Assignment Cover Page

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Ábhar / *Subject*: Research in Practice

Léachtóir / Teagascóir:

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Sprioclá / *Due date* : 23rd September 2019

Teideal an tionscadail / *Assignment title*: *To what extent did making an inventory of my class library cause me to reflect on and change how I teach story-writing to Junior Infants so as to live more in line with my educational values?*

Líon na bhfocal / *Word Count: 21, 799*

Líon leathanach / *Number of pages*: 108

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

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I confirm that I have read and understand the Department assignment guidelines. I have also retained a copy of the assignment for myself.

Síniú / *Signature*:

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Declaration

I certify that this dissertation submitted for the degree of Master of Education, Froebel Department of Primary and Early-Childhood Education, Maynooth University, is entirely my own work, has not been taken from the work of others and has not been submitted in any other university. The work of others, to an extent, has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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Maria Forrest

M.Ed, 2018/2019

Abstract

This project was initiated following the identification of a dearth of books in the class-library with subject-matter, characters or contexts relating to the Junior Infant children.

The dissertation considers how this gap, in terms of literary resources, led the teacher to alter and develop how she teaches story-writing to infants. It outlines the vision, rationale for, planning and implementation of a project wherein Junior Infant children were enabled to write their own picturebooks. This entailed using modelled writing as part of the writing-workshop structure as well as other changes to the teacher's previous practice.

In the initial stage, an inventory of the classroom library books was completed, and it was discovered that the literature did not provide sufficient opportunity for the children in the class to see their lives and interests reflected. The teacher, informed by the writing and pedagogy of Froebel (1782-1852), believes that that a teacher should always "start with the child". The children's preferences for reading matter were discussed and recorded. Consequently, the children were facilitated over a period of three months to write their own picturebooks which augmented the quality and relevance of the classroom library.

The theoretical framework underpinning the project is informed by the pedagogy of Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852). Literature from both national and international sources regarding the teaching and learning of story writing, is key to the work. A specific emphasis was placed on the use of picture-books as a genre of literature with its own specific merits.

The process of the project is explained in detail. The ensuing gathered data is presented and analysed through the lens of the teacher, as part of the Self-Study Action Research paradigm. The teacher's use of a reflective journal throughout the process contributes to the data-set.

Nuanced analysis following the gathering of data, concludes that as a result of the teacher's inventory of the class library, changes and adaptations were made to the practice of the teacher, benefitting both the teacher and the pupils. It was apparent that through the facilitation of modelled-writing and adaptations to practices, children, even those as young as five years of age, may be enabled to write their own stories, providing these changes are inspired by the needs and wants of the children,

It is suggested that, with the relevant knowledge, skills and belief in the merits of this approach, that a process such as this be undertaken in primary schools as part of the tools to actualise and modify the revised Oral and Literacy Programmes currently being introduced in Ireland in which a more integrated approach to literacy development is encouraged.

While the revised Oral Language and Literacy Programme (2018) provides a framework for planning, what emerges, so as to best address the interests and abilities of these specific children, is a modified version of the curriculum, stimulated by child-centred, authentic practice.

Significantly, in order for the teacher to be congruent and authentic in the process, she returns to her own practice of story-writing, an activity in which she had enthusiastically engaged as a child. This may assist in diminishing the likelihood she becomes a Living Contradiction (Whitehead) in terms of her beliefs and consequent actions.

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Acknowledgements

In line with the Froebelian Philosophy of Education which has been instrumental in my development as a Teacher and researcher, I am of the belief that the journey is every bit as important as the destination. Many people have accompanied me on this journey, whether of their own volition or otherwise!

I would like to first acknowledge the patience and care which my parents, John and Ruth and my little brother Roy, have afforded me through this research and accompanying dissertation. Throughout the process my father has brewed enough tea to fill an Olympic-sized swimming pool, for which I am exceedingly grateful. My mother's advice on all matters, both Masters and classroom-related, has been pivotal in maintaining my sanity and drive this year, as have the hugs which have regularly been required. Thank you both for putting up with my ranting, raving and procrastination and for taking me on regular trips to Aran.

Secondly, I'd like to thank my two closest friends, Sophia and Evan, without whom I would have disappeared down the rabbit hole of research to the detriment of all else. Their care, support and laughter enabled me to balance my role as Ms. Forrest, my role as researcher and my true self without diminishing any of the personae.

Thirdly, to my principal, and the Board of Management of my school; your support, advice and facilitation of my Masters has been invaluable. To the staff of my school, thank you for always expressing interest throughout the research process and making me laugh throughout the school day.

And finally, to the staff of the Froebel Department; your support, guidance and care has made this process a truly transformative experience. I want to especially thank my intrepid supervisor, Patricia, for her dedication, skill and unfailing care throughout this period. I look

forward to being able to spend our time discussing dystopian-science-fiction and the dubious merits of "sick-lit" in the future.

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List of Abbreviations

Sh. W. – Shared Writing

T.A.S., - Teacher as Scribe

Indep. W. – Independent Writing

B.O.M. – Board of Management

G.D.P.R. – General Data Protection Regulation

P.A.R. – Participatory Action Research

N.C.C.A. – National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

D.E.S. – Dept. of Education and Skills

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Chapter One: Introduction to Study

1.1 Focus and Aims of the Study.

This dissertation gives an account of my self-study participatory action research project which I undertook from February to May 2019, contextualised in the area of Infant Education. This study is concerned with the exploration of the research question "To what extent did making an inventory of my class library cause me to reflect on and change how I teach story-writing to Junior Infants so as to live more in line with my educational values?"

The research methodology I used in order to conduct this research was Self-study Participatory Action Research, the rationale for which can be found in Chapter Two. This research may be considered an extended piece of reflective writing, contextualised in the area of Infant Education.

1.2 - Research Background, Context and intervention.

As a critically reflective practitioner, prior to commencing my study, I decided to "take stock" of where I was "at", both personally and professionally. I was informed by questions posed by Evelein and Korthagen (2015). For this purpose, I created a table in my reflective journal in which I could address the questions.

Fig. 1 – response to questions posed by Evelein and Korthagen.

What inspires me?	*The enthusiasm of the children, their joy in simple things, their desire to always learn more.*
Who am I in my work?	*I am the facilitator of the children's play, play being 'a child's work' (Liebschner citing Froebel,), the voice for children who have yet to find theirs, a motivator towards learning, creator and provider of an emotionally secure learning environment.*
What do I believe?	*I believe in a child-centred approach to teaching and learning, all children should feel included and have a sense of belonging in school, irrespective of their culture, language, background, etc.*

At what am I competent?	*I am competent at making a child feel valued and cared for. I provide pupils with learning opportunities which are differentiated for all levels, interests and needs.*
What do I do?	*I bring a joyful presence to the class. I integrate a variety of methodologies into the class. I constantly reflect upon and evaluate my teaching and strive to improve the educational provision in the class.*

When I re-read the answers which I had written in my reflective journal, what was reflected back was an image of the personal and professional aspects of my teaching identity. This caused me to contemplate authenticity and to consider the extent to which Whitehead's *Living Theory* (2018) and associated construct of a *Living Contradiction* might constitute a significant component of my professional 'story'.

Since childhood, I have always been a voracious reader and lover of stories in all forms. This adoration of the written word is a trait which I endeavour to pass on to each child with whom I come into contact in my role as a teacher and educator. The research was informed by my values of care, inclusion and the creation of an emotionally-secure learning environment for the children whom I am teaching (Rogers, 1961).

Prior to my period of research and resulting change in practice, the extent to which I encouraged Junior Infants to write their own stories was limited to the age-old activity "Our News" (P.D.S.T., 2013). This structured, teacher-led writing activity, while providing some child to write about their short 'news' items, as well as common day-to-day descriptions, such as the day of the week or the weather. It does not encourage personal or creative expression through writing, nor can it represent or relate to all of the children in a given classroom (Kennedy, 2010). After performing an inventory of the reading material in my class library, I recognised that the literature in my classroom did not furnish the children in my care with books in which they could see their lives and community, a rural farming community, reflected (Larrick, 1961).

Reasoning for why this lack of provision is counterpoint to my educational values will be explained throughout this work. As a result of this recognition of the lack of provision which I had made for the literary needs of the children, I recognised that a change in my practice might rectify the issue, were I to adapt my teaching of literacy to place an emphasis on story-writing.

My practice has been heavily influenced by my development as a Froebelian teacher and educator. Owing to the emphasis which Froebelian education places on children being agents in their own learning (Bruce, 1997), I recognised that the process of creating their own picturebooks might address the perceived gap in the classroom resources, by enabling them to create characters, settings and events which were similar to their own lives. In recent years there has been a shift in the recognition of picturebooks as a medium for learning (Callow, 2017). Similarly, my growing understanding of the nature and practice of picturebook construction began to form the basis for change in my own practice of the teaching of literacy and emergent writing. This is supported by Callow (2017, 27),

> *The Picture-Book has recently been the focus of a more detailed analysis in literacy and educational research, both as an engaging and enjoyable literary artefact (Arizpe, Farrell & McAdam, 2013) and as a site for children's reading and meaning making activities (Pantaleo, 2005; Unsworth & Macken-Horarik, 2015).*

Further rationale for the choice of picturebooks as an appropriate genre can be found in Chapter Two. I considered that adopting this problem-solving approach with the children and being congruent with the constructivist emphasis of the Primary School Curriculum, might be more beneficial to the children than merely purchasing books which would fulfil the need. Creating their own books would, I opined, give the children a sense of engagement and ultimately, a sense of personal ownership of the resources created, in order to enable the children to have

access to literature which echoes their own lives. 'When you co-construct learning with children in your Kindergarten, you can make the most of their own interests and respond best to their needs' (Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning, 2015, 163). Liebschner (2002) writes that it is considered that the Froebelian teacher should assume the role of a gardener, preparing fertile ground for children in which they can optimise their growth.

*"When you co-construct learning with children in your Kindergarten (Garden of/for children), you can make the most of their own interests and respond best to their needs. You can negotiate their thinking and good ideas into your planning." (*Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning*, 2015, 142)*

As with any garden, the soil, aspect and other environmental factors need to be considered. These features are what provides the setting. The context in which I conducted my research was a Junior Infant class, comprised of nine girls and eleven boys. The school in a rural location with seven class teachers and is situated in a small village community which has experienced recent growth owing to its situation on the Dublin commuter belt. While not officially having 'Developing School' status, the enrolment figures have exceeded those in the surrounding areas, not only due to the commuter aspect but also due to falling enrolment in a number of other schools. As the numbers of children on the roll have increased, a call for a diverse range of teaching methodologies and initiatives has followed. This relates to teaching methodologies and child-centred initiatives in the school. The parents are generally very supportive of any targeted intervention which contributes to the holistic development of their children. This project was designed to enhance the children's sense of the merit of telling their own individualised stories.

The intervention which I planned was a change in my practice of the teaching of literacy in order that my teaching might reflect my values of care and inclusion. This was for the purpose

of enabling the children to write their own picturebooks with which we could augment the class library. The change centred on the introduction of Modelled Story-Writing as part of the development of emergent writing. This Modelled Story-Writing approach occurred as part of my facilitation of writing workshops (Calkins, 2001). This took place twice a week. The process of Modelled Story-Writing was integrated into the writing workshops as part of the mini-lesson at the beginning of each workshop session (P.D.S.T., 2013). This change in my practice and the subsequent research process had three stages, culminating with each child creating his or her own unique picturebook with characters, context and events which might mirror the children's lives (Bishop, 2010).

1.3 - Potential Contribution of the Study

The potential contribution of this study may be evaluated on a number of levels, ranging from the macro (national) to the micro (local). It may contribute to scholarly research, on both national and international levels on one end of the continuum. It could also serve as a guide for teachers as to methods by which they too can adapt their practice in Infant Education, specifically in the area of story writing. Teachers at local level might also be encouraged to reconsider the extent to which children could and should be active participants in creating and choosing their own reading material. This continuum of contribution is explored in detailed in chapter five, where conclusions and recommendations arising from the study are presented and discussed.

1.4 - Format of the Study

This dissertation details the process of my self-study participatory action research project in its totality.

Chapter One is concerned with the introduction of the background to and context of the research which was undertaken, in addition to highlighting my values and how these influenced the process and progress of my research.

Chapter Two contains a nuanced review of the literature pertaining to the concepts, constructs and models of research which I employed throughout this process. In Chapter Two, I discuss the plethora of definitions pertaining to picturebooks, as well as comparing and contrasting the opinions of theorists on the benefits of picturebooks. I examine research conducted in Ireland on picturebooks and their uses, relating them to my own research study. I conclude Chapter Two with an exploration of research regarding the practices of Modelled Story-Writing and writing workshops and how they informed or contrasted this with the change to my practice of story-writing with Junior Infants.

In Chapter Three, which is concerned with the description of my research methodology, Self-Study Participatory Action Research, and my research methods. I discuss materials which pertain to models of research which I employed, having rationalised them in my Literature Review. The framework for my research is outlined, i.e., which methods of data collection and reflection I utilised and the process of research. I outline how and why I made adaptations to my study and how these adaptations effected this change in my practice. I also summarise the procedures by which I aimed to maintain the validity and reliability of the research as well as its limitations and ethical considerations.

In Chapter Four, data pertaining to the project is presented and analysed against a theoretical framework, associated with Self-study Participatory Action Research. A broad overview of both the qualitative and quantitative data is presented prior to the presentation and subsequent analysis of the data associated with this project.

A rationale for the style and associated sources of data is also elucidated. As part of the analysis, the extent to which the initial data gathered is consonant or dissonant with that to which I refer in Chapter Two, Literature review, is explored.

Chapter Five is concerned with the conclusions regarding the process and outcomes of the project. The main findings of the study are summarised, the results are contextualised and areas of originality and contribution to scholarly research are identified. Recommendations for future best practice are presented, as well as potential areas for future study.

1.5 – Chapter summary, conclusion and signposts.

This chapter presented the focus and aims of the study, the research background, its associated context and interventions. The format of the study was outlined for the purposes of signposting. Potential contributions of the research will be explored in detail in Chapter Five were mentioned.

