

The study will be carried out by Ms. Vanston as part of the Research in Practice 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 Ms. Vanston to undertake this study with her 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. All participants will have the right to withdraw from the research at any stage in the process.

Contact details: Ms. Vanston   **E:** yvonne.vanston.2020@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

Declaration by Researcher

This declaration must be signed by the applicant(s)

I acknowledge and agree that:

a) It is my sole responsibility and obligation to comply with all Irish and EU

legislation relevant to this project.

b) I will comply with Irish and EU legislation relevant to this project.

c) That the research will be conducted in accordance with the Maynooth

University Research Ethics Policy.

d) That the research will be conducted in accordance with the Maynooth University Research Integrity Policy.

e) That the research will not commence until ethical approval has been granted by the Research and Ethics committee in the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education.

Signature of Student: *Yvonne Vanston*

Date: 28/10/2019

Maynooth University Froebel Department of

Primary and Early

Childhood Education

Roinn Froebel Don Bhun- agus Luath Oideachas

Ollscoil Mhá Nuad

Information Sheet

Critical Friends and Validation Group Members

Who is this information sheet for?

This information sheet is for critical friends and validation group members.

What is this Action Research Project about?

The Research in Practice Master of Education in the Froebel Department of Primary

and Early Childhood, Maynooth University are required to conduct an action research

project, examining an area of their own practice as a class teacher. This project will

involve an analysis of the teacher's own practice. Data will be generated using

observation, reflective notes, audio recordings, reflective journals, teacher designed

tasks and tests, and questionnaires. The teacher is then required to produce a thesis

documenting this action research project.

What are the research question?

- How can I engage collaboratively with parents to promote the learning of
  Irish for their children?

What sorts of methods will be used?

- Observation, reflective journals, reflective notes, questionnaires, teacher
  designed tasks and tests and audio-recordings

Who else will be involved?

The study will be carried out by Ms. Vanston as part of the Research in Practice

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 Ms. Vanston to anonymously

include transcripts of conversations held during validation group meetings

within her thesis. 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. All participants will

have the right to withdraw from the research at any stage in the process.

Contact details: Ms. Vanston   **E:** yvonne.vanston.2020@mumail.ie

Maynooth University Froebel Department of

Primary and Early

Childhood Education

Roinn Froebel Don Bhun- agus Luath-Oideachas

Ollscoil Mhá Nuad

VALIDATION GROUP CONSENT FORM

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

have been answered. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I am aware that I

can withdraw from the research at any stage throughout the process and I will receive

a copy of this consent form for my information.

Staff Name: _____

Staff Signature: _____

Date: _____

Maynooth University Froebel Department of

Primary and Early

Childhood Education

Roinn Froebel Don Bhun- agus Luath-Oideachas

Ollscoil Mhá Nuad

CRITICAL FRIEND CONSENT FORM

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

have been answered. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I am aware that I

can withdraw from the research at any stage throughout the process and I will receive

a copy of this consent form for my information.

Staff Name: _____

Staff Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 6. Pupil's Worries Surrounding Oral Irish

I'm worried I won't be as good as the others in secondary school (Pupil17)

I feel anxious when speaking Irish out loud in class. I'm not good enough (Pupil9)

I find it really difficult and I get frustrated when I can't do it right (Pupil6)

I was afraid … I'm very worried going into secondary school (Pupil24)

I'm afraid I'll pronounce it wrong and then learn it that way. (Pupil5)

(Baseline questionnaires, January 2020)

Appendix 7. Collaboration in the Project

Values of collaboration and co-operation noted by pupils in their engagement with the project.

I sit at the kitchen table with my mum and use the website to teach her. We then have a conversation together based off what we've learned. (Pupil11)

I do it with my grandparents and ask them questions. It helps them remember their Irish and they enjoy it. (Pupil9)

I normally try it with my nana and sometimes my grandad tries cause it helps his

memory (child with grandad who has dementia) (Pupil8)

We both sit at the kitchen table with the website loaded on the laptop. We listen to

and learn the vocabulary on the website on a Monday and revise this on Tuesday by

playing the games that you suggested. My daughter pretends she is the teacher and I

am the student which she loves. We then listen to the questions and answers on the

website on Tuesday and Wednesday and have a conversation about these. Then on a

Thursday we do the assigned activity for the week and write the blog post describing

what we did. (Pupil17)

(Reflective Journal Entries, February 2020)

Appendix 8. Collaboration with Other Family Members

I do it with my grandparents and they love it. It helps with their memory. (Pupil9)

My grandad really like it and he remembers some of the Irish. (Pupil6)

My brother and sister and me do games. They get quite competitive! (Pupil13)

… grandparents and they enjoy it too (Pupil7)

