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How can I foster a child-centred approach to the teaching of writing?

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to investigate how I could improve my practice by fostering a child-centred approach to the teaching of writing. My value of being child-centred was the driving force behind my research as I was concerned with my teacher led instruction of writing.

A self-study action research approach enabled me to examine my own practice with the aim of improving it. The research was qualitative in nature. Questionnaires, writing samples, observations and a reflective journal ensured that the perspective of the researcher, the children and colleagues were all represented in this study.

The Writing Workshop framework was implemented for a twelve-week period in my Senior Infant classroom. The workshop approach enabled me to support the children more effectively on a whole class (mini lessons), group (guided writing) and individual (conferences) level. The children were at the fore as their interests led the workshops. As I was working with children, ethical considerations were central to every aspect of this research.

Data collected and analysed during this research indicated that providing children with choice, effective teacher support and using assessment for learning to inform my instruction were significant aspects when fostering a child-centred approach to writing. Furthermore, the use of pictures, talk before and during writing and authentic literature were found to be effective strategies to support and differentiate for children as they learn to write. The children's overall enjoyment of the writing process and reasons for liking writing developed as a result of a more child focused approach to writing instruction.

This research identifies two areas of concern that arose during the study. Firstly, teachers need to question the role of pre-designed literacy schemes and their use in the classroom. Although these schemes may have a place, teachers need to adapt them to suit the children in their class. In my own practice, I will use AfL to effectively plan my instruction in accordance with the children's needs and abilities ensuring that the children are at the core of every lesson. Secondly, this research discovered an area of concern in relation to teaching constrained writing skills. Constrained skills are teachable skills including punctuation (capital letters, full stops) and spelling. Within this study, once the children had been exposed to these skills, they became overly focused on them. Therefore, I question when constrained skills should be introduced in our curriculum. In my own practice, I will delay the teaching of these skills until the children have had lots of exposure to craft development and are confident in their own ability to write.

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List of Abbreviations

AfL	Assessment for Learning
CF	Critical Friend
CPD	Continual Professional Development
DES	Department of Education and Skills
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Services
RAI	Reading Association of Ireland
SIP	School Improvement Plan

Declaration of Authenticity

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I hereby declare that this project, which I now submit in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education (Research in Practice) is entirely my own work; that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Focus and Aims of the Study

The aim of this study is to investigate how I can live more closely to my value of having a child-centred approach, with a focus on the teaching of writing. Understanding my values is significant as they "provide us with the basic structure for our expectations for ourselves, and also the overarching principles towards which we strive in our practice" (Sullivan et al., 2016: 60). Locating my values was a challenging process that encouraged me to reflect on my own experience as a learner and on the teacher I strive to be.

As a child, I struggled when expected to write stories independently. I lacked the strategies to begin and sustain a piece of writing and the emphasis of having correct spelling and punctuation made me reluctant. Therefore, I want to create a learning environment in which all children enjoy the writing process. I aim to provide individualised support for the children in accordance with their writing development. Most importantly, I strive for the children to feel that their work is valued with a focus on craft development rather than the constrained writing skills.

Throughout this study, I was engaged in critical reflection, defined by Brookfield as the "sustained and intentional process of identifying and checking the accuracy and validity of our teaching assumptions" (Brookfield, 2017:3). Assumptions are the beliefs we hold about the world and our place in it. They inform our actions, give purpose to who we are, what we do and why we do it (Brookfield, 2017). Our actions as teachers are based on the assumptions we hold about how best we think students learn. When reflecting on the assumptions I held about the teaching of writing prior to this study, I experienced

myself as a "living contradiction" (Whitehead, 1989) as my value of being child-centred was disconnected to my practice. I had believed in the following four assumptions:

1. Children in Senior Infants require teacher direction when choosing writing topics

2. Children transcribing writing from the board is a successful method to teach writing

3. Children need to be taught the constrained skills of writing – capital letters, full stops and finger spaces and know a wide variety of sight words and sentence structures before they can engage in free writing.

4. Using a set of predesigned lessons would work for the children in my class

My assumptions had resulted in a teacher led approach to writing in which all children were expected to write at the same level, about the same topic, with little support.

This style of teaching does not reflect my own teaching philosophy; therefore I decided to investigate how I could interrogate these assumptions and live more toward my values by exploring the following research question "How can I foster a child-centred approach to the teaching of writing?"

1.2 Research background, context and intervention

Within the Irish context, there is a gap in current research in relation to the teaching of writing. A study carried out by O' Rourke (2010) investigated the effects of the implementation of the Writing Workshop in a Junior Infant classroom. Her study had a duel focus on both constrained (punctuation, spelling) and unconstrained (craft development, vocabulary) skills of writing. O' Rourke (2010) claims that mini lessons, conferences and literature were beneficial scaffolds for the children and the daily immersion in writing resulted in an improvement in the children's writing skills (O'

Rourke, 2010). Very few studies focus purely on the craft of writing with young children. Thus, my research satisfies a clear gap in the Irish context.

There is a bias in Irish educational policies and reports towards the teaching of reading. In the "2009 National Assessments of Mathematics and English Reading" report, developing writing skills was the most requested CPD (continual professional development) cited by teachers (48% of Second class teachers and 59% for Sixth class), while only 11% of second class teachers and 10% of sixth class teachers required the teaching of reading for CPD (DES, 2010: 58). However, in the "National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Young People 2011-2020" the teaching of writing was infrequently mentioned, the teaching of reading was at the fore. Although, teachers had requested more guidance when teaching writing prior to this strategy, a higher value is placed by the Department of Education on the teaching of reading. Therefore, there is a need for studies that focus on providing teachers with approaches and strategies to teach writing.

In the Chief Inspectorates Report (2010-2012) where schools had underperformed in the teaching of writing, the recommendation on developing a whole school approach to the writing process was mentioned "the importance of establishing a whole-school, developmental and systematic approach to the teaching of writing, ensuring that pupils have frequent opportunities to write, and experience of writing in a variety of genres" (DES, 2013:45). The Writing Workshop, which is explored in this study, would be a suitable approach that satisfies this recommendation.

The New Primary Language Curriculum (NCCA, 2015) circulated in 2016 with a focus on junior to second class, with the senior curriculum expected in 2019, emphasises integrating oral language, reading and writing. The curriculum favours a child-centred

approach to writing as by placing children on different milestones within any one objective we are encouraged to work from where the children are at. This study compliments the New Primary Language Curriculum as within every writing lesson all three strands (oral language, reading and writing) are integrated. Using AfL the children can be successfully plotted on suitable milestones for different learning outcomes ensuring they are supported in line with their current level of writing development. This research will guide teachers as they implement the new curriculum in their classrooms.

As this study is carried out in a DEIS school, it is vital to note the correlation between DEIS and low literacy levels with approximately 27-30% of children experiencing serious literacy difficulties (DES, 2005a:35). Although, interventions have been put in place to combat these issues, there is "limited evidence on the efficacy of intervention programmes" (Kennedy et al., 2012:193). This research will address this issue as it will provide evidence and guidance of implementing the Writing Workshop approach.

Within the international context, a study carried out in America examined the support that Pre-K (children below the age of five) teachers provide the children during writing time. Bingham et al's (2017) study of forty one Pre K classrooms highlights that support is usually based on constrained writing skills as 58% of the support was based on handwriting, 35.6% was spelling and only 6.7% of the teachers provided support to children's writing composition. During my research, the focus is supporting children on craft development, the unconstrained skills of writing. Unlike constrained skills, that are "directly teachable" and "learners can achieve a perfect performance" (Snow and Matthews, 2016:58), unconstrained skills are "large domains of knowledge acquired gradually through experience. Unconstrained skills are particularly important for children's long-term literacy success" (Snow and Matthews, 2016: 57).

For the purposes of this study, the Writing Workshop (Calkins, 1986) approach will be implemented. The workshop aims for children to become "deeply and personally involved in writing" (Calkins, 1986: 5). Children have choice over writing topics and their own interests lead the workshops. Mini lessons, guided writing, conferences and share sessions enabled me to support the children on different levels according to their writing needs and ability. Assessment (AfL) was key in the intervention as it informed all aspects of the workshop, ensuring that I am always teaching in line with the children's development.

1.3 Potential Contribution to the Study

Three potential contributions of this research are identified: the role of literacy schemes, the purpose of writing in infant classrooms and looking at whole school approaches to writing.