The next chapter, Chapter Two, presents a review of both national and international literature pertaining to the various components of the theoretic framework underpinning this research project.

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Chapter Two: Review of Literature

2.1 - Introduction to Chapter Two

As outlined in the introductory section, this study sets out to answer the question 'To what extent did making an inventory of my class library cause me to reflect on and change how I teach story-writing to Junior Infants so as to live more in line with my educational values?'

In this section of the dissertation, which is concerned with a review of pertinent literature, I have included material which pertains to models of research which are appropriate to my particular area of study, including a rationale for their employment. An exploration of the importance of the class library is delineated. Literature which explores picturebooks, their uses and contribution is included, as well as theory exploring the importance of representation for children in literature. Theory investigating the aspects of my change in practice, such as modelled story-writing, writing workshops and writing with young children is also included in this chapter. This approach is intended not only to explore and clarify the associated meta-language, but also to locate my work in the wider academic field of self-study action research arising from reflective writing, and more particularly, reflective writing by teachers.

I was inspired by Bigili (2005, 16) when he posits that,

> *The teacher as researcher is a thread of educational reform researchers propose will bridge the gap between research and practice.*

Cochran-Smith and Lytle, cited in O'Gorman (2011, 213), propose that teacher research is

> *a legitimate and unique form of knowledge generation and profound means of professional growth that can radically alter teaching and learning.*

As teachers study their own practice, they endeavour to 'understand and improve their work as professionals, shape students' learning, inform education and reform education' (Forrest, 2016, 8.) This study of my own practice was stimulated by my inquiry into the extent to which my classroom library furnished the interests and needs of the children in my care, and the consequent change in my practice from structured recount writing in the form of "Our News" to creative story-writing in order to fill the gaps in the class library.

In conducting this research, and writing reflectively, I used the positivist methodology of Self-Study Participatory Action Research. Consequently, each component is defined and explored individually and then as a part of the composite.

2.2 - Values and Living Educational Theory

In order that I can change my practice of story-writing so as to live more in line with my educational values, it is incumbent on me to explore and identify my educational values and to examine the extent to which these values impact my practice.

In line with the writings of Whitehead (2018), I proffer that however conscious a teacher is of them, his or her values, good or bad, inform and shape that person's approach to teaching. My values have been heavily influenced by my training as a Froebelian teacher and educator. I value care (Noddings, 2012), inclusion (Booth and Ainscow, 1998) and the creation of an emotionally-secure learning environment (Rogers, 1961) for the children whom I am teaching, as well as my value and adoration for the written word. These values have informed and directed my teaching throughout my career thus far. I believe that authenticity requires that I link my personal and professional values. The implication is that where I observe a gap in terms of knowledge, resources or skills, either on my part or that of the children, I believe it is my role to reflect on the situation in my reflective journal and make the appropriate and relevant changes to my practice that I deem necessary.

The Living Contradictions element of the research of Whitehead (2018) was one which was significant for the purposes of my reflective writing. It describes the phenomenon of holding a particular philosophy while then appearing to operate in a way which is contrary to this belief-system. For example, despite my interest in and knowledge of early childhood development and their accompanying egocentricity, in addition to my valuing of holistic education, prior to beginning this research, I had not made an active effort to procure and provide literature for the children which reflected the lives of the children in my care and the community in which they lived.

2.2.1. – Developing an Emotionally-Secure Learning Environment.

In my own professional practice, I value and emphasize teaching from a position of 'care' for all the children in my professional practise. This encompasses caring for the children physically, i.e. making sure they eat their lunch and safeguarding them from danger, of course, but most it is of primary importance to me that the children with whom I work feel cared for, supported and listened to. Provision of relevant resources, in the case of this project, books, is part of my duty of care. My first priority when I work with a new group is to create an emotionally secure learning environment, through demonstrating *unconditional positive regard* (Rogers, 1961,122). Having books in the class library which acknowledge the diverse backgrounds, ranges of experiences and plethora of interests is part and parcel of this unconditional positive regard. The change in my practice of the teaching of story writing, is the result and manifestation of this value.

Rogers writes of learner-centred education:

> *A person cannot teach another person directly; a person can only facilitate another's learning.* (1961, 122)

This assertion emanates from his personality theory, which states that everyone exists in a constantly changing world of experience in which he or she is the centre. Each person reacts and responds based on perception and experience. The belief is that the actions of the student is of more importance than the actions of the teacher. Consequently, the focus is on the student.

A teacher's preconceptions regarding the interests of the children of this developmental stage, Junior Infants, impact, naturally, on his or her choice of literature in the classroom library. However, if a teacher is to teach in a child-centred way, I believe that it is incumbent on him or her to consider the children's interests and backgrounds pertaining to literature. This concept is congruent with both the Froebelian philosophy and my own, and thus has become part of my embedded practice. Rogers' writings in relation the importance of the creation of an emotionally secure environment in which the student is the focus. This has influenced my planning for and development of an environment in which the children in my care feel respected, valued and listened to. I also endeavour to enabled the children to recognise that they have their own voices to tell their stories. This emotionally-secure learning environment made it possible to enable the children to compose and write picturebooks in which they can see themselves, without fear of negative judgement (Butchart, et. al, 2006)

2.3 - Reflective Writing

This dissertation is an extended piece of reflective writing, located in the area of Infant Education. While it employed a Self-Study Participatory Action Research approach, the focus on reflection on action, in action and for action (Killian and Todnem, 1991) was inherent. It was through the reflection upon myself and the need for change in my practice, stimulating the interventions and actions which I put into place, that informed the proceeding actions which were taken by me as the researcher.

Many theorists have defined and described reflective writing in so far as it is used in the area of teaching and learning. Jay & Johnson (2002) concur with Brookfield's description of reflective writing and practice as a 'process of inquiry' (1998, 197), with Barr, et. al. stating that '[reflective writing] is a complex process of inquiry […] as well as a commitment to making changes based on new understanding of how to practice.' (2001, 4). Reflective writing for the purposes of change was a concept within which I could see a value, owing to my previous misconception that to be reflective on one's practice on an ongoing basis might be considered self-indulgent. Through my performing an inventory of the class library, I was enabled to recognise the dissonance between the contents of my class library and the interests of the children in my class. Consequently, through my reflective writing in my journal I was enabled to explore this conflict between my values as an educator and my practice as a teacher and accordingly design my intervention in order to rectify the issue. Campbell-Jones and Campbell-Jones (2002) correctly infer that the process of reflective practice is a process which is innate and unique to the researcher, referring to the 'inner dialogue' (2002, 134) of the practitioner, in which they are echoed by Resko, Roskies and Vukelich (2002, 42). Lasley (1992) makes an interesting point when he refers to reflective practice as '…the capacity of a teacher to think creatively, imaginatively and in time, self-critically about classroom practice' (1992, 24). I would not have considered the process reflective practice as being imaginative or creative. I would proport that reflective practice is systematic in nature, but can have creative and imaginative outcomes. As a result of my reflective journaling, I was enabled to design an intervention to rectify the issue of lack of books in my class library which was creative and imaginative in nature, i.e. having the children create their own books, as opposed to merely purchasing books to fit the purpose.

Throughout these definitions and comments, I notice that there is a recurring theme of conscious, systematic, purposeful commitment to the process of reflection. It is structured in

nature, critical in its process and has the optimisation of outcomes, in terms of teaching and learning, at its core. In contemplating these explanations, I wonder to what extent the learning comes as a result of reflection or does the reflection emerge as a result of the learning. This is where self-study may be an extension, almost like a dendrite, as opposed to a progression of the overall process of reflective writing (Resko, et. al., 2002)

2.4 - Self-study

Self-study is a personal, systematic inquiry situated in one's own teaching context requiring critical and collaborative reflection on in order to generate knowledge (Forrest, 2016, 8).

Samaras and Freese propose that Self-Study as a research methodology can require three definitions based on the role of the teacher, the situated practice and the purpose of the research (2006, 26-27). In employing this methodology, these three elements vary according to context and require elucidation on the part of the researcher so that the reader is clear as to the setting. As part of my self-study research, I took the role of facilitator of the picturebook creation, with my class of twenty Junior Infants in a small rural primary school in which there was a dearth of literature which pertained to the day-to-day lives and experiences of the children in my care. This was in conflict with my educational values, making me one of Whitehead's Living Contradictions. Therefore, my purpose was to facilitate the creation of picturebooks in which the children could see themselves, a change from my previous practice.

Baird (2004) analyses types of studies and distinguishes the foci of self-study, stating that the 'self' in 'self-study' can have multiple interpretations; "the self in teaching"; "the self as teacher"; "the self as researcher of my teaching"; "the self as researcher of teacher education" and "the self as researcher of self-study" (cited in Samaras and Freese, 2006, 27). Hamilton et. al (1998, 236) define self-study as,

> *'the study of one's self, one's actions, one's ideas, as well as the 'not self'. Self-study also involves a thoughtful look at texts read, experiences had, people known, and ideas considered.*

Conversely, self-study can be defined by its situated practice. Pinnegar (1998) suggests that self-study is a 'methodology for studying professional practice settings' (In LaBoskey, 2015, 100). If applying this definition, it could be said that I, as the researcher, was researching and exploring the context of my professional practice; my Junior Infant class in a small rural school. However, while it would have been disingenuous of me as the researcher to disregard the professional setting in which I was conducting my research, the primary focus of my self-study research was the exploration of the extent to which I, as the teacher, can change my practice and facilitate the creation of picturebooks with the children for the purposes of augmenting our library, rather than on the situated practice itself.

Using these descriptions as part of a theoretical framework assisted me in prioritising a focus on my professional practice and its potential impact on the teaching and learning which occurred in the classroom while also acknowledging my personal 'self' in the process, especially through the utilisation of my reflective journal (Hampton, 2010).

2.5 - Action Research

After performing the inventory of my class library and recognising that there were few texts in which the children in my care could see their lives and interests reflected, I saw this dissonance between by educational values and my practice of teaching literacy heretofore as a 'call to action'. Through my reflection upon my practice, I was enabled to recognise the need for further investigating and evaluating my work as an educational practitioner through research. McNiff (2013,1) provides a simple definition for Action Research, stating that it is

> *… a form of enquiry that enables practitioners in every job and walk of life to investigate and evaluate their work.*

McNiff infers that the process of Action Research can be 'a powerfully liberating form of professional enquiry' (2013, 2) owing to the fact that it can enable practitioners like me to investigate ways by which they can live more closely to their educational values. Key to this is that following from reviewing and evaluating progress, interventions are put in place in order to enhance the teaching and learning, with the expressed desire of optimising the efficacy of the education outcomes. This cyclical process of intervention, evaluation, reflection, adaptation, etc., corresponds with my professional requirements as a teacher to assess, plan, teach, assess and reflect, and as such was suited and familiar to me as it was in line with my own planning practice prior to conducting research.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018, 297) define Action Research as

> *a small-scale intervention in the functioning of the real world to address practitioners' own issues, and a close examination of the effects of such an intervention.*

In applying this definition to the education sector, the sector in which I located my research, the term 'real world' is adapted to 'classroom' or 'school', positing that the researcher is exploring, examining and addressing the effects of a methodological adaptation or an alteration to practice in his or her school or classroom. These changes were conducted by me, the practitioner, through engaging with the planning, observation and reflection 'more carefully, more systematically and more rigorously than [I] usually [did] in everyday life (Kemmis, et al., 2013, 10).

2.6 - Participatory Action Research

According to Cohen et al., (2018, 312),

> *Action Research is a process which is cyclical in nature, involving identifying a problem, planning an intervention, implementing the intervention, and evaluating the outcome.*

This four 'moment' cyclical framework (Kemmis et al., 2013) ought to be located in its 'natural setting' in order that the context of the research site is taken into account in order to bring 'meaning' to the research (Willis, 2007). It could be argued that the 'natural setting' for a research on any aspect of Infant Education ought to take place in the context of the children's classroom and be conducted by the teacher or another educational stakeholder, in order to bring 'meaning' to the research. This emphasis on 'meaning in context' (Willis, 2007, 264) has contributed to the rise of Participatory Action Research (PAR). Owing to the fact that the research which I conducted was stimulated by my identification of the dearth of literature relevant to the specific interests of the children in my classroom, this emphasis on 'meaning in context' is strong. It is the context, i.e. the inappropriateness and irrelevance of the resources in the classroom itself, which has inspired and necessitated the research. Consequently, as this piece of research is centred around the need for appropriate and relevant reading material in the classroom and the subsequent creation of texts to address this need, an exploration of the appropriateness and utility of the genre of text which the children will be creating is necessary.

2.7 – Picturebooks

2.7.1. - Defining Picturebooks

Sharon-Ruth Gill (2015) suggests that following the publication of Beatrix Potter's, *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* in 1902, children's picturebooks began to evolve from merely stories decorated

with aesthetically pleasing pictures; into another genre of storytelling. Owing to the fact that there is ongoing debate regarding the punctuation of the phrase "picturebook" [picturebook/ picture book/picture-book], it is unsurprising that a wide variety of definitions exist for the picturebook (Martinez & Harmon, 2012). For the purpose of this research, I chose to use the punctuation of "picturebook". While many theorists and literary enthusiasts recognise and promote the benefits and utility of picturebooks, for example, Jalongo (2004), Sipe (1998), Van der Pol (2012), many disagree as to how best to define them (Nodelman, 1988, Marantz, 1977, Stewig, 1995, Serafini, 2014).