… with grandparents and asking them questions. It helps them remember their Irish

and they enjoy it (Pupil19)

(Interim Questionnaires, February 2020)

Appendix 9. Pupils Highlighting a Need for Choice

I find talking about stuff in relation to me, what we're doing in school, hobbies and

more, easier and interesting. (Pupil10)

I find it easy to talk in a group working on projects etc. I also enjoy talking to my

teacher in Irish ☺ (Pupil18)

I do look forward to showing worksheets or projects to the class and explaining them

in Irish! (Pupil1)

(Baseline Questionnaires, January 2020)

Appendix 10. Parents' Descriptions of their Child's Improvements

Definitely, I feel her oral Irish has improved greatly (along with her confidence. I

have also learned a lot from her. (Parent17)

… she has gained confidence and has become more motivated to learn Irish for

homework. (Parent13)

Oral Irish homework is no longer a battle. It has become the first piece of homework

to be completed each night. (Parent18)

Not only has her Irish improved, so has her younger siblings as she teaches them Irish

too. (Parent7)

(Interim questionnaires, February 2020)

Appendix 11. Pupils' Descriptions of their Improvements

… I'm not worried about making a mistake because we all make them. (Pupil19)

I am learning loads and having fun teaching my parents. I think we are all getting

better too. (Pupil7)

I like teaching my parents and sister for homework as I get to choose the games and

things we play. I think we are all getting better and not afraid to say the wrong thing

anymore. (Pupil11)

(Interim questionnaires, February 2020)

Appendix 12. Increased Enjoyment of Oral Irish among Pupils

Reflective journal entries from pupils highlighting an increased enjoyment of OI

after cycle one.

Oh yea, definitely it's not boring anymore and I look forward to doing the oral Irish

homework now. I think I've got more confident at speaking and writing which I

never thought would be possible. I don't feel as nervous going into secondary school.

I feel I've learned a lot since the start of the year and I don't dread it as much as I

used to. (Pupil17, Reflective Journal Entry, 10th March 2020)

Yes, I like speaking it more because I've more words that I know and I'm able to

have a conversation with someone at home. (Pupil2, Reflective Journal Entry, 9th

March 2020)

Appendix 13. Website Traffic

Website Traffic Beyond Scope of Project

	January	February	March	April	May

Page Views — Visitors
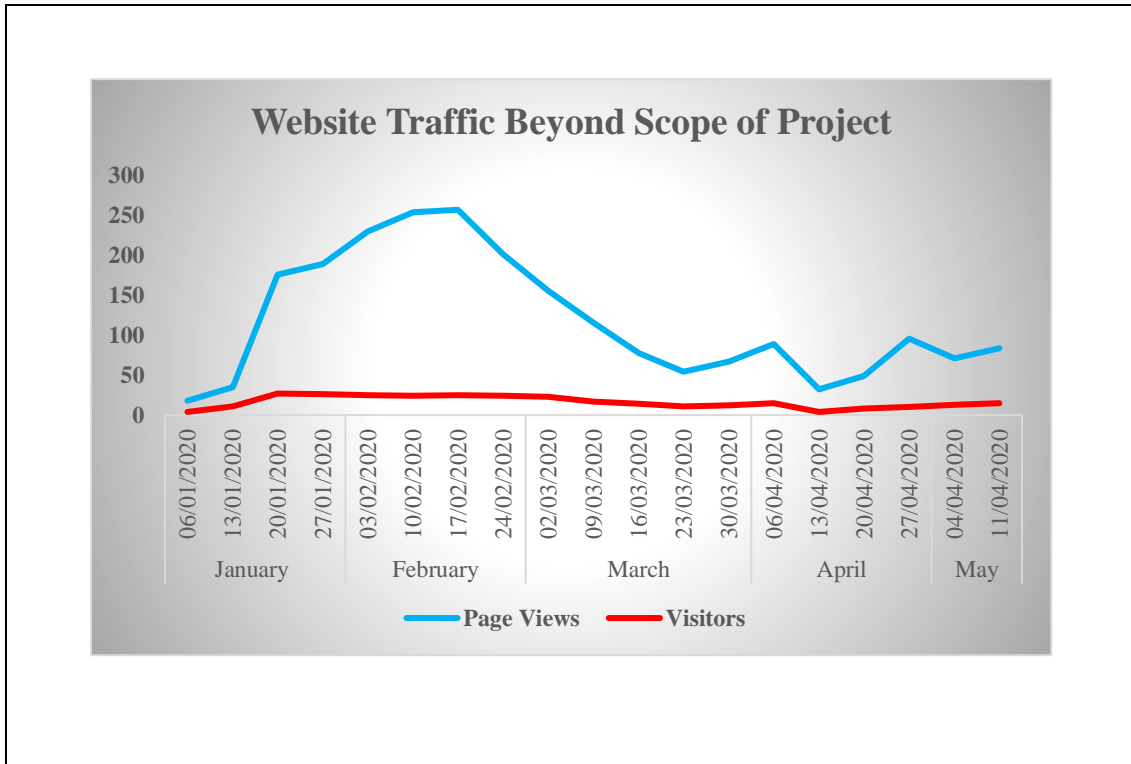
Appendix 14. Comment from Parent of EAL Child

Parent of EAL pupil expressing difficult with OI homework within interim questionnaire.

