OLLSCOIL NA HÉIREANN MÁ NUAD

THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND
MAYNOOTH

Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education

M.Ed. (Research in Practice)
2018 - 2019

HOW CAN I NURTURE COMPASSION IN MY CLASSROOM?

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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:

23rd September 2019

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DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

The growing competitive and capitalist nature of our Western world appears to be increasingly filtering down into our education system. Excellence in education seems to be synonymous with academic achievement and performance; something that can be quantified and used for economic gain. As a result, education may not be answering the expressed needs of our world such as the need for solidarity and compassion for others during times of suffering and struggle. Reflecting on my own teaching practice, I realised that my actions were not fully led by my values but led by this ever-mounting pressure on teachers and children to perform and achieve. My role of teacher needed to go beyond academic instruction by also actively nurturing caring and compassionate relationships in my classroom.

The purpose of this self-study action research project is to identify how I can change and improve my practice in order to nurture compassion in my classroom. The three month intervention was conducted in a co-educational urban school in Dublin. The majority of children in my class are from a prosperous socio-economic background. Academic achievement is highly valued and prioritised in the school.

Using the curricular subjects, I integrated and linked the topic of compassion as seamlessly as possible with curricular objectives and outcomes. I used teaching methodologies and Drama strategies that provided opportunities for the children to explore compassion through perspective taking, identifying common connections and expressing compassionate action. I applied a lens of compassion to my teaching and actions.

Through the use of thematic data analysis, common themes emerged revealing the findings of my study. The results indicated that compassion can be nurtured in the primary

classroom as part of the current curriculum. Analysis conveyed that particular teaching methodologies have an influential role in nurturing compassion in the classroom. Drama strategies proved effective in the enactment of compassion. Active engagement with the skills of compassion was evident in the data. Overall, the data evinced that the children had developed a deeper understanding of compassion. Evidence indicated the important role of self-compassion and collegiality for teacher wellbeing. Personally and professionally, I learned that nurturing compassion requires practice, imagination and courage.

Keywords: action research, self-study, critical reflection, compassion, self-compassion, Loving-Kindness meditation, methodology, Drama, emotional intelligence, social and emotional learning

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This has been a collaborative project and I have many people to thank.

Firstly I wish to thank my research supervisor, Aoife Titley, for her expertise, guidance and patience throughout the process of writing this dissertation. Aoife has provided me with so much support and somehow managed to put a positive spin on all my feedback throughout the process.

I also wish to extend my gratitude to my colleagues in school for contributing to my research through classroom observations, validation meetings and constructive caring advice. I particularly wish to thank Marita Keenan, Shóna Kelly and Amy Moran for their kindness, wisdom and support throughout my research project. You have collectively been role models of compassion for me and made me realise the value of caring colleagues. I would also like to thank the children in my class for being co-participants in my learning process.

Finally I am forever grateful for the support of friends and family. Thank you to Jonathan Diaz for maintaining my motivation and self-belief during my studies. I especially want to thank my sister, Jackie Joynt, for her motivational texts and advice. Thank you for listening to all of my concerns and worries. Thank you for proofreading my assignments and drafts and providing much appreciated feedback.

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1.1 Focus and aims of the study

The focus of my study centred around my practice and my concerns relating to it. I was concerned that my classroom culture was not as supportive, caring and compassionate as it could be towards the struggles and needs of others. I was avoiding the 'emotional presence' of the children in my class by not fully acknowledging them (bell hooks, 2003:129). I was not fully recognising and valuing the importance of caring compassionate relationships in the classroom. For a growing number of years, I have found myself on a daily curriculum chase, racing from topic to topic, getting things covered in order to move onto the next concept, topic or page. I was engaging with the curriculum and the children at a superficial level. In all of this hurry, I had lost sight of what I valued about teaching.

This daily curriculum chase was leading me down a path towards teaching for the test; prioritising academic performance over more pressing classroom and societal issues. I realised that my social responsibility as an educator to teach children about the importance of human interconnectedness and solidarity had become increasingly compromised by pressures to teach for the test and getting books completed. As a result of my concerns, my research question came into existence: How can I nurture compassion in my classroom? I approached the question by engaging with the McNiff and Whitehead (2010:9) question, 'how do I improve what I am doing?'. Nurture in the context of my study refers to the process of caring for, supporting the development of and attending to compassion.

The aim of my study centres around improving these concerns by changing my practice of teaching. In order to investigate my concerns further, I needed to participate in a self-study reflective practice that included my own considerations as well as the considerations of others (Beauchamp, 2015). I wanted to investigate how I could transform my practice in order to nurture compassion in my classroom. My other aims included living closer to my values and teaching a meaningful curriculum while connecting with the children in my class.

1.2 Research background, context and intervention

Despite taking the 'scenic route' into my teaching career, the delay afforded me various career opportunities and life experiences that have influenced my teaching positively. I struggled academically in primary school and attended learning support for reading and maths. My experience in primary school was challenging and caused a lot of distress and suffering for me. My interest in teaching was in part spurred on by my previous role as a special needs assistant. My collective experience in the education system allowed me to gain multiple perspectives on school life. School communities are infiltrated with power relations and assumptions (Brookfield 2017). Schools are in a constant flux of academic, emotional and social struggles for both pupils and teachers. From my experience, struggles and challenges can prove to be a source of common human connection or isolation, depending on the perspective taken.

My values focus on respect, inclusivity, compassion and social justice. My evolving teacher identity has been moulded by my experience as a member of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) community. The adversities of facing a dominant culture have heightened my awareness about the importance of inclusivity, respect and social justice. Based on my own early academic experience, I believe that children should be encouraged to use their voice in class in order to enhance their self-worth regardless

of academic ability. I believe that kindness, care and compassion should be seen as equally valuable learning outcomes that lead to important life skills. I strongly agree with the sentiments of Giroux (2011) that education and teaching are tangled with politics and social responsibility. While also attending to academic learning, I agree with Kelchtermans (2018) and Noddings (2012) that teaching includes social, emotional, moral and ethical education.

Giroux (2011), Green(1989) Freire (1994) and Kelchtermans (2018) ignited my interest to further study my value of compassion. Collaboration with my supervisor and reflective practice enabled me to unpack my reasons for applying a compassionate lens to my practice.

> Why is compassion important? Why do I want to nurture it? How can I nurture it? I was feeling slightly confused about my topic again…….. Wellbeing is a notable by-product of compassionate acts but the doing of compassionate acts is what creates a society that supports the good of others and values our common interdependence.
>
> (Joynt, teacher journal 19/11/18)

The context for the research study is a co-educational urban school in Dublin where I currently teach 4th class. Academic achievement is particularly heavily weighted by the parents of this school. There is a high level of pressure around aptitude tests leading to pupil and teacher anxieties. Results are compared with previous years and explanations must be given to justify drops even when the drops are not significant. The majority of children in my class are fully aware of their aptitude scores as they are discussed at home.

The intervention for my research project was influenced and driven by my values. It focused on introducing the concept of compassion into my classroom. The intervention involved the explicit teaching of compassion by using particular teaching methodologies as well as threading the theme of compassion into curricular subjects. The intervention

also involved the implicit teaching of compassion through teacher modelling. It was divided into two cycles. The first cycle introduced the concept of compassion and the second cycle developed on the learning from this by introducing the concept of self-compassion. The intention was to immerse the children into the topic of compassion without reinventing a new curriculum or adding to an already consuming work load.

1.3 Potential contribution of the study

The potential contributions of teaching for and about compassion could positively affect prosocial behaviour and attitudes towards diversity and social justice thereby impacting on the greater good of society (DeStano et al., 2016:46). By integrating the topic of compassion explicitly into the curriculum and pedagogy, it could potentially cultivate citizens with an informed compassionate outlook on environmental issues and humanity crises. Compassion could potentially have a place in the Teaching Councils Code of Professional Conduct (2016) as an important value for teachers to uphold. A loving classroom is one where children are taught by a teacher that shows up with full awareness. The teacher recognises that 'critical exchange' can occur without negatively impacting on anyone's self-worth and that issues can be resolved in a constructive respectful manner (hooks, 2003:135). I believe that a compassionate teacher is at the heart of a loving classroom. Compassion directed towards oneself, in the form of self-compassion, has the potential to be used as a form of self-care under the Wellbeing Policy Statement Implementation Plan 2018-2023 (DES, 2018). The potential contributions could influence my future practice, transforming how I teach.

1.4 Chapters Outline

Chapter One focused on the background of my research and my concerns. It introduced concerns about my practice, the education system and society. The action of self-study and reflection allowed me to identify my values and teacher identity. It included a brief synopsis of my research intervention. I outlined the importance of compassion and the potential contributions to the general society, education system and my teaching.

Chapter Two provides the theory that informs my action research study. The chapter establishes a background of current issues in society and education that are negatively impacting on teaching and children. It identifies the importance of social and emotional learning skills in the classroom. Emotional intelligence is identified as an influential model of social and emotional learning skills. I contextualise compassion and self-compassion relating them to an educational context. I put forward the argument that compassion and self-compassion are important learnable attributes for the benefit of children, teachers and our society.

Chapter Three outlines my research design noting my rationale for the research and describing my classroom intervention in full detail. I discuss ontological and epistemological views noting that my understanding of knowledge is socially constructed. I explain my reasons for choosing qualitative research. I justify my reasons for selecting the action research paradigm for my research. I outline the important elements underpinning action research such as critical reflection, collaboration and self-study. I then focus on data collection and tools. The chapter finishes by acknowledging my ethical guidelines for the study.

Chapter Four demonstrates my data analysis in the form of an integrated narrative that explores how compassion can be integrated into the classroom. The chapter initially discusses the findings relating to effective teaching methodologies and drama strategies for nurturing compassion in the primary classroom. The chapter concludes by focusing on the overarching findings related to enhancing understandings of compassion in the classroom.

Chapter 5 documents my conclusions and contextualises my learning from the findings. I identify the significance of the study for my own practice and for the wider educational field. I state my claim to knowledge and I also locate my own definition of compassion in the field of research. I note limitations to the study and recommendations for future studies in the area of compassion and education.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The literature review begins by explaining current concerns in society that are filtering down into our schools becoming educational concerns. The review then discusses the importance of social and emotional learning. It argues that social and emotional learning is just as important as academic learning. Emotional intelligence theory further develops the importance of social and emotional learning for children. The literature review then conceptualises compassion and self-compassion. Finally it focuses on the mechanics of integrating compassion implicitly and explicitly into education.

2.2 Societal concerns

Suffering and struggling are part of our human experience. The consequence of the passage of time leaves no one untouched by the fragility of life. What is becoming more and more evident is that suffering in our world is on the increase demonstrated by the growing humanitarian crises and growing natural disasters resulting from climate change. The United Nations Humanitarian Summit (United Nations 2016) note that the world is experiencing the highest level of suffering since the Second World War. We are increasingly becoming desensitised to the struggles in our community and world, often failing to see the human being behind the struggle. Compassion and collective solidarity appears to be digressing in today's society. Now more than ever, our future citizens need to be educated about the importance of societal interconnectedness and the value of compassionate caring relationships for the common good of society (Kemmis, 2010:420). In his report about our current state of humanity, the then secretary-general for the World Humanitarian Summit, Ban Ki-moon (United Nations 2016:5), noted that 'our value that

unites us is our common humanity'. The core responsibilities recorded in the report were all about our global responsibility to reduce human suffering. We depend on each other for our survival. Even Charles Darwin who had a strong interest in moral principles, noted that the flourishing of a community depends on its compassionate action towards one another. Darwin himself acknowledged that natural selection would favour the existence of compassion rather than the popularised competitive 'survival of the fittest' Darwinian perspective (which was actually a quote from Darwin's contemporary)(Ekman 2010).

The mindset of Western society is predominantly focused on achieving advanced capitalist values, individualism and materialism resulting in an increasingly unequitable society leading to wellbeing issues and declining interpersonal trust and relationships (Spandler & Stickley, 2011:557). This type of fixed capitalist mindset is leading to the creation of insatiable consumers rather than empathetic and compassionate citizens (Spandler & Stickley 2011). The values of social responsibility and compassion have been replaced by a self-orientated culture of prejudice. Giroux (2011:71) argues that educators need to link learning to social change and provide opportunities for pedagogy to apply social and political agency and critically rebel against capitalism power. Learning should be linked to becoming a good citizen; valuing social justice and human rights (Giroux 2011). Spandler and Stickley (2011) noted that a substantial amount of research conveys the damaging psychological effects on people because of modern capitalist society. Children are growing up in a society that is failing to recognise the importance of interconnectedness. The fact of the matter is that the human race fundamentally rely on the help of others during trying and difficult times. In the poetic words of John Donne (1624 Devotions Beyond Emergent Occasions), 'No man is an island, entire of itself' - we flourish because of our interconnectedness and

interdependence. However, compassion and care for ourselves, our world and those who inhabit it is steadily straying.

2.3 Educational concerns

Our education system should be an ecosystem of knowledge, responsibility, moral education and social awareness that inform social change while promoting democracy (Giroux 2011:78). Academic achievement is at the forefront of many schools today and education is driven by testing programmes leading to global competition between governments (Sjøberg 2019). The programme results are used to verify that education policies are proving successful in the realm of particular prioritised subjects. Teachers fall victim to teaching for the test and increasingly find their value measured against the results of their pupils. Objective measurements of learning and pupil outcomes dominate the lived out experience in many classrooms (White 2011). As mentioned, our western perspective tends to run on competitive principles and striving for personal success.

While healthy competition in the classroom has its role, prioritising competition in education breeds the possibilities of a self-focused society that views others as opponents to surpass rather than people to cooperate with and support (bell hooks 2003:130). Governments endeavour to create a world-class education system based on the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in the form of its Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (Irfan Coles, 2015:3). Governments strive to climb PISA's charts which focuses on assessing maths, reading, science and computer-based problem solving. Assessment has an extremely important role in education but many governments base the development of their curriculum and educational policies and guidelines knowingly on PISA results and recommendations (Irfan Coles, 2015:3). Noddings (2012) queries if this is what education is solely about - standardisation, PISA charts and economic globalisation.

2.4 Curriculum concerns

Research indicates that certain challenges and changes have occurred in the classroom since the introduction of the new Primary Curriculum (NCCA 1999; NCCA, 2016:1). The Primary Curriculum (1999) envisioned one of the aims as enabling 'the child to develop as a social being through living and co-operating with others and so contribute to the good of society' (NCCA, 1999:7). Classrooms are now busier places dealing with a greater level of diversity (NCCA, 2016:1). Concerns raised by teachers about the curriculum included its emphasis on theoretical rather than practical frameworks to support the intended 'child-centeredness' approach (NCCA 2016). Teachers noted that curriculum overload meant that objectives in all subjects are difficult to meet. As well as this, circular 0056/2011 cited in NCCA (2016) indicated that more time should be spent on literacy and numeracy in order to implement the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (2011). The unfortunate result of this has led teachers to sacrifice the curriculum content of other subject areas (NCCA, 2016:3). This panic around numeracy and literacy was instigated by Ireland's poor performance of their students in PISA 2009. However later international assessments and PISA 2012 results showed that there had been no drop in literacy and numeracy at all (INTO 2015).

Particular subjects (Maths, Literacy and Science) continue to be prioritised and hold weighted value solely driven by our capitalist competitive society (Sjøberg 2019). Character education and social education are not key predictors of a country's future competitiveness so they take a back seat as the priority subjects take the wheel. PISA claims to measure proficiencies and skills that are important for the global economy, advising governments on their educational polices while completely ignoring that education is a holistic learning experience. PISA fails to recognise that school has a purpose of contributing to overall social, emotional human development of the child to

help them become well-informed caring citizens (Sjøberg 2019). PISA alludes us to believe they are preparing the youth for the world of tomorrow with these emotionally detached tests. However, as we know, what is needed by society is not always testable (Irfan Coles 2015:109). Parents become frenzied consumers of this education market choosing schools solely based on test scores (Gibbs 2011).

The Irish Primary Curriculum (1999) was designed 'to cater for the needs of the child in the modern world' (NCCA, 1999:3). It was designed to nurture the whole child – spiritual, moral, cognitive, emotional, imaginative, aesthetic, social and physical (NCCA, 1999:6). If we deny the 'emotional presence' and wholeness of the pupils, we deny the caring role of the teacher, we deny the teacher-pupil interaction which ultimately affects the flourishing of optimal learning both academic and emotional (hooks, 2003:129).

Children are social and emotional human beings. Schooling is part of the socialising process that allows for implicit and explicit teaching of care, compassion, social interactions, emotional wellbeing and cultural norms. One of the defining features of the curriculum was to maintain a broad curriculum of integration and interconnectedness. However, what has become increasing evident is that this broad and balanced education has become undermined by trading off certain subjects to prioritise other ones (INTO 2015). The INTO conducted a survey on curriculum needs and noted that 72% of respondents spent more time on language and mathematics than recommended by circular 0056/2011 (INTO 2015). The present discrete teaching time allocated to Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is only 30 minutes per week (DES, 2009:27). However, the guidelines also suggest that topics can be integrated across the curriculum which is still a challenging task because literacy and numeracy continue to dominate timetables. SPHE is a subject that should permeate the curriculum but in 8%

of classrooms, inspectorate evaluation studies found a lack of regular SPHE occurring due to pressures of coping with the whole primary curriculum (DES, 2009:27). The Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Action: 2018-2023 address this by stating that more time needs to be given to teaching SPHE (DES, 2018:3).

It is clear that the intended curricular aims for the child conveys a holistic approach to character development but the reality of curriculum overload and academic subject precedence mean that personal, human and social development of the child may not be getting the sufficient attention it rightly deserves in the classroom. In today's classrooms, social and emotional issues impact on learning and should be prioritised just as much as academic learning (Schonert-Reichl 2017). The Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice (2018-2023) comments that schools should make deliberate efforts to focus on social and emotional learning (DES, 2018). Circular 0042/2018 states that teachers have a duty to provide the best social and emotional learning for children as well as best practice to follow when choosing a programme to support the emotional needs of the learner (DES, 2018a). Noddings (2012) comments that teachers provide a role of care thus teachers need to nurture children's 'expressed needs' and cultivate warm environments that support social and emotional learning. bell hooks (2003:133) notes that teachers who teach with love are more able to respond to the needs of the pupils. When teachers care for the emotional wellbeing of pupils, they are doing the work of love (hooks, 2003:133). Kelchterman (2018) agrees that while teachers must encourage academic learning, teaching must also encompass a moral and ethical aspect.

2.5 Complexity of modern life for children

Mental health Ireland note that one in ten children suffer with mental health disorders. These disorders (anxiety, depression, self-harm, eating disorders) are usually directly related to stressors in their lives (Mental Health Ireland 2019). Research conducted by The Irish Examiner and Reach Out Ireland indicated that children's stressors revolved around school, exams, body image, friends, family and social media (Reach Out 2017). The list of stressors affecting children today continues to grow. For example, social media appears to have a negative role on body image and identity as it conveys unattainable levels of self-image for children. Psychotherapist, Colman Noctor, notes that more than ever, children need to be educated in a value system to help them deal with the barrage of issues emerging from social media (Ní Chríodáin 2017). Exams and school were perceived as the top stressors in the Reach Out survey suggesting that children's educational experience is heavily focused on pressure to compete and achieve rather than creation of life-long learners who enjoy education (Reach Out 2017).

2.6 Social and emotional learning

Spandler and Stickley (2011) note that a key component of compassion is that it functions in and through social relationships. To develop the trait of caring, children must be able to see outside of themselves and recognise the concerns of others then act upon that concern through their emotions (Elias et al. 1997:1). Elias et al. (1997) argue that the challenge of raising knowledgeable, responsible, caring compassionate children can be enhanced by paying particular attention to the child's social and emotional learning. The term. 'Social and Emotional Learning' (SEL) has been around since the late nineties (Jones-Schenk 2019). SEL in education refers to integrating skills, competencies and attitudes that allow an individual to understand and manage their emotions in an effective

way allowing one to develop healthy social relationships and make well informed ethical decisions (CASEL 2018). The SEL competencies programs can vary but generally include: emotion regulation, self-awareness, self-management, relationships and relationship skills, social awareness and effective learning (CASEL 2018). Research indicates that SEL skills enhance academic and social outcomes of children (Jones & Doolittle, 2017). Research also indicates that SEL skills can be taught and fostered in schools so that children integrate their thoughts, emotions and behaviour leading to positive outcomes in school and later life (Jones & Doolittle, 2017).

Employers are increasing seeking SEL skills as employees can cope better with life and relationships being more self-aware and aware of others (Jones-Schenk 2019). SEL has three key domains which include cognitive regulation, emotional processes and social and interpersonal skills (Jones-Schenk 2019). Emotional knowledge, perspective taking, empathy and compassion allow individuals to be more adept at understanding others leading to more prosocial behaviour (Jones-Schenk 2019). Jones and Doolittle (2017) note that a variable that remains consistent to the success of SEL skills is the adult present at the time of the teaching. Schonert-Reichl (2017) furthers this by noting that classrooms with warm child-teacher interactions and relationships enhance positive SEL outcomes in children. Stress is contagious so having a teacher that is stressed will inflict a stressful environment on the children (Schonert-Reichl, 2017:137).

In relation to Ireland, several SEL programs have been used in the primary school system in Ireland that aim to promote children's social, emotional and behavioural wellbeing. These include parenting programmes (*The Incredible Years programme* and *Parents Plus programme*) programmes for anxiety and social skills in children (*Friends For Life programme* and *Zippy's Friends*) (McElvaney, Judge & Gordon 2017). McElvaney et al. (2017) note that the results based on these programmes in the Irish

context convey promising results. Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) offers opportunities to foster SEL skills in order to become a helpful member of society (NCCA, 1999a:2). However as noted earlier, SPHE has limited time allocated to it and evidence revealed that the subject itself is not always taught. SEL programs can often end up being an additional workload on top of the standard curriculum. A way to overcome this issue could be through curricular integration, however unnecessary hype surrounding numeracy and literacy needs to be reined in based on the initial false PISA result in 2009.