1.3.1 Role of Literacy Schemes

During this study, the role of pre-designed literacy schemes is questioned. Who benefits from using these schemes, the children or the publishers? Using a literacy scheme does not encourage child-centred instruction as the lessons are pre-designed, ignoring the differing needs in every classroom. Teachers might be encouraged to have more confidence in their own ability to create their own schemes based on the children in their class. My own confidence has developed, as through effective AfL I have been able to teach and support the children according to their current needs.

1.3.2 Purpose of Writing in Infant Classrooms

This study has the potential to encourage teachers and policy makers to revisit the purpose of writing in infants. In particular, teaching constrained writing skills in infants. Do we need to introduce young children to these skills before they are confident in their

own ability to write? Should we focus more on building enjoyment and motivation to write at infant level, giving children choice and freedom to play with writing without the pressure of these constrained skills?

1.3.3 Whole School Approach to Writing
I hope that this study will inform the school's whole school approach to writing. The Writing Workshop framework can be used from infant level up to sixth class and can facilitate the teaching of all genres. The study might also encourage other members of staff to carry out action research in their own classrooms.

1.4 Format of Study
This study consists of five main chapters.

Chapter Two (Literature Review) discusses national and international perspectives on the teaching of writing. The Writing Workshop approach is outlined and each of its elements is explored. Child-centred approaches to writing and methods to support young writers are critiqued.

Chapter Three (Methodology) provides an overview of the research procedure. A self-study action research approach is justified, and two action research cycles are discussed in detail. Data collection tools are examined, ethical considerations are addressed, and the study's reliability, credibility and validity are discussed.

Chapter Four (Data Analysis and Discussion) presents and discusses data collected during the study. Through thematic data analysis two themes were identified. The data will be critiqued using Brookfield (2017) four lenses. The impact of these finding on my own practice is outlined.

Chapter Five (Conclusions and Recommendations) summarises the main findings. Limitations of the study are outlined and recommendations for further research are highlighted. Methods of disseminating my research are provided and the impact of this study on my practice is brought to the fore.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The aim of this literature review is to examine and discuss national and international perspectives on the teaching of writing in primary schools. Within the Irish context, the role and value of the teaching of writing will be explored and critiqued in The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Young People 2011-2020 and in The New Primary Language Curriculum (NCCA, 2015). An in-depth analysis of the Writing Workshop framework (Calkins, 1986) and its components is discussed. The review investigates the importance of having a child-centred approach to the teaching of writing and will consider the use of choice and assessment for learning to achieve this goal. To conclude, methods to support young children during the writing process are considered and their significance within this study is reviewed.

2.2 The Teaching of Writing

2.2.1 Balanced Literacy Approach

A balanced literacy framework is valued at both national and international level as a multifaceted, active approach that balances skill and meaning based instruction to teach reading and writing. The NCCA recommend this framework when teaching reading and writing as it "allows for the integration of each of the essential literacy skills and strategies into a range of authentic literacy contexts" (Kennedy at al., 2012:177). The balance of skill and meaning based approaches to writing is particularly relevant to DEIS schools as children often struggle with the basic, constrained skills, such as spelling, grammar and punctuation. This leads to teachers placing a greater focus on these skills which can result in missed opportunities to engage in higher order teaching and learning, to contextualise these skills into meaningful and developmentally appropriate contexts (Kennedy et al., 2012). Based on my experience, I usually focus

more on the constrained skills of writing especially when first introducing the concept of writing to the children. By utilising a balanced approach, my teaching will be enhanced as I will be mixing strategies that focus on both writing skills and processes using a variety of teaching approaches to better support the children during their writing development.

The framework endorses differentiating literacy instruction as the teacher can select suitable instructional tools depending on the children's needs and level of development (Bingham and Hall- Kenyon, 2013). This approach relies on teacher's knowledge, confidence and ability to choose "the most appropriate instructional approach to facilitate the literacy development of each individual child" (RAI, 2011:5). Writing contexts within the framework are proposed by Kennedy et al. (2012: 177) and consist of shared writing, interactive writing, writing workshop and independent writing.

2.2.2 The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Young People 2011-2020.

In the National Strategy to improve Literacy and Numeracy (2011-2012), the success of using a balanced literacy framework in international contexts was recognised. Although the strategy does not explicitly aim for a balanced approach to literacy, it strives for teachers to "use an effective blend of teaching approaches including direct skill based differentiated instruction, individualised learning and the use of co-operative group work" (DES, 2011: 32). In the Reading Association of Ireland (RAI) review, it noted that the strategy was heavily focused on the basic literacy skills rather than a balance of skill and meaning based teaching. If implemented it "could result in an overly-narrow focus on a limited range of literacy skills at the expense of a broader-based approach that develops cognitive and metacognitive strategies, and enhances students' interest in reading/writing, both for enjoyment and as learning tools" (RAI, 2011:5).

Furthermore, the strategy is heavily focused on the teaching of reading. Writing was infrequently mentioned which suggests that the Department of Education places a higher priority and value on children's reading. Children's writing and reading are equally important for access to the curriculum and for life. Reading and writing are reciprocal processes. The imbalance of reading and writing is a missed opportunity to bring about better teaching of writing in Irish primary schools. Prior to this strategy, the need to improve teachers approach to writing was highlighted by an evaluation of curriculum implementation in schools "improvement in the quality of teaching of writing should now become a priority for all involved in the implementation of the English curriculum. Teachers' understanding of the writing process should be enhanced, and additional professional development is required on approaches to writing such as shared writing, modelling writing, scaffolding pupils' writing, and conferencing" (DES, 2005a: 53). In addition, the "2009 Assessments of Mathematics and English Reading" highlighted that developing writing skills was by far the most frequently cited CPD need (48% of Second class pupils' teachers and 59% for Sixth class), while only 11% of second class teachers and 10% of sixth class teachers required the teaching of reading for CPD' (DES, 2010: 58). If these statistics and reports were published previous to the literacy and numeracy strategy, it is unsettling that the teaching of writing was not prioritised or given equal attention as the teaching of reading.

Likewise, in "A Balanced Approach to Literacy Development in the Early Years" (NEPS, 2016), reading was the central focus while the teaching of writing was given minimal attention. The aim of this publication is "to help teachers plan and deliver a balanced approach to literacy in the early years, by sharing information about evidence-based approaches and best practices" (NEPS, 2016:3). It is clear that the document shows a bias towards the teaching of reading by providing practitioners with multiple

approaches and methodologies to utilise when teaching reading. Despite, Irish teachers seeking further CPD to teach writing (DES, 2010), the teaching of reading still appears at the fore of these publications. Therefore, there is a clear gap in the Irish context into evidence- based approaches and methodologies that promote a process approach to the teaching of writing.

2.2.3 Primary Language Curriculum

The new primary language curriculum promotes an integrated approach to literacy instruction. Like the 1999 English Curriculum there are three strands: oral language, reading and writing. While discrete language lessons associated with each of the strands are essential, the new language curriculum advocates their integration "engaging with all three strands of oral language, reading and writing in an integrated way enables the child to become a more effective communicator" (NCCA, 2015: 20).

The curriculum highlights the importance of oral language development, as it is essential to the development of both reading and writing "skills developed through oral language are precursors to related skills and concepts developed in reading and writing" (NCCA, 2015: 31). Molloy et al.,(2016) supports this idea "oral and written language have been described as being two parts of an integrated language system in which an underlying language core manifests in the forms of listening, speaking, reading and writing" (Molloy et al., 2016: 216).

Oral language is a useful prerequisite prior to writing (Calkins, 1986, Gibson, 2009). Talking with the children prior to independent writing supports the children's writing development. Fountas and Pinnell (2017: 229) highlight the "necessity to talk about topics and ideas with children, providing them with rich vocabulary before they are expected to write". In addition, children need to be given opportunities to talk about their own experiences and ideas when planning for writing as "the first entry point to

writing is simple conversation" (Graves, 1994:49). The use of talk within this study will be a vital support for children with EAL (English as an additional language) and speech and language delays.

2.2.4 First Steps Writing Resource

First Steps is a genre-based approach to the teaching of writing that was developed in Australia and is widely used in many DEIS schools in Ireland. The initiative promotes the use of a balanced literacy framework, using a range of teaching strategies and approaches, creating a strong foundation for teaching writing. Instructional procedural recommendations for teaching writing are based on the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model (Pearson and Gallagher, 1983) and consist of modelled writing, language experience (using children's own language and experience to co-construct text), shared and interactive writing, guided writing, independent writing and authors chair (Department of Education, WA, 2013:5). By implementing these procedures, teachers are encouraged to provide "opportunities for explicit instruction balanced with regular opportunities for independent application of strategies, understanding and processes" (Department of Education, WA, 2013: 5).