She still doesn't think she is good enough at Irish and worries about her level going into secondary school. (Parent11, February 2020)

Appendix 15. Uncertainty of Increased Confidence after Cycle One

I'm not sure, I'm definitely learning more. (Pupil4)

I think I'm getting better but I don't think I'm there yet. (Pupil7)

I'm not sure if sure if I'm more confident. (Pupil21)

I would make it at levels that would suit students who might need more help and make it

harder for those that like Irish who like competition and want to improve. (Pupil5)

(Interim Questionnaires, February 2020)

Appendix 16. Researcher Reflection during Cycle Two

Researcher reflective journal entry documenting learning during cycle two.

Sitting down and chatting with 1A today really helped me understand how homework

is completed on a daily basis. It gave me a new understanding of how difficult OI

homework can be for someone who began learning it last year and the tremendous

amount of work that goes into this homework each night. 1A acknowledged the

comfort she now feels with doing her OI homework. She explained that it has eased

the pressure she felt to complete all tasks and to a high standard. She also noted that it

was now an easier tasks teaching less vocabulary and content at home to her dad and

that he was having more success learning the language.

(Pupil10, Reflective Journal Entry, 10th March 2020)

Appendix 17. Engagement with Website Blog

Cycle	Month	Date	No. of Responses	Total number of pupils	Percentage Engagement
Cycle 1	January	14th	24	24	100%
		15th	24	24	100%
		16th	24	24	100%
		Service of Light	No homework Given	24	
		22nd	22	24	92%
		23rd	21	24	88%
		28th	23	24	96%
		29th	24	24	100%
		30th	22	24	92%
	February	4th	24	24	100%
		5th	24	24	100%
		6th	24	24	100%
		11th	23	24	96%
		12th	24	24	100%
		13th	21	24	88%
		Mid-Term Break	No homework Given	24	
		Mid-Term Break	No homework Given	24	
		Mid-Term Break	No homework Given	24	
Cycle 2		25th	22	24	92%
		26th	21	24	88%
		27th	24	24	100%
	February	Science Blast	No homework Given	24	
		4th	24	24	100%
		5th	23	24	96%
		10th	24	24	100%
		School Bereavement	No homework Given	24	
Precentage Total					96%

Appendix 18. Pupil Accountability

I sit down with my mum at the kitchen table and we go over what I've learned in

class. We start with the words on the PowerPoint. Then we do the games to try and

see what we can remember. After that we test one another and we make it like a

competition. There's usually a prize for the winner. Then I teach the questions and

answers. After we know them we test each other and then we go onto the activities.

So we leave the best bit until last. We really enjoyed doing the baking. We then write

a post for the blog and it's nice to see what everyone else writes. I feel I needed to

check if my teaching is working or not so testing was a good way to find out what

you know and where you need to improve.

(Pupil9, Reflective Journal Entry, 9th March 2020)

I go into another room to learn the words first and then I teach them to my mum.

(Pupil20, Reflective Journal Entry, 9th March 2020)

I learn the vocabulary on my own by repeating the words over and over while

looking at the PowerPoint and then I learn the conversation starters. Next, I teach my

dad (sometimes my mum) the Irish and we have a conversation. (Pupil19, Reflective

Journal Entry, 9th March 2020)

I have been able to make tests for myself and my parents using the website and we do

it on every Friday to see how much we've learnt from the week. We have a leader

board and I am WINNING!!!!!! ☺ (Pupil8, Reflective Journal Entry, 10th March

2020)

Appendix 19. Parents' Perceptions of their Child's Accountability

She learns the vocabulary and conversations in her room on her own and then comes

down to the kitchen to teach me them. (Parent16)

She has taken ownership of her Irish homework and has taken on the role of the

teacher at home … she can be quite strict! I think she now feels responsible for her

own learning as well as mine and this motivates her to learn more Irish now. She is

enjoying it. (Parent7)

(February 2020)

Appendix 20. Distance Learning Capabilities of the Project

One of my validation group members noted the following: It would be great to share

this with staff next year in case there are further school closures, I think this project

will be very valuable for all teachers, especially those at the upper end of the school.

(Researcher, Reflective Journal Entry, 20th March 2020)

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