Froebel recognised that interconnectedness was an important holistic approach to children's learning and understanding (Bruce 2012). Studies have indicated the importance of curricular integration and linkage for the success of SEL skills in particular noting the importance of arts subjects such as Drama (Joronen 2011; Müller, Hunter Naples, Cannon, Haffner & Mullins 2018). The practice of SEL skills is an important part of children's learning. The explicit teaching of SEL skills are important for children to recognise their own feelings, the feelings of others and develop positive compassionate relationships with those around them, ultimately enhancing their emotional intelligence. In reality, the already overloaded academic curriculum leaves very little space for the explicit teaching of SEL skills. What may be needed is a seamless integration of compassion into our curriculum.

2.6.1 Emotional intelligence

SEL programmes are anchored in emotional intelligence theory (Nathanson, Rivers, Flynn & Brackett 2016). Nathanson et al. (2016) note that emotional intelligence is a set of skills that assists individuals to reason with and about emotion. Emotional intelligence involves a range of capabilities that allow a person to be aware of, to comprehend, and to manage their own emotions, to identify and comprehend the emotions others, and to use this information to nurture their success and the success of others

(Behera, 2016: 18). Nathanson et al. (2016) note that emotional intelligence includes an individual's ability to process emotions to direct thought and actions in a way that enhances reasoning and decision making. Nearly two decades of research indicates the benefits of the skillset associated with emotional intelligence. It has a positive impact on social and cognitive functioning as well as psychological wellbeing (Nathanson et al., 2016:2). Mayer and Salovey (1990) were one of the first team of researchers to conceptualise the theory of emotional intelligence (Drigas et al. 2018) . Emotional intelligence is the ability to observe one's own emotions and to differentiate between them and then use this data to guide one's own thinking and actions (Mayer, Caruso & Salovey 2016).

Emotional intelligence covers verbal and nonverbal evaluation, emotional expression, self-regulation and regulation of emotion in others and using emotional data to problem solve (Mayer & Salovey, 1993:433). Mayer and Salovey (1993) mention that the initial name for the concept was going to be 'emotional competency' however, on reflection they wanted to link it in with Gardner's (1983) Multiple Intelligence Theory, focusing on intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligence. Mayer and Salovey (1993) indicated that emotional intelligence is a cognitive ability. Their model was termed 'The Ability Model' of emotional intelligence (Drigas et. al 2018; Mayer et al. 2016). Mayer and Salovey (1993) identified four different levels of emotional intelligence including emotional perception, the ability to reason using emotions, the ability to understand emotion and the ability to manage emotions.

Enhancing children's emotional intelligence positively impacts on their moral character, social interactions, emotional growth and their academic learning. Drigas et al. (2018) note that emotional intelligence involves learning more about oneself and others. Social and emotional factors are at the core of education and cannot be separated from

academic content (Bahman et al., 2008:2). Plato said that all learning has an emotional base. Scientific research notes that birth to late teens are the years when emotional intelligence is formed (Drigas et al. 2018). Measuring emotional intelligence proves just as difficult as measuring other human qualities. At the moment there are two methods of measuring Emotional Intelligence: self-report measures using interviews and questionnaires to self-assess themselves and performance measures that identify how well they perform in a given scenario. Self-report measures tend to be easier and cheaper to administer (Claxton, 2005: 11). A criticism related to self-reporting lies in the participants ability to identify their own self-awareness and that the participant may give answers that paint them in a better light (Claxton 2005). An individual's perception of oneself can skew a participant's ability to estimate their own level of emotional intelligence which can vary from self-critical to over-estimating their own abilities (Claxton 2005:12).

With developed emotional intelligence, one can self-regulate to survive adversities and use empathy to interact and coexist with greater humanity (Drigas et al., 2018: 44). As will be evident in the following section, emotional intelligence is intrinsically linked with compassion and self-compassion. Emotional intelligence like compassion involves the recognition or awareness of emotion in others and oneself. One could even argue that in some respects, emotional intelligence is the repackaged modern version of compassion. Emotional intelligence involves channelling empathy to enhance and comprehend our social awareness and management of our relationships. A criticism of cultivating emotional intelligence in people is that emotional intelligence could be used in a Machiavellian manner to manipulate the behaviour of others when used incorrectly (Grant 2014; Claxton 2005). Empathy allows one to understand what the other may be feeling but then there is the possibility to use that information to act in a manipulative

way or to understand and share the feelings of another. However, as will be outlined in the next section, compassion is a high moral virtue and one who acts in a compassionate manner recognises the feelings of the others and intrinsically responds in a way to help that person, not in a way to manipulate the other person. Compassion is a process of connecting by identifying with another (Gilbert, Catarino, Duarte, Matos, Kolts, Stubbs, Ceresatto, Duarte, Pinto-Gouveia & Basran 2017). Compassion like emotional intelligence, involves awareness of oneself, others and also the environment. The skills relating to emotional intelligence may be seen as prerequisites to the development of compassion.

2.7 Conceptualising compassion

The concept of compassion has a long history spanning back to many spiritual and philosophical practices. Compassion has religious connotations that can be found in Christianity referring to 'suffering' and can be noted in parables such as 'The Good Samaritan' and the story of Jesus' death – suffering death and sacrificing his life for the sins of humanity (Gilbert et al. 2017). The word compassion has its origins in English and French or late Latin. The word comes from the word *compati-* which means to sympathise. Compassion involves an act whereby one is aware of another person's distress and has an intrinsic motivation to alleviate that distress (Kohler-Evans & Barnes 2015: 33). Compassion, core to Buddhism teachings, is noted as the act of recognising the suffering in others and oneself and wishing all to be free of the suffering including oneself. Buddhist thinkers like Thích Nhat Hanh, Pema Chodron and the Dalai Lama advocate for the importance of compassion in our society recognising the shared humanity and interdependence (White 2011). Compassion is viewed as a strength in Eastern philosophy but in some of our Western philosophy, compassion is seen as a weakness as you are being influenced by the pain of another and have in a sense lost

power (White 2011). The modern competitive capitalist nature of the West has its roots in this way of thinking. This overly competitive and power hungry nature can suffocate compassionate care.

Kant noted that compassion increases the sense of suffering in the world (White, 2011:23). Frederick Nietzsche considered compassion as 'self-serving'. He believed in tough love and encouraging people to face their adversities rather than pity them (Peterson, 2017:14). However, a variety of Western philosophers have stated that compassion is the cornerstone to morality. Arthur Schopenhauer was one of many European philosophers who believed that compassion is one of humans' core incentives for motivation, the others being egoism and malice (Gilbert et al., 2017:2). He believed that all three of these ethical incentives were present in each human in varying amounts (Madigan 2005). Operating from those incentives would result in an ensuing action. For Schopenhauer, all moral actions can be expressed by a Latin phrase translated as 'injure no one, on the contrary, help everyone as much as you can' (Madigan 2005). Schopenhauer argues that when we relate with the suffering of others, it transcends our egotistical and individualistic tendencies (Gibbs, 2011:5). In his writing of Emile, Rousseau conveys how compassion can be cultivated to help a child develop good social relations with others (White 2011).

Peterson (2017) notes that compassion is considered to be a virtue which involves both cognitive and emotional responses leading to an active choice to help others. Strauss, Lever Taylor, Gu, Kuyken, Baer, Jones and Cavanagh (2016) note that based on their review of compassion definitions, several definitions noted that compassion is about recognising a commonality with the sufferer and the acknowledgment that we too could experience a similar fate. Peterson (2017:14) indicates that even though compassion is a virtue or a moral behaviour, emotion is an integral part of compassion. Seppala,

Rossomando and Doty (2013) note that empathy and compassion are often used interchangeably but there is a difference between the two terms. Seppala et. al(2013) argue that while empathy is an awareness of a person's emotional experience, compassion combines this awareness with a desire to lessen their problem and thus a compassionate response is stronger than an empathetic response. Goetz, Keltner & Simon-Thomas (2010) chime with Seppala et al.(2013), noting that compassion is motivated by empathetic concern which initiates a compassionate action.

Empathy is the process of accessing the emotional content of another, viewing a scenario from their point of view without the follow up of an action to resolve their struggle or suffering (White 2011). Noddings (2012) in relation to care ethics, notes that empathy can often lead to a self-orientated mode rather than other orientated mode. The accuracy of our empathetic judgements due to not fully listening or knowing the other individual can mean that it is often difficult to understand how the other person is actually feeling (Noddings, 2012:777). Peterson (2017) also argues that compassion has roots in morality. Compassion involves upholding a moral decision - an act to relieve the concerns of another. Another emotion used interchangeably with compassion is sympathy. It is involved with compassion but like empathy, when taken in isolation, it may not be considered a moral concept like compassion (Peterson, 2017: 15). When one feels empathy or sympathy for another, it may lead one to seek relief from their own discomfort surrounding the problem rather than seeking to relieve the discomfort of another which is the only action that occurs during compassion (Peterson, 2017: 15). White (2011) states that compassion should not be synonymous with pity. The act of feeling pity for someone takes a standpoint of superiority and a sense of looking down on them. Compassion involves respect, identifying our shared common struggles and the recognition that our lives carry equal value (White, 2011:20).

Philosopher, Martha Nussbaum, believes compassion to be 'an intelligent emotion' (Nussbaum, 2001:301). Compassion could be considered the moral compass of emotions with a purposeful action to help others. Kostanski (2007) traces the term compassion to the Greek verb *'splangchnizomai'* meaning 'to be moved with compassion'. This Greek verb comes from a term referring to abdominal organs – one is moved by their gut feeling, to the depths of their gut (Kostanski, 2007: 4). Kostanski (2007) notes that compassion involves nurturing personal dignity and helping another to find their freedom. The Dalai Lama defines compassion as 'An openness to the suffering of others and a willingness to relieve it' (Kostanski, 2007: 4). This conceptualization of the term compassion resonates the moral aspect noted by Peterson (2017) and Nussbaum (1996).

Just as Kostanski (2007) notes the link to freedom, this too permeates in the Dalai Lama's concept of compassion. The Buddhist understanding of compassion is a response founded on wisdom, reason and emotion connected to a selfless act (Strauss et al. 2016: 17). Strauss et al. (2016) noted that Gilbert (2010) noted six parts to his conceptualisation of compassion. These include 'sensitivity, sympathy, empathy, motivation/caring, distress tolerance and non-judgement' (Strauss et al., 2016:17). Gilbert et al. (2017) notes that non-judgement plays an important role in compassion. If the person over-identifies with another person's distress, the individual becomes burdened by the distress focusing on their own discomfort and not acting (Strauss et al. 2016). This echoes Peterson's (2017) idea of sentimentalism. Peterson (2017) ascertains that it is ultimately the emotion and reasoning that avoids compassion falling into the trap of sentimentalism.

In summary, the conceptualisation of compassion is seen as an awareness of another person's suffering, being affected by it (emotionally and cognitively) and acting upon it through a sense of motivation to help. A definition of compassion which provides

the most inclusive version of the concept, encapsulating its historical foundations, its spiritual and theological aspects along with more recent philosophical thinking is from Strauss et al. (2016). They propose that compassion consists of the following attributes:

> recognising suffering, understanding the universality of suffering in human experience, feeling empathy for the person suffering and connecting with the distress, tolerating uncomfortable feelings aroused in response to the suffering person so remaining open to and accepting of the person suffering; and motivation to act/acting to alleviate the suffering (Strauss et al., 2016: 19).

2.7.1 Conceptualising self-compassion

Self-compassion recognises that all humans are valuable regardless of their achievements or physical attributes (Orsillo & Roemer, 2011). Russell (2014) argues that self-compassion forms the foundations for compassionate relationships with others. According to Buddhist psychology, it is believed that having compassion for oneself is as important as having compassion for others (Neff, 2003:224). Self-compassion according to Neff (2012:3) involves being kind and understanding towards ourselves, recognising the commonality of human suffering, using a non-judgemental attitude in the form of mindfulness and the use of self-compassion phrases directed towards oneself. So in the same way, self-compassion conveys a similar attribute to Gilbert at al. (2017), an element of non-judgment and tolerance towards oneself and finally recognising that one's experience is part of the shared experience of humanity rather than an isolating experience (Neff, 2003: 224). Neff (2003) notes that self-compassion hinges on an attitude of kindness towards oneself during difficult times rather than being self-critical or berating oneself. Neff (2003) takes a focus on the term kindness and uses it interchangeably with the term compassion, sometimes noting self-compassion as self-kindness. Shapira and Mongrain (2010) also note that self-compassionate people respond to their suffering and loss with appraisals of kindness and warmth.

Strauss et al. (2016) argue that kindness is not the same as compassion and that compassion extends beyond kindness. They also note that a compassionate response may not always be a kind response and vice versa as in the response could be in the form of 'tough love' (Strauss et al., 2016: 18). However Gilbert et al. (2017) concurs with Neff (2003) choosing kindness as a facet of the conceptualisation of compassion. 'Tough love' could also be argued to be rooted in kindness when the act is performed from an intention of compassion to help someone in the long-term – thus a caring and kind act despite the initial 'tough' execution of the act. Peterson (2017) comments that being positively aware of oneself and conveying care for oneself has its roots in Aristotelian thinking of positive self-love in a non-egotistically and non-gratuitous way. Our compassion (*love*) for oneself, for Aristotle, is vital for our compassion (*love*) for others (Peterson, 2017: 99). Self-compassion cultivates one's relationship with others, recognising the common humanity at play in our daily lives (Peterson, 2017: 104). Research indicates that self-compassion appears to enhance both physical and mental wellbeing (Neff, 2012: 10). A key facet in self-compassion is the lack of self-criticism which is known to be an indicator of depression and anxiety (Blatt 1995 cited in Neff, 2012: 7).

2.7.2 Compassion and self-compassion in the context of education

Recent scientific research has started to recognise the role of compassion in promoting prosocial behaviour, cooperative relationships, and physical and psychological wellbeing (DeStano et al., 2016: 46). Children and adults who are exposed to kindness, warmth, gentleness and compassion are more confident and secure, happier and less vulnerable to mental and physical wellbeing issues (Gilbert et al. 2017). Spandler and Stickley (2011: 577) note that research indicates that compassion creates a sense of purpose, meaning and hope which is what is needed for mental health recovery.

Cultivating compassion in the classroom can help children live and work interdependently which makes a positive contribution to school and their community (Peterson, 2017: 157). Zembylas (2011:174) notes that pedagogy of compassion must be 'critical' and 'strategic'. There must be opportunities for children to identify challenges relating to the enactment of compassion and pedagogies of compassion have to function at the right time and space to avoid emotional distress (Zembylas 2011:174). The purpose of strategic and critical compassion is that it provides opportunities for pupils and teachers of privileged societies to take some action for those suffering or vulnerable rather than selecting the option of pity and sentimentality (Zembylas 2011:185).

Compassion operates in and through social relationships and it can be inhibited or nurtured depending on social or cultural values (Spandler & Stickley 2011). Peterson (2017) states that even though compassion is conveyed as an individual response to suffering, it does not occur within a void. It is co-constructed by interactions with other human beings. In the thinking of Freire (1994), children are not empty 'compassionate vessels' waiting to be filled by imparting information. Compassion does not occur in a vacuum in and of itself. It is formed, learned and moulded by institutional processes, those who work in schools and the ethos and culture connected to the school (Peterson, 2017: 135).

The Education Act (1998) states that a school has an important role in the moral development of a child in consultation with their parents (DES 2018). Schools can play an important role in nurturing compassion or inhibiting it and even though compassion is generally advocated in a school's ethos, it may not be so evident in practice (Peterson, 2017: 136). The Teaching Council, the professional standards body for teaching, have drawn up a code of professional conduct which is a guide for teachers regarding ethics and respectful behaviour in their practice. According to the Code of Professional Conduct,

the ethical values that are the pillars of teaching are respect, care, integrity and trust (Teaching Council 2016:6). Despite care being one of their broad values, compassion as a value is unfortunately not mentioned during the entire code of conduct.

The Jubilee centre for Character and Virtues' Framework for character Education (2017) note that character education or the teaching of virtues should be explicitly and intentionally part of a whole school planning approach. Peterson (2017) comments that it is important for teachers to reflect on ethos, culture, curriculum, teacher relations, and community and family links; and identifying if these various facets benefit or impinge on character education (Peterson, 2017: 138). Peterson (2017) suggests that schools can become a 'compassionate institution'. This refers to a school with compassionate values, uses language of compassion, and which seeks to construct and promote relationships founded on care, empathy, altruism and self-love (Peterson, 2017: 138). A compassionate school depends upon the teachers who work there and how they see themselves as moral educators or how they perceive their role in educating children about these virtues (Peterson, 2017:142). Role-modelling is one important factor for cultivating compassion in schools. The teacher aims to reflect on their own character and conduct as well as the figures (other role-models) they identify with when nurturing the virtue of compassion in the classroom (Peterson, 2017:143).

Kosnik (2001) states that teacher educators should work in the same way that they advocate for their pupils (i.e.) to practice what they preach. The use of modelling the virtue for example, offers more opportunities during teaching and learning that might not be understood if such learning was not authentically expressed by oneself. That is, teachers must model the virtue rather than deliver it through the traditional transmissive approach (Loughran et al. 2005). Many advocates of character education view the methodology of modelling as a vital pedagogical tool that can help children learn through

observation, reflection and ultimately emulate the virtue being modelled (Sanderse 2013 cited in Peterson, 2017:143). Claxton (2005) refers to modelling as children's 'emotional apprenticeship' and this is what occurs while children watch how other people deal with their emotions (Claxton, 2005:20).

Emotional education appears to depend on how teachers publicly respond to their own changing moods and stresses and in how they deal with the children in their class. These implicit channels of emotional learning can at times prove more relevant than explicit lessons on emotions in the class (Claxton, 2005:20). Noddings (2012) recognises the care-ethics perspective of teaching and sees teachers as caring role-models who can advocate and support pupils with moral direction and emotional support. Teachers need to be aware of expressed needs from the children and inferred needs from the teacher (Noddings 2012). Dewey's 'give and take' dialogue involves this reciprocal relationship using open-mindedness and continuous inquiry and open communication leading to a more democratic classroom culture (Noddings, 2003: 223). Noddings (2012) notes that teachers can often fall into the role of 'virtue carers' when they act from a place of good intention and make assumptions about the care needs of a child without critically thinking and fully identifying the expressed needs of the child (Nodding, 2012:773). A compassionate and caring teacher is mindful of the expressed needs of pupils within their reflections and decision making (Peterson, 2017:145). Noddings (2003:29) notes that the role of education should assist children to become the best version of themselves – assist in the development of life-long learners, provide opportunities to develop their talents, provide opportunities for self-understanding and nurturing of moral character education.

Research studies on self-compassion in education or self-compassion interventions used with children is currently sparse. This appears to be an important gap in this area. Self-compassion could be a valuable element in education as it would have

an important role in developing self-worth in pupils and also allow children to recognise the common connections that exist between them thereby promoting a more inclusive environment (Peterson, 2017:104). Recent studies on self-compassion in adolescents have conveyed that self-compassion is linked to self-reported emotional well-being and also noted that self-compassion can have a protective function for adolescents experiencing stress (Bluth, Roberson, Gaylord, Faurot, Grewen, Arzon & Girdler 2016). In adults, self-compassion has been correlated with reduced rumination, reduced anxiety, increased life satisfaction, social connectedness, motivation, emotional intelligence and happiness (Barnard & Curry 2011).

The benefits noted in adults merit research in the realm of children and education. It could also be deduced that teachers and others working in schools could use self-compassion as an intervention to reap these benefits as part of a self-care routine. These benefits would also add to the authenticity of modelling the virtue of compassion to their class (Loughran et al. 2005). Advocates of self-compassion note that recognising the commonality of human suffering in others can remind the sufferer that they are not separate from others or suffering alone. This allows the self to recognise the shared connection that links us together (Peterson, 2017:104). When we have love for ourselves, our actions mirror our love for ourselves. To convey compassion for others, we have to be comfortable with loving ourselves (Peterson, 2017:108). This would reinforce the importance of including self-compassion as part of a child's education on character development in order to fully access the virtue of compassion.

2.7.3 Nurturing compassion in education

The idea that compassion can be cultivated or nurtured implies that it is something that can be fostered and developed. Peterson (2017) notes that educational institutions, teachers and children are compassionate in various ways and levels and that we must not

view the teaching of compassion in a deficit light but rather a light of building on what already exists and in this way, nurturing compassion will create a space for more awareness of compassion in our lives as a whole or individually. With this in mind, just as with academic learning, development of compassion and awareness of others can be seen as a continuum process and pupils will be on different stages of that continuum at different times and at times it may not occur in a clear sequential manner (Peterson, 2017:114).

A key component to deciphering an act that requires compassion is what may be termed as phronesis or having the wisdom or experiential knowledge to know what to do (Peterson, 2017:115). Noddings (2003) concurs with this using the idea of developing critical thinking in order to make the most eudemonistic judgement. As previously noted, compassion can be taught through implicit educational practices such as school ethos, school values and norms but also explicitly through teacher modelling and interventions used to nurture compassion in the classroom.

Through literature based on compassionate acts, the reader can use critical thinking skills to identify the compassionate acts at play and also the reasons that make such an act compassionate or not (Peterson 2017). The teaching of compassionate figures proves important but of even more benefit is the use of literature that shows character interactions in a given context and proves to be a beneficial factor in providing critical inquiry about culpability of characters for pupil's comprehension (Peterson, 2017:124). Nussbaum (2001) notes that it is through engagement with literature that pupils can understand the minds of others clearly. Compassion is a relational concept and because of this, another vital element to developing and experiencing compassion is based on interactions with others. In agreement with Zembylas (2011), Peterson (2017:126) notes that when children are exposed to a dialogic environment that discusses perspectives from

their own view as well as others, different interpretations are brought to the forum and can be analysed in critical ways. Dialogue forms social connections and helps to sustain caring relationships.