Prior to engagement of writing a new text, the First Steps resource describes the importance of allowing children to familiarise themselves with the new genre by studying the work of other authors. Furthermore, the children will be engaged in problem solving as they analyse the text forms to discover writing features of genres. This initiative complements the structure of the New Language Curriculum in Ireland, as it views reading and writing as mutual processes. Children learn the work of writers from reading texts and their use of oral language to share and discuss their writing, is valued.

2.2.5 Writing Workshop

The Writing Workshop (Graves 1994; Calkins 2013) is a process focused, child-centred approach to writing that originates, and is widely used in schools in America. The workshop aims for children to become "deeply and personally involved in writing" (Calkins, 1986: 5). Children write about their own personal experience and have autonomy over writing topics. Calkins recommends "for children to learn to write and grow as writers, it is absolutely essential that they are invested in their writing and that they care about writing well" (Calkins, 2013: 31).

Calkins endorses a balanced approach to writing, correlating with First Steps (2013). Each writing lesson begins with a mini lesson consisting of explicit teacher instruction, followed by independent writing and sharing and celebration of work. During independent writing time, the teacher conferences with children on an individual or group basis targeting the needs based on assessments. While most of the workshop is independent writing time, the role of teaching writing skills and strategies is at the fore "when teachers explicitly teach the qualities, habits and strategies of effective writing, that writing becomes better, and the improvement is evident within days and weeks"(Calkins, 2013: 33).

Throughout my research I have noticed very few studies carried out in the Irish context based on the writing process and craft development. There is a gap in the literature in these areas. O' Rourke (2010) was inspired to undergo a study into the implementation of the Writing Workshop in a Junior Infant classroom as she was unhappy with the traditional, product orientated approach to writing that existed in Ireland and was concerned by the lack of Irish research on the writing process.

The use of mini lessons, conferences, modelling and authentic literature were found to be effective scaffolds for emergent writers. Furthermore, the daily immersion in writing

resulted in an improvement in the children's craft development across six areas: ideas, organisation, voice, word choice, sentence fluency and organisation (O'Rourke, 2010).

An interesting finding revealed that the children's automaticity of spelling affected the amount of time children devoted to the craft of writing. This highlights the value of the children being familiar and having control over a bank of sight words that they can use fluently and independently in their writing. Although, children don't need sight words when first engaging with writing, devoting time to explicitly teaching sight words will be beneficial alongside this study as the children will write more fluently and naturally allowing more time to focus on the content of writing.

Kennedy and Shiel (2014) utilised the Writing Workshop approach as a key component in their "Write to Read" project. They suggested that teachers will need further support on the "craft of writing and on linking assessment with the planning and teaching of mini lessons- in particular, how best to respond to writers during conferences, how to document assessment information gathered during conferences and how to use a writing rubric to inform teaching and learning" (Kennedy and Shiel, 2014: 112). This study aims to provide teachers with methods to use AfL to inform future lessons and discusses strategies used to document and plan all elements within the Writing Workshop.

2.2.6 Interactive Writing
Interactive writing lessons are a useful approach to use with emergent writers as the teacher models what the children should do during independent writing time and demonstrates the thinking aloud processes involved in writing, allowing the young writer to get a snapshot into the thought processes involved in composing a text (Williams, 2017). During these lessons, the teacher "shares the pen" (Mc Carrier et al., 2000: xvii) with the children encouraging them to be active participants in the lesson. The teacher chooses words that are at the children's instructional level and allows them

to 'share the pen' to add to the text (Fountas and Pinnell, 2017: 226). Interactive writing supports children's early writing as it explicitly focuses on "instruction into the thinking and behaviour of a 'good writer'" (Williams, 2017: 524).

Interactive writing appears to focus more on the concepts of print, letter sound relationships, and word problem solving. Although these constrained skills are not the prime focus of this study, I used interactive writing to teach the children word attack strategies during the mini lessons. Strategies included breaking words into syllables, recognising chunks in words, stretching the word out slowly and recording sounds we hear. These strategies were very useful for children throughout the intervention.

2.2.7 DEIS and Literacy

As my study is situated in a DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) school it is important to look at the relationship between DEIS and literacy. DEIS is an action plan for educational inclusion. It is based on the definition of "educational disadvantage" as described in the Education Act (1998) as "the impediments to education arising from social or economic disadvantage which prevent students from deriving appropriate benefit from education in schools" (DES, 2005b:7). There is a direct correlation between DEIS and low literacy levels, with 27-30% of children in DEIS school's experiencing serious literacy difficulties (DES, 2005b:35). This is three times the national average.

It is pivotal that young children experience success and enjoyment in learning, these are prerequisites if children are to be motivated to reach their full potential (DES, 2005b: 16). However, research highlights that when children have low levels of attainment in literacy, they are more likely to experience education failure (DES, 2005b: 35). Early intervention is noted as a key feature to try and combat these low literacy levels. From my experience teaching senior infants, it is clear that early intervention is crucial to

provide the children with strong foundational skills and concepts. This research is aimed at supporting children during their early writing phase. By implementing child focused supports I hope that this will be a successful intervention to build on children's writing development. Kennedy et al. (2012:193) state that although intervention programmes exist in DEIS schools there is "limited evidence on the efficacy of intervention programmes". This study aims to fill a gap in the research into early writing programmes.

In the Inspectorate Evaluation (DES, 2015) the key areas for development within literacy teaching was assessment and target setting. It was suggested that there should be "a clear and meaningful link between the outcomes of assessment in literacy, the literacy targets set, and the teaching approaches, interventions and strategies evident in the learning settings in the school" (DES, 2015:33). Similarly "a lack of differentiation that would address the individual needs of the children" (DES 2005 cited in Kennedy et al., 2012:191) was noted as an issue impacting on children's literacy development in DEIS schools. My study satisfies these criteria as effective assessment was used to inform future whole class, group and individual learning objectives. My instruction was differentiated to suit the learner's needs and abilities. This ensured that I was living toward my values and supporting the children in line with their development.

2.3 Focus of the study

As I aim to be more child focused in my approach to the teaching of writing I need to ensure that the support I provide to the children is based on their current needs and writing development. In a recent study examining early childhood teacher's writing practices, Bingham et al., (2017) utilised two frameworks to understand ways in which teachers can support children's writing. A conceptual framework was used to focus on component skills such as handwriting, spelling and composition. The second framework

is based on Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory. (Vygotsky 1978 cited in Bingham et al, 2017: 36) explains "the theory promotes the idea that experience, knowledge and learning are dependent on a child's environment, context, and interactions with others and that writing experiences should be undertaken in ways that are meaningful to the children". This theory validates the significance of teacher's interactions with children and the methods in which they offer children support during composition. Furthermore, the theory compliments the Writing Workshop approach (Calkins, 1986) as it favours giving the children choice and control over writing topics, allowing the children's interests and ideas lead the process. The socio-cultural theory framework was central to the support I provide during writing instruction through the promotion of social interactions between teacher and students and students talking together before, during and after writing.

The development of unconstrained skills such as composition, vocabulary development and oral language will be fundamental to this study as from engaging with literature it was evident that teachers usually focus more on the constrained skills. This is illustrated in Bingham et al's (2017) large scale study of forty one Pre K classrooms in which 58% of the support was based on handwriting, 35.6% was spelling and only 6.7% of the teachers provided support to children's writing composition. I aim to create a writing environment in which the children enjoy writing and are motivated and enthusiastic to engage in writing activities throughout the day, if the focus is on handwriting and spelling , this will be discouraging for the children, as Gerde et al. (2012) acknowledges "requiring spelling accuracy may reduce children's writing attempts" (Gerde et al., 2012:n.p).

There were children in the study with underdeveloped fine motor skills, if the focus was purely on handwriting, I know a lot of children would avoid writing opportunities. When

children understand that the focus of writing is on "sharing their thoughts and ideas and that lower level skills such as grammar, spelling and punctuation can be dealt with when editing and publishing, this can relieve their anxiety and increase children's confidence and sense of self-efficacy" (NCCA, 2015:n.p). The NCCA (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment)(2012) explain that these lower level skills should only be taught when "children demonstrate a readiness for the skill in their writing and skills such as spelling, punctuation and grammar should only be taught in small groups using children's writing as the context" (Kennedy at al., 2012: 153).