2.7.2 – Relationship between image and text in picturebooks

In his book *Words about Pictures: The Narrative Art of Children's Picture Books* (1988), Prof. Perry Nodelman defines the picturebook as a book in which the illustrations play the dominant role in the storytelling, with the text providing additional information, such as *Rosie's Walk* (1968) and *Handa's Surprise* (1994). Dr. Lawrence Sipe (1998), however, describes what could be referred to as the synergistic relationship between picture and text, stating that picturebook readers interpret 'the text in terms of the pictures and the pictures in terms of the text' (1998, 102), positing that text and picture share equal importance in both story-telling and meaning-making in a picturebook. Marantz (1977, 3), likewise, believes that all aspects of the picturebook, including the cover, font and endpapers are 'crucial to the understanding of the book' owing to the fact that

> *A picturebook, […], is properly conceived of as a unit, a totality that integrates all the designated parts in a sequence in which the relationships among them are required in order to illicit meaning and delineate the story.*

Examples of picturebooks in which picture and text share the symbiotic responsibility for eliciting understanding are *The Flower in the Snow* (Corderoy and Allsop, 2012) and *The Bear and The Piano* (Litchfield, 2015). Other scholars propose the need to distinguish between picturebooks and illustrated books. Stewig (1995) defines picturebooks as those which use picture and text to tell a story, whereas illustrated books use the illustrations as extensions to the text which may or may not add to the interpretation of the story. Applying these distinctions between picturebooks and illustrated books, an example of a picturebook might be John Prater's *Once Upon a Time* (1996), with *Mother Bruce* (Higgins, 2015) being classified as an illustrated book. Serafini (2014) wishes to remind literacy stakeholders that there are huge literary benefits to what he refers to as 'visually rendered narrative' (2014, 1), otherwise known as wordless picturebooks. For the purposes of my research, I did not distinguish between picturebooks and illustrated books, owing to the fact that I allowed the children to decide the ratio of text to image where meaning-making was concerned.

A significant benefit of using picturebooks as a medium for story-writing, is that it facilitates the writer to use as many or as few written words as is appropriate in order to tell the story and also may be influenced by the competency of the child in terms of his or her ability to use and comprehend the written word. In order for me to teach using methods which were authentic, congruent with my aforementioned philosophy, this cognisance of the need for authentic teaching and learning, was key to my choice of picturebooks for the purpose of story-telling.

As a young child, I was presented with a wordless picturebook, Kevin O'Malley's *The Box* (1993). I quickly dismissed it as not being a 'proper book' and subsequently wrote my own accompanying text, which demonstrates the innate bias which I had assimilated into my schema of what constituted a 'proper book'. While now recognising the benefits and opportunities which a wordless picturebook can afford, for the purposes of this research I never-the-less

include this anecdote as a potential starting point for a consideration of how other children may perceive the vital components of a book to be. The extent to which this may be evidence of a 'Living Contradiction' (Whitehead, 2018) on my part was considered when reflecting on what I required from the children in terms of their story, i.e. did a wordless picturebook still "count"?

While exploring the variety of contrasting and complementary definitions of that which is defined as a picturebook, I was enabled to recognise that in order to empower the children in my care to achieve in their creation of their own picturebook, I decided that a loose definition of the picturebook was necessary for the children to understand, owing to the fact that all children made their individual decisions regarding the level of text to image ratio.

2.7.3 - The benefits of the use of picturebooks.

Jalongo (2004, 2) proposes that picturebooks are

> *a major resource in children's acquisition of literacy' and highlights the importance of picturebooks as a source of motivation for children to read, stating that 'the enjoyment of picturebooks is a precursor to not only learning to read but also wanting to read.*

Maria Nikolajeva (2014,249) asserts that picturebooks 'are slowly being recognized as powerful implements for visual literacy', but states that '[picturebooks] have been largely neglected as a path towards children's emotional development' (2014, 249). I am in agreement with Nikolajeva when she proposes that 'reading picturebooks prepares children for dealing with empathy and mind-reading in real life' owing to the fact that fictional picturebooks 'creates situations in which emotions are simulated' (2014, 250).

As a result of my Bachelor of Education studies in the Froebel Department of Early Childhood and Primary Education and the fact that I consider myself a Froebelian teacher, it is of primary

importance to me that the teaching and learning which is enacted in my class 'starts with the child' (Froebel cited in Liebschner, 2002). As such, my belief that all children ought to be able to see themselves and their lives reflected throughout my classroom and specifically in the resources which I employ on a day-to-day basis. Unfortunately, there was a dearth of literary resources available in to me in the school which related to and reflected the lives of the children in my care and their wider community. My primary motive for my action research project manifested from this desire for the children to have literature in which they might see themselves.

According to Rudine Sims Bishop,

> *'Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection, we can see our own lives and experiences as part of a larger human experience. Reading, then, becomes a means of self-affirmation, and readers often seek their mirrors in books'* (Bishop, 2015, 2).

While the children in my care were not from a diverse ethnic background (the majority of their families have lived in the village community for at least three generations), there was limited reading material available to them which represents and depicts the lives of their community; a rural farming community. According to the poet and critic, Nancy Larrick (1965), if children are not given the opportunity to see themselves in books, they receive subtle messages that they are not important enough to appear in books (cited in Effertz, 2017, 13). Boyd et al, (2015) assert that

> *[i]t is just as important to offer books and texts that represent different perspectives from the everyday lives of our students.*

In my class library there was a plethora of books about children in other countries and walks of life, telling stories about lives which are exceedingly unlike the day-to-day lives of my

children. ‘Students shape their views of the world and of themselves partly through the books they read’ (Galda et al. 2013, 52) and already the children in my class recognised if a character in our daily picturebook had similarities to them, i.e. same hair colour, wearing glasses etc. As the class teacher, the burden of responsibility fell to me to provide and explore works of literature which enabled the children in my care might identify themselves, their experiences, their loved ones and the community in which they lived.

Kathleen O’Neil (2011) states that

> *It is often the case that full comprehension of picturebooks is dependent on the reader’s ability to reading pictures as well as the text*

In her practical article, *Reading Pictures: Developing Visual Literacy for Greater Comprehension*, she suggests some activities which can be used by classroom teachers to assist their pupils in developing visual literacy skills. In the article, she cites Serafini (2009) who posits that teachers should make a more concerted effort to develop a more explicit understanding of the meaning attached to the finer design points of a picturebook such as ‘aspects of colour, line and shape, along with the way the images in which these elements are used interact with the text’ (2009, 4). I endeavoured to do this as part of the mini-lessons during the writing workshops.

It is important that children are enabled to use and develop their visual literacy skills in order to decode picturebooks. According Schwartz (1982), in a similar way in which writers and authors use words to create texture, mood and activity, illustrators also employ a set of techniques with which they can ‘evoke emotions and conjure atmospheres. Schwartz refers to these techniques as a ‘visual grammar’ system, which struck me as unusual, owing to the fact that I had never considered there to be a set of rules to illustration or artistic rendering. However, upon contemplation it is clear that there are certain symbols and techniques

employed universally to indicate aspects of story-telling in image. Bang (2016) discussed her use of shape in her illustrations and the symbolism behind them; 'Smooth, flat, horizontal shapes give us a sense of stability and calm' (2016, 42) whereas jagged, crooked lines indicate tension and unease. I recall this technique being demonstrated by Neil Buchanan on CITV's 'Art Attack' (1990 – 2007) in the late 1990's and it had never occurred to me to consider these techniques as being part of a 'visual grammar'. This visual grammar and discussions regarding rendering of images became part of the development of my practice as the process of story-writing became actualised in the classroom.

Owing to the fact that my research aimed to enable the children in creating their own picturebooks, it would stand to reason that I ought to explicitly teach and discuss aspects of visual symbolism and colour theory as part of my mini-lessons in order that the children can recognise the visual cues in picturebooks and therefore translate them into their own compositions. As a Froebelian teacher, however, I am a proponent of experiential, active learning, therefore in my mini-lessons, I encouraged the children to identify aspects of commonality between visual renderings across a variety of illustrations and, through talk and discussion, enabled them to begin to identify this visual grammar (Leborg, 2004). We then created a poster collaboratively for our Writing Workshop display board with images conveying the different methods by which illustration can represent this aforementioned visual grammar.

2.7.4 - Research conducted in Ireland on Picturebooks

Acknowledging that as part of Participatory Action Research it is impossible to extricate the research site or context from the research period, it stands to reason that it would have been disingenuous to ignore research conducted in the Irish context in literacy and literature while

exploring the literature pertaining to my field of study and research. In this section, I will discuss the work of Irish experts in the teaching and learning of literacy and literature.

Owing to the fact that my research predicated on the value and benefit of the use of picturebooks, Mary Roche's seminal work (2015) on the use of picturebooks in developing critical thinking was of particular interest and influence for me. Between 2001 and 2007, Roche conducted a longitudinal self-study action research enquiry into her practice as a teacher in the primary education sector. She recognised that she was unhappy with her practice in the classroom and was concerned that her teaching style did not encourage the children to think critically. Situating her research within the 'Living Education Theory' approach (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006), Roche purposefully chose to complete her research using the Self-Study Action Research paradigm as she wished her research to be conducted 'with [her] pupils rather than carrying out research *on* the children'. (Roche, 2011, 6)

Roche states initially upon beginning to use picturebooks as stimuli for developing philosophical dialogue, she chose to use the medium of picturebooks (as opposed to chapter books) because she felt that they would be a 'useful prop' (2015, 4) as '[they] are usually short, attractive and encourage visual literacy', however, upon developing her knowledge of picturebooks, she realised how complex they are in their own right. Roche, influenced by Greene (1978), states that the caring pedagogical relationship between the teacher and pupil is essential for the development of (Roche citing Greene, 1978, 32).

> *'the kind of dialogue that might move the young to pose their own worthwhile questions, to tell their own stories, to reach out in their being together to learn how to learn.'*

The aspect of Roche's writing and research which I find most compelling is the fact that she does not present her research as a 'victory narrative' (Roche citing Maclure, 1996) and

highlights that her methods and findings were not always supported by those with whom she was sharing her research, particularly when sharing her research with other educators whose values did not align with her value of dialogical education (2011, 11). My reason for this interest is situated in my relief that not all "good" research must be predicated on the intervention which the researcher is putting in place being "successful" and received well in all quarters. Hence, my use of the term 'investigates' in my title.

2.8 - Modelled Story-writing and Writing Workshops

According to the New Language Curriculum (2017), it is expected that by the end of their first year in primary school, Junior Infants achieve the 'a' and 'b' writing milestones. The expectations and objectives for Junior Infants "writing", according to the N.C.C.A. is predominantly limited to 'making letter-like forms', '[distinguishing] between letters and pictures' and '[recognising] some letters in familiar words' (N.C.C.A., 2017, 67). In affording the children the opportunity to create their own picturebooks, I was, unbeknownst to them, challenging them to push beyond the expectations of national policy makers. In order that the children were enabled to write their own picturebooks, it was incumbent on me to adapt established approaches to suit the children's stage of development.

In order that the children in my class could be facilitated in creating their own picture-books, we as a community of learners, engaged in *writing workshops* where *Modelled Story-Writing* took place. This introduction of writing workshops and the process of modelled story-writing constituted the one of the most significant changes in my practice, in that I had little experience with the use of these approaches with children in Junior Infants, owing to the perception that Junior Infants would not be 'ready' for the independence required to write their own stories. This concept is further developed in Chapters Three and Four.

Rebora (2016, 37) cites Calkins 'Teaching kids to write isn't just something where you can turn down the lights, turn on some music, and say, WRITE'. He goes on to suggest that 'One of the most important ways to get better at writing is to study exemplar texts'. This is consistent with the documentation of the *Professional Development Service for Teachers* (PDST), which states,

> *Such skills and processes need to be modelled, shared and guided before they are practised independently in a manner that is integrated across literacy and across the curriculum'* (P.D.S.T., 2013, 2).

Christianakis (2011, 22) quotes Hubbard (1989)

> *Drawing is not just for children who can't yet write fluently, and creating pictures is not just part of rehearsal for real writing. Images at any age are part of the serious business of making meaning—partners with words for communicating our inner designs.*

She goes on to state that there are

> *social, motivational, cultural, and expressive possibilities when children employ pictorials in the classroom.*

The inspirational aspect of drawing and its potential as a stimulus is explored by a number of theorists. "[Drawing] inspires young writers". (Calkins, 1986; Graves, 1983). Clay (2017), documented how a five-year-old child's teddy bear drawing served as the impetus for an oral story. (Christianakis, 2011, 27)

In considering the merits of pictures as a means of telling a story, I read

> *"One thing only is certain—that the written language of children develops in this fashion, shifting from drawings of things to drawings of words... the entire secret of*

teaching written language is to prepare and organize this natural transition appropriately." (Christianakis, citing Vygotsky; 2011; 26).

This is, perhaps, a commonly-held view, however, I suggest that, with regard to the process of the learning explored in this dissertation, the emergence of written words was not necessarily going to be a measure or criterion of "success". It was considered as one **form** of story-telling, no better nor no less than any other form.

Much of the literature focuses on spelling, construction of sentences etc. This formed part of the workshops, in addition to our usual English language lessons, but the objective of the children telling their chosen story in the form of pictures, remained the over-riding feature of the writing workshops, as the focus was the creation of the picturebooks in order to address the relevance and appropriateness of the class library. It is to be noted, therefore, that from the outset, the focus was on the use of drawings, paintings or other forms of illustration as the basis of the story-books. I was of the opinion that words and sentences MIGHT also appear, but this would be subject to the desire and wish of each of the children who would become "writers" during the process. I had planned my research thus owing to the fact that I hypothesised that owing to the age of children in my care, an equal representation of the two sign systems (words and illustrations) would be unlikely. As a result of this epistemological assumption, I was indeed surprised to discover during our circle-time discussion at the beginning of the research period that the children were of the opinion, similar to the opinion which I also held at that age, that a picturebook wouldn't be a "proper book" unless there were words accompanying the pictures. I reflected upon this in my journal, pondering

'I wonder where children absorb the notion that a book is only a "proper book" if it has text accompanying the images […] It is very interesting

that my class have the same misconception as I did, twenty years earlier!'

(Reflective Journal, 17th November, 2018)

Gainer (2013,17) writes that 'Over the years, many literacy educators have relied on ideas of apprenticeship for teaching and learning reading and writing'. Calkins (1994) used the term "touchstone texts" to refer to works that can serve to guide and excite the imaginations of writers. Others (see, for example, Dorfman & Cappelli, 2007) discuss mentor texts that allow students to concentrate on skills and strategies and help readers notice things in published works, empowering them to try something new in their own writing.' This is one aspect of what I practised with the children in my class.