Zembylas (2011) notes that teachers must be aware of possible dangers when teaching about compassion; compassion fatigue, desensitisation and self-victimisation. Children can be overwhelmed by the suffering and struggles of others so it is important to draw attention to the altruistic acts used to combat the suffering and help them understand that even small gestures of solidarity with those who are suffering is compassionate action (Zembylas, 2011:184). He notes that trust, compassionate relationships between educator and pupil and attentive awareness are important when teaching compassion with criticality (Zembylas, 2011:185). Irfan Coles (2015:19) states that in order to cultivate compassion in education, we must make compassion the 'organising principle' of everything we do. A teacher can take a curriculum of work and teach it through a compassionate lens. Compassion in education is product based through the curriculum, the institution and process-driven through meditation, mindfulness, critical analysis of content, dialogue, compassionate listening and the power of narrative (Irfan Coles, 2015:20).

Scientific research indicates that certain types of meditation can increase prosocial and compassionate responses to oneself and another's suffering (DeSteno, Condon & Dickens, 2016; Neff 2003; Friedrickson et al. 2008; Hutcherson, Seppala & Gross 2015). Studies have conveyed that a particular type of meditation, Loving-Kindness Meditation, demonstrated heightened levels of positive relations to others and oneself (DeSteno et al., 2016:834). It may also be helpful not to view compassion in isolation from other emotions or virtues when nurturing compassion in the classroom. For example, DeStano et al. (2016:835) noted that compassion and gratitude exist as a type of positive symbiotic

relationship that both keep “the wheels of social exchange greased”. Compassion and gratitude both stimulate prosocial behaviour. The benefit of the emotion can be felt by the experiencer and those witnessing the emotional transaction experience thereby causing them to emulate these prosocial behaviours (DeSteno et al., 2016:835). Both gratitude and compassion enhance wellbeing by intrinsically encouraging individuals to behave more virtuously recognising the value of others and our interdependence with others (DeSteno et al. 2016).

2.8 Conclusion

This literature identified the current problematic state of affairs in our society. Society is experiencing a rapid transformation from a compassionate caring global community to a more capitalist, competitive and self-orientated climate. This transformation has filtered down into our education system ultimately impacting on our future generation. I value the importance of increasing explicit teaching of social and emotional skills in order to cultivate compassion in the classroom. In responding from a place of compassion, we are also engaging with our emotional intelligence to gain awareness of others and oneself. An emotionally intelligent electorate that act compassionately towards themselves, others and the environment would benefit the greater good of society.

We are failing as a society if we focus our education system on academic intelligence only without considering the equal importance of emotional intelligence. The current situation in our education system is off balance due to global capitalist powers dictating school policies influencing our academic curriculum. Compassion has a place in our classrooms and schools for the flourishing of our world. Compassion is the antidote to an ‘us versus them’ society. Compassion breathes an attitude of care, understanding and willingness to help those who are less fortunate than we are. The literature reviewed

indicates that compassion can be taught explicitly through a variety of curriculum subjects with the help of particular methodologies and co-constructed implicitly through the role of the teacher, social interactions and school ethos.

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter begins by discussing my research rationale. Research paradigms and Qualitative research are discussed followed by my justifications for choosing qualitative research. I review action research while indicating my reasons for selecting this methodology. I outline my data collection methods and ethical guidelines for my research. The chapter closes with a detailed description of my intervention and the mechanics behind it.

3.1.1 Research rationale

The catalyst for my research project was the result of self-study and consistent critical reflection. I realised that I was not intentionally nurturing caring compassionate relationships with the children in my class or providing them with opportunities to develop their understanding of compassion and its impact on our world. My understanding of what needed to be taught was being overshadowed by external pressures to teach for the test and unquestioned assumptions about completing textbooks. They were clouding my values. My aim was to design a research project that allowed me to identify how I could nurture compassion in my class and how I could achieve this through my teaching. I recognised that even though I valued compassion, I was not actively providing opportunities for it to flourish in my classroom.

3.2 Research paradigms

Paradigms are ways of viewing the world and assumptions about how we understand the world (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018:8). The positivist paradigm emphasises objectivity which can often be detached and value-free. Soren Kierkegaard,

a Danish philosopher who was a major influence of existentialism, noted that a strict positivist approach to research would have a dehumanising effect on the person participating in the research (Cohen et al., 2018:15). Positivism views the world as predictable, generalisable, objective, quantitative in measurement and mechanical or technical in nature. While this may prove beneficial in the realm of natural sciences, it does not provide a holistic understanding of the social sciences or that of education and the classroom (Cohen et al. 2018; Bassey 1990).

Interpretive researchers reject the idea of forming generalisations and they also see themselves as potential variables in interpretation of research. However, they do not see themselves as active participants of the research or neither have an aim to use the research to improve their practice which therefore conflicts with my role in my research project (Bassey 1990). As an educational researcher, I am researching how my values, actions, assumptions impact on my pedagogy and influence the children in my class. I am inseparable from the research. In this way, the interpretive approach does not form the most suitable research approach for me.

3.2.1 The nature of qualitative research

My research question is inherently linked to my relationship with the children in my class. I wanted to gather data that conveyed attitudes, feelings and thoughts. Compassion was not something that I could measure accurately by setting a before and after test. Quantitative research design is focused on testing, numerical data, generalisations, use of set variables and identifying methodical patterns of connections (Cohen et al., 2018). Qualitative research design by contrast places more emphasis on subjectivity and uses a verbal descriptive approach to study commonalities of smaller groups (Cohen et al., 2018). The general purpose of qualitative research is to understand

and interpret phenomena as they occur and capture insider perspective (Hendricks, 2013:5). Using qualitative data-gathering helped me to identify data beyond the testable. The qualitative approach allowed me to identify values and to hear the voice of the child, the teacher and others involved in the research.

3.2.2 The nature of action research

Action research is born out of values with a focus on social justice and democratic practice (Brydon-Miller 2003; Whitehead 1989). It is something which can be noted in the work of educational theorist and social reformer, John Dewey (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003). Theory is developed as a result of data grounded in the action taken during the research leading towards positive social change (Bassey 1990; Brydon-Miller et al., 2003:15; Kemmis 2010:420). Action research is about researchers trying to improve singularities through action. It is unique to each researcher as it focuses on the researchers set of values, norms and assumptions for doing things (Sullivan, Glenn, Roche & McDonagh, 2016:25). Action research is strongly influenced by our values and our values influence our behaviour and methodological choices (Pollard & Anderson 2008; Cohen et al. 2018). Kemmis (2010:420) notes that action research is an ideal way to maintain high standards in any profession as it involves 'collective responsibility of professionals' to adjust to the needs of the changing society. Critical and collaborative action research can bring about changes in history that are in the best interest of future generations (Kemmis 2010).

Action research is designed to ameliorate action taken by the teacher through critical enquiry (Bassey, 1990:41). Action research relies on a cyclical approach that emphasises rigour and validity through dialogue with colleagues and validation group to critique findings. The cyclical process involves reflection and change in order to refine

the next cyclical process (Bassey 1990). The cyclical process nature means that each cycle informs the next cycle as an iterative process. McNiff and Whitehead (2010) note that the cyclical process is not always straight forward and involves what Mellor (2001) terms as a series of 'messy' approaches that can provide strengths and challenges for the teacher.

There are various models of action research but they share common elements – identify a problem, collect and analyse data followed by a form of action that leads to the repetition of the process due to the identification of new emerging issues (Mills 2011). Sullivan et al. (2016) note that action research has the power to transform a teacher's practice through a meaning-making process. Action research can be seen as a way to value the alternative perspectives of others in order to generate new knowledge about improvements in our practice (McAteer 2013). The methodology of action research allows one to create their own "living educational theory of practice" conveying their educational influence in their own learning and the learning of others – 'how do I improve what I am doing?' (McNiff & Whitehead 2010:9).

As mentioned. action research hinges on reflection. Mezirow (1990 cited in Sullivan et al., 2016:26) argues that reflection is key to understanding our assumptions and challenging these assumptions. He argues that reflection is very subjective and has its foundations in our individual values and norms. Current literature indicates that purposeful reflection on one's teaching leads to the emergence of teacher identity (Beauchamp 2015:132). Sullivan et al. (2016) argue that reflection is highly important to teachers and through this reflection we can identify if our values align with our practice. The intention for my research involves re-evaluating my practice to identify how I apply my values through my teaching and what action I can take to allow me to live closer to these values. Tension between values and actual practice can occur creating a 'living contradiction' (Whitehead 1989). Critical reflection provides an opportunity to illuminate

these contradictions in our practice. Reflecting critically allowed me to gain distance from my practice which in fact brought me closer to it (Freire 1994; Beauchamp 2015).

I experimented with various critical reflection frameworks including Moon's (1999b) model, Brookfield's Lenses (1995), Gibbs (1988) and Borton's (1970) model. I struggled to find a framework that suited me. At times, I felt like the frameworks were restricting my reflections rather than guiding them so I opted to not focus strictly to one particular framework. Greene (1989:28) emphasises the importance of freedom and imagination in order to 'consciously attend' to our written reflections. Brookfield's (1995) lenses heavily influenced my reflections and unravelled assumptions related to teaching and my hegemonic position in the classroom. I purposefully used critical reflection to find out if what I was doing had value by using various perspectives; my perspective, the perspective of my colleagues, the children's perspective and theoretical literature (Brookfield 2017).

Action research involves working collaboratively with others. By critically reflecting and taking the perspective of others, it transforms our practice and avoids the possibility of navel gazing (Freire 1994; Swan 2008). Social interaction with others during action research maintains transparency and enables triangulation. Effective reflection should include the considerations of other colleagues too (Noffke & Brennan 2005 cited in Beauchamp, 2015:130). This creates a greater sense of community that not only impacts on those around but also has a personal impact on the researcher too, leading to changes in their practice (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003:14). O'Sullivan et al. (2016: 30) also argue that the social aspect of self-study importantly provides 'affective nurturing and cognitive challenges' on our action research process.

Self-study is an approach to action research carried out by teachers to improve their practice, validate their findings with their colleagues and share their findings with the teaching profession (Hendricks, 2013:4). Self-study is collaborative in approach and since it focuses on one's own practice, it favours the qualitative approach (Vanassche & Kelchtermans, 2015). Another theme of self-study research is noted by teachers trying to create a socially just learning disposition in the class (Vanassche & Kelchtermans, 2015:513). Feldman, Paugh & Mills (2004) note that those who participate in self-study action research are critical of themselves and their roles as researchers. Feldman et al. (2004) believe that self-study could lead to a fundamental perspective change on one's educational philosophy thereby impacting on one's practice.

McAteer (2013:22) notes that action research contributes to the generation of knowledge through 'systematic self-critical enquiry' that will be available for all to see. Self-study can be linked to existentialism due to the common themes of the individual, the pivotal role of values, emotions and passions, and the illogical aspects of life (Feldman et al., 2004:971). An important result of an existentialist approach is that teaching is a way of being and for us to change our teaching requires us to change who we are through a form of critical inquiry such as self-study (Feldman et al., 2004:973).

3.2.2 My value systems

As mentioned earlier, action research is value laden and value-led (Pollard & Anderson 2008; Cohen et al. 2018). My ontological values are based on respect, compassion and social justice. These values guide my personal and professional life. My interactions with others and my experience in the education system have continually moulded my values. I know what it feels like to be respected and treated with compassion. I also know how it feels to be part of a minority group that experiences oppression. I

believe that a more compassionate and respectful atitude would positively impact how we view ourselves, how we view others and how we view our environment.

My view of knowledge is based on the cognitive constructivism approach recognising that knowledge is actively created and people actively construct their own subjective understandings of the world around them. My epistemological views move away from 'technical rationality' which is a positivist approach placing science at the forefront for knowledge creation and acquisition (Schön, 1983:31). I believe that knowledge is co-constructed through social interactions with others allowing people to develop knowledge of the world as noted by Piaget (1961) and Vygotsky (1978). My role is to provide ways to assist children to achieve their own problem-solving learning through the Vygotsky (1978) approach of 'Zone of Proximal Development'.

3.3 Data collection

3.3.1 Research Participants

I was allocated 4th class by my school principal. The class consists of 20 females and 13 males. Convenience sampling is the approach that is involved as it based on having samples of who is accessible to the teacher at the time of the research. This type of sampling resonates with action research as it not based on generalisability or replicability (Cohen et al., 2018:218). The research is based on my findings with my specific class during this moment in time.

As will be discussed in the findings, the baseline survey conducted with the research participants indicated that the children did not have a strong understanding of the concept of compassion. It also conveyed that they had not completed any significant work on compassion previous to the research.

The gatekeepers include parents, the Board of Management and the principal. Their role in the sampling is to mediate access to children and ultimately adhere to the rights of the child as noted by the United Nations (1989). Other participants include critical friends and my colleagues as a validation group for rigour and validation of research.

3.3.2 Research site

The school is a mixed urban mainstream school in Dublin. The ethos of the school is Catholic. Most of the pupils are from a prosperous socio-economic background. Academic achievement is valued and prioritised at the school.

3.3.3 Data collection instruments

Questionnaires and surveys

I used scenario based open ended questions in the form of questionnaires (Appendix 3.2) to identify the children's views on some dilemmas that link to compassion at the beginning and end of the intervention to track the progress of their learning. Questionnaires can be used to ask respondents to think about concepts that they have not thought about before (McNiff, 2016:184). Cohen et al.(2018) note that open ended questions are very suitable for small scale research projects. However, there are concerns that it can yield unnecessary data and that the results cannot be easily collated (Cohen et al. 2018).

I also used a post-it survey as a baseline to identify the children's understanding of compassion in cycle 1. McNiff (2016) notes that this form of data tool needs to be treated with care as they can often give misleading data unless the questions are constructed in such a way that get the specific answers that you are looking for. I invited the children to document their understanding of the term compassion. At the end of cycle

2, I asked the children to complete a final post-it survey on their understanding of compassion. The data from the surveys and questionnaires was transcribed verbatim into my research project.

Journals – teacher journals and pupil journals

McNiff (2016) notes that journals can be a very important implement to record your actions and also convey the development of your reflexive critique and dialectical critique as you interpret the reasons for your actions. I used the journal to log significant events, document observations, reflections and conversations with my critical friend and validation group (McNiff, 2016:179).

During the intervention, children used their journals to reflect and record their experiences during intervention activities. McNiff (2016:180) notes that participants can be invited to keep a journal of learning as long as ethical guidelines are adhered to. I informed the children that I would be using data from their journals for my research. In order to avoid data overload and writer's fatigue, I limited the journaling to one entry every fortnight. When using the data from the children's journal and my journal, I transcribed the data verbatim.

Semi-structured observations

McNiff (2016) notes that all research starts with observing what is happening and systematically record notes about the observations. When conducting action research, you are observing different things at different times (McNiff, 2016: 180). Observations can be used to record interactions, conversations and behaviours in a more naturalistic approach (McAteer 2013). I was observing first-hand 'live' data during social situations in my classroom (Cohen et al. 2018). Observations allow the researcher to become aware of everyday behaviour that might be normally overlooked (Cooper and Schindler

2001:374 cited in Cohen et al. 2018). Semi-structured observations are aimed to gather data with a particular issue in mind. The observations will be for the purpose of hypothesis-generating rather than testing (Cohen et al., 2018:543). I used semi-structured observations to make note of children's comments or physical actions during intervention activities. I recorded these quotes from conversations on post-its and later transcribed them into my teacher journal.

3.4 Data analysis

3.4.1 Thematic analysis

The aim of thematic analysis is to identify interesting and important patterns. The researcher must constantly question what narrative the data is telling (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017:3353). I chose thematic analysis because it was a very accessible approach to analysing my qualitative data. Thematic analysis, a method used in qualitative research, works well with most data collection tools and can be used on large or small scale data collection (Clarke & Braun 2013). With the help of my supervisor, I used the Braun and Clarke (2006) six-phase format of thematic analysis. The phases are not necessarily a set linear process.

I initially began by familiarising myself with the journals, surveys and questionnaires. I created a coding frame (Appendix 2.4) and used the analytic process of coding to record common identifiers appearing in my data. I colour-coded the data refined the codes by completing further iterations of the codes to create categories. This then allowed me to search for themes within the collected codes. I reviewed the themes and collaborated with my critical friend and validation group to define the themes such as use of perspective, identifying common connections, expression of feelings, kindness

directed at others and oneself. The findings involved weaving together the analytic narrative and data extracts with the literature.

3.4.2 Validity and credibility

Credibility of data was established through triangulation (Hendricks, 2013:89). I collected, used and analysed multiple forms of data that were all dated and signed where necessary. The use of pupil journal, questionnaires and post-it surveys conveyed the voice of the pupil and allowed for methodological triangulation (Sullivan et al., 2016:107). My journal and observations demonstrated my learning, my perspective and provide a source of data that will be used to compare and contrast the data from other methods of collection.

Habermas (1976) emphasises the importance of communication with others to fulfil the validation process or attain agreed understandings (Long, 2017:205). I explained the process of my intervention and data to my critical friend, colleagues, supervisor and validation group to increase validity. We discussed my data, rigour, acquiescence bias, comprehensibility of my study and research claims. One needs to be very rigorous with the process of validation (Glenn, 2017 cited in McDonagh, 2018). It is of utmost importance to offer evidence that supports my claim to knowledge, provide comprehensibility of my explanation and evidence that shows that I am living closer to my values (Whitehead 2018 in McDonagh, 2018).

Jean McNiff (2016) notes that a claim can be considered fair and accurate once it has been validated by other people's opinions through triangulation. My validation group consisted of a member of the school SET team who regularly does in-class support with my class, two colleagues who had my class previously and a teacher in another school. My supervisor also provided validation for my data and findings. Our first meeting was

four weeks into cycle 1. We discussed the topic of saturation and acquiescence of data. I provided an opportunity for my validation group to provide feedback with the research so far and to identify any gaps in the research. I recorded their feedback in my journal. During cycle 2, I met with my validation group again to discuss possible claims to knowledge that I could make based on my research.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

3.5.1 Principle of informed consent

After being granted ethical approval of my research proposal from the University, I sent a letter to my Board of Management requesting permission to conduct research in the school with my class (Appendix 1.2). I sent letters to the parents informing them about the research study with consent attached (Appendix 1.1). Informed consent is a necessary ethical consideration so that one does not breech an individual's right to freedom (Cohen et al. 2018). It provides an opportunity for participants to decide whether they want to participate or not after weighing up any risks or benefits to them (Cohen et al. 2018). All but one set of parents returned written informed consent. The consent form the other parents allowed me to seek the assent from the children in my class. The importance of informed consent from the parent/ guardian does not negate the ethical importance of gaining the child's agreement to participate in the project (Dockett, Einarsdottir & Perry 2009).

3.5.2 Child assent

I am working with children who are a very vulnerable cohort of individuals. To be informed, children need to understand the study, what is expected of them and what will be done with the data (Dockett et al. 2009). With this in mind, I had a number of steps to complete before starting the research. I sent a letter to the children explaining the

research at an appropriate level for their age and I requested their assent to co-participate in the research (Appendix 1.3) Parents and children were both given the opportunity to ask further questions. I explained my research project to the children. I clarified any questions that they had about their role and my role in the project. I also mentioned that they did not have to participate if they did not want to and that there would be no consequences for opting out at any stage. Researchers need to be mindful that they continually let children know that they can withdraw from the study at any time (Phelan et al. 2013). 32 children gave written assent. One child did not have the consent/assent forms returned so his data was not recorded during the study.

3.5.3 Data storage

I recorded my journal entries in my laptop which is password encrypted. When pupil journals were not in use, I had them stored in a locked filing cabinet in my room. Any paper-based data collected during the intervention such as post-it surveys and concept maps were also kept securely in the cabinet.

3.5.4 Confidentiality and anonymity

Keeping in line with the sentiments of The Belmont Report (1979), I intended to maximise the beneficial effects of nurturing compassion such as the ability to empathise with others, boost emotions of joy and contentment while minimising the negative effects on the co-participants such as emotional upset, emotional vulnerability. I used anonymity in my journal, notes and dissertation through the use of pseudonyms for my co-participants. All data was treated with the utmost respect and kept confidential. I made sure not to disclose any information from a participant (names, address, date of birth, physical attributes) that might make him or her identifiable to the public sphere (Cohen

et al., 2018:130). I did inform the children that I would be discussing the research data with staff members as part of my study.

3.5.5 Principled sensitivity

I was sensitive to the fact that my topic engaged with emotions, struggle and suffering which had potential to cause emotional distress for children. I consistently reflected on possible ethical issues during the intervention with the help of my critical friend, colleagues and reflective journal. I adhered to the Children First Guidelines (DCYS 2017) and was ready to report any disclosures to the Designated Liaison officer in my school immediately. I adhered to the UN (1989) Convention on the Rights of the child and consider the child's view on all matters relating to the research (Article 12). In regards to acquiescence and hegemony, I recognise that children might feel obliged to give answers that they deem pleasing to the teacher (Cohen et al., 2018:341). I clearly stated to the children that the research is to do with my learning of me as a teacher. I did not use language or techniques that incentivised competition amongst children to achieve research outcomes. My validation group provided me with clarity to recognise power dynamics at play between children themselves and teacher/child dynamics through observations of my work. I constantly adjusted my viewpoint from that of the parents of the children, the children and my colleagues to get a better understanding of any power dynamics at play.

3.6 Research design

3.6.1 Description of intervention

The three month intervention (January 7th – March 27th 2019) was based on nurturing compassion in my classroom implicitly and explicitly through my teaching and through the curriculum. Cycle 1 of my intervention focused on teaching for and about

compassion and cycle 2 developed on the learning outcomes from this by focusing on self-compassion. The mechanics of my intervention involved three main actions.