2.4 Components of the Writing Workshop Approach

2.4.1 Mini Lessons

The Writing Workshop begins with a mini lesson whereby the teacher explicitly models and demonstrates a new writing strategy using the think aloud methodology. Dennis and Votteler (2013: 442) confirm that "it is crucial for teachers to model and think out load about the writing process. The teacher's writing should mirror where the children are developmentally". Thus, mini lessons arise from the children's own writing, focusing on what the children need to know in order to progress. Calkins (2003:50) defines our job as teachers to "plan a learning journey that ensures that all our children are productively engaged". This implies that teachers need to know the children in their class and dedicate time into planning mini lessons that are both accessible and challenging to the children. Assessment, through observation, is pivotal to ensure mini lessons are developmentally appropriate for the children "carefully recorded observations can lead us to modify our instruction to meet the learning needs of particular children in the formative stages of their learning" (Clay, 2002:4).

When introducing a new writing strategy to the children it is not enough to simply tell the students what to do, teachers should use one of the following approaches to explicitly teach the strategy: "demonstration, explicitly tell and show an example, inquiry or guided practice" (Calkins, 2003: 51). As this study is focused on younger children the demonstration and explicitly tell and show an example approaches will be most applicable. The mini lesson concludes with the children actively trying out the new strategy with the support of the teacher, this is crucial as children "learn more from what they do than from the words out of someone else's mouth" (Calkins, 2003:55). The teacher supports and scaffolds the children as they implement the new strategy which helps build on the children's confidence to use the strategy independently.

2.4.2 Guided Writing

Guided writing is defined as "small group instructional framework presented to students who share similar needs at a particular point in time" (Fountas and Pinnell, 2001 cited in Gibson, 2009: 324). Guided writing compliments the new Primary Language Curriculum as it enables me to successfully differentiate my teaching and meet with children on similar "progression steps/ milestones"(NCCA, 2015) during the Writing Workshop.

Guided writing consists of a brief discussion based on the children's interests, followed by modelling of the new strategy or concept. The teacher then scaffolds the children as they write independently. The teacher provides immediate guidance for the children in the form of "feed forward", "feed forward focuses the writer's attention on what strategies to use next" (Gibson, 2009: 328). This contrasts the usual feedback that we offer children, which simply reviews what the children have already written. Feed forward is very progressive at it focuses the writer on their next stage in the process. One aspect of guided writing which is questionable is the suggestion that "these lessons

are most successful when presented on a daily basis to the same group of students, perhaps for several consecutive weeks" (Gibson, 2009: 236). This approach would not allow me to support all the children of varying abilities in my class equally as I would have to commit to the same group of pupils for several days. For the purpose of this study, a plan will be drawn up to meet groups on alternative days to ensure that I am supporting all the children as best I can.

2.4.3 Conferencing

Calkins (1986) advocates conferencing whereby the teacher meets and supports individual children, discusses their writing and "asks questions of students that help them interact with their work in progress" (Calkins, 1986: 119). Conferencing enables the teacher to assist the children in a more meaningful way as it is individualised support based on the children's current level of writing development.

Conferencing provides teachers "with a time to invent instruction on the spot to address problems you may not even have known existed" (Calkins, 2015: 37). This is useful as new difficulties may arise for the children that were not observed during assessment. Conferencing equips teachers with the flexibility to support children as their needs occur. Throughout conferencing the aim is to "teach the writer and not the writing" (Calkins, 1986:120). If the writer has not learned something that he/she can apply to their next piece of work, then the support given was ineffective. Many teachers and researchers (O' Rourke, 2010; Dennis and Votteler, 2013 and Kennedy and Shiel, 2014) utilise conferencing within the Writing Workshop approach. Teaching "transferable skills and strategies" (Calkins, 2015: 15) that can be applied to multiple writing activities would be a favourable objective when planning group or individual conferences. It is evident that feedback provided during writing lessons is usually based on lower order skills such as handwriting and spelling. I question how much learning takes place when

I provide lower order feedback commenting only on the children's quantity, presentation or 'surface features' (Clarke, 2001) of writing. During the research, I aim to provide feedback based on the specific learning intention rather than on these "surface features".

NCCA (2015) suggest that "a good conference is 80% child talk and 20% teacher talk". The teacher's job is to "nudge details from the writer, to understand what the writer is trying to do and to continue to encourage children as writers" (NCCA, 2015:n.p). One potential challenge is motivating children in senior infants to interact with their writing and view their work as work in progress rather than finished products. Encouraging children to add more detail or alter a piece of writing is challenging as children in this age group are very product driven.

In contrast, Graves (1994) notes that he would rarely want children in the younger class to revise their piece of writing alternatively he explains "I want them to write extensively and to experience the flow of writing. They may occasionally add information and work to improve certain skills, but they ought to concentrate on only one skill at a time when they write" (Graves, 1994: 235). I agree with Graves' expectation as it is realistic for this age group and when beginning their writing journey children should focus more on the craft and enjoyment of writing rather than revising and editing their work.

Clay (2005) draws our attention to the gradual release of responsibility model when supporting children, "in the early lessons the teacher's contribution is high…the child should gradually take over the problem solving of new words, and the teacher then reminds, prompts, and facilitates the production" (Clay, 2005: 59). Similar to Calkins (1986), Serravallo (2017) provides a clear framework within the Writing Workshop approach to ensure that all children are working at their pace and are catered for accordingly. During independent writing time, Serravallo suggests that the teacher

conducts two mini-strategy lessons, working on identified needs of the groups of children. The teacher then meets with children individually through conferencing whereby the focus is on the individual's goal or writing need. This process enabled me to plan for differentiation more effectively and opens a platform to support writers at both group and individual level on a daily basis, "meetings with individual and groups allow you to differentiate what you're teaching, match the strategies to individual student's goals and give student's opportunities for guided practice with you by their side" (Serravallo, 2017: 29). By implementing conferencing and small – group instruction into my teaching of writing I will be living more closely in the direction of my values as I will be more child-centred in my approach to teaching and I will be starting from where the children are at.

2.4.4 Share Session
The Writing Workshop concludes with a share session, an opportunity to celebrate the children's writing. The NCCA (2015: n.p.) justifies the importance of the share session as it "provides the writer with real, attentive and appreciative audience and increases the children's confidence and motivation to write". It affords children to engage in peer assessment and allows them to use each other's writing as mentor texts, providing new ideas for their next pieces of writing.

Calkins (1986) suggests the use of an "authors chair" (Graves and Hansen, 1983) whereby the child sharing their writing sits on the chair and reads their work to the whole class. The key problem with this method of sharing work in an infant classroom is the children attentiveness and their lack of understanding when only a few children can share their work each day. A more appropriate solution is to allow every child to share their writing with a partner or in small groups so that all children feel that their work is valued. Setting up a schedule to ensure different children read their writing each day is

an alternative solution. During the share session the link between reading and writing is highlighted, children use their own writing as a context to practice reading skills which increases their motivation to read and builds on reading fluency.

2.5 Child-centred approach to the teaching of writing

2.5.1 Child-centred Education

Having a child-centred approach to teaching is one of my core values. A child- centred philosophy is a key Froebelian principal encapsulated by Brown (2012: 30) as "ensuring that the child is at the centre and leading the curriculum rather than the curriculum leading the child". Likewise, Bruce (2011:30) echoing Froebel states "begin where the learner is, not where the learner ought to be". In order to be child-centred, the children's own ideas and interests have to be respected (Liebschner, 2001) and lead the learning. Froebel encourages us to respect the child's autonomy and intrinsic motivation. This is referred to as the "self-activity" of the child, "the child is learning to think for him or herself, to know how to get the help needed when needed, to willingly accept being taught directly when it makes sense" (Bruce, 2011:11). The teacher's role is "observing the child and placing their needs at the centre of our active environment" (Brown, 2012:30). A child-centred approach to the teaching of writing can be achieved by providing the children with choice over writing topics, writing genre and writing materials and using AFL in order to plan lessons according to child's level of development and what they need to know in order to progress.

2.5.2 Choice

Current research favours providing children with choice during the writing process in order to increase children's motivation to write. "When students choose their own topics, they may become more engaged and motivated to write. Such engagement and motivation could potentially lead students to write more frequently and become more

involved in the writing process and the writing community" (IES/NCEE, 2018:34). Similarly, Dennis and Votteler (2013: 441) find that "when children self-select a topic they will become more motivated to create, complete and share their story with others because it is more meaningful for them".