Gainer (2013,17) continues,

> *When educators help students see themselves as writers, they begin to read like writers and to write under the influence of reading.*

This is consistent with my earlier reference to the community of learners, as we, as a class-group, consisting of me and the children, learned from each other in the story-writing process. The children were enabled to learn the process of story-writing, I was learning to improve my practice and expand what I considered to be appropriate and relevant writing tasks for Junior Infants through observing and recording the opinions and actions of my class.

Calkins (2016,54) asserts that,

> *[enabling students to write] requires knowledge — and also an understanding that teaching writing is a lot like teaching tennis or soccer, where you demonstrate, and then the kids go about their work.*

In conducting the writing workshops, where the creation of picture-books was modelled, the challenging aspects of the process were highlighted by me for the children in language which

is appropriate to their stage of cognitive and linguistic development. Kellogg (2008) likens the complexity of writing to playing chess, in terms of the demands it makes upon cognitive resources and particularly upon working memory. This was important to acknowledge as the experience and process was new to most of the children, particularly as it promoted an independence from the teacher and acknowledges the process part of writing, prior to possible editing, based on feedback from me and other children in the class. This self-directed form of writing differed significantly from my former approach to Infant writing, the teacher-led 'Our News'. I mused in my reflective journal,

> *Recognising the potential importance and significance of this huge change in my practice has been easy – the challenging part is coming to the realisation that relinquishing some element of control to the children has also been difficult, despite my value for the children's voices and opinions. However, I'm trying to move past the discomfort and fear in order to change my practice, hopefully for the better.* (Reflective Journal, February 14th, 2019)

This sharing of ideas and co-evaluation is seen as key in the writing of Myhill and Jones, (2009, 266), who state,

> *creating classrooms where children can talk about and collaborate in the process of writing supports the development of individual students' writing.*

Key to all of the above is the oral component, just as it is with story-telling, be this with or without a book. "Speaking, reading and writing involve exchanging meanings with each other." (Rose, 2018; 164). Throughout the process I encouraged the children to talk, in a focused manner, about their work at their groups and in feedback sessions.

Myhill and Jones, (2009,265) write that

> *The principle that writers, and especially emergent writers, benefit from opportunities to talk before they write is a well-rehearsed, pedagogic fundamental for teaching writing"*

They go on to suggest that,

> *Through talking, we can formulate ideas for the first time, crystallising inner thoughts into substance and shaping our ideas into existence; we can reformulate our ideas so that our thinking and understanding is clarified, focused or modified; we can communicate our ideas with other people through interaction and feedback; and we can reflect upon our learning through talk.*

This process of communication in relation to their work proved to be very beneficial as it enabled the children to receive constructive feedback from their peers and it gave them the motivation to work in a focused manner as all of the children wished to be in the position of being able to feed back to their peers at the end of each workshop. This is another positive diversion from the writing activiitys which I facilitated with the children prior to conducting this research. When writing 'Our News', the Junior Infants were all writing the same news, the items for which were predominantly teacher-led, negating the opportunity for most children to share their news.

In teaching and learning, the element of assessment is seen to be important. How should I assess the children's creation of picture-books? What might the criteria be?

Rose (2014,167) writes that,

> *Theories of learning can be contrasted between those that construe learning as intra-individual processes modelled on biological development, and those that construe learning as a social process between teachers and learners. Theories of language can be contrasted between those that focus on forms of words and syntactic rules for combining them in sentences, and those that focus on the social functions of meanings exchanged by speakers. Theories of knowledge can be contrasted between those that view knowledge as constructed by the individual and social realist theories such as that of Bernstein (2000), that view learning as an exchange of knowledge between learners and teachers.*

This was of interest to me in deciding what and how to evaluate "progress" and the extent to which objectives are achieved. I needed to consider how much significance was I placing on the extent to which the language of the children is being enhanced, their social interactions becoming more meaningful for them and how, as well as what, in terms of knowledge was being constructed. I also needed to assess whether there was a balance between the knowledge that I try to construct for them as opposed to that which they seek and co-construct amongst themselves.

2.8.1 - Writing workshop in Irish Schools

The search for research pertaining to the writing-workshop construct being adopted and integrated into the Irish context encouraged me to recall my own prior teaching experience. During my first year as a Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT), I was introduced to the *Write to Read* programme which is an 'action-research partnership between St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra and a group of nine schools and community schools, founded in 2011'

(Drumcondra Education Centre, 2015). The programme is 'a literacy model…[which] encourages children to see themselves as readers, writers and thinkers' by supporting teachers 'to deliver high-quality literacy programmes' (Preparing for Life, 2018). The *Write to Read* programme is based on award-winning research carried out by Dr. Eithne Kennedy, encapsulated in her articles 'Improving Literacy Achievement in a High-Poverty School: Empowering Classroom Teachers Through Professional Development' (Kennedy, 2010a) and 'Narrowing the Achievement Gap: Motivation, Engagement, and Self-Efficacy Matter' (Kennedy, 2010b). During this two-year longitudinal study, conducted in a 'high-poverty junior school' in Dublin, Kennedy's research succeeded in 'significantly raising children's literacy achievement in reading, writing and spelling…' while also 'enhancing [the children's] motivation, engagement, ability to self-regulate learning and a sense of self-efficacy' (2010, 1).

Kennedy, a teacher educator from St. Patrick's College, outlines in the article the shared characteristics of 'highly motivating and engaging classrooms' (2010, 2) used in her action-research, which contribute to positive impacts on children's motivation and engagement in literacy. This framework proved to be of significant influence throughout my research, but most especially during the process of pre-teaching and skill development prior to beginning the writing workshops.

Create a print-rich environment; Kennedy states that creating a superlative print-rich environment is critical as it 'communicates to children that literacy is a meaning making activity' (2010a, 2) and posits that these classrooms which are 'suffused with literary richness' (Knapp, et al., 1995, 69) ought to be filled with a wide range (typically 500) of high-quality literature for children, drawing on the work of Lipson et al., (2004). She draws upon the work of American literacy expert, Lucy Calkins (2001), to whose work I referred earlier,

acknowledging that by having a wide range of children's literature, it enables children to select and read books which are 'just right' (2001, 122) for them i.e., books which the children can read with enjoyment and a high rate of success. Owing to the fact that one of my objectives for this piece of research was to enable the expansion of my library with a wider range of literature for children, I was hopeful that the children's work would add to the literary richness in relation to the relevance of the books of the classroom environment.

Choice and Control: In her study, Kennedy found that giving the children the power of 'self-selection' (2010a, 3) in relation to their reading material, writing topic and media, acknowledging that

> *'[t]he power of choice extends to the writing workshop where autonomy and agency are fostered when children self-select topics' (2010, 3).*

As part of the writing workshops, the children are encouraged to be creative, 'drawing upon their own unique experiences for inspiration' (2010, 3). This construct of creativity of topic, as outlined earlier, was of importance to me when beginning to plan the progression of our writing workshops. I allowed the children to select their own topics and narratives relating to their lives and the progression of their stories were entirely up to them, while reminding them to be aware of continuity issues. However, after the initial four sessions, in which the children were allowed to choose their own media, it became clear to me that the children were more focused on the colour or texture of the paper on which they were writing than the process in which they were engaging. After a number of tears lamenting the absence of 'shiny purple' paper, I decided that in the interest of fairness each child would be given the same media with which to create their book. The children even acknowledged that this was for the best, ''cos we are squabbling more than writing' (observation notes February 13th). This decision was a deviation from the recommendations made by Kennedy (2010) and Calkins (2006) in that it could be argued that in dictating the medium with which the children created their picturebooks negated their

creative freedom. Therefore it could also be argued that this was not very different from my previous practice in which I dictated the manner and matter of their written work. However, I do not believe that this alteration

Social Context: Providing opportunities for collaboration and social interaction in literacy, states Kennedy, have also been found to enhance cognition, foster intrinsic motivation, and increase achievement (Guthrie et. al, 2007). As part of the writing workshops, the children are provided with opportunities to interact socially with peers through discussing their writing topics, collaborating with writing partners, in drafting, editing and revising a piece of work and through important feedback sessions at the end of each workshop. 'When students can talk to each other about their writing, they learn an acute sense of audience and authorship' (Guthrie and Anderson, 1999, 36). This sense of authorship was witnessed by Kennedy in the children and it is an aspect of the writing workshops which I strove emulate in my own research during the feedback sessions. This development of a social context for writing proved to be one of the more challenging aspects of my development of my practice of the teaching of story-writing in that the children required significant training to distinguish between conversing about the topic on hand; writing, editing and discussing their texts, and getting distracted by chatting.

Strategy instruction which fosters collaboration and self-efficacy: Kennedy proposes that 'children's self-confidence and successful mastery of tasks can be fostered through the use of instructional techniques' (2010, 4) such as the gradual release of responsibility model (Pearson and Gallagher, 1983), in which the responsibility for a task is handed over to the children after demonstrations and collaborative guidance are completed during which the children's efforts are scaffolded by the teacher. These demonstrations may take the form of think-aloud sessions which enable the children to see themselves as the potential enactors of the demonstrated skill or strategy (Bandura, 1995). This gradual release of responsibility model proved to be quite

successful in that nearly all the children were enabled to create their picturebooks with some degree of independence. While true independence of the teacher was not an aim of this research, I allowed the children to choose what degree of independence they wished to employ during each session. The few children who required teacher as scribe were still capable of drawing their images without the help of the teacher and this gave them a sense of independence and self-efficacy. This constituted a change from my previous practice wherein the children's choice and independence did not feature in either my planning nor my practice.

During her research, Kennedy and the mainstream teacher with whom she was working adopted a 'collaborative and investigative stance…to effect changes to the instructional programme based on the children's demonstrated needs' (2010a, 6), as evidenced by the quantitative and qualitative data they had gathered which they used as methods of formative and summative assessment of needs and attitudes, as outlined by pupils and staff in the target school. In so doing, they planned and implemented daily reading and writing workshops which spanned ninety minutes, during which the members of the Learning Support team came into the classroom for the duration of the reading and writing workshops in order to best meet the children's needs. Teachers in Kennedy's study cited that the daily, consistent and predictable schedule as being critical part of the change process. I posit that this radical change to the literacy time-allocation was not without its curricular challenges for the class teacher and I am curious to discover the extent to which allowances in the subject time allocation framework were or would have been made had there been a Departmental incidental inspection. According to the N.C.C.A. (1999), the primary language of a school (hereafter to be referred to as 'Language 1'), was allocated three hours per week for Junior and Senior infants and four hours for First to Sixth class, which was then adapted to six-and-a-half hours for Junior and Senior

infants and eight-and-a-half hours for First to Sixth class for both Language 1 and Language 2. (2016, 41).

2.9 - Conclusion:

This literature review enabled me to refine and clarify my thinking in relation to all aspects of my research question and its associated meta-language. While exploring the variety of contrasting and complementary definitions of that which is defined as a picturebook, I was enabled to recognise that in order to empower the children in my care to achieve in their creation of their own picturebook, a loose definition of the picturebook was necessary, owing to the fact that all children made their individual decisions regarding the level of text to image ratio. As a teacher who values the development of independence in the children it would have been contradictory of me to prescribe and impose my own definition upon them. This could also compromise the validity of the research. This is congruent with my reading of Whitehead and McNiff's concept of a 'Living Contradiction'. The literature pertaining to the creation of these picturebooks as part of the writing workshop and modelled story-writing was elucidated above also. This literature review chapter considered not only the national and international research pertaining to my subject i.e., the use of modelled story-writing as part of writing workshops in order to enable Junior Infants to create picturebooks, but also explored sources which justified my choice of research methodology – self-study participatory action research. In the initial sections of my chapter, the work of theorists with a wide range of perspectives and their associated writings influenced my thinking and planning in relation to my own process of reflective practice as arising from my reflective journal, as well as my definitions of the terms which are integral my investigation.

The next step on this process will be an in-depth exploration of the method by which I performed the inventory of the library and I outline the steps I took in order to formulate and the design the change in my practice for the purposes of living more in line with my educational values. I also describe the process by which the children were enabled to create their picturebooks and my associated methods for facilitating them to do so, while being congruent with my Froebelian philosophy and pedagogy.

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Chapter Three: Research Methodology

3.1 - Introduction

This study sets out to answer the question 'To what extent did making an inventory of my class library cause me to reflect on and change how I teach story-writing to Junior Infants so as to live more in line with my educational values'. I employed the research methodology of Self-Study Participatory Action Research in order to explore this question.

In this section of the dissertation, which is concerned with the description of my research methodology and my research methods, I discuss materials which pertain to models of research which I employed, having rationalised them in my Literature Review. I also outline the framework for my research, i.e., which methods of data collection and reflection I utilised and the process of research. I also summarise the procedures by which I aimed to maintain the validity and reliability of the research as well as its limitations and ethical considerations.

3.2 - Self-Study Participatory Action Research

The research methodology with which I investigated my research question is the methodology of Self-Study Participatory Action Research.

Samaras and Freese propose that Self-Study as a research methodology can require three definitions based on the role of the teacher, the situated practice and the purpose of the research (2006, 26-27). In employing this methodology, these three elements vary according to context and require elucidation on the part of the researcher so that the reader is clear as to the setting. As part of my research, my role as the teacher was that of instigator and facilitator of the new intervention of writing workshop (Calkins, 2004) style modelled story-writing, as well as documenter of the processes and outcomes of the study. The term "facilitator" was a key

concept and construct of my research, drawing from the work of Carl Rogers, who states that 'A person cannot teach another person directly; a person can only facilitate another's learning' (1995, 122).

According to Pinnegar (1998), self-study is a 'methodology for studying professional practice settings' (In LaBoskey, 2015, 100). However, while acknowledging that it would be challenging to separate the professional practice context from my research study, the priority focus of this study is my own practice and praxis in the context of the Junior Infant classroom, rather than merely the context itself. Owing to this focus on my exploration of my practice and subsequent learning resulting from this exploration, I was cognisant of the likelihood that there would an intersection of my personal and professional identities. This is explored as part of my reflective writing throughout my research.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018, 297) define Action Research as

> *a small-scale intervention in the functioning of the real world to address practitioners' own issues, and a close examination of the effects of such an intervention.*

The 'small-scale intervention' constituted the change in my practice which was the introduction of modelled story-writing as part of the writing workshop model (Kennedy, 2011 and Calkins, 2004) in order to enable the Junior Infants to create their own picturebooks. The purpose of this research was located in my values of care and inclusion, as I recognised after performing an inventory, that my library in my classroom did not furnish the children in my care with books in which they might see their lives reflected. This caused a dissonance between my practice and my espoused educational values.