Firstly, it involved weaving compassion into the curriculum as seamlessly as possible. Through thematic planning, I explicitly taught and unpacked the topic of compassion through subjects such as Drama, Religion, English, History, Geography, Art and SPHE while still achieving curricular objectives for 4th class (Appendix 3.1).

Secondly the intervention involved using particular methodologies to enhance the teaching of compassion. These methodologies included talk and discussion, narratives (video and book based)(Appendix 3.3), games-based learning SPHE (*cross the line*), Loving-Kindness meditation and Drama strategies (forum theatre & conscience alley). Meditation was practised every second day for around six minutes. It was usually practiced during Religion or as part of SPHE.

Finally, my intervention involved the implicit teaching of compassion through my pupil interactions and teacher modelling. Table 1 shows my indicators of success that I created for modelling compassion in the classroom, influenced by Brookfield (2017) and Noddings (2012). The indicators provided me with a reflective framework for fostering a habit of responding with compassion.

Table 1 Indicators of success for modelling compassion in the classroom

1. I am acknowledging and considering the perspectives of the child.
2. I am identifying common connections with the child or their struggle.
3. I am responding with compassionate, kind action acknowledged physically or verbally by the child.

I used Webb's Depth of Knowledge Framework (DoK) (Appendix 4.1) as a guide to help me understand the children's changing level of knowledge about compassion (Webb 2002). Webb's (DoK) categorises activities in relation to the level of complexity in thinking. The highest level being (DoK) level 4; transferring what they have learned into real-life contexts (Francis 2016). The literature on compassion and Webb's (DoK) enabled me to compose indicators of success for the children which provided a framework for structuring compassion related activities during the intervention (Peterson 2017; Neff 2003; Nussbaum 2001; Noddings 2003; Webb 2002; Francis 2016; Zembylas 2011).

Table 2 Indicators of success for children (using the skills of compassion)

Pupils are practicing perspective taking skills to identify how others might be struggling. *Depth of Knowledge Level 4:* Augmentation/ synthesis/ extended thinking.
Pupils are identifying common connections with others or their struggle *Depth of Knowledge Level 3:* Analysis/ strategic thinking
Pupils are expressing opinions of compassionate action either verbally or physically *Depth of Knowledge Level 4:* Augmentation/ problem solving/ extended thinking.

I used the indicators in table 2 to help me plan activities for the intervention and as a form of assessment during the activities. I wanted to make sure that the children would have opportunities to practise these skills linked to compassion. The children had the opportunity to reflect and record written responses to certain activities during the intervention in their own reflective journal. Entries were recorded every second week.

At the core of the intervention was the teacher and child informed by indicators of success. Radiating out from this were the teaching methodologies for teaching compassion effectively and finally radiating out from this were the curricular subjects permeated with compassion. These elements together created a compassionate curriculum. See figure 1 a visual of the overall mechanics of the intervention.

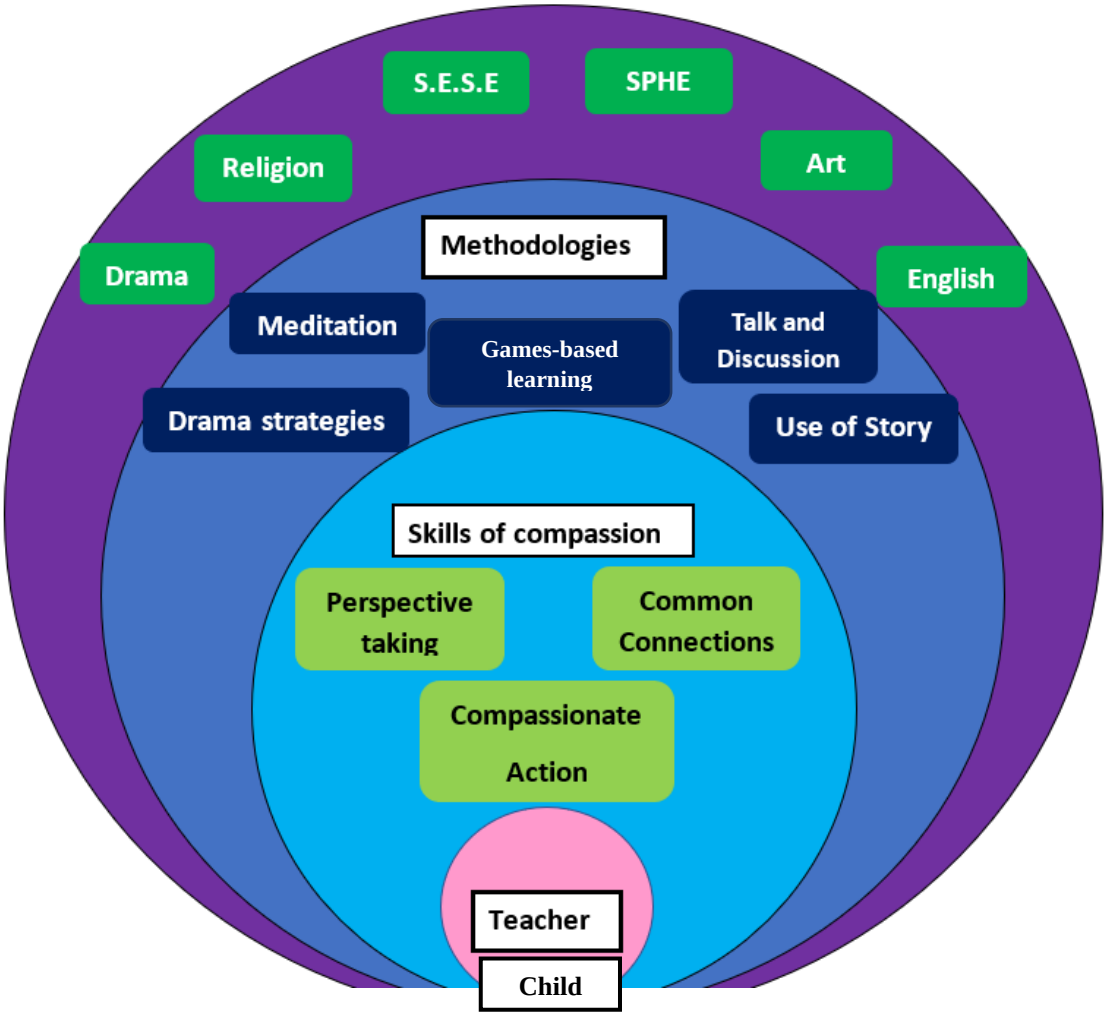


Figure 1 Mechanics of the intervention

3.7 Limitations

Due to the subjective nature of qualitative research and use of thematic analysis, other researchers may have organised themes differently or even recognised other themes. However, triangulation with my validation group, critical friend and supervisor strengthened my choice of themes.

Compassion is a difficult value to measure. In my research, I focused more on the children's understanding of compassion and how it progressed during the intervention. However, there are specific self-report questionnaires for compassion and self-

compassion available for adults (Neff 2003). There are currently none available for children. This may have provided a more quantitative result of levels of self-compassion in the children pre and post intervention.

Chapter Four: Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is an integrated narrative about my learning and the children's learning as a result of conducting a self-study action research project on compassion. It begins with the first main finding that relates to the role of teaching methodologies used to effectively teach for and about compassion. The next main finding demonstrates Drama strategies used for the enactment of compassion. Finally, it focuses on the overarching finding that relates to enhancing the understanding of compassion in the primary classroom followed by the enhancement of my understanding of self-care through self-compassion.

4.2 Methodologies for teaching for and about compassion

4.2.1 Video narratives and dialogue

Nussbaum (2001) noted that engagement with narratives on suffering and struggles provides pupils opportunities to understand the minds of others. I chose narratives in the form of video narratives, novels and picture books based on struggles and suffering (Peterson 2017; Nussbaum 2001; Neff 2003). Freire (1994:111) notes that a teacher must offer other 'readings of the world' of the content other than their own in order to allow critical thinking to breathe. Peterson (2017) offers two types of frames to use in order to foster empathy and connect with compassion. My intention was to use Peterson's (2017) literature frames to firstly show characters that demonstrate compassionate acts and secondly characters that provided opportunity for children to decide whether they were deserving of compassion.

As we read through the chapters of our class novel based on the struggles of refugee children during World War II, the class were intrigued to learn more about real-life refugees so I sourced a video narrative on the Syrian refugee crisis. I was using the novel to stimulate opinions on perspectives and compassionate acts but the video narrative seemed to stimulate a deeper interest. I wondered if video narratives of the refugees were more engaging for the children as it was alive with sounds, voices, emotions and visuals. Did it help support their imagination of such a foreign concept? The video narrative became a prevalent part of our oral English lessons over the weeks.

I used the children's understanding of compassion from the post-it survey and used it to scaffold their understanding closer to its contextual meaning from my literature review. Using the video narrative, I asked the children to identify compassionate acts. I was very pleased with the verbal and physical acts of compassion that they noted.

> Cael noted that the compassionate act that he saw was when the old man rubbed the woman's feet and then gave his shoes to her so that her feet wouldn't hurt as she walked.
>
> Adrian noted that the compassionate act that he saw was the woman asking the refugees if she could give them a lift in her car to the border.
>
> (Joynt, teacher journal 14/01/19)

When I asked the children to imagine what the refugees might be experiencing, they listed off answers like frustrated, lonely, tired, angry at the Hungarian government, angry at the Syrian government and let down. I could see that they really connected with the content which could also be reflected in a comment from one of the children about acts of compassion. During our conversation, Eve appeared disheartened by the suffering of the refugees and asked:

> What can I do? I'm only a child (Eve).
>
> (Joynt, teacher journal 14/01/19)

This statement felt very poignant for me. It demonstrated the connection with the refugees but also feeling voiceless, disillusioned at not knowing what compassionate act a child could do for the refugees. I opened the question on the class.

> Bertie noted how they did a compassionate act in first class and raised €500 for a refugee cause in Africa.
>
> Lauren shared her opinion and said that if they arrived in Ireland, she could give the children her old toys.
>
> (Joynt, teacher journal 14/01/19)

Another child, Noah, asked me what I would do. I suddenly found myself in the midst of the dialogue. I commented that the simple act of listening to understand their struggle was a compassionate act in itself. I was pleased with their examples and I wanted the children to know that compassionate acts do not always have to be material or majestic. At the final viewing of the Syrian refugee video narrative, the reporter asked one of the refugees what he had to say to those people who had negative opinions about the refugees coming to their country. I asked the children to identify what negative opinions people might have about the refugees.

> Adrian said that they might take our jobs.
>
> Michael noted that they might do bad things.
>
> Amelia remarked that people may have had bad experiences with a Syrian before.
>
> Helen commented that some might believe that their government is right and the refugees are wrong and that they are the ones who started the war.
>
> (Joynt, teacher journal 28/01/19)

This data demonstrates the children applying imagined perspectives of the residents. This conversation led to dialogue about perspectives, generalisations and stereotypes. Elias et al. (1997) note that children must be given opportunities to see outside of themselves and recognise the concerns of others to develop the trait of caring. I continued to ask the children to identify common connections with the refugees.

> Edward noted that they are human beings.
> Ella commented that they lost things and we have lost things too.
> Nathaniel said that they have families that they love and who love them too.
>
> (Joynt, teacher journal 28/01/19)

I pressed play on the video narrative and the refugee replied to the reporter with similar answers to that of the children. The man mentioned that they (the refugees) are just like everyone else, they have families who love each other and they just want to be happy. The children's interest in refugees continued so I responded to their needs by sourcing a video narrative that demonstrated how the community of Wicklow town did compassionate acts to welcome refugees into their community.

I sourced another video narrative that shared a theme of suffering and acts of compassion. A deeper level of imagination and perspective taking emerged during this video narrative. *The Present* was about a mum who gifts her son with a puppy. Both the boy and puppy are amputees. The boy is initially annoyed at the puppies disability. I asked the children what they thought about the boy before they knew the full story. They mentioned that they thought he was cruel and some even commented that he was a brat! A lot of the children gasped and made sympathetic sounds when the boy stood up and it was clear that his leg had been amputated. I continued to delve deeper and asked if knowing more about the child and his disability changed their feelings towards the boy. The children made a general agreement that they felt differently about him after learning about his disability. Some began to say that he may have felt angry because he thought his mum was comparing him to the dog in a mocking way. I hadn't thought of that perspective!

> Elliot commented that he thought the boy was angry at the start because he may have seen himself in the dog and he didn't like what he saw.

> Miller mentioned that when she saw that the boy was missing a leg, she didn't think he was cruel anymore. She commented that he was hurt and that she wanted to hug him and be his friend.
>
> (Joynt, teacher journal 21/01/19).

The class agreed with Miller. I asked them to identify their common connections with the boy and they mentioned some of the following: plays computer games, has a mum who he loves and loves him. Their initial judgement of the boy and his behaviour had evolved through the use of a variety of lens. After imagining his perspective and the mum's perspective, the children were able to rationalise his initial actions based on his suffering and agree that he was deserving of compassion.

Peterson (2017:126) notes that when children are exposed to a dialogic environment that discusses perspectives from their own view as well as others, different interpretations are brought to the forum and can be analysed in critical ways. The use of dialogue was providing opportunities for the children and me to learn more about each other. Noddings (2003; 2012) emphasises the importance of dialogue, how it forms caring relations and provides an opportunity for democracy to breath. The more we understand the other person's view on their suffering, the more effective our compassionate response will be (Noddings 1998 cited in Smith 2016). This continued dialogue will aid in developing wisdom or phronesis (Smith 2016). Children can thus develop a greater awareness of themselves and those around them, providing opportunity to reflect on their own assumptions and thereby offering space to unpack those assumptions (Smith 2016). The use of narratives and dialogue was deepening the children's understanding of compassion as it involved justification, complex thinking (Dok Strategic Thinking) and applying learning to real-life contexts (Dok Extended thinking)(Francis 2016).

4.2.2 Games-based learning SPHE (Cross the line)

Cross the line was a methodology that showed common connections and awareness of diversities in the class. Children listened to dictated statements of various experiences (Appendix 3.6) and physically stepped across a line in the class if they had lived out this experience. The children then paused to reflect silently before returning back to their original spot ready for the next statement. The objective was to help the children recognise common connections in the class while also acknowledging diversities in the class. Strauss et al. (2016) noted that shared human connection was a key tenet in the various definitions of compassion. I hoped that the continued use of this game would build an awareness of others and offer opportunities to reflect on how common connections with others can change their thinking. The children recorded their own reflections from one of games and it conveyed a new awareness of themselves and their peers.

> I learned that my bully has been bullied.
>
> (Cian, children's journal 22/01/19)

> I didn't know that so many children's parents were from a different country, like me.
>
> (Conor, children's journal 22/01/19)

> I learned that I have a lot of things in common with other people in my class.
>
> (Saebh, children's journal 22/01/19)

> It was really nice to know that you're not alone and people have gone through what you have gone through.
>
> (Mary, children's journal 22/01/19)

> I learned about others that they have gone through hard moments. I learned that everyone has something in common.
>
> (Allie, children's journal 22/01/19)

> I've learned that others aren't so different than me and they have experienced similar things.
>
> (Edward, children's journal 22/01/19)

> I learned that a lot of children have been through what I have been through.
>
> (Alice, children's journal 22/01/19)

I had assumed that the children knew more about each other after spending six years together. The written reflections from the children conveyed an awareness of others and oneself. They were engaging with their emotional intelligence and also recognising that despite their differences, they shared experiences both positive and negative. The methodology developed the children's sense of unity as a group as evinced by their reflections.

4.2.3 Loving-Kindness meditation

Initially, the Loving-Kindness meditation script (Appendix 3.5) had to be shortened for practical time reasons and children were feeling too sleepy after it. I also noted that during the intervention, two of children had noted that the meditation was becoming repetitive. I could completely relate to this from my own personal practice of the meditation as the script was indeed repetitive. As a class we made changes to the script by shortening it and making it more age appropriate. The meditation involved directing kind thoughts towards oneself, loved ones, people with whom they had difficulties with and the world as a whole. In order to maintain interest over the weeks, the children facilitated Loving-Kindness meditations to our school community (parents

and other class levels). My critical friend observed the meditation practice and noted how engaged the children were during the practice and how peaceful they were after the practice (Appendix 2.3)

Common themes emerged from their journal entries about the meditation. For example: the meditation was calming, relaxing and enjoyable; the experience brought up a variety of emotions for them; that the children were actively directing their feelings of good will towards others (family members, classmates, Syrian Refugees, child-workers, homeless people, people who are ill, drought in Africa – topics we had discussed in class); that it became easier over time to direct kindness towards those with whom they have difficulty with.

> I felt relaxed and happy and I really enjoyed it.
>
> (Miller, children's journal 16/01/19)

> I experienced anger, annoyance, happiness and compassion.
>
> (Sean, children's journal 16/01/19)

> I felt very calm after the meditation. I was thinking about all the poor babies in Africa. I thought about how lucky I am to be living in a safe country with a brother and a sister and my mum and dad.
>
> (Harry, children's journal 16/01/19)

> I visualised my family all around me.
>
> (Mary, children's journal 16/01/19)

> I thought of my family, my friends and refugees.
>
> (Saebh, children's journal 16/01/19)

> I felt calm and peaceful. I also realised how lucky I am. I sent Loving-Kindness to an old lady who we always see in Spain who looks like she is homeless
>
> (Cian, children's journal 16/01/2019)

The children's journal entries demonstrated developed compassionate thinking and displayed use of perspective and common connections (DoK Level 4 Extended thinking). I found it interesting that their ability to direct kindness towards those with whom they struggled with had positively changed from their first journal entry. See table 3 for further details.

Table 3 Children's reflections after participating in Loving-Kindness meditation.

16th January 2019	**8th February 2019**
The person I sent love to who I did not like is a Canadian boy across the road from me. He is so so so so so annoying! (Evie, children's journal 16/01/19).	I felt it was pretty easy (*now*) to send kindness to someone I dislike because they are people too who deserve the same amount of respect as your friends even if you dislike them (Evie, children's journal 08/02/19).
I felt happy to send love to the people who I love but I dislike sending it to the people who are mean to me. It was annoying (Ellie, children's journal 16/01/19).	I felt it was easier (*now*) giving Loving-Kindness to the people I don't like and I am happy I could send loving kindness to them because sending Loving-Kindness to them helps me to develop my relationship with them (Ellie, children's journal 08/02/19).
When I thought about those (who I had difficulty with) I was so angry and annoyed (Elliot, children's journal 16/01/19).	It felt kind of normal (*now*) to send kindness to the person I dislike (Elliot, Children's journal 08/02/19).
I found it hard to send kindness to the people that I didn't like (Saebh, children's journal 16/01/19)	Now during the meditation, I find it easier to give Loving-Kindness to people I find hard to get on with (Saebh, children's journal 08/02/19).
I was thinking of two classmates and I found it hard to send them peace (Louis, children's journal 16/01/19).	When Mr. Joynt said imagine people who you don't get along with, I imagined a picture of them in my head and then I imagined giving a heart to them (Louis, children's journal 08/02/19).

	It changed my perspective about others. Before I thought about the person I have difficulties with as mean, annoying and not a nice friend. (*Now*)..I think he is nice, kind and not annoying. I think he was just acting out (Sid-Michael, children's journal 08/02/19).

Analysis of the data from table 1 correlates with the literature regarding Loving-Kindness. Practicing this type of meditation can heighten levels of positive relations towards others (DeSteno et al., 2016; Neff 2003; Friedrickson et al. 2008; Hutcherson et al. 2015). An unexpected outcome from the meditation practice was the creation of a meditation booklet. I realised how important the meditation was for the children's wellbeing from their journal entries so I suggested sharing the benefits of meditation with others in our school community and home. The children wrote a variety of meditations containing themes of compassion, positive self-talk and self-compassion conveying engagement with emotional intelligence. The meditations were so effective that the principal asked me to create a booklet containing all of the meditations to be shared amongst the school community (Appendix 4.2). Please see figure 2 on the next page for sample meditations from booklet.

Hug Of Kindness

Close your eyes. Sit comfortably on your chair. Start to notice your breathing. Breath in, breath out. In, and out. Start to imagine yourself in a warm hug. Who is hugging you? Is it your mum? Is it your dad? Your granny or your grandpa? They are warm and kind. Why are they hugging you? Did you win a game? Did you do well in a test? Or have you done something kind? Imagine the person saying they love you, know that you are loved. Imagine the person saying you are safe, know you are safe. Imagine the person saying you are kind, know you are kind. Bring to mind someone that isn't as lucky as you. Why aren't they as lucky as you? Do they have no home? Do they have to go to work? Think of how lucky you are. Be grateful for what you have. Your friends, your family, your school and your teachers. Give thanks to all these people. Send kind thoughts to all these people, who aren't as lucky as you. Start to notice your breathing. Shake your fingers and toes. Stretch your arms above your head. When you are ready open your eyes. Know you are loved. Know you are safe.

Stars of self esteem

Sitting comfortably on your chair with both feet on the floor, notice your breathing. Take a deep breath in and close your eyes. Breath in, breath out, breath in, breath out

. Imagine you are walking down a mountain on soft grass. You look behind you and see a pink, orange and red sunset. The sun is slowly sinking behind the mountain. Feel relaxed and happy. Soon the sky is a deep dark blue with a bright moon high up in the sky. Tiny white little stars are suddenly appearing in the night sky. Each and every one of these stars represents a piece of you.

A star for bravery,
A star for faith,
A star for calmness,
A star for joy
A star for love
A star for hope
A star for peace,
A star for safety,
A star for wonder,

You are all of these things put together. So if you're ever feeling sad or feeling like you are not good enough. Remember that you are all of these things. Stretch your fingers and toes and when you're ready open up your eyes.