An investigation into the effectiveness and importance of choice in the classroom, revealed that students spent more time and effort on a task when given choice and choice was beneficial for children with low interest and low motivation levels (Patall, Cooper and Wynn, 2010: 896). The significance of allowing the children to self-select their own writing topics has been advocated by Graves (1994) and Calkins (1986) for many years. Yet during an evaluation of curriculum implementation (DES, 2005a) over half the teachers inspected relied on workbook activities to teach writing and the pupils did not make any decisions over writing topics (DES, 2005a:19). A serious weakness in our education system is that this issue still fails to be addressed in recent publications as previously mentioned.

2.5.3 Assessment for Learning (AfL)

AfL occurs when the "teacher uses evidence on an ongoing basis to inform teaching and learning" (NCCA, 2007: 8). AfL emphasises the child's active role in his/her learning as the teacher negotiates the learning outcome and success criteria with the child and feedback is given regularly (NCCA, 2007). The use of AfL compliments having a child-centred approach as the teacher observes and takes notes of where the children are at and uses this information when planning lessons. It is the children's own work that lead the teaching and learning.

In the context of teaching writing, AfL ensures that mini lessons, guided writing lessons and conferences are focused on what the children need to know to progress with their writing development, Kennedy and Shiel (2014:28) support this view "the content of

the whole class, group and individual mini lessons is based on ongoing formative assessment of children's learning needs derived from anecdotal records taken during conferences with children, interactions amongst children in the share sessions and assessment of writing samples". The Writing Workshop framework affords teachers the opportunity to talk and spend time with the children both in small groups and on an individual basis. This results in an increased awareness of the children's interest and abilities and encourages a more child-centred approach to teaching as you can "individualise your instruction, helping students with the exact skills they need to work on and noticing which teaching strategies work best" (Calkins, 2015:3).

Prioritising knowing the children in your class as a means to successful teaching is highlighted by Fountas and Pinnell (2018:10) "the more you know about how students learn to read and write text, the better you can act on those understandings". Likewise, Serravallo (2017:2) explains "choosing an appropriate goal requires that you have a deep knowledge of your students developed through assessments of course, but also through talking to your student and getting to know them". Therefore, when introducing the Writing Workshop in the classroom, time needs to be invested in talking and listening to the children and "taking lessons from them" (Calkins, 1986:10). This type of teaching is coined by Fountas and Pinnell (2018: 11) as "responsive teaching" defined as "a view of teaching as a process of gathering data, observing reading or writing behaviours, identifying priorities for teaching and using facilitative language to build on a student's strengths and expand the student's existing reading and writing".

Responsive teaching is child focused as it rejects the use of literacy schemes, a pre-designed sequence of lessons for all children to complete at the same time. When initially planning my research it was tempting to follow a prescribed set of mini lessons, however Fountas and Pinnell (2018:11) highlight the issue of using pre-designed

literacy schemes "placing all student's rigidly into the same program leads to serious differences in outcomes in that all (or almost all) may make progress, but not all will have the opportunity to fully develop as readers and writers because the teaching does not come to meet them" (Fountas and Pinnell, 2018: 11). Thus, the use of AfL is critical in ensuring that I am best meeting the needs of the children in my class and that the teaching and learning is focused on their needs and interests.

2.6 Methods to Support Young Writers

2.6.1 Composing with Pictures

Key researchers in the field of writing (Calkins, 1986, Clay, 1998 and Serravallo, 2017) value the use of pictures for both younger and older children when creating stories. Calkins (1986:40) admits that it is "easy to dismiss picture-stories" but urges teachers to "focus on what the children are doing rather than on what we wish they would do" (Calkins, 1986:41). Calkins encouraged me to question and interrogate my own assumptions around pictures. Initially, I would have expected the children to write first and draw their pictures after. However, Serravallo (2017) and Clay (1998 cited in Dennis and Votteler, 2013) support using pictures as a key planning tool for writers, suggesting that pictures come before the writing. Both younger and older children benefit from drawing pictures prior to engaging in the writing task "drawings actually generate ideas for writing and help the child remember the ideas when he or she attempts to use writing for self-expression" (Clay 1998 cited in Dennis and Votteler, 2013:441), furthermore as "children get older, using pictures as a way to practice qualities of good writing, and as a way to plan their writing has lots of value" (Serravallo, 2017:3). Pictures enable all children, regardless of age or ability, access to writing "even before children are able to write conventionally with words, they can compose pieces of work using what they can do-draw pictures" (Serravallo, 2017:3). Pictures are beneficial

supports for children of all ages and can be used as a useful differentiation tool in the classroom.

2.6.2 Use of Mentor Texts

Reading and writing are reciprocal processes, as children develop their writing competencies the use of "mentor texts" (Culham, 2019) is highly recommended. Mentor texts are well written exemplar texts that provide a guide for young children as they learn the craft of writing. Mentor texts act as a support and scaffold for young children and can effectively model craft development across the traits of writing: idea generation, organisation, voice, word choice, sentence fluency and conventions (Culham, 2005). When engaging with mentor texts it is vital that teachers help children develop "the eyes of a writer" (MacKay et al., 2017:177). Teachers highlight writing techniques that authors use to achieve their purpose with the aim of the children applying these strategies in their own writing, they encourage the children to "look at reading through the eyes of the writer and study what writers do that amaze and challenge us, then try out some of the techniques as we write" (Culham, 2019: 510).

When choosing mentor texts it is suggested that the text is introduced as reading material initially as it is "through the reading that student's begin to value a book enough to be willing to look to its author as a writing mentor" (MacKay et al., 2017:177). In addition, the children should be able to see themselves in the book (Culham, 2019), choosing books that reflect the lives of the children is useful as they can make genuine connections to the characters which will support them when writing their own stories. Calkins (1986) endorses the importance of the children recognising themselves as authors because when "children perceive themselves as authors, they will make connections with the books they read" (Calkins, 1986: 221).

2.7 Role of Reflection

Reflection is a core element of self-study action research (Sullivan et al., 2016). Reflection is a tool for understanding our practice, leading to transformation of that practice. It consists of both processes of reflection (internal thinking) and the representation of reflection (reflective writing) (Moon, 2007). When engaging in action research, researchers are "informed by their own values, norms and assumptions" (Sullivan et al., 2016: 25). This research began with critical reflection of my teaching, in light of my values and locating an area of concern.

Critical reflection is defined by Brookfield as "sustained and intentional process of identifying and checking the accuracy and validity of our teaching assumptions" (Brookfield, 2017:3). Assumptions inform our actions, give purpose to who we are, what we do, and why we do it (Brookfield, 2017). Our actions as teachers are based on the assumptions we hold about how best we think students learn. Assumptions arise from our own experience as learners, advice from trusted colleagues, what the theory and research say and from observing and knowing how our students learn (Brookfield, 2017).

In order to engage in critical reflection, one must be aware of their underpinning assumptions. As outlined in the introduction, I held four assumptions about the teaching of writing. However, these assumptions contradicted my value of being child-centred, which led me to create my research question. In order to scrutinise these assumptions, I viewed them through four lenses: the student's eyes, colleagues' perspective, theory and research and our own personal experience (Brookfield, 2017:7). Brookfield's framework for critical reflection is used in my reflective journal and when analysing the data at the end of the study.

2.8 Conclusion

This chapter discussed current national and international approaches to writing. Educational reports and policies were examined and critiqued in light of the teaching of writing. The Writing Workshop framework and its components were analysed. Current research in relation to giving children choice and using AfL to inform writing lessons was described. To conclude, literature based on methods to support children as they engaged in writing is reviewed. The next chapter will discuss the research approach carried out during this study.

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Introduction to Methodology Chapter

This chapter will provide an overview of the research carried out during the study. A self-study action research approach was chosen as it critical that as teachers we continue to evaluate and develop our practice. The methodology was designed to determine the children's, colleague's and my own perspective on the teaching of writing with the aim of fostering a more child-centred approach to my writing instruction. The role of reflection as a key tool in this study is addressed when discussing my research question and when outlining new insights and developments that occurred during the two action research cycles. The data collection tools are examined, highlighting advantages and limitations of each. The process of thematic data analysis is outlined. As this research involved children, ethical considerations are addressed, and any potential issues are considered. To conclude, this chapter will illustrate how the research is credible, reliable and valid.

3.2 Research Question

In the initial stages of the research, I had to identify and articulate my values. As outlined in the introduction, I understand my core value to be having a child-centred approach. I reflected on my current practice and examined my practice in light of this value. A tension existed as although I claimed to value being child-centred, my teaching of writing was teacher led. I dictated the writing topics; all children wrote the same piece of writing in their copy and there were little opportunities for the children to lead their own learning. I experienced myself as a "living contradiction" (Whitehead, 1989). I aimed to investigate how I could be more child-centred in my approach to writing.