Prior to beginning this research, I had not made an active, concerted effort to procure and provide literature for the children which reflected the lives of the children in my care and the

community in which they live. This was in direct conflict with my values of inclusion and care. Accordingly, in order that I cease to be a 'Living Contradiction' (Whitehead, 2018), I wished to enable the children to tell their stories in such a way that it also furthered their motivation and proficiency in literacy.

Applying Cohen et al.'s (2018) definition of Action Research to my own practice, "the real world" was not merely my own classroom, but also the wider school community. Modelled story-writing and the subsequent picturebook creation occurred within the classroom but would have impact in the child's extended learning environment. This was its 'natural setting', bringing 'meaning to context' as outlined by Willis (2007, 264). The potential impact on the wider community is explored as part of Chapter Four.

3.3 - Reflective Practice

This research may be considered an extended piece of reflective writing, located in the area of Infant Education. I employed a Self-Study Participatory Action Research approach; in that I performed an inventory of the reading-matter in my classroom library. My focus was on reflection on action, in action and for action (Killian and Todnem, 1991). This entailed identifying an issue, introducing an intervention and evaluating the outcome, so as to inform my future practice. In this particular instance, that change in practice constituted adapting my teaching of story-writing with Junior Infants in order to enable them to create their own picturebooks.

Many theorists have defined and described reflective writing. Gibbs (2015) posits that 'Without reflecting upon [a] experience, [a learning experience] may quickly be forgotten or its learning potential lost' (2015, 14). This is integral to the cyclical nature of Action Research. in that I, as the researcher and practitioner, adapted my intervention and therefore my practice. This was

based on the learning experiences which occurred during my research and my subsequent reflection upon these experiences.

Accordingly, each cycle of the research was instigated after reflection on previous stages and appropriate modifications made. My primary reflective tool during this period of research was my reflective journal. Other forms of data which I used were checklists and field notes which were employed during the writing workshop process as well as planning documents which I used to record the changes in my practice.

3.3.1 - Journaling

Holly (1991) writes that 'Journaling is described as the keeping of a diary or a collection of pertinent words or paragraphs for the purpose of providing for reflection of practice in a focused way'. (1991, 23) The entries in my reflective journal were stimulated by events throughout my teaching day or as a result of my planning. Shepherd writes that

> *'By subjecting accounts of my practice to critical reflective inquiry, I am able to recognize the dissonance between what I espouse to practice and what I actually do' (2006, 1).*

The "dissonance" described by Shepherd could be compared to the Jack Whitehead's Living Theory term, the 'Living Contradiction' (2008). This process of Journaling enabled me to continuously assess and evaluate my practice so that I was cognisant of the extent to which I was living in accordance with my educational values. I had initially been of the naïve opinion that the process of journaling in order to encourage my adherence to my own education philosophy to be 'a nice idea' at best – 'wishful thinking' at worst. As I considered my educational philosophy to be intrinsic to my teaching and professional practice, and therefore implacable in nature, I was surprised and jarred to discover a theme emerging in my early

journal entries, stating my wish that the children would 'stop trying to tell me stories when they are supposed to be working' or 'stick to the theme I told them to during art lessons' etc. Owing to the fact that I espouse to value dialogic teaching and the fostering of creativity in class, I was frankly appalled to realise that I was beginning to adopt the behaviours of the very type of draconian, dictatorial teacher. Through the use of my journal, I was able to reflect and discuss with myself as to why I believed I was not living in accordance with these aforementioned values, discovering that I had allowed myself to regress into a similar teacher to the kind I had as a child; one whose concept of order in the classroom was complete silence. I had also recorded in my journal an incident from early October wherein other members of staff referred to my children as being 'wild', which I took as a slight upon my perceived lack of control in the classroom and therefore adapted my classroom management to be much more strict; perhaps more strict than I would normally have been.

Through reflection and meta-reflection on my journal entries, I have been enabled to discern moments and incidences when I have not been teaching in accordance with the values which make up my educational values of care, inclusion and my value for the written word. In doing so, I endeavoured to fend off the danger of becoming one of Whitehead's 'living contradictions'.

3.4 - Ethical Considerations and Actions

As children are considered, in terms of research, as a 'vulnerable population' (DCYA, 2011), careful adherence to ethical protocols was observed throughout the investigation. This encompassed a number of elements.

Informed consent and assent: I first gained the written consent of the Board of Management (hereafter to be referred to as the B.O.M.) prior to conducting the research. I gained this consent by writing a letter to the B.O.M., In this letter, I outlined my research aim, methodologies and

methods of data collection. I acknowledged to them that the children would be taking the role of co-researchers, as my practice was the subject of the research and the role that the children would be taking is that of co-researchers, rather than subjects. I assured them that the identities of the school and the pupils would remain anonymous and that all data collected would be for professional use only and would only be shared with the supervisor and the examiner of the final piece of research.

I sought the consent of the parents of the children with whom I conducted this research through a similar letter, asking for permission to use their children's work in class as data and ensuring that the pieces would be kept in a confidential manner. Where possible, I asked the children's consent to make copies of their work for use in the research.

3.4.1. - Recruitment and participation

The recruitment for the research was predicated on the fact that the children are members of my class of Junior Infants. The children took part in this period of research through their participation in and engagement with the process of writing workshops, which we referred to as story-writing workshops. These writing workshops took place during English language time and therefore the children were obliged to participate in the workshop, but could opt out of their feedback and work samples being used for the purposes of data collection.

3.4.2. - Ethical Issues

Vulnerability: Owing to the fact that the children in my class are considered a vulnerable group in terms of research, I adhered to the guidelines outlined in my school's Child Protection policy and the Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children (DCYA, 2011). While none of the children in my class had specific special educational needs, I was cognisant of the fact that there may have been challenges at home of which I might not have

been aware and which may have presented in class during the research period. In order to minimise risk to the participates, I aimed to ensure that all children in my care felt that they were achieving and that their input and work was valued by both the other children in the class and by me.

Power Dynamics: There is an imbalance of power between the class teacher and the student and a consequence of that is that the children might do what they believe will please the teacher and comply with his or her wishes. This might skew the data. The children were permitted to opt out of their work being included as data and it was made clear that there would be no recompense or retribution for the participation or non-participation in the research.

Data Storage: The children's work was kept in individual folders for "Work in Progress" and the children had the option to select a piece to be displayed on the Writing notice board. The folders were kept in a locked cabinet. My reflective journal was kept in my handbag or locked in my school desk. All of the data collected was stored in line with the GDPR regulations.

3.5 – Reliability and Validity

Reliability may be defined as the extent to which a research instrument consistently has the same results if it is used in the same situation on repeated occasions (Hearle and Twycross, 2015). *Validity* is defined by Walliman and Buckler (2008, 207) as referring to 'the accuracy of a result, whether the collected data is representative and illustrates the phenomena'. As such, it is a level 'trueness' (2008, 207)

In order that my research was deemed to demonstrate reliability and validity, I took the following steps:

- I collected appropriate data in order to have evidentiary support of any claims of developmental outcomes which might have occurred.

- I consistently consulted with the children in order to be sure that my interpretations of both their written and demonstrated responses were accurate.

- I constantly evaluated the appropriateness of the methodology and methods being used to investigate my research question.

- I consulted with my supervisor and critical friend on an ongoing basis, to assess the extent to which the methodology I used and the deductions I made arising from the data were, in fact, representative and an accurate reflection of the interactions with and materials received from the children and other data.

3.6 - Process of the Intervention

3.6.1. – Introducing the Intervention

While the intervention was heavily influenced by the work of Calkins' and Kennedy, I made a number of adaptations to their Modelled Writing and Writing Workshop structures in order to best suit the intervention to the individualised needs and stages of literacy development of the children in my care. This is congruent with the Froebelian stance of 'always [starting] with the child' (Liebschner, 2002). The adaptations which I made to this process of modelled writing were also for the purpose of achieving my objective of creating picturebooks with the children in order that they could be added to our class library. Notably, one aspect of the work of Calkins' and Kennedy to which I did not adhere was their process of creating a writing portfolio, containing a number of genres, owing to the fact that the genres on which the children and I focused were predominantly recount and narrative writing.

My research period began in the first week of February. The intervention comprised three stages. *Stage One* took place prior to the official research period and aimed to provide the children with the necessary basic literacy skills required for writing independently during the writing workshops. *Stage Two* was concerned with the initial writing workshop, enabling children to plan, write and review stories, as well as discussions regarding the components of a picturebooks and guest workshops in with stories were read to them and written for them by children in other classes. *Stage Three* involved the writing, illustrating and structuring their unique picturebooks, as well as reading them to children from other classes.

3.6.2. – Stage One

Prior to the beginning of the official research period, it had been my goal to spend the months of December and January facilitating the children's development of basic literacy skills, such as phonemic awareness and phonological knowledge, as well as correct pencil grip and left-to-right writing orientation. These skills enabled the children to write more independently during the 'independent writing' period of the writing workshops (Berne, 2009). I refer to this period of skill development as Stage One of my research project, despite it having took place prior to the designated research period of February to May.

3.6.3 – Stage Two

Stage Two of the research project began in February with the introduction of the writing-workshops into the weekly timetable. Berne (2009, 10) posits that 'Students flourish because of the independence offered in the writing workshop' but acknowledges that '...this independent activity requires significant behind-the-scenes preparation'. The objectives for the initial two weeks of the writing workshops, comprising four sessions, aimed to enable the children to become accustomed to the format and tasks required during the workshops, i.e. sitting on the carpet for teacher-led story-boarding sessions, organising their writing folders, not interrupting the teacher when he or she was with another group, volume control, etc.

However, owing to a significant change in routine upon the arrival of a student teacher, the children's readiness for these tasks was diminished. After observation of and reflection upon the first two sessions, I recognised that in order to enable the children to engage effectively with the process of writing workshops, an elongation of the "settling-in" period would be necessary and beneficial.

'In order to succeed [at writing independently], students need explicit instruction in what to do and how to do it' (Berne, 2009, 10). In our first session, I adapted a simple method which was used by Calkins (1994); I told a simple story with a clear beginning, middle and end, which acted as my touchstone text. After telling this story, the story of my fifth birthday, I asked the children to tell the story back to me and following on from this the children and I collaboratively drew a picture to tell the story. This comprised the Modelled Writing portion of the mini-lesson. I then asked the children to return to their seats to draw the story of their own most recent birthday.

After writing about this first session in my journal, I created a simple storyboard structure in order to provide the children with a basic structure with which to build their narratives. In order to enable the children to recognise the potential for progression of their own stories, I asked the children to work in pairs to discuss familiar stories and asked them to identify and articulate the beginning, middle and end of these stories. This deviated from Calkins' writing workshop structure in that it could be argued that teaching the children to employ a structure could be seen as diminishing their creativity and agency in the picturebook creation process. My rationale for this adjustment was influenced by my observations that owing to the age of the children in question (Junior Infant age), without structure of some degree, the children became too overwhelmed with the perceived freedom to "write whatever they wanted".

After this first session, I did not place any restrictions on the children's choice of topic, characters or language; aside from topics which I deemed not to be age-appropriate for the class at large. For example, in our third session one child wished to write a narrative regarding a killer clown in another child's bedroom. I deemed this inappropriate and asked the child to choose a less frightening narrative because 'you wouldn't want to scare Teacher, would you?'.

This stage of my research was concerned with my facilitation of the children's exploration of the components of a story and acquainting themselves with the process of story writing in its entirety. In this stage they were permitted to write new stories in each session or re-write and edit one from their previous workshop session. I chose to do this as this was an aspect of Calkins' and Kennedy's work which I found to align with the needs and preferences of the children in my class. The process of editing and revising is discussed in Chapter Four.

In terms of the feedback sessions, it was incumbent on me to ensure that the children were enabled to give and receive constructive, positive feedback. I integrated this into one of our mini-lessons in our second week of the project during which I modelled the use of the Two Stars and One Wish methodology. I chose to use this model as I realised that, similarly to using storyboarding for the structuring of stories, that the children might benefit from a structured approach to peer-assessment. The Two Stars and One Wish structure enables the children to give and receive two positive items (Stars) of feedback on their work and one item of constructive criticism (Wish), by which they could adapt and edit their work. This served as one aspect of formative assessment for the improvement of their pieces.

3.6.4. – Stage Three

The next stage of the process was the writing, illustration and construction of the unique picturebooks.

Firstly, I reminded the children that because we were beginning to write our books, it was important that they plan one story that they were going to stick to for the rest of the writing workshops, because we were writing a picturebook with one story in it. I asked the children to follow our modelled writing process of telling their story to their partner first, then drawing their storyboard plan for the story. I recorded the progression of each child's story on a separate checklist, in case of deviation from the original plan.

After each child created their storyboard, I explained in a mini-lesson (Calkins, 2003) that we would be creating the books page-by-page, first drawing and writing our pictures and sentences (or whatever level of text they wished) into our copies, and then when they were happy with it, copying their illustrations and text onto a separate sheet. I had decided that this might make it easier for the children to remain on task, as it was structured. By virtue of the fact that they alternated between writing and copying, I was able to provide further scaffolding, where necessary, to the children who were composing their text and illustrations. This occurred while others were copying their work onto the 'book pages'. This is in line with the constructivist theory of education, as highlighted in the Primary School Curriculum (N.C.C.A, 1999). The children's book pages were kept in their individual folders, with their writing copies. At the end of each workshop, I asked each child to identify a target for the following workshop, as a method of self-assessment. These targets were read out at the beginning of each workshop and I would ask each child if they had achieved the target during each session.