Figure 2 Samples of children's meditations

4.2.4 Teacher modelling

Irfan Coles (2015) notes that we model the kinds of relationships that we wish to cultivate in our classroom. Modelling compassion through my interactions and responses with the children proved challenging at times. At times, I felt the pressure of being one of the children's 'emotional mentors' (Claxton, 2005:20). At any given time in my class someone was struggling with something and it was communicated verbally or by behaviour. I intentionally drew my awareness to my responses and interactions with the children. Once I participated in perspective taking from a child's view, I noticed that I was more likely to respond from a place of compassion. This not only had a beneficial effect on the child but it also avoided any feelings of 'teacher guilt' which resulted from reacting to situations. When I solely viewed behaviour or incidents from my perspective alone, I was more likely to misinterpret what the behaviour was communicating leading to negative consequences for the child in question and myself.

> I came to a realisation that Helen doesn't communicate her annoyances verbally. Reflecting on her repetitive reactions shows that she gets easily frustrated when things don't go her way. She communicates it through defiant behaviour. She communicated her annoyance that she wasn't allowed to complete her Texaco art at home. Did I provide opportunities for her to voice her annoyance? Yes. But did I actually take them onboard. She commented that she had more time and colours at home to work on it. Was it really that important that she completed this activity in school? No. Helen's disruptive behaviour continued for the afternoon. I felt tired, frustrated and guilty after the experience because I had not handled the situation with compassionate consideration.
>
> (Joynt, teacher journal 08/02/19)

On further reflection I began to realise that Helen had indirectly voiced her reasons for her needs but I had not really listened to her needs or as Noddings (2003:223) phrased it, her 'expressed needs'. I learned that reflection allowed me to identify perspectives of the children in a particular situation and this afforded me the opportunity to respond with compassion. However, when it was reflection in action during class time, I found it more

of a struggle as I would more likely focus on my perspective alone and react to the behaviour/ incident moving away from my values. Compassion takes practice and compassion under pressure in front of an audience requires even more practice. Practice made me more effective at inferring the 'expressed needs' of my class (Noddings 2012). Helen's behaviour was a constant challenge but as my compassionate mindset developed, my perspective of her changed too. I learned that she had a very harsh inner critic which warped her perception of social and academic situations leaving her feeling isolated. I could relate to her as I too, had become increasingly aware of my own inner critic and how it warped my perspective as well. During the task of writing letters of self-compassion, she struggled to put pen to paper.

> I asked Helen to mention the things that she was good at. She shrugged her shoulders. I asked her if she was good at chess to which she shrugged her shoulders. I said to her that I've heard from many people that you are very good at chess and I've seen your drawing and it's very good too. She smiled awkwardly which was her common response to receiving praise. She then began writing.
>
> (Joynt, teacher journal, 23/03/19)

As my compassionate mindset developed I realised that like the children, I too needed indicators of success to guide my role modelling of compassion. I applied questions to my thinking: What is this behaviour communicating? (perspective) Have I ever felt like this? (common connection)What can I do right now to help? (Compassionate response). I began to question my own needs versus he needs of children during activities. The illumination of this part of my practice opened up my awareness of it, thus allowing it to disturb or interrupt my habitual practice.

> I remember one of our lecturers simply saying "what can I do right now to help?" during a time when we were overwhelmed with the demands of the masters along with school work. This question was so facilitating, empowering and compassionate. I found myself saying it to Sid-Michael today during his struggle

> to perform at the class talent show. He responded by asking if everyone could continue to talk while he was doing his challenge as it helped him concentrate
>
> (Joynt, teacher journal 15/02/19)

The learning process of identifying expressed needs as well as the child's acknowledgement that I had fulfilled the need was developing my caring compassionate responses. Critical reflection and use of theory reminded me of the importance of reciprocal relationships using open-mindedness, communication and continuous inquiry (Noddings, 2003:223). Modelling compassionate responses was not only of benefit for the children but it was developing my emotional intelligence and it interrupted my habitualised autopilot reactions.

4.3 Drama strategies for fostering active engagement in compassion

4.3.1 Drama can be used for the enactment of compassion

Forum theatre or Theatre of the oppressed was pioneered by Brazilian radical educator Augustus Boal. The premise behind the activity is to provide opportunities for the audience members to move from passive viewers to active spectators or 'spec-actors' to create a more just scene (Howard 2004). I used forum theatre in cycle 1 of the intervention and it provided opportunities for the children to practice perspective taking, to practice reflecting on common connections and engage in acts of compassion to create a more just outcome for those in the scene (DoK Extended Thinking).

It took some time for the children to grasp the mechanics of forum theatre. The scenes used during the forum theatre were scripts created by me and were based on my class' struggles on yard or in class, for example bullying, academic struggles and diversity issues (Appendix 3.4) By using a show of hands, I asked the class to identify common connections with the character or topic. At times, the dialogue around the forum became

quite loud and heated. I was aware from Peterson (2017) that it was important to avoid the activity turning into a competitive debate but rather a safe space to offer perspectives and suggest compassionate action.

I asked my colleague to observe forum theatre in action and she noted how engaged the children were, the use of critical thinking to decide on amendments to the scene. She suggested that instead of providing opportunity for all children to give individual changes to the scene, the class could collectively create a new scene and play it through without commentary from the audience. This proved beneficial as at times some of the input from the children had turned into a competitive debate. The children recorded an entry relating to one of the scenes into their learning journal. The data again displayed engagement with emotional intelligence. It also showed that children identified that more than one character in the scene was struggling.

Using perspective*: (characters: Tom – Victim, John – Bully)*

> I think John and Tom were both suffering because Tom was being bullied and John didn't like school.
>
> (Amelia, children's journal 26/01/19)

> I think Tom and John are suffering because Tom gets bullied every single day and John looks like he is going through a lot.
>
> (Ellie, children's journal 26/01/19)

> I think John, Tom, the onlooker and the teacher (*were suffering*). Tom is getting bullied, John because he misses his Dad, onlooker as she might feel worried about what to do, the teacher because she might not know who to believe.
>
> (Conor, children's journal 26/01/19)

> If I saw what happened, I would talk to John and explain to him (*that if*) he was Tom, how would he feel?
>
> (Sid-Michael, children's journal 26/01/19)

Suggesting a compassionate act:

> The compassionate things I could do for John and Tom is get them to talk to each other and see what they have in common.
>
> (Tommy, children's journal 26/01/19)

> I would comfort Tom and make friends with John to help him become a nicer friend.
>
> (Ellie, children's journal 26/01/19)

> I would say to John – I can get help for your difficulties, if that's what you want? I would say to Tom – You're brave, go and talk to the teacher.
>
> (Edward, children's journal 26/01/19)

> I think it can be resolved if we look into John's life and try to learn more about him.
>
> (Abigail, children's journal 26/01/19)

> I could be compassionate to John by understanding how he feels and being nice to him.
>
> (Nathaniel, children's journal 26/01/19)

Analysis of the data demonstrated that the children were widening their lens on who deserved compassion. It showed that the children were engaging with critical thinking by analysing John's (the bully) story to decide whether he deserved compassion or not. It conveyed that the children were practicing perspective taking and identifying compassionate acts. Advocates of critical pedagogy such as Giroux (2011) and bell hooks (2003) note that pupils should be encouraged to think critically in order for personal, political and cultural transformation to occur. Forum theatre provided opportunities for children to be active agents of compassion. They were engaging in critical thinking, reflection, dialogue and taking compassionate action to create a positive social change (Brydon-Miller et al. 2003; Howard 2004; Giroux 2011).

4.3.2 Drama can be used for the enactment of self-compassion

In cycle 2, the focus of the intervention was driven by self-compassion. I used my own edited version of Neff's (2003) framework of self-compassion to explain the procedure of being compassionate to oneself. I used the metaphor of a kind caring friend to explain self-compassionate responses. Conscience alley is a strategy that I used with the class to explore the enactment of the self-compassion. One side of the alley offered compassionate constructive responses to the character while the other side of alley was the character's inner critic and offered harsh and berating criticism.

The principal had become increasingly interested in my research and asked if three newly qualified teachers (NQTs) could observe my lessons as part of the Droichead scheme. The teachers and Deputy Principal provided positive feedback about the engagement of the children and their comprehension of the compassion (Appendix 2.2).

> As we pack up our school, one of the things I was saddened to see being taken off the walls was the wall of compassion in Greg's class. It was so lovely to have the children's words on display, encompassing creativity and compassion.
>
> (Deputy principal, appendix 2.2)

Figure 3 Wall of compassion display

The following data is from the children's written reflections highlighting the internal dialogue of their inner critic.

> My inner critic was screaming at me – how did you not get that! You are horrible! Ejitt! Get off the field! I started believing it and I felt terrible.
>
> (Sean, children's journal 27/2/19)

> I was almost finished (*the race*) when my inner critic came and said "You can't do this". I believed my inner critic and gave up trying.
>
> (Cael, children's journal 27/2/19)

> My inner critic talked to me when I didn't go to the Santry trials and said I was useless.
>
> (Ella, children's journal 27/02/19)

> At my first gymnastics competition, my inner critic started to say I wasn't good enough when I fell on the bars. I felt like a failure.
>
> (Ellie, children's journal 27/02/19)

From reading the children's reflections, I was learning about their harsh, berating and isolating beliefs. I realised how important it was for the children to learn about of self-compassion. When the children listened to their inner critic, they noticed that it affected how they felt. The following data from the children's journals shows that the children could actively change the perspective of their inner critic by using a lens of self-compassion.

> Everyone else experiences this too. Try to be kind to yourself.
>
> (Sid-Michael, children's journal 15/03/19)

> Everyone has been through this, you're good at other things.
>
> (Nathaniel, children's journal 15/03/19)

> You're kind. You've got three good compassionate friends.
>
> (Cael, children's journal 15/03/19)

> Maybe you just had a bad day. You're getting better at this.
>
> (Ella, children's journal 15/03/19)

Everyone feels this way sometimes, you're not the only one.

(Elliot, children's journal 15/03/19)

Everyone struggles with something. Its ok.

(Louis, children's journal 15/03/19)

Conscience alley and dialogue proved a very useful way to simulate the voice of the inner critic and nurture the self-compassionate voice. In following lessons, I asked the children to compose letters to themselves, writing it from the perspective of a compassionate friend. I wanted them to identify their struggles, setbacks, blessings and successes from the eyes of a good friend. The letters conveyed themes of self-compassion, constructive criticism, positive perspective and soothing self-care (Appendix 4.4).

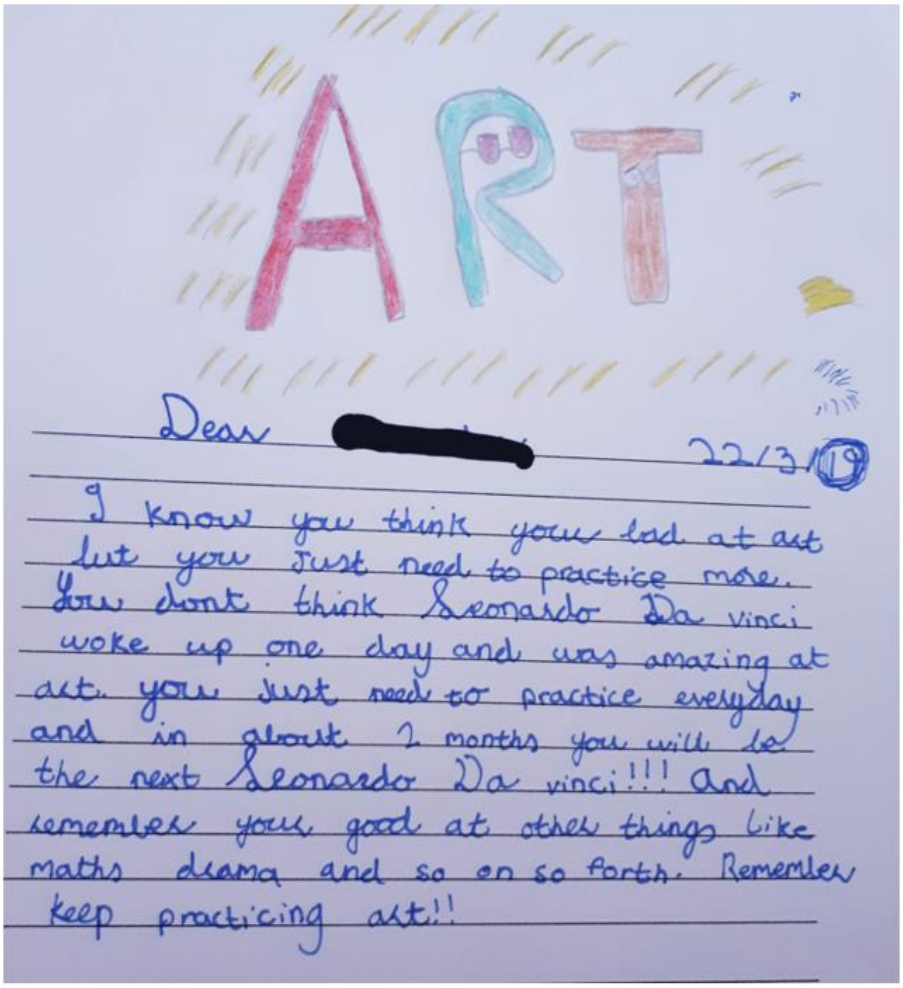
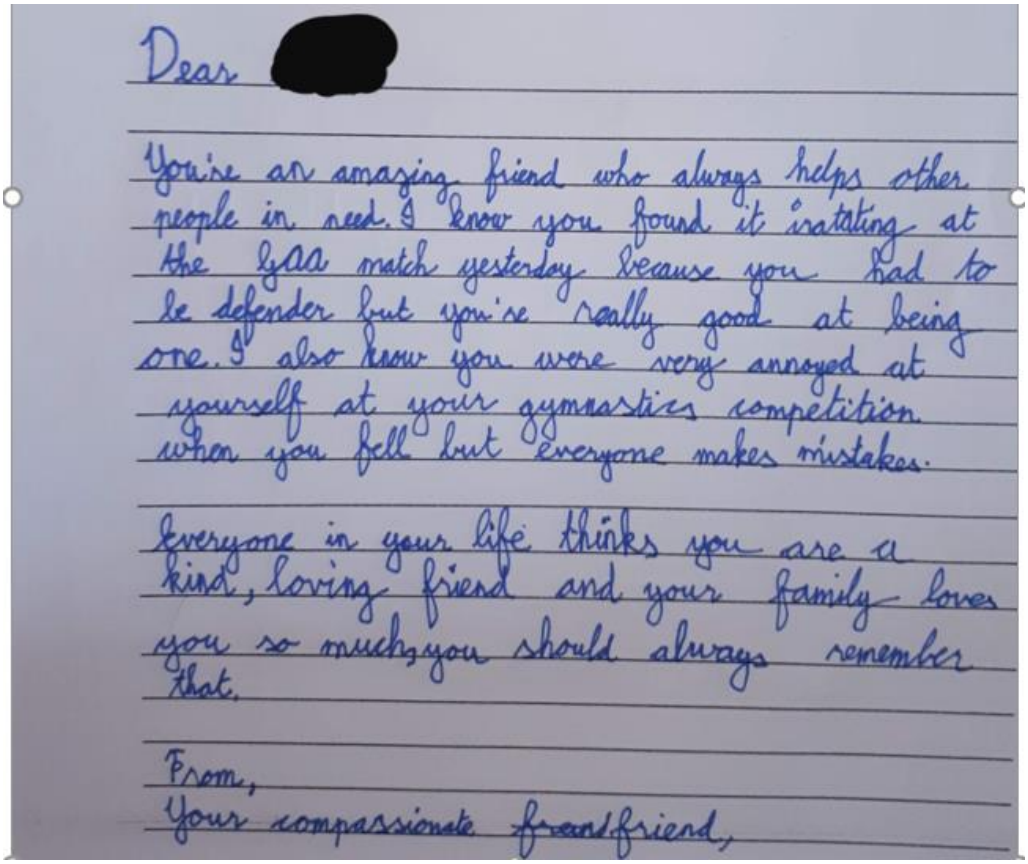


Figure 4 Example of pupil's letter of self-compassion


Dear [redacted]

You're an amazing friend who always helps other people in need. I know you found it irritating at the GAA match yesterday because you had to be defender but you're really good at being one. I also know you were very annoyed at yourself at your gymnastics competition when you fell but everyone makes mistakes.

Everyone in your life thinks you are a kind, loving friend and your family loves you so much, you should always remember that.

From,
Your compassionate ~~friend~~friend,

Figure 5 Example of pupil's letter of self-compassion

4.4 Enhancing the understanding of compassion and self-compassion in the primary classroom

4.4.1 Compassion and self-compassion

Prior to starting the intervention, I conducted a baseline post-it survey on the 7th January 2019 to identify the children's level of knowledge around the concept of compassion. The data showed gaps in their understanding.

They are passionate about something.

To have a passion.

Not sure what it means.

Feeling strong about something.

Something you feel strong about.

> Strong feelings.
> Being fond or happy when doing an action.
> You want to do something.
>
> (Children's Baseline post-survey 7/01/19)

Following this, I conducted an open-ended questionnaire to inform me about their current imagined actions in simulated situations of struggle and suffering. One of the questions in the survey outlined that an old lady had tripped and dropped her shopping. She had injured herself too. When asked what they would do, 46% of the class responded by writing 'let someone else help her' or 'walk away' (Children's questionnaire 07/01/19). Another question related to self-compassion and asked the children for their response to experiencing an academic struggle in class and to identify their inner dialogue during the struggle. Some of the responses included:

> I hate this I am so bad at this.
> I can't do it, I'm just going to give up.
> Why can't I get this!
> Come on stupid person, you know this!
>
> (children's questionnaire 07/01/19)

At the end of cycle 1, I began to realise that I was getting repetitive data in relation to comprehension of compassion. Theoretical saturation occurs when even new data begins to yield similar answers to previously gathered data (Cohen et al., 2018:309). I met with my validation group to discuss the acquiescence of the data recorded so far by the children. The group commented on the level of honesty in the children's written accounts, the richness of the data and how self-aware the children were in their answers. The validation group agreed that data had reached saturation and that the children

appeared to have a good understanding of compassion based on their journal entries, their observations in class and my journal.

The final post-it survey and questionnaire conveyed broader thinking about compassion and circumstances to consider when viewing a struggle. The themes conveyed an understanding of compassion as kind and loving action towards oneself and others; using perspectives, recognising common connections and sufferings, compassion as an adjective and verb; and compassion that is inclusive of all. In the early stages of cycle 1, the children were just naming and identifying acts of compassion (DOK Recall and Reproduction). As the intervention progressed, the children were explaining and imagining the perspectives of others and eliciting common connections (Dok Extended Thinking)(Webb 2002). The intervention activities actively required the children to move from 'acquired knowledge' to 'extending their knowledge' (Francis 2016).

The data from the final survey conveys their developing understanding of compassion. Aspects of topics covered during the intervention (Fair trade, climate change, Syrian refugees) were evident in their answers. I realised how the topic of compassion brought the curriculum alive for me and the children by seamlessly linking it to humanity, environmental and political issues.

> Compassion is being kind, caring, inclusive and thoughtful. You can be self-compassionate to yourself.
>
> Compassion is being kind to people and supporting them if they are going through hard times.
>
> Kind, loving, thoughtful to somebody. It could be a pat on the back or something big. There is also self-compassion where you are compassionate to yourself.
>
> Recognising common connections and using perspectives taking, giving everyone equal rights and being kind.
>
> Compassion is kindness and helpfulness.
>
> You can be self-compassionate to yourself by being kind to yourself.

> Boyan Slat is being compassionate to the environment by building a tube that will take plastic out of the sea.
>
> (Post-it survey 01/04/19)

I repeated the open-ended questionnaire at the end of cycle 2. The question involving the old lady who had dropped her shopping and had injured herself showed more compassionate responses with the majority of children stating that they would offer to help her. The question relating to self-compassion conveyed a positive change in their inner dialogue. They frequently commented that everyone has strengths and weaknesses. They also identified that others experience academic struggles at times too. The answers conveyed that nearly half of the class were responding to themselves with soothing and comforting self-compassionate inner dialogue as seen in the following data.

> You might not understand it now but you will soon and other people are struggling too, it's not just you (Alice, children's questionnaire 25/03/19).
>
> Everyone has strengths and weaknesses. Keep on trying and you'll soon get it (Mary, children's questionnaire 25/03/19).
>
> Try your best to answer the question. Everybody finds it hard sometimes (Edward, children's questionnaire 25/03/19).
>
> I would not let my inner critic catch me. I would keep going and I would ask other people to help me (Sid-Michael, children's questionnaire 25/03/19).

After I had completed my data collection from cycle 2, I met with my validation group again to show my findings based on my data and provide opportunity for them to critique my claims. The group noted that the data provided evidence that the children had developed a deeper understanding of compassion. They identified how I increasingly used the perspective of the children and other's perspective before taking action. We discussed generalising my intervention in other classes and they noted that the successful enactment of the intervention hinged on the teachers own levels of compassion and that is what

makes it an authentic experience for the class. Members of the validation group have included their reflection on my learning and the learning in the class (Appendix 2).

4.4.2 Role models of compassion

The result of threading compassion through curricular subjects had provided opportunities for children to learn about famous role models of compassion such as Gandhi, Mother Theresa, Greta Thunberg and fictional characters from the narratives read in class. In early February, the children were given an opportunity to make a presentation about a role model of compassion in their own life. Many of the children chose their parents as their role-models of compassion.

In some instances, children had selected role models outside of their family. Elliott explained to the class how his mum had been searching for a new apartment for them. He mentioned how much of a struggle it was to find somewhere affordable. Eventually they found a place but the rent was still too high, however the landlord subsequently lowered the rent for them. The landlord was also a carer for his own parent. Elliot explained that he chose his landlord as his role model of compassion based on these reasons. He described how much of a relief it was for their family to finally move into their new home.