Therefore, the following research question was designed "How can I foster a child centred approach to the teaching of writing?"

3.3 Research Design

3.3.1 Action Research

As I strive to improve my practice, by promoting a more child-centred approach to the teaching of writing, a self-study action research methodology was chosen. Carr and Kemmis (2004) explain that the aim of action research is primarily focused on improvement of practice, understanding of practice and the improvement of the situation in which the practice takes place (Carr and Kemmis, 2004: 162). Similarly, Mc Niff and Whitehead encapsulate the value of action research to investigate and transform one's practice "the action aspect of action research is about improving practice. The research aspect is about creating new knowledge about practice. The knowledge created is your knowledge of your practice" (Mc Niff and Whitehead, 2005:5). Through action research I aim to create my own living theory based on how I can foster a child-centred approach to teaching writing.

3.3.2 Self -Study Action Research

Self-study research refers to "teacher educators researching their practice with the purpose of improving it" (Vanassche and Kelchtermans, 2015:508). Mc Niff (2002: n.p.) describes the process of self-study, it begins with the teacher identifying a problem and imagining a possible solution. The teacher implements the action and evaluates it and changes his/ her practice in light of the evaluation. It is "an enquiry conducted by the self into the self" (McNiff, 2002: n.p.) The focus of the inquiry is the researcher and the central question at the heart of self-study is "how do I improve my practice?" (McNiff, 2002: n.p.). The role of reflection is paramount in self-study action research, in order to develop my research question I had to critically examine my current practice

in light of my own professional value of having a child- centred approach. I uncovered

an area where tension exists, where my values were not being lived out and this became

the focus of the research. Through reflection, I noticed my values were being denied as

I was not allowing the children to lead their learning and my instruction was teacher led.

Beginning with your values is vital in self-study research, "the researcher is informed

by their own values, beliefs and assumptions" (Sullivan et al., 2016: 25). Action research

opens up the space to learn about myself as a teacher, through self-study I can examine

my values and identity and explore how they influence my practice.

3.3.3 Research Paradigm

This research is situated in the critical paradigm (Scotland, 2012) as it best correlates

with my ontological and epistemological commitments. My ontological assumption is

that there are multiple truths that can develop and change over time. These realities are

shaped by an individual's context and can be altered or influenced by human action. My

epistemological stance views knowledge as socially constructed. Knowledge is not fixed

but is constantly evolving through interactions with others. Scotland (2012) explains

that in the critical paradigm the researcher and the participants are both subjects and the

researcher's role is not to bring about transformation for the students but with them.

During this study, I implemented key features of the critical paradigm as I interrogated

my own values and assumptions and I explored potential issues of power and hegemony

that influenced my practice (Scotland, 2012:13). As I aim to develop my own living

theory, by capturing the voice of the child and collecting all participants' views,

qualitative research is the central focus within this research paradigm.

3.4 Research Sample

The study was conducted in a Senior Infants classroom in a suburban, DEIS school. The

class was selected for me by the principal. Seventeen children, boys and girls, agreed to

participate in the study. Initial free writing samples were collected from the children and each child was plotted on a rubric (Appendix A) .The children were then divided into four bands of ability (blue, red, green and orange), based on their writing samples. The children were coded within the group for anonymity purposes, for example B1 is the child one in the blue group and R4 is child four in the red group, see figure 3.1 below. These groups were used for guided writing during the intervention. To select a sub sample, a child from each group was chosen at random at the end of the study, using an online random name picker, in order to provide an adequate representation of the class. The children were randomly selected to ensure that I am not bias toward any particular children during the study.

Figure 3. 1 Selection of Sample
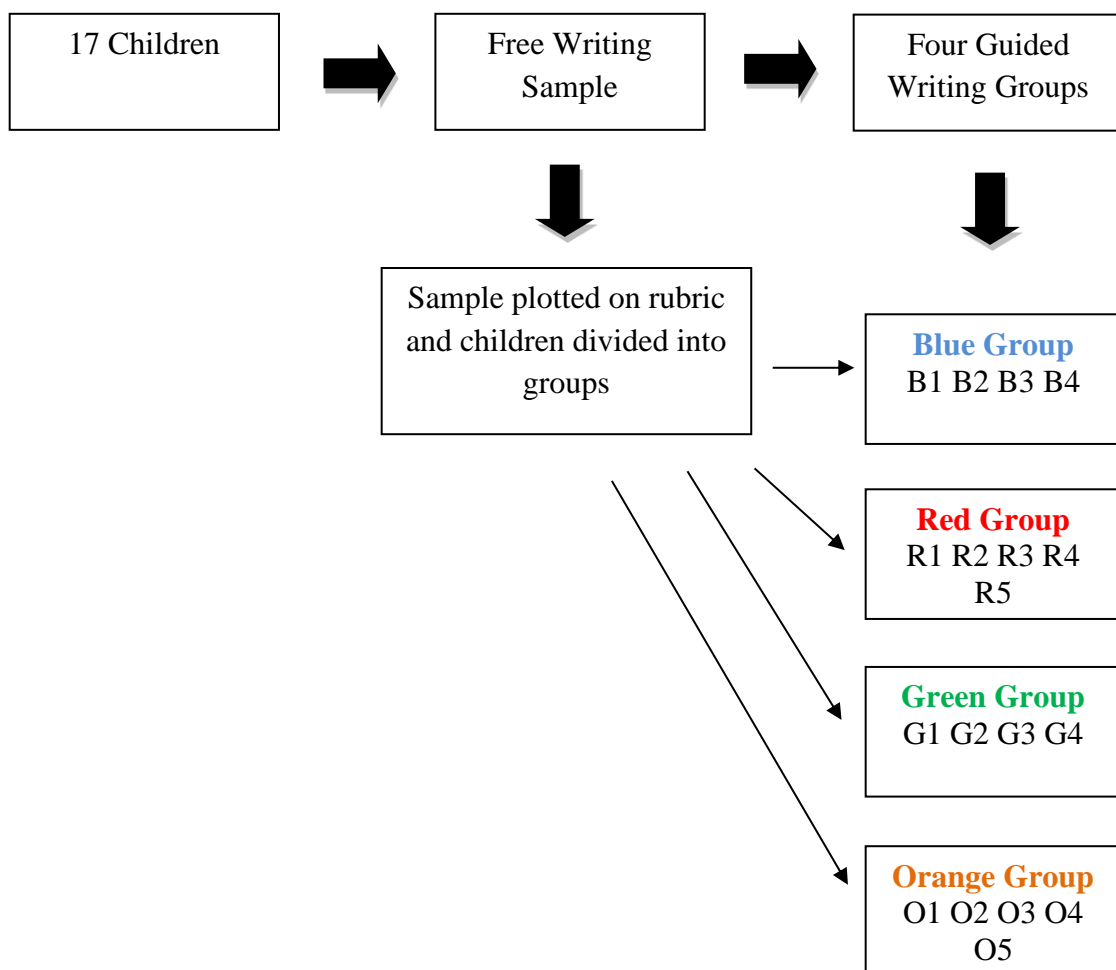
I value the children as co-participants in the research and view knowledge as being co-constructed. I will aim to capture their voice and perspective, respecting their opinions and outlook. Collecting evidence based on the children's thinking can "provide an invaluable complementary data source which add depth to any enquiry" (Baumfield et al., 2013: 41). Therefore, the research will have a duel focus on my perspective and the children's. Baumfield et al. (2013: 10) discusses three key focus areas which can be examined with regard to the learners' viewpoint: observed behaviours, evidence of learning and thinking and beliefs. Figure 3.2 maps out the instruments that will be used to examine the children's perspective.

Figure 3.2 Tracking the Children's Perspective

Observed Behaviours	Evidence of learning	Learner thinking and beliefs
• Observations • Reflective Journals	• Writing Samples • Conferencing Notes • Rubrics	• Questionnaire • Conference Notes • Observations

Three critical friends were selected to "provide support as well as constructively challenge and critique" (Sullivan et al., 2016: 27) my implementation, approach and teaching during the research. Critical friend one was selected on her knowledge and expertise of early writing and approaches to literacy. Critical friend two was chosen as they have taught my class the previous year therefore would have a good understanding of the children I am working with and they too have an expertise in early literacy. My third critical friend is undertaking the Masters in Education course and therefore is aware and understands the nature of the research and the importance of value-based education. Figure 3.3 illustrates data collected from researcher and critical friends.