As we came close to end of the picturebook creation, I demonstrated how to construct the picturebooks. Each child created a title for their story, as well as a cover illustration, which I laminated for durability. I wanted to enable the children to construct the books themselves, to the best of their ability. Each child backed their book pages, which were slightly smaller than A4 paper, onto coloured A4 paper, which were more robust. I showed the children how to use

a hole-punch and how to weave pipe-cleaners between the holes to act as binding. With a little help from some 5th class girls who were in the classroom for the day, each child was enabled to construct their book components into individual picturebooks, of which they were very proud.

3.6 – Data Collection

3.6.1 - Observation and Checklists

The primary method by which I gathered the required data is through the use of reflections based on my observations of the children's interactions during whole-class and writing workshop sessions. Throughout the day, as part of my research, I employed naturalistic approach to observation (Cohen et al, 2018) by recording notes throughout the lessons and activities in order to record pertinent occurrences and engagements instigated by the children and noted by me. I also used teacher-as-researcher designed checklists based on the learning objectives of the mini-lessons. (E.M.C.L, 2015)

My reason for employing the use of these checklists and observation notes (Cohen, et. al, 2018) was two-fold; first and foremost, owing to the creative and dynamic nature of the writing workshop structure, it would have been exceedingly challenging for me to take it upon myself to attempt to recall interactions with and observations of the children in order to record them after the end of the writing workshop sessions. It was incumbent on me to keep detailed records of the children's progress and their feedback on the process, and as such by employing the use of an observation grid which I filled out during each session as interacts and observations occurred, I was enabled to collect and collate the data pertaining to each child with ease. Through the use of checklists regarding writing and drawing skills, i.e. pencil grip, left to right

orientation etc., I was also enabled to utilise the observations in order to set differentiated tasks for homework which might aid the improvement of a child's work.

My second reason for employing the use of checklists and observation notes on a clipboard was the fact that the children were accustomed to my use of checklists and notes for their phonics and letter formation, as well as such Activity Centres in the morning, wherein I often note incidences of interest or use of contextual language. Owing to this familiarity with the use of the clipboard, the children were not intimidated when they noticed me writing or ticking something during the workshops.

Other data which I collected and employed were the planning documents which I creating for the mini-lessons. Owing to the fact that this piece of research was tasked with evaluating the extent to which I can facilitate the children in my care in creating their own picturebooks, it stands to reason that I ought to evaluate and reflect upon the planning which I undertook in order to facilitate the writing workshops. Since the beginning of the writing workshop sessions, there were significant changes in my planning and my structuring of the mini-lessons within the writing workshop. These changes were stimulated by changes in the children's needs and scaffolding requirements, as well as the advice of a departmental inspectors who came into the school to consult on the new Language Curriculum (N.C.C.A., 2018).

I also employed the use of the children's work, which I utilised for both interim evaluation and assessment and in order to track any changes in the children's theme, subject and characters in their stories, as they became more familiar with the story-creating process.

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Chapter Four: Data Collection and Analysis

4.1 - Introduction

In this chapter, data pertaining to the project is presented and analysed against a theoretical framework, associated with Self-study participatory action research. A broad overview of both the qualitative and quantitative data gathered in this project is included prior to the presentation and subsequent analysis of the data. A rationale for the style and associated sources of data is elucidated. As part of the analysis, the extent to which the initial data gathered is consonant with that to which I refer to in Chapter Two, Literature review, is explored.

4.2 - Data - An Overview

Usually the process of collecting qualitative data infers that the researcher is an active participant in the research which is being undertaken (O'Sullivan, 2018), however the extent to which data is qualitative or quantitative is determined by nature of the data.

> *'Qualitative data analysis involves organising, accounting for and explaining the data [by] making sense of data in terms of the participants' definitions of the situation noting patterns, themes, categories and regularities'* (Cohen et, al, 2011; 537)

Accordingly, where data can be quantified, i.e. through graphs or other numerical forms of presentation then this can be considered quantitative data.

> *'Quantitative research gathers data in a numerical form which can be put into categories, or in rank order, or measured in units of measurement. This type of data can be used to construct graphs and tables of raw data.'* (McLeod, 2017)

Data which is qualitative in nature is data which tells a 'story', often in the form of narrative. In terms of my research the individual voice of the respondent can be clearly heard in this form

of data. The use of qualitative data took a more dominant role in my research than that of quantitative data, owing to the fact that research methodology by which I conducted this study is Self-Study Participatory Action-Research, which is concerned with the construction of a research narrative (Kemmis et al., 2013).

4.2.1 - Quantitative Data.

In collecting quantitative data prior to beginning my intervention, I decided to assess the extent to which the literature in my classroom reflected the interests and experiences of the children. This was a three-step process involving first uncovering the interests of the children, then making an inventory of the library and finally investigating the level of correlation between the two. The picturebooks in my library were selected by previous teachers in consultation with the Parents Association. I could not find any evidence to state the extent to which the children were enabled or encouraged to select these books.

Firstly, in order to gather the data pertaining to the interests of the children, I employed the use of the Talk and Discussion learning methodology (N.C.C.A., 2007) with my class, asking open-ended questions regarding the children's interests and the subject matter of books they liked to read. (See appendix 2 for questions used). We first discussed types of books that we enjoyed reading using Circle Time and a talking object. I recorded their opinions and ideas on my clipboard as field notes using the naturalistic approach and then collated these ideas into categories. Following on from this I called out the categories and asked the children to raise their hands if they were interested in books which contained these themes and subjects. The children were allowed to vote more than once, recognising that the children most likely would have more than one interest where literature is concerned, and I recorded their responses using a tally system. The resultant data from this Talk and Discussion session is encapsulated in the chart below.

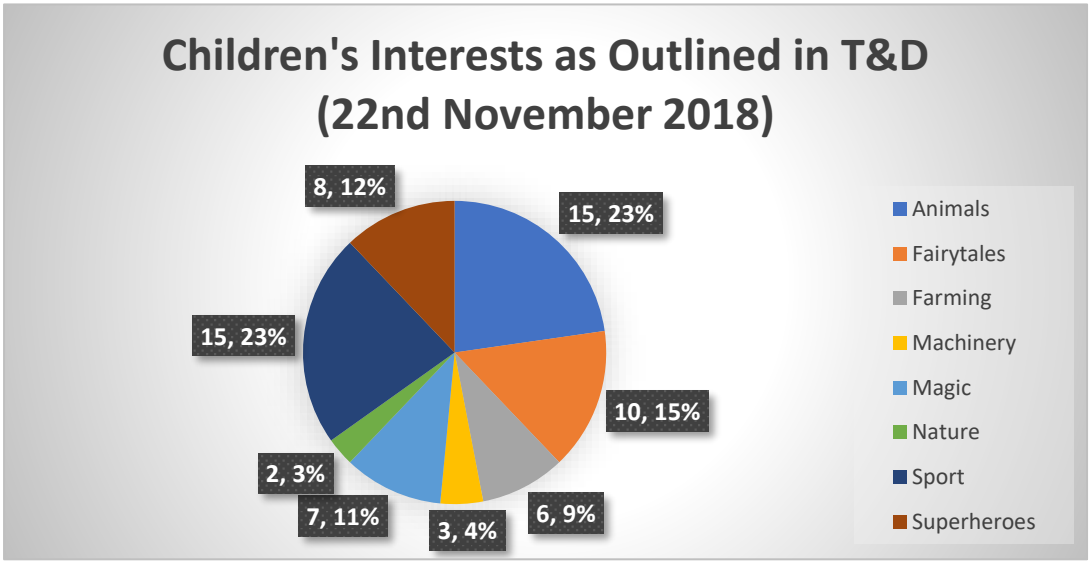

Fig. 3

Secondly, I endeavoured to make an inventory of my class library, in order to assess the extent to which the supply of books in the library, all of which were picturebooks, were sufficient to address the previously identified interests of the children in the class. To do this, I used the interests of the children, as outlined above, as sub-genres by which I could categorise the books.

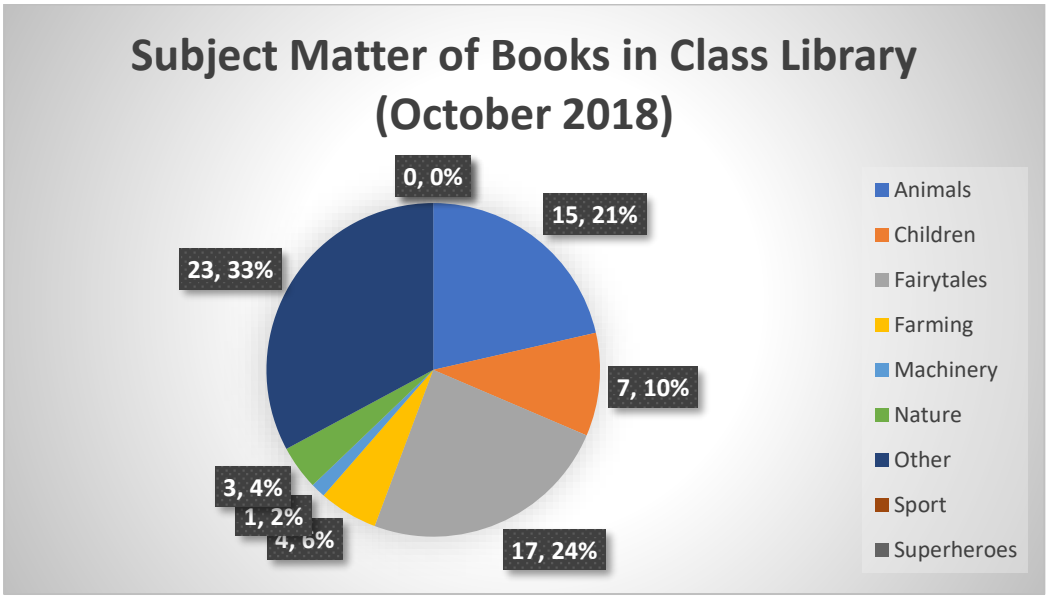

Fig. 4

As outlined in the chart above, the largest category of books in my library were books which did not contain subjects or themes relating to the interests outlined by the children. It also should be noted that although I identified that 75% of my class were interested in sport, there

were no books pertaining to sport available to them in the library. In a similar way, while eight children claimed an interest in superheroes, there were no books related to or mentioning superheroes.

Owing to the fact that my primary aim for the planning and execution of my intervention exploring the extent to which I could enable which to create their own picturebooks was to enable the children to see their lives and experiences reflected in the literature that they were reading, I undertook to record the location and setting of the picturebooks in the library. I did this in order to investigate the extent to which the picturebooks reflected the setting of the community in which they children lived, a rural area of Ireland, and how those areas were presented. The results of this exploration can be found in Figure 3.

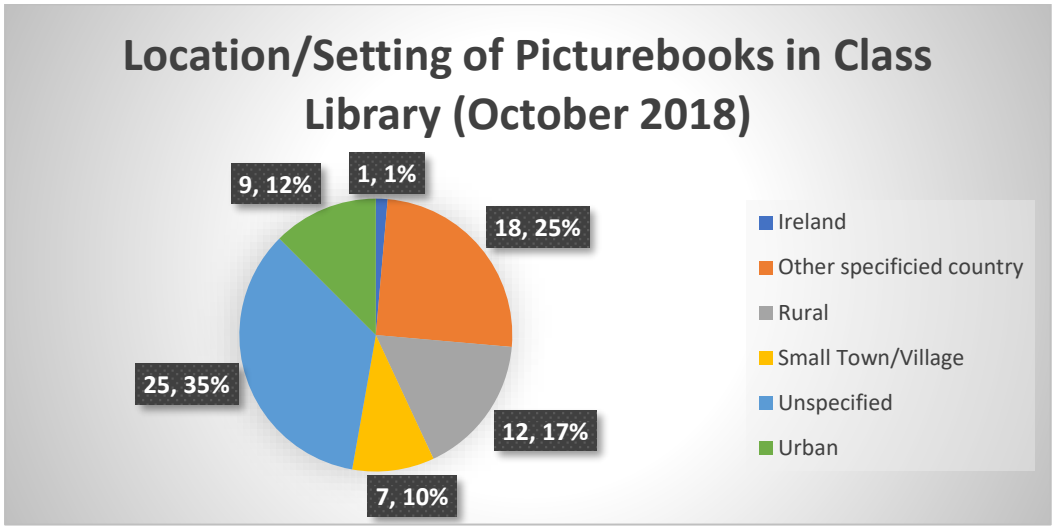

Fig. 5

As is stated above, of the books in my class library, twelve picturebooks were located in a rural setting, one book specifying that it was based in Ireland. Eighteen books took place in other Specified countries, such as China (*Mulan*), India (*Rama and the Monster*) etc.

Owing to what I would infer to be a deficit of picturebooks in which the children are interested, it was important to me that my research into enabling Junior Infants create their own books would furnish the children with the opportunity to create stories in which they could see their

lives and interests reflected. This exploration of my class library also enabled me to recognise potential for further study exploring why the majority of the protagonists of the picturebooks in my class library were animals, rather than male, female or other, and to what extent is this indicative of the majority of picturebooks in publication today.

The primary aim of my research was the hope that I could enable my children to have a store of books in our class library in which they can see their lives, interests and experiences reflected. It stands to reason, therefore, the extent to which my research could be deemed "successful" might be measured by the degree to which the picturebooks which have been written align with the interests of the children as assessed in November. A limitation of my study was the fact that I did not think to have another discussion with the children regarding a potential change in their interests from November to April.