Another child, Emily, commented that her role model of compassion was Bertie's mum from our class. Emily recounted the difficult lead up to Christmas when her dad was ill and ended up being hospitalised over the Christmas period. Emily then went on to gleefully explain how Bertie's mum arrived at their door with a Christmas meal with all the trimmings on Christmas morning. She enthusiastically noted how the compassionate act had changed her family's Christmas.

Figure 4 Display of the children's role model presentations.

Providing a space that nurtured trust and respect for the children to share their role models of compassion allowed them to hear the difficult stories of others in the class and nurture their understanding of compassion (Noddings, 2003:29). The children's reasons for choosing their role models conveyed that they were recognising acts of compassion and acknowledging the value of it. During their short presentations, I had learned about the aunties and uncles who worked in caring professions helping people who were sick or had needs, parents who had volunteered with charities, a neighbour who does random acts of kindness for the people in his neighbourhood. The children went on to hand deliver gratitude letters to their chosen role models acknowledging their value in their life. Providing opportunities like this during the intervention naturally formed a deeper connection with the children for me. I was connecting with their experiences and ultimately seeing the story behind their face.

4.4.3 Teacher self-care

My emotional intelligence was evidently developing as I had become more perceptive of the feelings of others but also my own feelings. During my written reflections, I began to notice how I struggled to accept errors in my practice leaving me feeling dejected and isolated. I noticed that I was berating myself for not responding to classroom situations in a more proficient way.

> By about 20 minutes into the day, I felt tired and drained. Why was I feeling like this? I felt irritable and found myself getting annoyed with members of the class for being giddy. I was trying to help certain children grasp a concept and also keep others on task. I was using empty threats to manage the behaviour. I feel an internal cringe for teaching this way. At this stage, I should know how to manage my class. I'm so annoyed at myself for not doing the things that I know I should do.
>
> (Joynt, teacher journal, 08/10/18).

Neff (2003) notes that self-compassion hinges on an attitude of kindness towards oneself during difficult times rather than being harshly self-critical. The collaboration with my colleagues during the research and my critical reflections uncovered my inner critic.

> …. the speculation of a whole-school inspection was looming over me too. All my internalised thoughts about my own perceived teacher incompetence came to the forefront. (Joynt, teacher journal, 24/02/19).
>
> The experience with Helen genuinely left me worn out. I questioned my behaviour and actions towards her. How could her behaviour be heightened in my classroom while I'm supposed to be nurturing a compassionate environment? Am I even making a difference here? (Joynt, teacher's journal, 08/02/19).

When I was open and honest with my trusted colleagues about my own vulnerabilities, it nurtured caring and compassionate relationships for me (Russell 2014). It was a collaborative learning experience (Brydon-Miller et al. 2003; Beauchamp 2013). I initially felt that sharing struggles in the classroom would reflect weakness and allow

others to judge me. However, it had the opposite effect. The act of being honest about one's struggles and reaching out to others for help can be considered self-compassionate. Being brave enough to open up and be more transparent about my struggles created a culture whereby my colleagues shared their own classroom struggles forming connections between us built on shared human experiences (Neff 2003 & 2012; Gilbert et al. 2017). My colleagues also offered kind and supportive advice and reminded me to show compassion towards myself. I began to notice how empowering self-compassion was and how it motivated me to continue to improve my practice; to reflect critically but compassionately towards myself. Self-compassion was the antidote to my inner critic and negative mindset.

> *Place the oxygen mask on yourself first before helping small children or others who may need your assistance.*

Just like the oxygen mask advice given during the safety announcement on a plane; in order to look after others, we need to look after ourselves first. In order to nurture compassion in my classroom, I needed to direct compassion towards myself echoing the sentiments of Aristotle on self-love (Peterson, 2017:99). Self-compassion provided me with a self-soothing approach which positively impacted on my wellbeing and reduced rumination and feelings of isolation (Gilbert et al. 2017; Bluth et al. 2016; Barnard & Curry 2011).

I continuously reflect on my own letter of self-compassion during difficult times which proved extremely beneficial for me. I found that it takes practise to form this self-care habit. It requires gentle reminders from colleagues and self-awareness to confront one's inner critic with compassion.

> Teaching can be tough and you have experienced some tough times this year like other teachers. You do have a bigger workload this year so it is natural to feel that

it is more intense this year. You are surrounded by people who care for you and support you and want to see you do well.

(Joynt, teacher's journal, 23/03/19)

Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings from my research indicated that video narratives and dialogue, games-based learning, loving kindness meditation and teacher modelling were effective methodologies for teaching compassion. Drama strategies could be effectively used for the enactment of compassion. Overall the research indicated that the understanding of compassion in my classroom had been enhanced for teacher and pupil. The findings collectively indicated that perspective taking, identifying common connections and expressing compassionate action were part of the lived out experience in my class during the intervention.

As evinced from the findings, the children and I had frequent opportunities to engage with self-awareness and awareness of others thereby exercising our emotional intelligence. By providing talk and discussion on the topic of compassion, I was gaining a deeper understanding of the children, seeing things from their perspective and connecting to their struggle thus empowering me to respond more compassionately to them. The intervention activities enabled the children to gain a better understanding of their peers by being flexible with their perspective and recognising shared humanity in our class community. The children and I have developed a broader and deeper understanding of the concept of compassion as result of the intervention which in part hinged on integrating compassion into real-life world contexts through curricular subjects. Personally, the research has held a mirror up to my practice and even though I did not always like what I saw, I have learned that self-compassion is an essential part of my teaching transformation.

I make no claim that my findings can be generalised to all classrooms. However, even though my study is based on singularities, Bassey (2001:6) notes that ‘fuzzy

generalisations' from my research '*may*' also inform the practice of others. Using both the teacher and child indicators of success may act as a framework for guiding and assessing the implementation of compassion in the classroom. My learning from this experience is transferable to my own future teaching regardless of class level. I can now make a claim to know how to effectively nurture compassion in my classroom. I have generated my claim to knowledge through analysis of data gathered during my research as well as reviewing literature and collaborating with my colleagues. I am now living more closely to my values as represented in my findings. My validation group have validated my claim to knowledge giving my claim credibility and rigour.

In learning about compassion, I experienced the overwhelming sense of its immensity as a topic. I am still learning and practising compassion. One of the variables to note about my study was the time constraint of the intervention. Compassion is on a continuum of learning and three months is a short period of time to see obvious changes in character and moral outlook. A spiral curriculum approach to compassion would allow for the unpacking of this valuable concept in its full entirety. Children are not empty 'compassionate vessels' waiting to be filled with compassion (bell hooks 2003; Freire 1994). They come with their own knowledge and history which should be developed on a yearly basis, compassion included. This brings me to another notable limit to the study; compassion is not quantifiable like maths or reading scores. Children's levels of compassion develop based on growing maturity levels and social interactions leading to experiential learning. I could only assess their developing understanding of the concept and assess their use of applying skills necessary for compassionate action.

Having lived the experience of nurturing compassion in my classroom, it has inspired me to compose my own definition of compassion.

> Compassion is using and acknowledging perspectives, recognising our shared human connection and acting in ways to resolve the suffering of others and oneself. Compassion requires imagination, practice and courage. (Joynt 2019)

Compassion proved to be something that can be learnable and nurtured implicitly and explicitly in the classroom. Self-compassion proved to have an important role not only in the wellbeing of the child but also in the wellbeing of the teacher. The continuum of learning on the topic of compassion in the primary classroom deserves a yearly evaluation. Based on my findings and research in the area of compassion, I recommend that compassion deserves more time not only through integration with subjects but at a whole school level; infused into the ethos, leadership and policies of schools. Based on its importance in society, our education system needs to shift the balance from a predominantly academic focus to an equally weighted social and emotional education. I also recommend that compassion is added to the Teaching Council's Code of conduct values as relevant and important value in and of itself. Self-compassion deserves further research as a form of self-care for teachers. I believe that teachers need to nurture their own self-compassion before attempting to nurture it in others. Professional development and the establishment of compassionate learning communities in schools are fundamental for the operation of self-compassion practices. I recommend that enhancing compassion in an classroom environment requires further experimentation with other methodologies and strategies.

During the facilitation of my summer course for teachers this year, I shared my research and findings with other primary school teachers. They noted that many of the activities were transferable to their own classrooms. The teachers commented that they shared similar internalised feelings and experiences with me in regard to teaching. They were keen to practise self-compassion strategies as part of their own self-care regime.

During the week, the teachers participated in Loving-Kindness meditations, perspective taking activities to reframe their thoughts and they also wrote a letter of self-compassion to be read at a later date when they might be experiencing struggles in work. I have also shared my research with staff during workshops on resilience and wellbeing that I facilitated this year. I hope to continue to share my research through future papers and blogs.

On a final note, when I talk to colleagues and friends about my research project for the first time, they generally ask if the children are more compassionate now than before I started. I cannot quantify that but I can use a metaphor to describe my learning from nurturing compassion in the classroom:

Seeds of compassion

> I might be helping some children to plant their seeds. For others I might be providing the minerals and water to grow their seeds. Perhaps for some, I might be helping them to find their roots and strengthen their shoots to survive an environment that, at times, can be harsh. Some children's seeds may even be dormant and even though I may provide all the favourable conditions for a compassionate environment, the seeds may not germinate during the time I spend with them and I allow myself to be ok with that, knowing that when the right conditions for them occur, they will hopefully reap the rewards of when I changed my practice to nurture compassion in the classroom. And within that lies my hope for change.
>
> (Joynt, Teacher Journal 15/01/19)

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Letters of consent

Appendix 1.1 Letter seeking consent from Parents/Guardians

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 doing a research project. The focus of my study is myself and my own practice as a teacher. I am trying to identify how I can best use my teaching skills to nurture compassion in the classroom. The topic of my research will be part of curricular subjects such as Religion, Drama, English, Art, History, Geography and could be practised in a physical manner in P.E through co-operative games.

The data will be collected using observations, a daily teacher journal, children's journal, semi-structured interviews, content analysis of children's work, questionnaires and surveys.

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

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

I would like to invite you and your child to give permission for him/her to take part in this project. If you have any queries on any part of this research project feel free to contact me by email at gregory.joynt.2019@mumail.ie

Yours faithfully,

Gregory Joynt

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: _____

Appendix 1.2 Letter seeking consent of the Principal and Board of Management

Maynooth University Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education

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

Dear Principal and Board of Management,

I am a student on the Master of Education programme at Maynooth University. As part of my degree I am doing a research project. The focus of my research is based on cultivating compassion in the classroom *(the teacher's role and the role of the pupil)* and whether this leads to enhanced emotional intelligence *(interpersonal skills, understanding and recognising emotions judiciously and empathetically, managing their own emotions in a healthy way).*

In order to do this, I intend to carry out research in the classroom by facilitating the following with the children:

- Using their pupil journal (a copy) to document responses to activities based on the topic of compassion (e.g. Random acts of kindness, discussions on compassion, experiences of compassion in the classroom).
- Discussing historical figures noted for their acts of compassion through the use of books. (figures may include Mother Theresa, Ghandi etc..)
- Participating in a guided meditation that nurtures compassion for themselves and for others. (A six minute regular practice that includes deep breathing and directing good will towards themselves and others.)
- Exploring the topic of compassion through curricular subjects such as SPHE, Religion, History, Drama, Art.

The data will be collected using observations, a daily teacher journal, children's journal, semi-structured interviews, content analysis of children's work, questionnaires and surveys.

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

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 am seeking the consent of the Board of Management and Principal to conduct this research in my classroom. Once I have consent from the B.O.M, I will seek the consent from the parents in my class along with the children's assent to participate in the research project.

Yours faithfully,

Gregory Joynt

Appendix 1.3 Letter seeking children's assent

Dear …….

I am doing a research project about showing kindness towards others and showing kindness towards ourselves. I want to learn more about creating a supportive classroom for everyone. By participating in the research, you may have to write notes in a copy or participate in surveys and questionnaires. I would also like to use this work as part of my research.

Would you like to participate in this research project?

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 ok too.

I agree to take part in this research. (Your name signed)_____

Appendix 2: Validations and Analysis

2.1 Validation letter from Deputy Principal (validation group member)

Wednesday 26th June 2019

It is with pleasure that I write this statement of validation of the work undertaken by Mr. Greg Joynt in the course of completing his research.

I have had the privilege of getting to observe the work done by Greg with a dual lens. Firstly, as a parent of one of the children fortunate enough to be in his class at the time of this research and secondly as a colleague. As a parent I would have to say that my daughter showed her learning on compassion through conversations we had that were evident of engaging learning in Greg's class. She was most engaged on topics discussed in class and really enjoyed the variety of modes used to learn about compassion. She spoke of the drama games such as forum theatre, conscience alley, cross the line, novel reading, letter writing, walking debates and that is just to mention a few.

I know this work will always be of benefit to her. As a colleague, I am delighted to be able to report that I did have the privilege of getting to make short observations on Greg's teaching of compassion.

As a result I asked the Droichead coordinators in our school to approach Greg so that our Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) could benefit from observing lessons on compassion, which Greg readily agreed to. Our three NQTs learned so much that afternoon.

As we pack up our school, one of the things I was saddened to see being taken off the walls was the wall of compassion in Greg's class. It was so lovely to have the children's words on display, encompassing creativity and compassion.

2.2 Note of validation from Droichead NQT observing lesson on self-compassion

April 2019

It was so obvious that compassion was part of the classroom dialogue from their comments. I was amazed by their level of self-awareness. I want to use some of this with my Senior Infants. It's really important for children to learn about positive self-talk. Conscience alley was a really effective way to show the two perspectives of inner critic versus self-compassion.

2.3 Letter of validation from critical friend

June 2019

I am a colleague of Greg Joynt's. I worked next door to Greg in 5th class.

Greg asked myself and 2 other colleagues to meet him regularly to discuss his project for his Masters. It was clear that Greg was very passionate about his project and that he really enjoyed his topic. Greg was always open to any feedback and advice we had during these discussions. I, myself, took a lot of ideas and inspiration from Greg's project and he was always open to sharing these ideas and explaining how to carry them out in the class.

I observed Greg carrying out a Loving-Kindness Meditation with his class. It was very clear to me that the pupils enjoyed the meditation from the concentration I saw from each of them. The atmosphere Greg created for the meditation in the class was a very relaxed but concentrated one. This is hard to do in a class of 33 but Greg achieved it. I asked the pupils after their meditation if they enjoyed it. They were very enthusiastic in their responses and it was clear that Greg had created a classroom environment that was comfortable practising and discussing Loving Kindness exercises. The children's answers displayed a deep knowledge and understanding of what they were doing and why they were doing it.

Greg discussed lessons with me that he had carried out to promote compassion and self-compassion in his classroom. One lesson that was carried out was each student was asked to choose someone to send a thank you to that had shown them compassion at some point. The stories from the pupils were beautiful to hear. This helped the children to talk about and concentrate on a positive event that they had experienced.

Greg also did Forum theatre with the children that encouraged more discussion and research into their understanding of compassion.

On another occasion pupils from Greg's class came into my classroom to perform Loving Kindness meditations for my class. My class are older which is daunting for younger pupils but because the pupils from 4th class were so confident with what they were doing and why they were doing it, they were comfortable and performed the meditations excellently. The feedback from my class was very positive and I was asked if we could please do more of those in our class.

Greg was very dedicated to his project. He created a lovely atmosphere in his class which benefitted his pupils. It was evident from the language they used to solve problems on the yard and in the classroom that they were taking on board all the hard work that Greg was doing with them on his project.

I know I will definitely be using lots of strategies and lessons that Greg discussed with me and carried out with his class with my future classes.

Greg's best resource for his project and promoting compassion in the classroom and self-compassion was himself. Greg led by example and showed compassion to all his pupils and colleagues. He created a compassionate atmosphere in his classroom and promoted it throughout the school by working so hard with his own class on compassion, enabling them to be a great example for the rest of the pupils in the school.

2.4 Sample coding framework and categories

Base-line post-it coding framework

Iteration 1	Iteration 2	Iteration 3	Themes
Feeling strong about something Being fond or acting happy when doing an action You have a passion for something Friendly or kind ~~Not sure what it means~~ – that you love something so much Strong and courage To believe you can do it They are passionate about it You are sensitive Love for something/ someone/ sensitive for something/ someone I feel strongly about something and believe in doing it What you love, your personality, your dream, what you want to do when you get older What your dream is about, how you will help people To have a passion Something you feel strong about Passionate about something but you don't feel strongly Feelings for something, kindness	Passion (misunderstood) Strength of feeling Love Care Courage Sensitive Friendly/ kind Sympathy Action To others	Misunderstanding of concept Feelings Action to others Courage	• Lack of knowledge • Compassion as feeling • Compassion involving action

Coding children's journal

Loving Kindness 1 16/1/19	Cross the line	Forum Theatre	Loving Kindness 2	Inner Critic	Inner Critic 2	Letter from Compassionate Friend
Calm/relaxed/ peaceful experience Expressing concerns/ kindness towards others. Gratitude Enjoyed it Helps a lot Felt relaxed, calm, happy Felt sad for people who are less fortunate than me Sended love and wellbeing out to everyone in the world. Felt calm, relaxed, happy and good. Spreading loving kindness to people	A new awareness of their peers Identified common connection with peers. Learning something new about everyone. Felt brave. Learned that a lot of people have been through what I have been through. It felt exposing but it didn't feel exposing in a bad way. I learned that I am not alone. Learned more about my classmates. I learned that a lot of	Q1:Children identified that both of the subjects are suffering. Taking perspective of both children. Also mentioned that onlookers and teacher is suffering. Q2: Involving teachers/ parents/ adults through the use of talking things out – hearing both sides of the story, creating trust, learning more about John. Q3: Understanding John, talk, be his friend, tell Tom to	Easier to send LK to the person who they have difficulty with. Felt calm, relaxed, happy. Enjoyed sending love to myself. Easier to think of people who I don't get along with. Felt relaxed Felt good about myself Felt calm and caring Easier to send loving kindness to the people that I don't like.	Their inner critic commentary was based on times when they were doing hobbies/sports. 'Failure' used as a common descriptor used by their inner critic. Inner critic berated the child's abilities but no comparisons to other children's abilities acknowledged. Inner critic harsh words had a negative effect on their feelings.	***Inner critic*** – very harsh, isolating, comparison to others who are better, negative comments. ***Self-compassion comments*** – kind talk to themselves, using some common humanity connections, treat yourself like a friend, making reasonable allowances for what happened. **Inner critic commentary:** Nobody likes you.	Letters focused on abilities while others focused on abilities and personality traits. Recognised common humanity struggles, everyone makes mistakes, no one is perfect. Used gratitude to help recognise things they are grateful. Focused on who loves them. Directed kind and positive thoughts/ wishes towards themselves. Focus on the good

Common themes based on coding journals

Children's journal

Connections in data.

Loving Kindness 1
Response to meditation:
- Felt calm/ relaxed/ peaceful experience
- Expressed concerns/ kindness towards others.
- Conveyed gratitude

Cross the line (Common connections)
- A new awareness of their peers.
- Identified common connection with others.

Forum Theatre
- Identified protagonist and antagonist in the scenario are suffering.
- Importance of involving adults and use of talk
- Wanting to help the characters

Loving Kindness 2
Response to meditation:
- Easier to direct LK to the person who they have difficulty with.
- Felt calm, relaxed, happy
- Enjoyed sending loving kindness to myself.

Inner Critic
Write about a time when your inner critic spoke to you.
- Responses were based on times when they doing hobbies/sports
- 'failure' used as a common descriptor of what inner critic said.
- Inner critic berated child's abilities but no acknowledgement made regarding comparisons to others' abilities.
- Inner critic's harsh words had a negative effect on their feelings.
- Believing the inner critic: some fought against it and used positive self-talk. Others sided with the inner critic and ended up having a negative experience.

Inner Critic 2.
Scenario given and children had to write down self-compassionate responses versus inner critic responses.
- Perspective of Inner critic/responses: very harsh, isolating, comparisons to others made, negative comments.
- Perspective of Self-compassionate /responses: kind talk used, reference to common humanity connections, treat yourself like a friend, making reasonable allowances for what happened/ seeing the situation realistically.

Letter from Compassionate friend.
Children wrote a letter to themselves as if they were a compassionate supportive friend.
- Letters focused on commending abilities and personality traits.
- Recognised common humanity struggles – everyone makes mistakes, no one is perfect.
- Used gratitude to help recognise what they are grateful for. Focused on the people who loved them.
- Directed kind thoughts/wishes towards themselves.

What does the data tell me?

My learning about the students/ my learning about my teaching. Have I improved my own practice?

- Teacher Journal
  - Teaching compassion through subjects
  - Using compassion to respond to students/ Teacher Modelling
  - Dialogue used in class to develop understanding.
  - Perspective taking/ common connections
  - My personal experience with compassion/ self-compassion
- Children's journal
  - Expressing feelings
  - Understanding of compassion including perspective taking, common connections and a motivation to help others.
- Surveys and questionnaire
  - Initial understanding versus end understanding
  - Demonstrates development of perspective taking, common
- Content analysis of their homework pieces.
  - Who their role models are.
  - What compassion means to them.
  - What topic of article did the children pick.

Themes : A deeper understanding of Compassionate action, common connections, perspectives, using compassion as adjective and verb, critical thinking, teacher modeling.

Modeling compassion as a teacher: Compassion can transform teacher-learner relationships.: how can I expect to cultivate the compassionate, equitable teaching practices I hoped to see by making a student feel inadequate and incompetent. these are all people who have experienced alienation, the feeling of not being valued or understood, or other forms of suffering.3 Student – relationships seeing them with compassionate lens. A compassionate lens illuminates the struggles of a the learner, the behaviour that they are displaying (what is it communicating?). Become a more caring teacher.

Finding: Children's knowledge and enactment of compassion can be nurtured through the curriculum. (can use Webb's depth of knowledge/ building bridges framework to convey how their understanding went from acquired knowledge to extended thinking).