Figure 3.3 Documenting the researcher's and critical friends' perspective
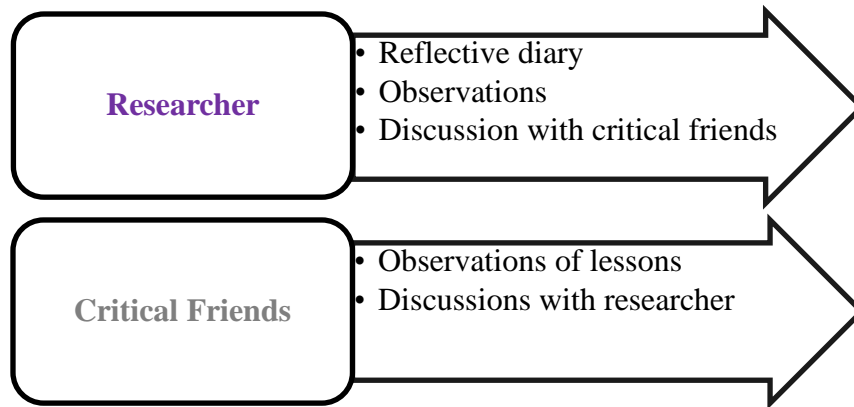
3.5 Research Procedure

Action research involves the following actions "plan, act, observe, reflect, construct a revised plan, act, observe, reflect" (Sullivan et al., 2016:75), known as an action research cycle. Each new cycle is informed by the researchers' reflections on the previous cycle. This study consisted of two action research cycles, however due to the pivotal role of reflection new insights were gained which led to various changes and adjustments of the planned research throughout each cycle.

Figure 3. 4 Action Research Cycle
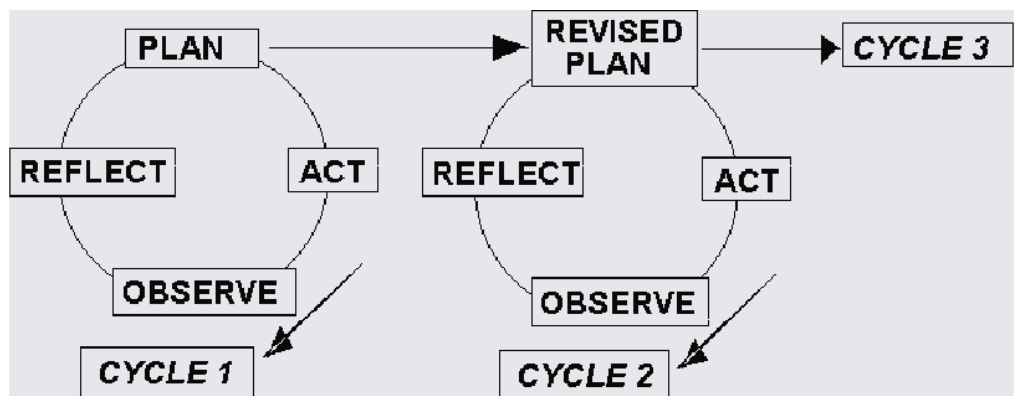
(Carr and Kemmis, 1986)

3.5.1 Reflection

Reflection played a central role throughout the research process. Essential to action research is reflection in order to "make meaning", to make sense of an experience

(Mezirow, 1990 cited in Sullivan et al., 2016: 26). During this study, I reflected on lessons and observations in order to "make meaning". Reflections guided my decision making and next steps in the research. Through reflecting I learned more about my practice and my understanding of that practice. Reflection ensured I was living more toward my values and having a child -centred approach. Sullivan et al. (2016: 26) explain "reflection is key to the process (identifying and articulating your educational values) and key to researching our practice to see if it matches our values". Reflection was a favourable method as it opened up the space for me to unpack and challenge any assumptions I may hold and to challenge any issues of power dynamics and hegemony that influence my practice and teacher identity (Brookfield, 2017). This is brought to the fore in two early reflections within the research. When reflecting on my teaching of sight words I questioned who decides the words the children should know, "*Have I become dependent on the publishers of books? Do I simply teach certain words the children "need" to successfully read a particular set of books? Could I be more child-centred in my selecting of words? How can I make the words more relevant to the children I teach?*" (Reflective Journal, 2018: 2). Similarly, when reflecting on my teaching of writing, prior to the intervention, I experienced a tension in my practice: "*I am challenged by the various needs in the class and I feel as though I am not showing empathy and patience towards the children. I think I need to slow the pace down and let the children experience enjoyment of writing. Today I feel guilty that the writing lesson was not differentiated effectively and although all the children tried their best for some reason I still commend and acknowledge the children with the neatest handwriting. I question why I do this? Do I value neat handwriting?*" (Reflective Journal, 2018: 36-37). A reflective journal was used to track my learning and thoughts throughout the study.

3.5.2 Reflective Journal

My reflective journal provided true and honest insights into my teaching and learning. I was enabled to critically reflect on areas within my practice that were not living towards my values. I used my reflective diary to have an internal conversation with myself as to why I found certain situations uncomfortable and why actions needed to be taken in order to overcome these areas of discomfort. Sullivan et al. (2016:79) justifies the use of reflective diaries as "they can provide data about changes in how you think, about your work and how you go about it. These changes are important because they track the story of one's learning, which is at the heart of generating theory from practice". Similarly, McNiff (2002) believes that reflective diaries serve as essential data at the end of the research as it illustrates the learning that has taken place "during action research it is important to not only show the actions of your research but also your learning involved throughout the process" (McNiff, 2002:n.p). Brookfield's (2017) reflective framework was used to ensure that various perspectives were considered within my reflections. The four lenses used by Brookfield include our own perspective, the children's views, our colleagues' thoughts and the literature. By utilising Brookfield's framework within my reflections, I got a more rounded view of all participant's ideas and viewpoints.

3.5.3 Research Cycle One

After ethical approval was granted, I gathered the children's initial thoughts about writing using a questionnaire (Appendix B). An open –ended questionnaire was chosen to capture the voice of the child. Burton et al. (2008:74) favours questionnaires as they "can generate a lot of information very quickly and easily". Likewise, Cohen et al. (2007:330) suggest that open-ended, qualitative, questionnaires "invite an honest, personal comment from the respondents" and "can catch the authenticity, richness, depth of response, honesty and candour which are the hallmarks of qualitative data".

The questionnaires were administered to the children on an individual basis. A colleague assisted me, and she administered the questionnaire with half of the children to overcome the issue of power dynamics whereby "having the researcher present may be threatening and exert a sense of compulsion, where the respondents may feel uncomfortable about completing the questionnaire" (Cohen et al., 2007:334). I conducted the questionnaire with the other half of the class. As I didn't pilot the questionnaire an ambiguous question was included which the children found challenging to answer. Future questionnaires were piloted with a group of children to ensure that the questions were easily understood.

To narrow the focus of my study, I considered which aspects of craft development I wished to focus on. I consulted with my supervisor and O'Rourke (2010), they advised keeping the focus explicit and manageable. Idea generation was chosen as the children had little experience with the writing process and "finding an idea is writer's job number one" (Culham, 2005: 66).

A rubric was designed using Culham's (2005:70) scoring guide for idea generation. An initial writing sample was used to plot each child on the rubric prior to the intervention. Collecting examples of the children's writing as a source of evidence will "help make the research practical, meaningful and relevant" (Baumfield et al., 2013:13). Using the rubric, four guided writing groups (blue, red, green and orange) were established consisting of children of the same ability. Through discussions with my critical friends and my supervisor, personal narrative writing was the most suitable genre to begin with as the children enjoy sharing their news and therefore would be interested in this aspect of writing.

The Writing Workshop approach was introduced to the class, and the emphasis on having a go and trying your best was at the fore. The children were addressed as "authors" from the beginning. The workshop occurred four times a week for 45 minutes each day. Each workshop included whole class (mini lesson), group (guided writing-using groups developed from rubric) and individual support (conferences).

Guided writing and conferencing took place during independent writing time. I met two guided writing groups and conducted 3-4 conferences daily (Appendix C).To ensure the children did not disturb the teacher during this time, a high vis jacket was worn by the teacher. Writing checklists, ABC charts and sight words were provided as supports during independent writing time (Appendix D).   A breakdown of a typical writing workshop is shown in figure 3.5.