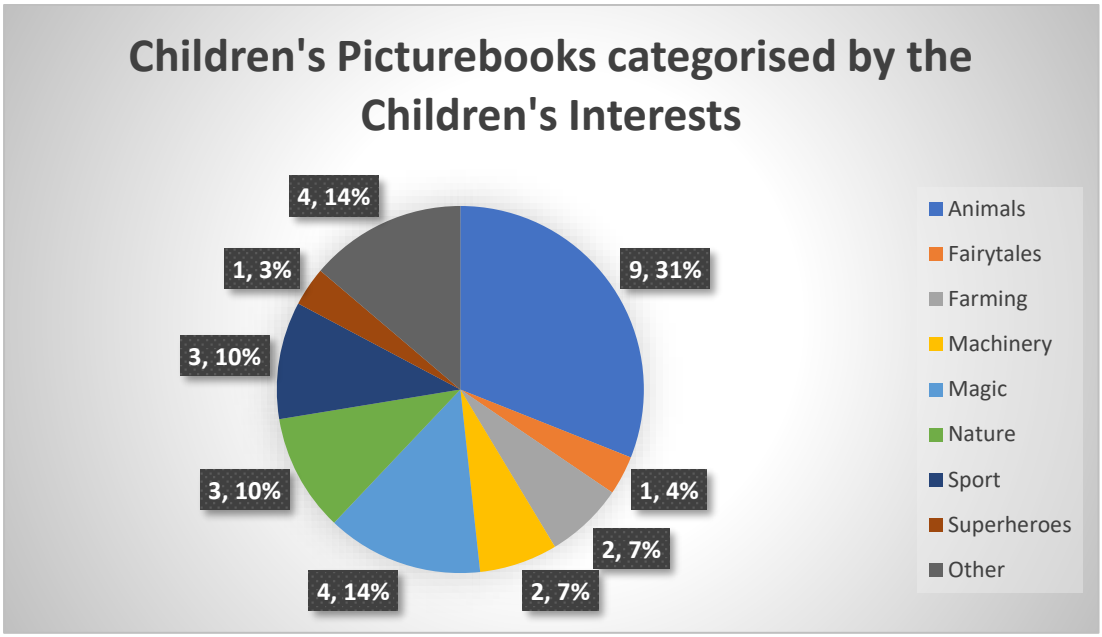

Fig. 6

With the aim of that all children achieved within their Zone of Proximal Development, when undertaking this research, I recognised that each child would require differentiated levels of support and guidance. As the project progressed, it was of primary importance to me that I begin a 'gradual release of control' (Calkins, 2003), thereby handing the responsibility for the

narrative creation to 'My Little Authors'. I recognised through my observations however, that some children benefitted from greater input from me. While all children successfully created a narrative, in writing their stories some children required a larger proportion of shared writing (hereafter to be known as Sh. W.), others benefitted from teacher-as-scribe (hereafter to be known as T.A.S.) due to deficits in fine-motor skills. For the purposes of collating this data, I used the samples of the children work and my individual field notes and checklists to categorise the children's writing process into categories: Mostly T.A.S., Some T.A.S., Mostly Sh. W., Some Sh. W., Some Independent Writing (hereafter to be known as Indep. W.) and Most Indep. W. I would like to note that while achieving complete independent writing was not the aim of the research, the fact that all children, regardless of the level of independence with which they wrote their stories, all children were enabled to and we successful in creating individual narratives.

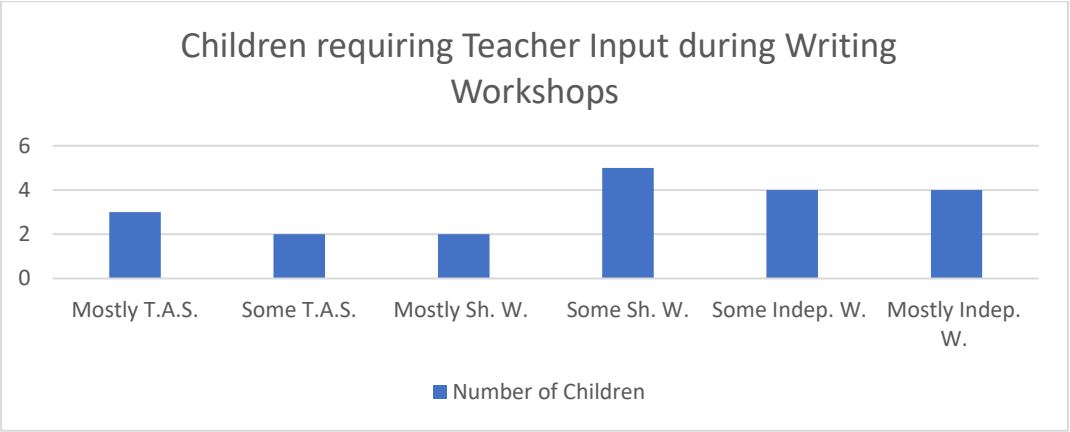

Fig. 7

4.2.2 - Qualitative Data

Throughout my period of research, my primary method of data collection of a qualitative nature was my reflective journal, within which I recorded and analysed my day-to-day notes and thoughts, my feedback from my critical friend and other occurrences pertinent to my research

topic. As this research is concerned with the extent to which *I, the teacher***,** could enable the Junior Infants to create their own picturebooks, rather than if Junior Infants would be capable of creating unique picturebooks, my reflective journal, stimulated by my notes, observations and checklists, was of huge significance to my research.

The extent to which the personal and professional elements of my identity and consequent practice intersect is also an intrinsic part of what it is to conduct self-study in general. This was something of which I was cognisant throughout my reflective writing. I found that throughout my period of research, the line between my 'self' as "Maria" and my 'self' as "Ms. Forrest" had blurred to the point of near-dissolution. I attribute this to the fact that I was conducting research as "Ms. Forrest" in school and then reflecting upon those actions at home; a place which was usually the preserve of "Maria". This did, however, enable me to gain perspective on my research, owing to the fact that removing "Ms. Forrest" from her situated practice in the classroom provided sufficient physical and emotional distance for effective reflection and evaluation. This, I believe, positively contributed to the examination of my effectiveness and efficiency as the facilitator and enabler of my children's picturebook creation.

Following on from identifying my area of concern, which was stimulated by my exploration and inventory of the library, culminating in my decision to enable the children to create their own picturebooks for reasons stated throughout this chapter. It was apparent to me what I wanted to achieve with the research and why I was enacting this research, but I was unsure as to how to begin. During one of my reflections, I stated that

> '*While I think I know what I want the aim and product of the research to be, I am unsure as to how to begin to formulate a method by which to do so. I can't find any writing or incidences of other teachers creating books with children so young. Am I biting off more than I can chew with this project? How will this*

> *affect the children's learning and their confidence and motivation? I don't want to be setting them up to fail.* (Reflective Journal, 2nd January 2019)

From the outset, the children engaged enthusiastically as their wonder increased when they learned that they could write their own stories. I had enabled them to see this by creating short picture series with them as stated in the section pertaining to methodology. An entry in my reflective journal exemplifies this.

> *'Excitement levels were at an all-time high today – S and L were excited at the prospect of becoming authors and wondered if their books could be used in the class library… Maybe I ought to explicitly tell them that that is my goal – to augment the library with their stories.* (Reflective Journal, 2nd March 2019)

I continued to utilise the journal throughout the process as it enabled me to track the changes in my own practice and the motivation of the children.

> *I'm surprised and heartened by the level of progress towards independence during the writing portion of the workshops. While many of the children still require engaging in a shared writing process, a number of children have moved towards writing mostly independent of my input.*

While the input and engagement of the parents is beyond the scope of this research, I was interested to note the informal feedback which I received from parents regarding the process. In my journal, I noted that

> *'N's parent, a teacher, was curious regarding the story writing process, and chose to inform me that she was sceptical to say the least of the project initially but has noticed a change in N's motivation in relation to writing – apparently he often wants to practice his "independent writing" at home.*

This process, like many others had its peaks and its troughs all of which were recorded in the journal. Troughs related to doubts expressed by a colleague with regard to the 'usefulness' of this approach, bearing in mind that I was working with "only infants". I recorded my doubts and anxieties regarding this feedback in the journal

> *In avoiding being a Living Contradiction, it seems like I'm setting myself up for feedback which is not necessarily constructive; in order to ensure that it doesn't become destructive I need to keep reminding myself to look at the children and their progress, and just work harder to prove that this process is beneficial and worthwhile, not just for the children but for me and my professional growth.*

While the Froebelian approach and any child-centred approaches to education focus on the process, the outcome too, naturally, is of significance. I felt a huge sense of accomplishment as the fruits of the children's work came together in the form of the children's individual picturebooks.

> *There were shrieks of excitement today when I did a PowerPoint presentation for the class into which I had put images of the children's books. After first practising reading them to their partner, the children, glowing with pride, were sent into [my critical friend's] classroom so they could read their stories to the 3rd class, as 3rd had done for us back in March.*

For the children, this was the culmination of the project and upon adding their picturebooks to the library, the children still enjoy reading through their Magnum Opus during library time. In my journal I mused

It doesn't seem to matter if they are reading their own books, or the books written by their peers; the picturebooks are now the most popular books in the library. I would imagine that the reasons for this are not only that the books are starring themselves, which is in line with

their egocentricity at this stage, but also that they can read nearly all the words in the books as they are made up of our sight words and other words from our readers. This seems to have increased the motivation to read "properly" as well as enabled them to become authors.

This development of the children's motivation towards reading and writing was of huge significance for me, as it negated the doubts I had had at the beginning of the research regarding whether or not I could facilitate this ambitious project.

4.3 - Observations, Field Notes and Checklists

Throughout the research period, it was incumbent on me to record the process and progress of the writing workshop in order to track changes in both my facilitation of the workshops and the children's engagement with the process. Through employing a naturalistic approach (Cohen, et. al, 2018) to observation, I recorded the events of the workshop using checklists based on objectives for the session and expected outcomes and field notes to record feedback and unanticipated outcomes or events. Using these observations, I was able to evaluate, adapt and reflect upon my facilitation of the workshops which became the cycles of my Action Research project. (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2013)

One of the cycles which was influenced by my observations occurred very early on in the research process. During my first writing workshop session as part of my introduction of the modelled story-writing, I told the story of my fifth birthday party, drew the picture and then retold the story with the help of the children. After this, I asked the children to follow the same steps of story creation. However, while this appeared very simple to me, it became very clear after a number of minutes that the children required more structure in order to help them build their own stories. This lack of certainty manifested itself in the children appearing more 'needy' than they would usually have been when given a task, in that they were coming out of their seats more often than normal and many children merely copied my drawing on the board.

Accordingly, I created a very simple storyboard structure with a clear beginning, middle and end. This, as stated in Chapter Three, was a deviation from Calkins' writing workshop structure in that it could be argued that encouraging the children to employ a specific structure could be seen as diminishing their creativity and agency in the picturebook creation process. However, my rationale for this adjustment was influenced by my observation that without structure of some degree, the children became too overwhelmed with the perceived freedom to "write whatever they wanted". After the introduction of the storyboard structure, the children demonstrated more certainty and independence when writing their unique stories and were able to articulate the progress of their stories. This first major adaption of my planned intervention was stimulated by my recorded observations of the children's change in levels of engagement in the process and then by further reflection upon the potential roots of this change in my reflective journal.

As stated in Chapter Two, in which I discuss the relevant literature pertaining to this study, my writing-workshop process was heavily influenced by the recommendations made by Kennedy (2006). In Kennedy's study, the time allocated to each writing workshop was ninety minutes daily. As a mainstream class teacher in Junior Infants, I can attest to the challenge of reaching the time allocation to be dedicated to languages each week, owing to the time constraints of the plethora of curricular areas. Therefore, the addition of daily ninety-minute workshops posed an even greater challenge in order that other curricular areas are not disregarded completely. As a result of this, while recognising the veracity of the benefits of the intervention put into place by Kennedy and her collaborators, for the purposes of implementing writing workshops into my weekly timetable, I adapted the time allocated to the workshops in order to best suit the needs and strengths of the children in my care, as well as the constraints of the time allocations for other subject areas. As such, my writing workshops took place on Tuesdays and Thursdays, between 11.10 and 12.20. This provided ample time for progression within each

session, while not detracting from other aspects of the English curriculum such as Phonics, Letter Formation or Discrete Oral Language lessons, which were explored outside of the writing-workshop time.

Each writing workshop began with a mini-lesson from the very beginning, ranging from the layout of the drawings or paintings (pictures), to attempts at how the children might approach spelling, particularly as this was identified as a need by the children. Possible ways of constructing a sentence, albeit a very short one, were also be included. The children suggested that they could use some of their sight words for their readers in order to help them construct sentences, an initiative which I was impressed by. Throughout, picture-books were displayed, explored and critiqued by and with the children as part of the process of the writing workshops.

As outlined in Chapter Three, when addressing the concepts of reliability and validity the desirability of potential for replicability, might be informed by the adjustments which I made to my initial plan. By this, I mean that if another researcher/practitioner were to contemplate introducing the same intervention, having accommodated the modifications I made, it is likely that his or her resulting observations would be similar. In terms of validity, being able to refer back to the observations, points to action upon reflection as a result of authentic engagement with and observation of the children. Another aspect of validity to which I gave referred previously is that of interaction with a critical friend. My critical friend is a member of my staff and is a more experience teacher. She saw my drawing on the flipchart and said that it has been her experience that many children are inclined to copy anything that the teacher presents rather than daring to risk doing their own. This was very helpful as it caused me to reinforce with the children the idea that irrespective of their evaluation of their own drawings, and capacity to make same, what was important was an authentic representation of their own narrative, be this in the form of picture or words.

In order to maintain my focus on my facilitation of the workshops, at the end of each of the checklist templates I had an evaluation box for me to evaluate my facilitation of each child's work. For example; during a session where one child was drawing pictures which did not appear to have relevance to the story they were writing and I recorded that in the next session I would 'use more focused questioning based on subject matter of illustrations' (Observation Notes, March 5th). The checklists proved useful in order to track the progress of each child to provide specific feedback to each child as a means of interim evaluation.

These individual checklists also enabled me to assign differentiated tasks for the children outside of the writing workshops. For example, one child developed a propensity for writing the letter 's' backwards, which when I observed and recorded this over a number of weeks, I was able to intervene and provide her with some worksheets for homework which she could use to practice the letter in question. The children enjoyed having the differentiated homework because it 'made [them] feel like [I, the teacher, was] actually paying attention to [them]' (Observation notes March 5th] and one child reasoned that 'I'm really good at writing but I forget my finger-spaces and [Child A] is good at using [their] finger-spaces, but their letters aren't as pretty as mine, so it would be silly to give me letter homework when I can do it' (Observation notes March 5th). Through the use of the checklists, I was enabled to adapt my teaching and facilitation of learning in order to suit my practice to the needs of the unique children in my care.