Themes: Threading compassion through the curriculum; the importance of dialogue ,perspective taking, imagination, meditation, teacher modelling their values, emotional literacy

Finding: Threading compassion through the curriculum; using subjects to stimulate emotive dialogue, imagination, common connections and perspective taking.

Themes: critical reflection, inner critic, working with colleagues, self-compassion, talk and discussion, collaboration, commonalities, contradicting values. Critical reflection as a form of self-compassion.

Finding: Critical reflection allows provides opportunity to reflect compassionately? Using self-compassion to enhance personal self-care and professional development. Critical reflection in conjunction with compassion.

Teacher journal data codes

- My view on the comprehension of compassion
- Talk and discussion/ dialogue/ critical thinking.
- Use of literature
- Perspective taking
- Relatable examples for the children
- Feelings – children talking about their feelings as well as me.
- Using a lens of compassion to teach the curriculum subjects.
- Teacher self-compassion/ struggling with teaching.
- Loving kindness meditation
- Democratic teaching/ student involvement in the process/ offering choice/ autonomy.
- Curriculum subjects mentioned.
- Identifying acts of compassion
- Metaphor used by me: growing compassion in the children.
- Compassion and imagination.
- Struggle with understanding student behaviour. Compassionate attitude towards her behaviour.
- Teacher modelling.
- Wellbeing/ moral distress/ burnout/ disillusionment.
- My level of compassion towards the children developed as I was using perspective taking to identify the struggle that a child could be experiencing. I use the question: What can I do right now to help. Teacher modelling?
- Self-compassion as teacher – it is a constant practice and struggle but the use of self-compassion has given me the space to continue with kindness towards myself and recognise common humanity. Through the process of reflection, I met with my own inner critic. I could see my own thought habits emerging. Reflection exposes my inner critic
- Talk and Discussion of feelings in the class. Emotional literacy/ Emotional Intelligence.
- Using literature and curriculum subjects to unpack the term for the comprehension of the children.
- The impact of meditation on the child and teacher as part of a wellbeing process.

Final post-it survey coding (April 2019).

Iteration 1	Iteration 2	Iteration 3	Themes
Kindness Kind, caring, helpful, loving To help someone To be kind to someone or yourself Using your perspective to be kind To be nice to others Takes a challenge in life Always help people in need Kind and loving Kind to others or doing something good Friendship, comfort, happiness and kindness Always take the right decision and not just think about you Get perspective on what their thinking Self-compassionate Lots of things	Kind/ kindness Caring/ loving Action Perspective Common connection To others To yourself/ self compassion Comfort Gratitude Happy	• Kind and loving (Comforting) • Continuous/ unconditional Action • Perspective • Common connection • Towards others and towards oneself • Sufferings • Compassion as an action and an adjective • Covers a Variety (others, yourself, environment) • Gratitude and happiness	• Kind and loving action towards others and oneself • Using perspectives, recognising common connections and sufferings. • Compassion as an adjective and verb • Compassion that is inclusive of all.

Appendix 3: Intervention resources

3.1 Outline of thematic curricular planning for intervention

<table>
<tr>
<td><u>S.E.S.E:</u>
Themes discussed:
Being compassionate towards the environment, climate change, Single-use plastics, materials, history of plastics, recycling and reducing waste, interdependence, history of trade and fair-trade, working standards in parts of the world, perspective taking, identifying possible compassionate solutions to environmental problems.

Narratives used (stories):
The Boy who harnessed the wind by William Kamkwamba

One Plastic Bag: Isatou Ceesay and the recycling women of Gambia by Miranda Paul.

Activities:
• Creating compassionate country profiles.
• Simulation Trading game
• Narrative video clips on Syrian Refugees
• Fair trade Video Narratives: Talk and discussion</td>
<td colspan="2"><u>English:</u>
Themes discussed:
Identifying and suggesting compassionate acts, perspective taking from characters involved, finding connections with characters and situations. Identifying feelings of characters and how compassionate acts impact on characters.

Stories used:
Faraway Home by Marilyn Taylor (Class novel).

Video narratives used:
Video narratives on the Syrian Refugees, Wicklow welcomes a refugee family and ‘The Present’.

Activities:
• Discussion on topics focused on questions relating to the themes above.
• Letter writing – writing a gratitude letter to compassionate role model
• Choosing an article about compassion in the news.
• Composing a quote on compassion with the help of their family.
• Explicit lesson on perspective taking
• Linkage and integration with narratives used in S.E.S.E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><u>Religion:</u>
Themes discussed:
Conscience, compassion, parables relating to compassion.
Narratives used:
The Good Samaritan
Who is Mother Theresa?
Who is Ghandi?

Activities:
• Topics in the Grow in love curriculum linked in well with it. Conscience, the golden rule, the commandments.
• Loving-Kindness meditation</td>
<td><u>SPHE:</u>
Themes discussed:
Feelings, Bullying, stereotyping, homophobia, racism, compassion, common connections, perspectives.
Activities:
• Cross the line – Find the common connection between others.
• Talk and discussion on self-compassion.
• Circle of compliments – saying positive things about each other.
• STAY SAFE programme.
• Secret Agents of compassion.</td>
<td><u>Drama:</u>
Themes discussed:
Bullying, compassionate acts, social justice, perspectives, common connections.

Activities:
• Conscience alley – (for self-compassion).
• Forum theatre.</td>
</tr>
</table>

3.2 Children's open ended questionnaire

Date:_____

Q1. You are struggling to understand a new topic in Maths. You tried to answer the Maths questions but you get a lot of them wrong. Then you hear some of the children at your group saying that the questions are easy. The teacher explained the topic again but you still don't understand it fully. What would you say to yourself?

Q2. John loves football, watching TV and coding. He loves going to Scoop for ice-cream with his mum and brother. In school, he often ends up playing on his own during yard time. John finds it difficult to be a good friend. He sometimes says and does mean things to other children without realising how hurtful he can be. He has also said hurtful things to you even though you never did anything mean to him. He feels that no one in the school likes him and that everybody thinks that he is bad so why should he even bother trying to be nice. What would you say to John?

Q3. An old woman gives out to you for cycling on the footpath. Your parents asked you to cycle on the footpath because it is much safer than the bike-lane on that busy road. You try to explain this to her but she keeps shouting and giving out until you get off the bike. During the week you see the old woman coming out of Lidl with her shopping bags. She trips and falls and all of her shopping spills onto the footpath. You can see that she is hurt and embarrassed. There are other people on the street who saw her fall as well. What would you do?

Q4. You overhear a child at your group say that they are terrible at drawing. They make an attempt to draw something and then rub it out. They try again but they cover it with their hand and seem annoyed. They give up trying and say 'I'm no good at this. Drawing is boring'. What would Mr.Joynt say to this child?

Q5. One of your friends tells you that their pet has died. What would say or do for your friend?

Thank you for completing the questionnaire!

3.3 Video narratives used during the intervention

'We walk together: A Syrian refugee family's journey to the heart of Europe'.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ubGhzVdnhQw

'From Syria to Wicklow: a desperate family, an Irish welcome'.

https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/people/from-syria-to-wicklow-a-desperate-family-an-irish-welcome-1.3537684

'The Present'.

https://www.literacyshed.com/the-present.html

3.4 Example of Forum Theatre Script

A child has been bullied for weeks – it has been ongoing for weeks…

Enter Tom – Tom is 10years old, he has two younger sisters and lives with his granny. He likes computer games, reading, visiting his mum in the hospital on Saturdays, baking with his granny. He has a couple of close friends in school. He really enjoys learning and his favourite subject is history.

John – John is nearly 12 years old. He doesn't have a lot of close friends. He loves spending time with his dog. He hates school because he thinks its boring. He never seems to understand how to do maths and still finds it difficult to read clearly.

Tom has been bullied by John for over a month. John has repeatedly hit Tom and repeatedly called him offensive names. John has also made fun of Tom in front of others on numerous occasions.

How do you think Tom's confidence/ self-esteem is? How do you think Tom feels about himself? What kind of feelings might he be experiencing in school? In class?

Why do you think John is behaving the way he is? How do you think John feels about himself?

Who has power over who? Who is suffering?

Yard scene:

John: Hey freak – yeah you! There is no other stupid freak in this yard! Why are you always sooooo annoying? *pushes and shoves Tom*

Tom: Stop..just leave me alone.. I haven't done any…

John: Did I give you permission to you to talk…….. I didn't think so. I'm here to make your life a misery. If you weren't so annoying I wouldn't have to do it.

(Onlooker watching from both sides.)

(Teacher approaches..)

John: Keep your mouth shut if you know what's good for you.

Teacher: Hi John, Hi Tom. John why aren't you playing with your class? And Tom you should be over with the rest of 4th class. Now quickly go on and join your class.

Both: Yeah ok… we're going over now.

(Teacher exits..)

John: **Rolls his eyes and *whispers quietly*** I'm watching you…

John Walks past onlooker and goes up into their face

John: What are you looking at!

3.5 Loving-Kindness script used during the intervention

Loving-Kindness

Sitting comfortably on your chair with both feet on the floor…….close your eyes and start to notice your breathing. ……You might be feeling it around your stomach or your chest or you might notice the air passing in and out of your nose. …….. Take a slow deep breath in through your nose and then slowly breathe out through your mouth. Take another slow deep breath in through your nose and then out through your mouth. We are now ready to practice a Loving-Kindness meditation.

Start by focusing on the area around your heart. Imagine your heart filling with love and becoming warm……. Now start to send this warm feeling all around your body…….down as far as your toes, right out to your finger tips and up to the top of your head. We start by sending Loving-Kindness towards ourselves. Repeat these sentences in your mind after I say them:

May I be happy, healthy and peaceful.

May I let go of sadness.

May I be safe.

May I be filled with loving kindness.

Notice how you feel. Now bring to mind, family and friends – all the people who you are thankful for and start to give Loving-Kindness to them.

May you be happy, healthy and peaceful.

May you let go of sadness.

May you be safe.

May you be filled with Loving-Kindness.

Notice how you feel. Now I want you to bring to mind someone who you have difficulty with or who you find challenging at times. This could be a family member, a classmate or someone you know outside of school. Try and give Loving-Kindness to this person…..

May you be happy, healthy and peaceful.

May you let go of sadness.

May you be safe.

May you be filled with Loving-Kindness.

Notice how you feel. Now I want you to bring to mind people all over the world, people near and far. Allow yourself to start giving Loving-Kindness to them. Repeating the following lines in your mind.

May all beings everywhere be happy, healthy and peaceful.

May all beings everywhere let go of sadness.

May all beings everywhere be safe.

May all beings everywhere be filled with Loving-Kindness.

Notice how you are feeling. Start to notice your breath, notice where your feel your breathing.

Take a deep breath in through your nose and then breathe out through your mouth.

Take another deep breath in and stretch your arms above your head and start to open your eyes.

Thank you for your time.

3.6 Examples of Cross the Line statements used in class

Cross the line if…

You have ever found something in class difficult to understand.

You have been upset in school.

You have ever felt worried in school.

One of your friends has ever hurt your feelings.

Someone you cared about was teased in yard.

You have been called a mean name in yard.

You have ever felt lonely or isolated in the yard.

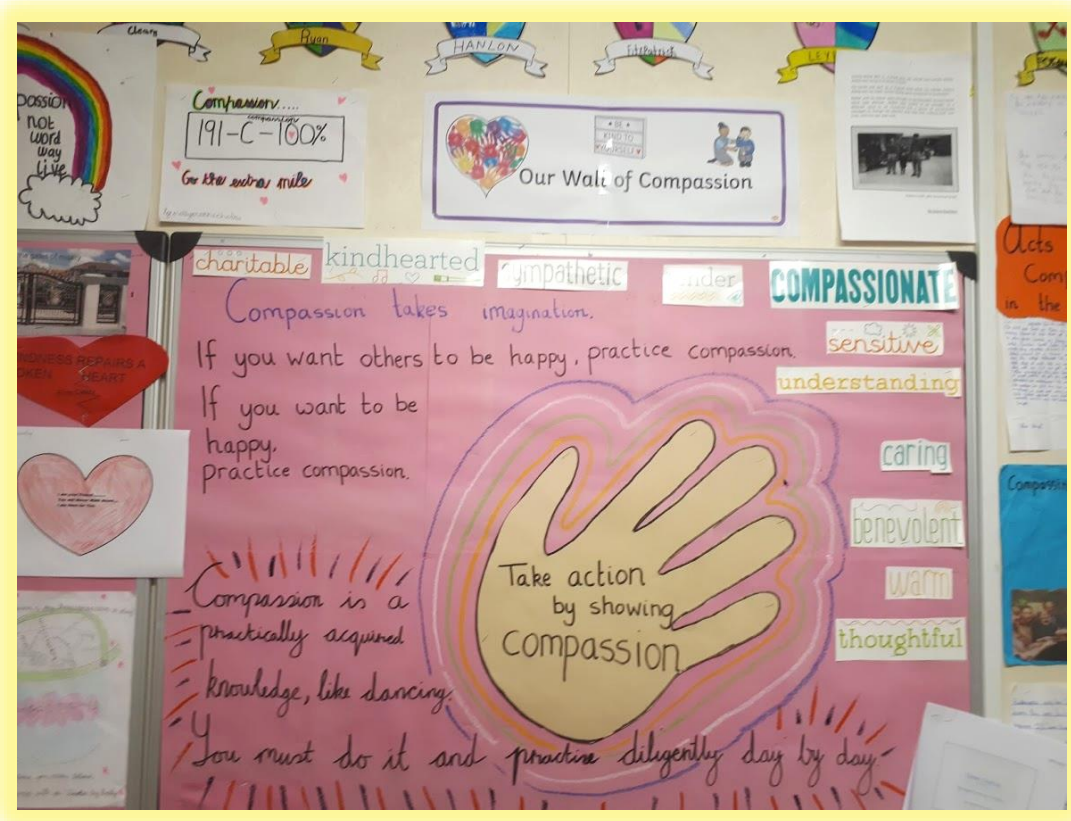
Someone has done something mean to you and you are too afraid to tell someone.

If you have ever stood by and watched someone hurt somebody else and said or did nothing because you were too afraid.

What feelings did you have during this activity?
What was the hardest part for you?
What did you learn about yourself? About others? What do you want to remember about what we've just experienced?
What, if anything, do you want to tell others about this experience?"

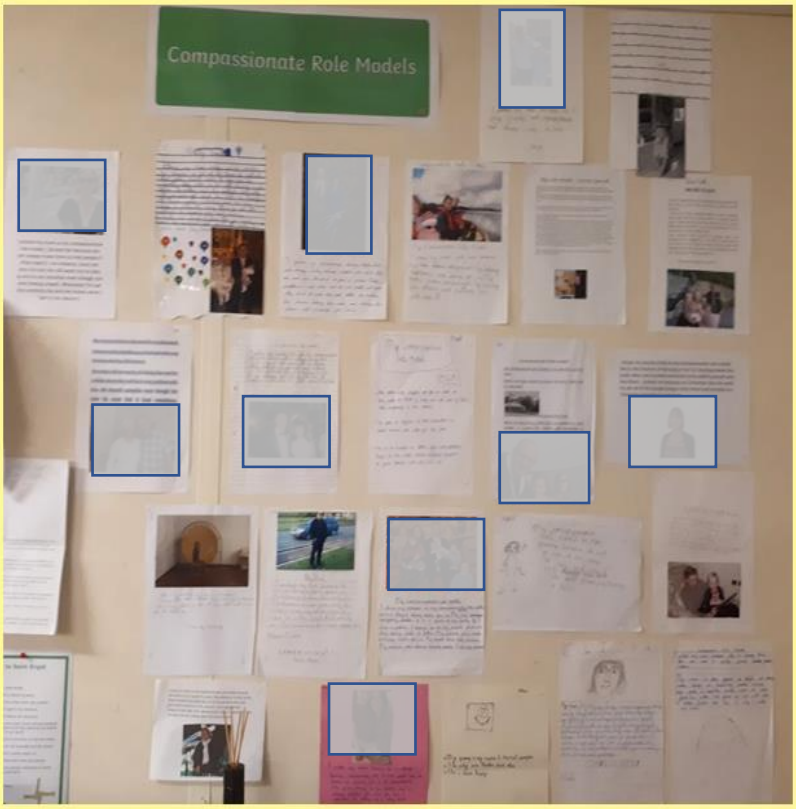
3.7 Wall of compassion display (photos)

Wall of compassion display



Acts of compassion in news articles:

Role models of compassion in the children's lives



Quotes about compassion created by the children in collaboration with their family.

Appendix 4: Supporting documentation

4.1 Webb's Depth of Knowledge (DoK)

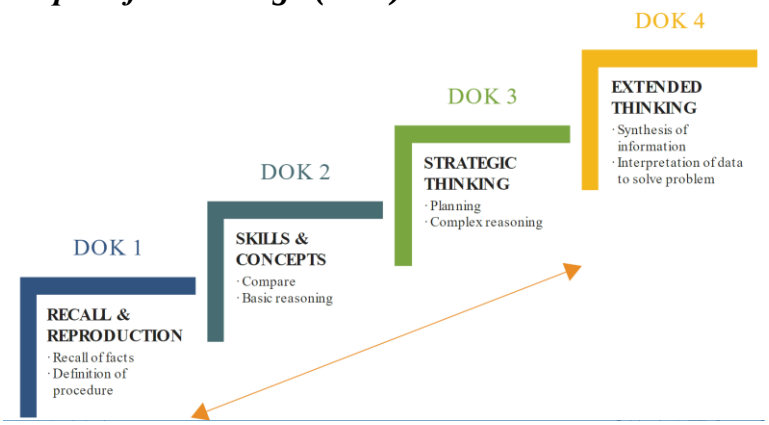
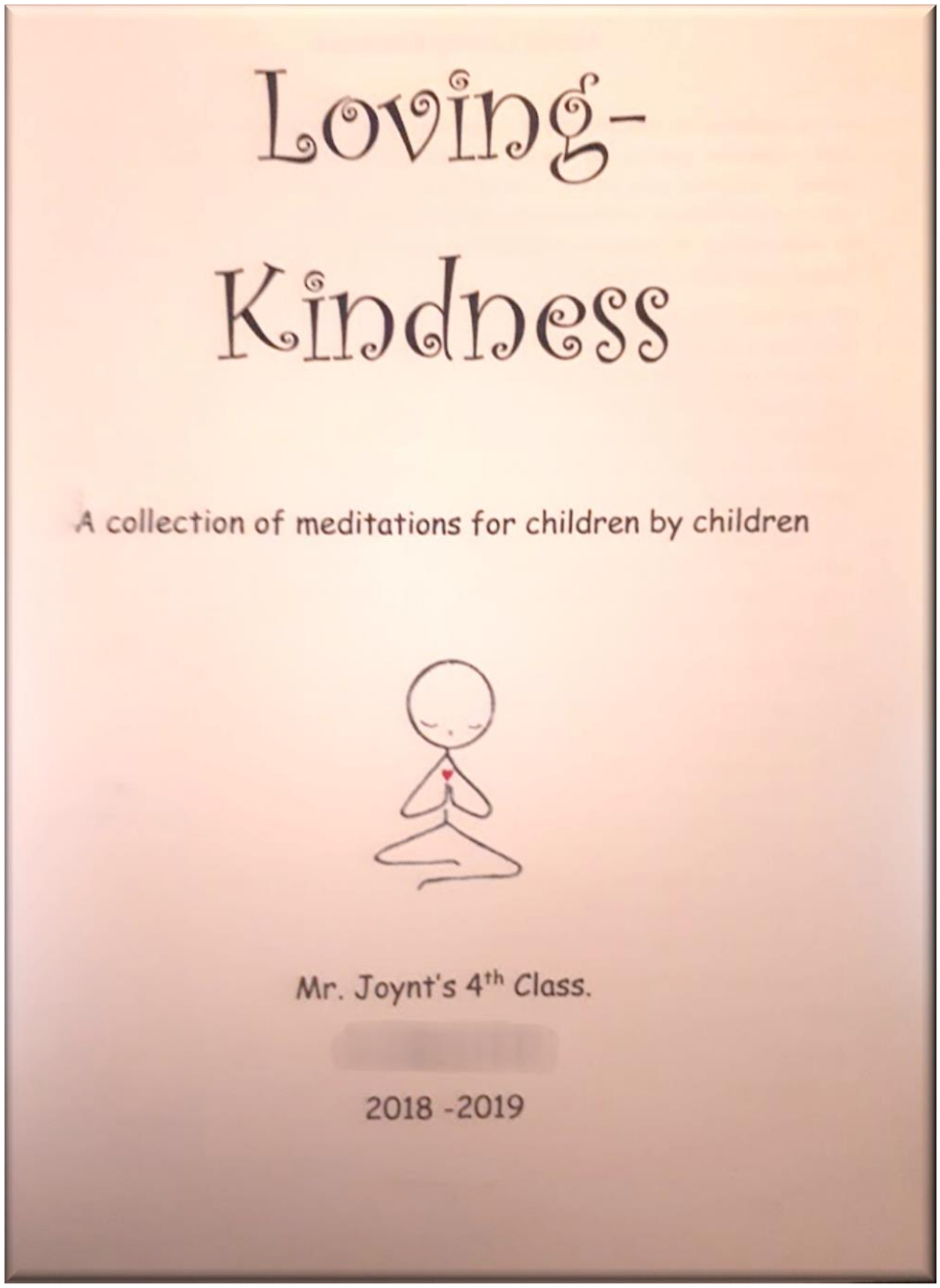


Figure 3: Webb's Depth of Knowledge

1. **Level 1 (Acquired knowledge)** involves recall and reproduction. Remembering facts or defining a procedure.
2. **Level 2 (Knowledge Application)** are skills and concepts. Pupils use learned concepts to answer questions.
3. **Level 3 (Analysis)** involves strategic thinking. Complexity increases here and involves planning, justification, and complex reasoning. Explains how concepts and procedures can be used to provide results.
4. **Level 4 (Augmentation)** is extended thinking. This requires going beyond the standard learning and asking, how else can the learning be used in real world contexts.

4.2 Meditation booklet with children's meditations



Inside cover of the meditation booklet

About Loving-Kindness

We are developing our understanding of compassion and self-compassion in school. Compassion takes imagination, practice and courage. We learned that compassion is about recognising common connections with others, acknowledging the perspectives of others and being motivated with kindness to help ourselves and others during times of difficulty. We developed our understanding of compassion through stories, journaling, discussions, Drama, Art, SPHE, Religion, Geography and History.

We also used the practice of meditation to nurture compassion in our classroom. The first meditation in this booklet is the 'Loving-kindness' meditation that we used in class. During this meditation we directed love and kindness to ourselves, to our friends and family, to people with whom we have difficulties and to all the people around our world. We experienced a variety of feelings during the meditation. We noticed that practising meditation allows us to feel calm, peaceful and relaxed. We decided to compose our own selection of guided meditations so that others could enjoy the benefits too.

The meditations in this booklet consist of short guided stories filled with imagery and metaphors that appeal to all the senses. The meditations are brimming with positive self-compassionate statements. The meditations offer children an opportunity to reflect, to use their imaginations and to relax.

Tips for the reader and listener:

- Use a soft, calm voice when reading the meditation aloud.
- Take short pauses between sentences.
- Allow the listener time to imagine and visualise the story.
- Allow the listener time to take deep slow breaths when prompted.
- Children can close their eyes or send their gaze towards the ground during the meditation.
- Spend some time discussing the meditation after it has been read aloud.
- Meditation takes practice.
- Each listener will have a different and equally valuable meditative experience.

We hope you enjoy listening to our meditations.
With love and kindness,
4th class
……(school name)

4.3 Examples from children's meditation booklet

Cloud of mistakes

Close your eyes. Take a deep breath in and out. Notice how you feel. Imagine a big fluffy cloud and it is the fluffiest cloud ever. This cloud is called the cloud of mistakes. You put all your mistakes here into it and start your day fresh.

You are kind,

You are brave,

You are friendly,

Know that everyone makes mistakes.

Imagine a unicorn, the most colourful unicorn ever. Blue, red, yellow and pink, all the colours of the rainbow. The unicorn is here to tell you that, your mistakes are lifted and released away. Then you start drifting down from the sky. You land on a soft bed. Notice how you feel. Put your hands above your head. Start to open your eyes. Thank you for your time.

Hill of Thought

Start to close your eyes and feel the rate of your breathing. If it's fast, try to slow it down. Now take a slow deep breath in through your nose and breathe out through your mouth. Repeat this as many times as you want.

Imagine you are standing on the top of a hill. It's a sunny day. Feel the sun's rays shining on you. These are the rays of determination. It tells you to believe in yourself and never give up. Feel the grass beneath your feet. This tells you to be brave and to stand tall. Feel the warmth of these things. Now let's start to think.

Think about the positive times you had. It might be a holiday, it might be in a sport, anything positive really. As you think about this, all your negative thoughts roll down the hill. Now repeat these lines in your mind.

May I be positive,

May I be thankful for who I am,

May I be happy.

Now think about all the people who have made you happy. It might be family, relatives or just a friend. Now repeat these lines in your mind.

May they be positive,

May they be thankful for who I am,

May they be happy.

Now think about the people who have made you made you unhappy. It might be physically, or verbally. Try to forgive them. Repeat the same lines in your mind.

May all people be happy,

May al people be thankful for who they are,

May all people be happy.

Notice they rate of your breathing. Has it slowed down? Repeat the same lines in your mind one last time.

May I be determined,

May I be brave,

May I be positive,

May I be thankful for who I am,

May I be happy.

Now gently stretch your arms and open your eyes.

Rainbow of feeling

Sitting comfortably on your chair, put both feet on the floor and try to become as still as possible. Close your eyes and start to notice your breathing. Take slow, deep breaths in and out. Feel your body starting to get warm.

Imagine yourself looking at a colourful, bright rainbow. Visualize the first colour on the rainbow, Red. The colour Red means strength. Imagine yourself wearing a belt. A part of the belt has become Red. I am strong, I am strong, I am strong.

Now, look at the next colour of the rainbow, Orange. The colour Orange means joy. Imagine another part of the belt filling up with the colour Orange. I am joyful, I am joyful, I am joyful.

Now, visualize the next colour on the rainbow, Yellow. The colour Yellow means confidence. Imagine another part of the belt turning Yellow. I am confident, I am confident, I am confident.

Now, look at the fourth colour on the rainbow, Green. Green means caring. imagine the next part of your belt turn green. I am caring, I am caring, I am caring.

Visualize the next colour blue, imagine another part of the belt becoming blue. The colour blue means braveness. I am brave, I am brave.

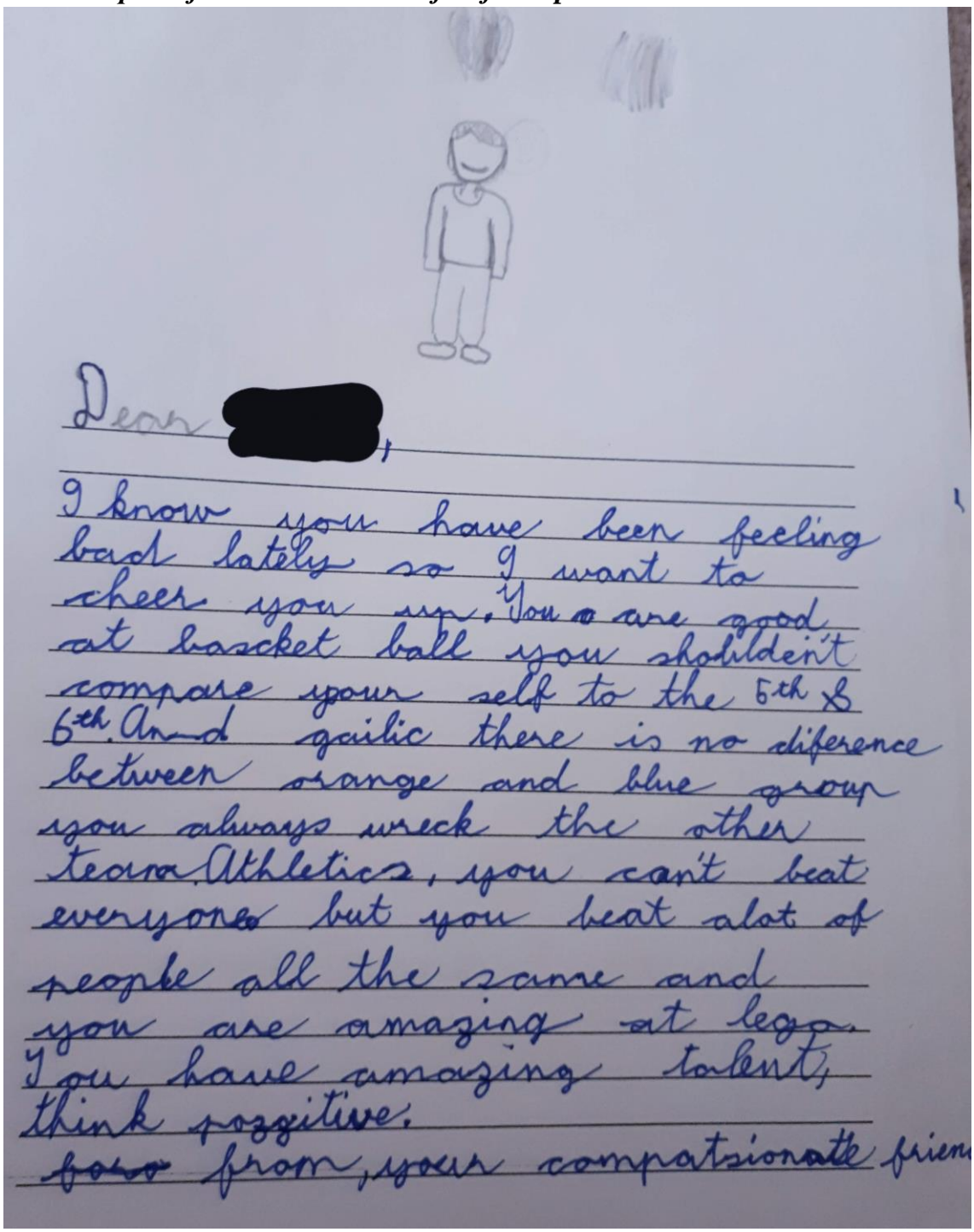
Now imagine the next colour of the rainbow indigo. The colour indigo means love. Imagine another part of your belt turning the colour indigo. I am loving, I am loving, I am loving.

Now visualize the last colour of the rainbow violet. Violet means hope. Imagine the last part of your belt turn violet. I am hopeful, I am hopeful, I am hopeful.

Whenever you feel sad or worried, put on the belt of feelings and you won't feel sad or worried anymore.

Now, take a slow deep breath in and out. Start to wiggle your fingers and toes, stretch and open your eyes. I am brave, I am loving, I am joyful, I am caring.

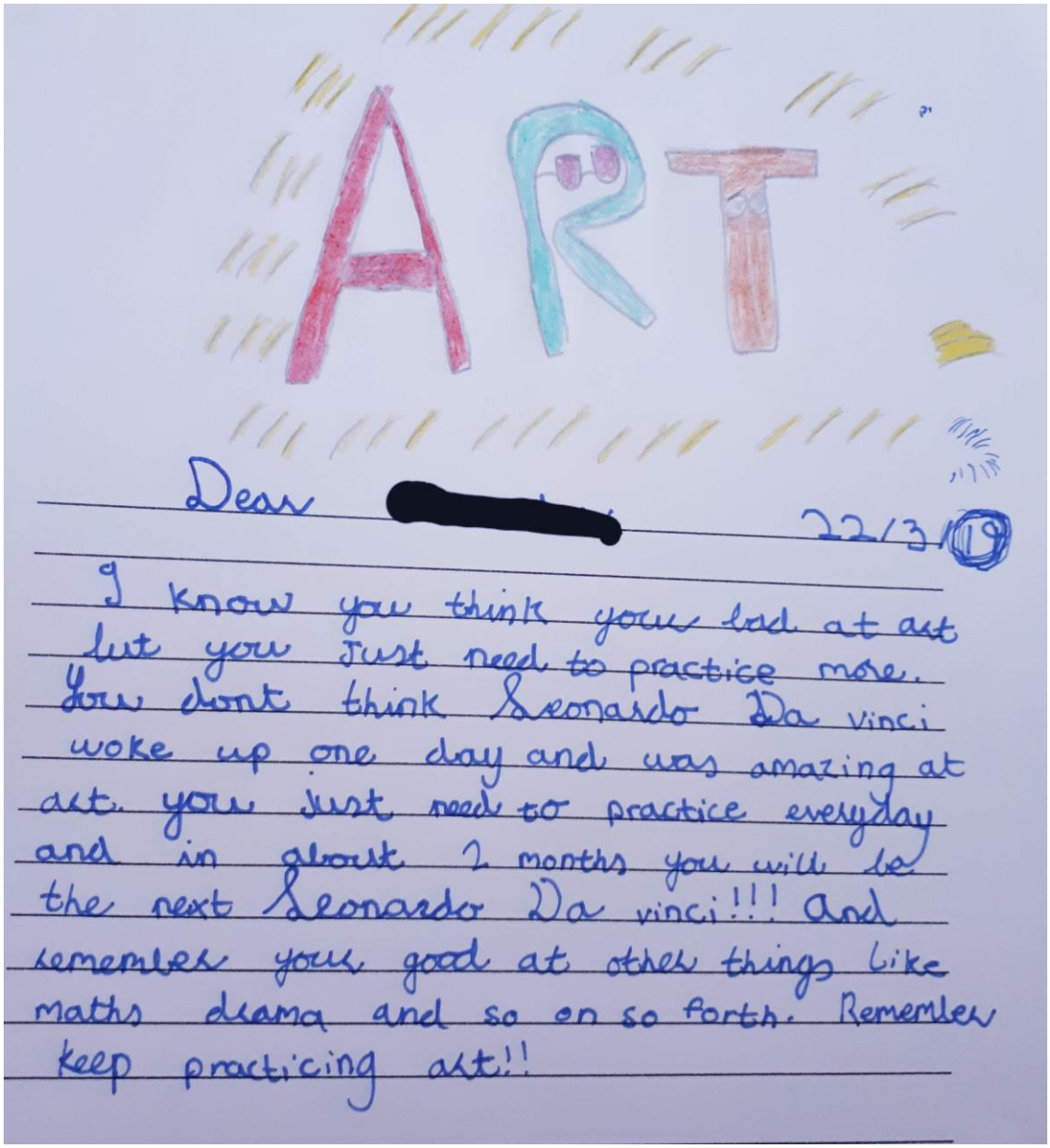
4.4 Examples of children's letters of self-compassion

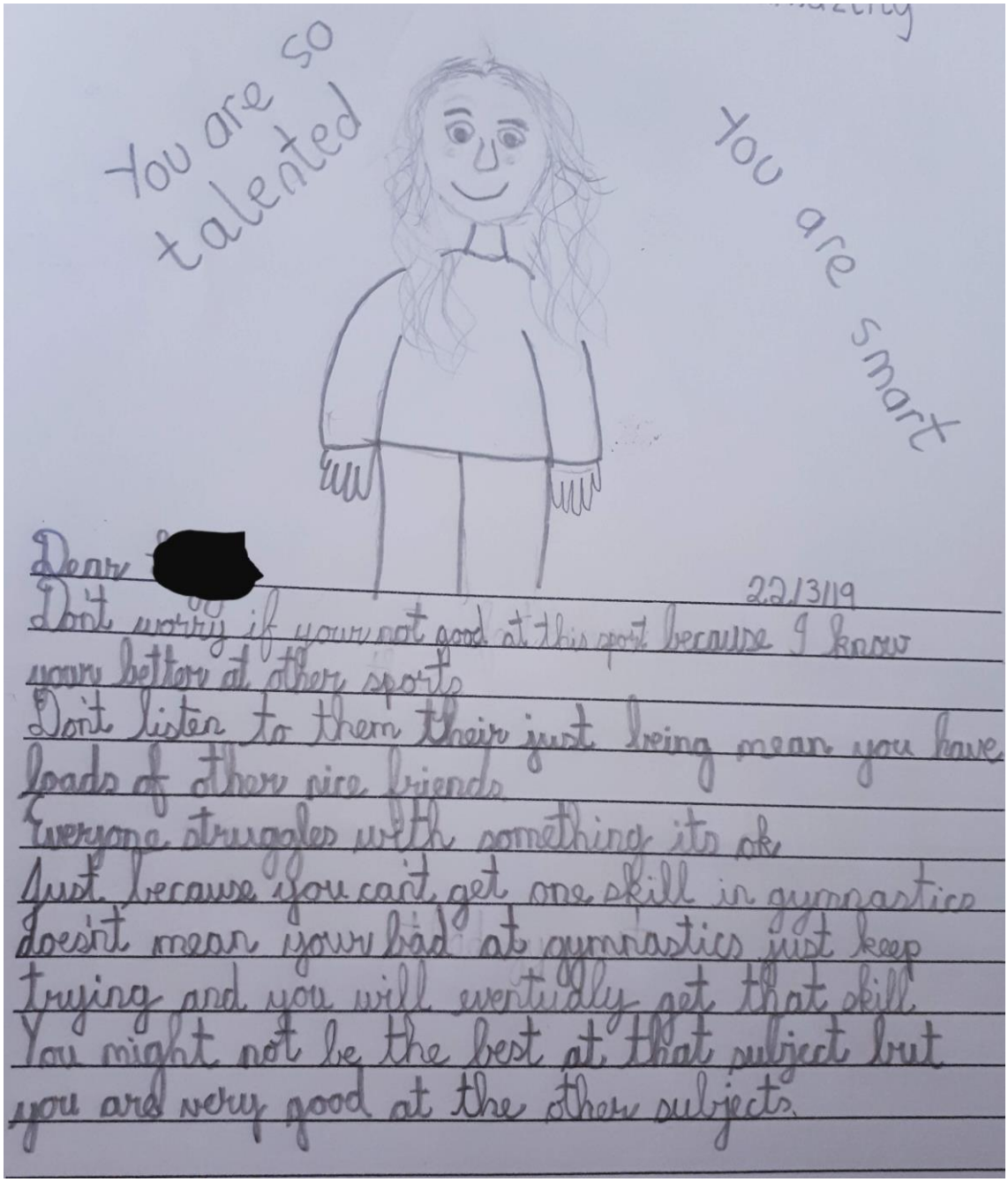


Dear [redacted],

I know you have been feeling bad lately so I want to cheer you up. You are good at basket ball you shouldn't compare your self to the 5th & 6th. And gailic there is no diference between orange and blue group you always wreck the other teams Athletics, you can't beat everyone but you beat alot of people all the same and you are amazing at lego. You have amazing talent, think pozzitive.

~~fo~~ from, your compatsionate frien


ART
Dear [redacted]
22/3/19
I know you think your bad at art but you just need to practice more. You dont think Leonardo Da Vinci woke up one day and was amazing at art. you just need to practice everyday and in about 2 months you will be the next Leonardo Da Vinci!!! And remember your good at other things like maths drama and so on so forth. Remember keep practicing art!!



Dear [redacted]

22/3/19

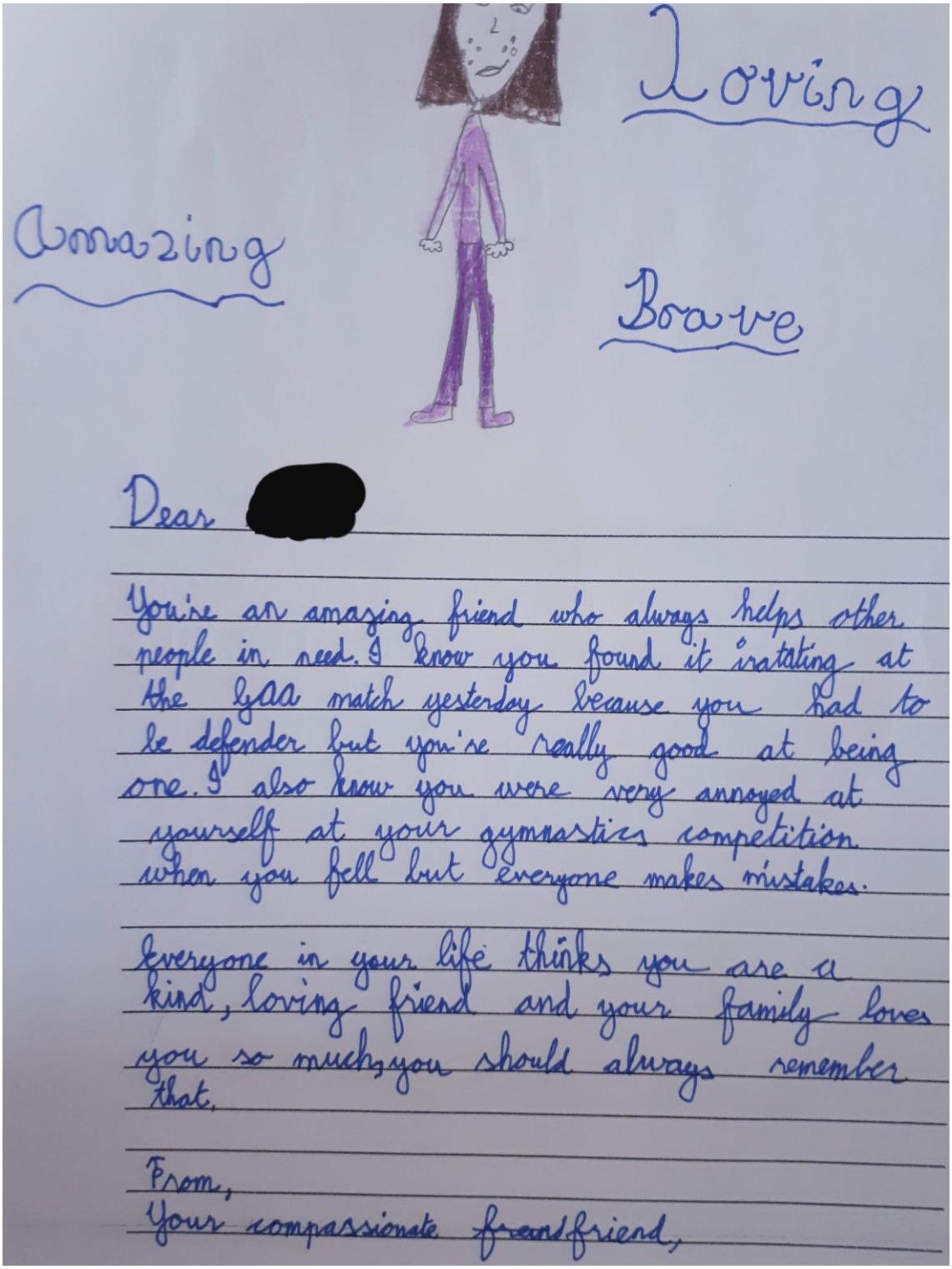
Dont worry if your not good at this sport because I know your better at other sports

Dont listen to them their just being mean you have loads of other nice friends

Everyone struggles with something its ok

Just because you can't get one skill in gymnastics doesn't mean your bad at gymnastics just keep trying and you will eventuly get that skill

You might not be the best at that subject but you are very good at the other subjects.


Loving
Amazing
Brave
Dear [redacted]
You're an amazing friend who always helps other people in need. I know you found it irritating at the GAA match yesterday because you had to be defender but you're really good at being one. I also know you were very annoyed at yourself at your gymnastics competition when you fell but everyone makes mistakes.
Everyone in your life thinks you are a kind, loving friend and your family loves you so much, you should always remember that.
From,
Your compassionate ~~friend~~friend,