While I had not anticipated it, there were words which were frequently asked of me which had not been pre-taught. The words which I had pre-taught the children were words from the children's readers as well as other words which I assumed that they might need so as to create their narratives should they choose to write a picturebook with words. If a word was requested three times during a session, I added it to our Word Wall. In line with the approach outlined by

Lucy Calkins' writing workshop, where possible I avoided providing the children with the spellings of unfamiliar words, stating that unless it was one of our previously taught words I would not be concerned with the spellings of the words. As part of a mini-lesson I modelled the process of figuring out the phonics of the words. I asked the child how they think it is spelled and advise them to sound out the word. This led to the many children developing a level of independence owing to the fact that they felt they were not dependent on me to provide them with the spellings of the words.

An aspect of this decision which I did not anticipate was the fact that for children in my class with speech impediments, their "sounding out" of each separate phoneme led to interesting spelling choices; 'home' became 'heme' for one child, another child spelled 'rock' as 'woc', yet another wrote 'called' as 'cod', etc. However, owing to the fact that this did not inhibit the child's ability to create their narrative, I made the decision not to correct this owing to their developmental stage and my desire that they not become disheartened by incorrect spelling. This further facilitated the children in continuing to create their own picturebooks, as they were not discouraged by "not being able" to write (Christianakis, 2011)

4.4 – Children's Work

I hypothesised that in the case of the children in my care, there was a higher likelihood that the relationship between the illustrations and the text which they would be creating would be congruent in nature, owing to the fact that at this stage of their artist development children try to create artwork and visual renderings of events which replicates the life events as they perceive them. This hypothesis was proven to be correct. However, I was surprised at the extent to which the children became fixated on having their artwork mimic life accurately, e.g. One child insisted that his drawing "needed" to have right shade of blue for this house door, otherwise it 'wouldn't be right' (Observation notes March 5th). I was curious as to why the

children were requiring such perfection out of their work, as, while generally aspiring for perfection myself, I was careful to espouse the mantra 'If you are trying your best, that is good enough'. However, an exploration of early childhood perfectionism was beyond the scope of this research.

During a period of research, it is usual that a researcher identifies a definition of that which he or she is studying. Accordingly, it ought to have been incumbent on me to do likewise with regard to picturebooks. However, owing to the fact that my research was predicated on the fact that my children would be creating the picturebooks in question, I recognised that there would be a disparity in the level of text versus illustrations in each child's books, due to differences in ability and the extent to which they prioritised picture over text. As I have previously identified that I value 'care' and 'equality' in my classroom, it was of primary importance to me that all the children with whom I was conducting this research felt that they were achieving and succeeding within their Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1962). By permitting a variance in the extent to which text dominates picture or vice versa as the primary story-telling medium, I hoped to ensure that all children would be enabled to create a picturebook as defined by the criteria which was set. Therefore, I elicited the children's understanding of what constituted a picturebook for our research through talk and discussion as part of 'Carpet Time' at the beginning of the period of research in order to aid their creation of their own picturebooks. Interestingly, the children unanimously set the requirement for words accompanying their visual-rendered narrative, but acknowledged that in most cases the children's hand-rendered illustrations would be the dominant mode of meaning-making with the words providing details which they [the children] perceived the illustrations could not provide, such as the names of characters, etc.

Some of the children found rewriting and editing their stories to be rewarding, as they enjoyed making the story 'even better than the last time' (Observation notes, 14th February), or they were dissatisfied with their presentation of their work in its previous iteration. One child stated that 'I'm doing this story again 'cos my writing was messy 'cos my hand was sore from hurling, so it'll look nicer today' (Observation notes, 20th February). Other children wished to write new stories, generally based on whatever events were going on in their lives at the time. One child had recently acquired a new baby brother and therefore every story written by that child was about something to do with the new baby. As I had expected, each child was eager to feed back their stories at the end of each session. Owing to time constraints, I had to limit the number of children who could feedback to the whole group to five in each session. The children could, however, read their stories to the children sitting next to them during the sessions.

One aspect of Stage Two which proved to be very beneficial, both as a validation of my own practice and as a motivator for the children in my class was the introduction of a 'guest workshop'. While discussing the planned process of my intervention with my critical friend, the third-class teacher in my school, she wondered if the process could be adapted for the children in her class. I explained to her ways by which she could adapt it and as a result she decided to adopt the writing workshops for a month in her class. We hypothesised that it could be mutually beneficial for the children in her class to create books which they could then read to my children as part of an elongated paired feedback session. This collaboration proved to be beneficial for the children in my care and myself as it enabled the children to discuss the process of story-writing with the third class, as well as giving them the motivation to write their own stories in order that the Junior Infants might reciprocate the story-telling upon the completion of their picturebooks.

After the success of the Guest Workshop, in Stage Three of the invention, my Junior Infants were enthusiastically anticipating beginning their own picturebooks.

The workshops at this stage could have been described as structured chaos. I recognised from the outset that I had made the correct choice in elongating the 'settling-in' period of Stage Two. Owing to the fact each child was at a different stage in the process, after three workshops it became clear to me that in order to ensure a level of efficiency that I would have to break the groups up by task. As a result of this I decided that the children who were at a similar stage in the process should sit together. In order to afford the children some agency in this, I enabled the children to select which table they wanted to sit at. I remained between two tables which required Shared Writing or Teacher as Scribe and children who wished to work more independently could sit at the other tables. I explained that there would be no judgment regarding what level of independence they wished to maintain. This worked well on the whole, as it enabled me to divide my time judicially between the different groups. This led to interesting conversations at the feedback sessions with children identifying that they 'wanted to sit at the independent table tomorrow because I don't need your help colouring my unicorn, Teacher' (Observations notes, 19th March) or recognising that they might need to be in closer proximity to help the following day because they '..have a long sentence to write tomorrow with eight words in it' (Observation notes, 26th March).

4.5 – Addressing validity

In Chapter Three I outlined how I addresses validity throughout the implementation and data gathering processes. How did I ensure validity in my analysis and interpretation of the collected data?

This was done by consulting both the children and my critical friend in order to assess the extent to which my analysis was a true and accurate reflection of the progress made from my

commencement of the intervention and my subsequent adaptations and alterations to the original plan. Arising from these consultations, I was satisfied in a broad sense that validity had been achieved, however, I still wonder if there is an element of both the critical friend and children knowing and saying what they think I want to hear. This is somewhat potentially somewhat inevitable, owing to both the hegemonious and the "genuine" relationship between pupil and teacher has developed over the academic year.

In relation to the use of my critical friend as a method for ensuring validity, I constantly consulted with my critical friend regarding the analysis of my data. My critical friend acted as a sounding-board relating to whether or not the claims to knowledge and conclusions which I was drawing were valid, as indicated by the data. She concurred that my assertions and conclusions were, in fact, valid.

A claim I made at the outset, based on my reading and my epistemological assumptions that children, if supported appropriately by me, may be facilitated and enabled to create their own picturebooks. In terms of proving the validity of this assertion, the evidence which I have gathered is included in the appendices, i.e. scanned images of the children's work.

After conducting this research, I would assert that any teacher could instigate a similar research project and achieve similar results, providing that the teacher in question had the corresponding pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1986) and associated philosophical outlook. However, the adaptations which I made to the writing workshop structure were stimulated by my observation of the needs and preferences children in my care. Consequently, owing to the individuality of each class and indeed the uniqueness of each child in a class, the adaptations which I made may not be necessary or conversely, adequate, to suit the needs of the children in another class group. I am of the opinion that a teacher must adapt and alter his or her practice to align with the needs of his or her pupils.

4.6 - Limitations

According to Price, et. al,

> *'The limitations of the study are those characteristics of design or methodology that impacted or influenced the interpretation of the findings from your research. They are the constraints on generalizability, applications to practice, and/or utility of findings that are the result of the ways in which you initially chose to design the study or the method used to establish internal and external validity or the result of unanticipated challenges that emerged during the study.'* (2004, 66)

As outlined in the introductory chapter, while there is much information regarding picturebooks and their potential use in the classroom, as well as a plethora of research into writing workshops, there appeared to be a dearth on the subject of writing-workshops in relation to Infant education or similar. Accordingly, the generalisability of my research should not be considered presumable owing to this lack of similar research.

Another limitation of this study is that it requires support from school leadership as it necessitated a knowledge and understanding of current best-practice with regard to the New Language Curriculum (N.C.C.A., 2018) and the associated pre-reading activities. The reason for this is that to the untrained eye the intervention might appear to encourage self-indulgent and egocentric activity on the part of the children, as espoused by Rebora (2003). It initially proved challenging to convince the staff of not only the desirability, but also the appropriateness of teaching in this way, so as to ensure the children would develop and maintain and interest in reading and writing, starting from their own experiences (Liebschner, 2002). The fortuitous support of the D.E.S. inspector facilitated me in developing the collected mindset.

4.7 - Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented the data arising from the various sources identified in Chapter Three. A systematic, nuanced analysis of the data was undertaken and the implications explored. The extent to which validity was achieved was discussed and the limitations which were identified by me were elucidated.

The final chapter, Chapter Five, draws on the findings of the project, in order to formulate recommendations for my future practice and all those who might be interested in pursuing a similar intervention. The extent to which engagement in the process has impacted on both my personal and professional identity, is examined.

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Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction to Chapter

In this final chapter, Chapter Five, the overall conclusions and recommendations are presented with the view to elucidating how these findings may impact on my future professional practice. I will also account for the study's potential impact in the wider education community.

5.2 Summary of main findings

As indicated in Chapter Four, as a result of engaging in this process and carrying out the associated research, I am now convinced that the outcome of engaging with my research question was overwhelming positive on a number of levels.

After conducting an inventory of my class library and discovering the dearth of literature in which the children in my care could see their lives and interests reflected, it has been made abundantly clear to me that children should have a say in the contents of their class library, be it that the teacher furnish the children with the opportunity to vote for certain books, or that the teacher plan and stock their library with the books which might reflective the lives and interests of the children. Accordingly, I would assert that an inventory should be taken of a class library each year by the class teacher in order to uncover the extent to which the reading material is suitable and interesting for the children in order to increase the motivation of emergent readers. I plan to do this from now on, and this is a significant change in my practice.

Another finding of the research exemplified the important role that parents take as the Primary Educators of their Children. At the beginning of the school year, there were parents that were resistant to helping with the sight words at home. When the children began writing their

picturebooks, however, these parents became more motivated to help the children with the sight words and phonics as they saw an immediate purpose for the work.

Through my adaptation of and engagement with the writing-workshop structures, I facilitated and enabled the children to create their own unique picturebooks. While engaging with the process, it was evident that in order for the children to be facilitated in creating their unique books, I would have to adapt the structure of the writing-workshops, and in particular the content of the modelled-writing mini-lessons. By differentiating the levels of independence which was expected of the children, as well as not placing a strict tenet on the level of text versus images of the picturebooks, each child was enabled to write a picturebook at their own unique level. The extent to which this would be possible was formed the basis of my original research question.

5.3 Contextualising the results

The findings of this project, while relating only to the Infant class, have potentially significant implications for not only these children, but also for those in the other classes in the school. The principal, who initially had misgivings about my plans ended up being one of its greatest advocates. Evidence of this my being asked to present my findings at the first CPD day of the next term. The intention is to employ this approach throughout the school. I would be interested in presenting these findings to student-teachers, if they were so-interested. The purpose of this would be to encourage such an approach in the schools in which they will be teaching in the future. It also serves as a reminder of how "current" the Froebelian methodology is, in starting with the child, learning from the environment and teaching through play.

5.4 Developing Theory

In considering the potential impact of this project, I think it might be evaluated at different levels. On a macro, or a grander level, the national context might be considered. When I first undertook review of literature pertaining to Irish children at Junior Infant level creating their own books, there was a dearth of sources. Hence, this account may contribute to any repository deemed appropriate by researchers in this particular area.

The New Language Curriculum (N.C.C.A., 2017) promotes a child-centred and child-directed approach to literacy and language skill development. I was cognisant of this emphasis during my planning for the intervention, both at the outset and throughout the research process. As a result, the progression of the study was performed in such a way so as to be directed by the children. The subject-matter of the picturebooks which the children were enabled to create was decided by each individual child, as well as the pace and independence with which they completed tasks. The language which they used was also their own. Owing to this, the process of the writing-workshop was in adherence with and complimentary to the New Language Curriculum.

This project sparked a shift in not only my practice, but also in the awareness of the other teachers on my staff and the parents of the children with regard to the capabilities of Junior Infant children. It was apparent during this study that when provided with the correct scaffolding, preparation and facilitation, it was more than possible that children of this age can be enabled to create their own reading material, provided they are afforded the opportunity to do so. This was somewhat surprising to other educational stakeholders.

5.5 Areas of originality and contribution to scholarly research.

The originality in this project stems from the lack of research pertaining to permitting children to select, augment and construct the content of their class library. As stated previously, while the construct of the writing-workshops is well established in education, it did not seem to have permeated into Infant Education in the manner employed in this project.

5.6 Further recommendations

This project could also contribute to teacher education and in-service education in that it may form an aspect of a module for pre-service teachers, or might be adapted for summer courses for the Continuing Professional Development for teachers. Owing to the fact that I planned and constructed an adaptation of the Writing Workshop structure, re-envisioning it for Infant Education, it might be possible that, through the development of an exemplar manual or pamphlet, I could facilitate training. In this way teachers might be enabled to replicate the project in their own classes.

5.7 Conclusion

Emanating from this research are aspects of personal and professional development. Conducting this research as necessitated me reflecting upon my identity, both within and outside the classroom. On a personal level, it has given me the courage and confidence to stand up for what I believe is right, and to articulate it with conviction to those who are in a position, like me, to effect change, irrespective of what that change may be.

On a professional level, I understood in a very practical manner, not only the significance, but also the necessity of developing skills as a research practitioner. Conducting Self-Study Participatory Action Research has helped me to form and articulate my professional identity and to enact it so that I do not become one of Whitehead's Living Contradictions (2018)