Figure 3. 5 Breakdown of Writing Workshop
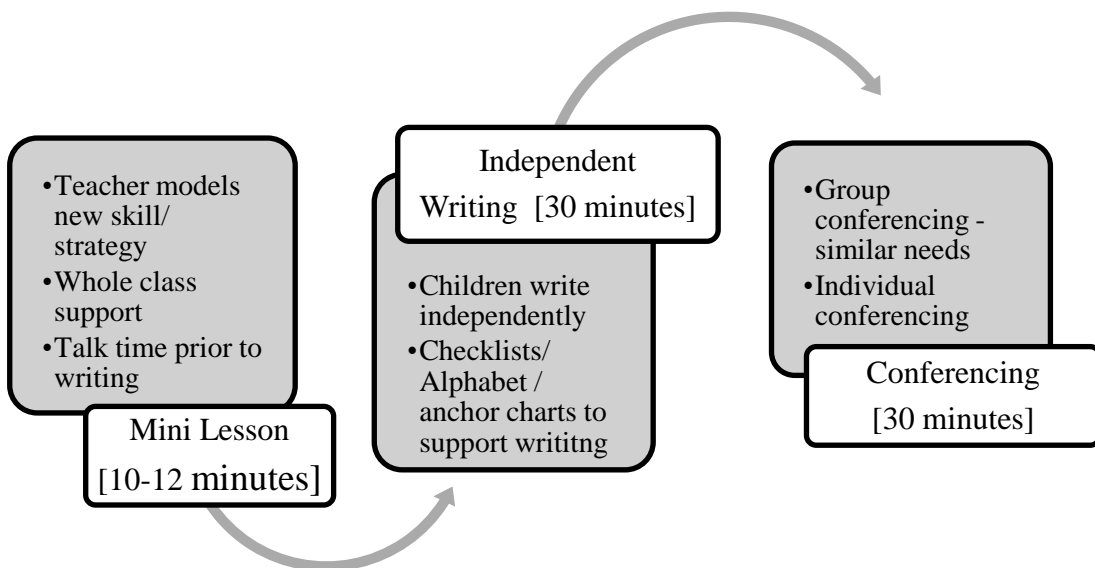
Initially, I had a predesigned order and plan of mini lessons that I could teach over the 12-week research period. I believed that using a scheme that had already worked for other teachers would be favourable. However, I soon realised that I was not living

towards my value of being child-centred as I was not taking the children's needs and abilities into perspective.

Through reflecting my practice developed, mini lessons became more focused on my observation notes taken during conferences of what the children needed to know in order to progress. I used AfL in the form of observations, writing samples, talking with the children to plan for more child focused teaching. The children began to lead the workshop as lessons focused on their needs and what they wanted to know.

Similarly, when first conducting conferences with the children I had planned exactly what I was going to teach each of the children. Through reflecting and discussions with my supervisor, I asked myself if I was truly meeting the children's needs and if I was teaching in line with their current level of development. This ability to "ask critical questions about your own practice and find answers for yourself" (McNiff, 2002: n.p.) is a key to action research. I took a step back and allowed the children lead the conferences; my teaching came from the children's own writing that day. Their writing became the context for teaching a new skill or strategy.

During conferencing, the child's strengths, writing goals and observations were noted (Appendix E). Time was spent observing the child as they engaged with their writing which was a good opportunity to "gather live data", in addition "observed incidents are less predictable there is often a freshness to this form of data collection that is often denied in other forms" (Cohen et al., 2007: 396). Observations were then reflected upon each day in my reflective journal. Limitations to observations are discussed by Cohen et al. (2007: 410), they suggest that there can be "selective attention of the observer" resulting in missing out on key data, "reactivity" whereby the participants change their

behaviour if they know they are being observed and "selective memory" which can occur if the observations are written up some time after the event.
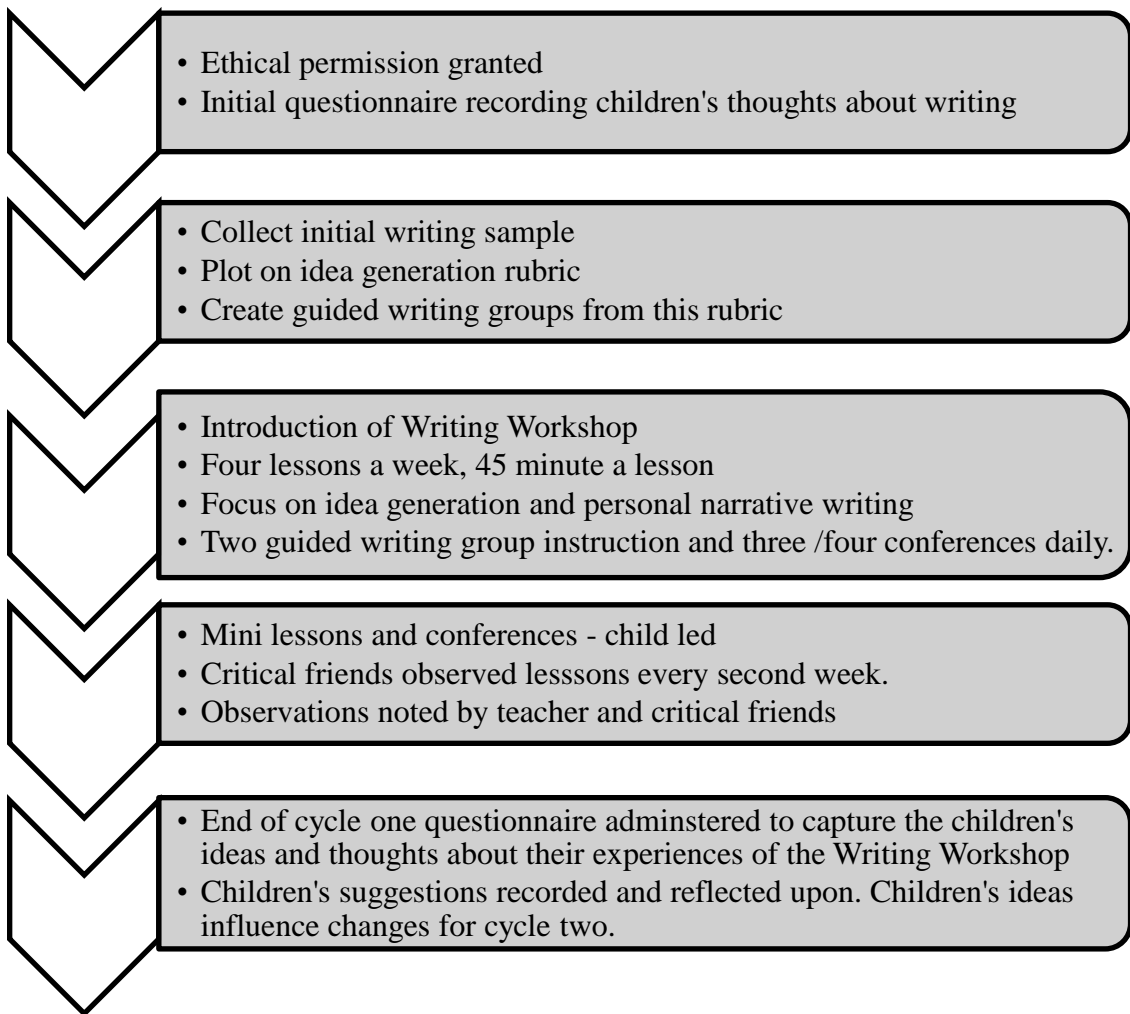
In order to overcome this limitation, critical friends were invited in every second week to observe my lessons. They offered a new lens in which I could evaluate and reflect on my own teaching and how the children are learning. Having a different perspective is vital as "a single observer will have an inherent bias". An example of the critical friend observation sheet is in appendices (Appendix F).

Towards the end of cycle one, I strived to ensure that I was listening to the children as co-participants in the research. A questionnaire was designed to capture their views and opinions about my teaching and their learning of writing (Appendix G). The questionnaire was administered by a student teacher to overcome the power limitation of the researcher conducting the questionnaires.

Key suggestions made by the children included read more stories "do more story time" (Child B1, February 2019), more teacher help with spelling words "help me spell and sound out new words" (Child O2, February 2019), talking about their stories first "talk with my talking buddy" (Child O5, February 2019) and making group stories.

I reflected on the children's ideas and implemented them in cycle two of the research. Figure 3.6 illustrates the main steps taken during cycle one of the research.

Figure 3.6 Steps taken during cycle one

- Ethical permission granted
- Initial questionnaire recording children's thoughts about writing

- Collect initial writing sample
- Plot on idea generation rubric
- Create guided writing groups from this rubric

- Introduction of Writing Workshop
- Four lessons a week, 45 minute a lesson
- Focus on idea generation and personal narrative writing
- Two guided writing group instruction and three /four conferences daily.

- Mini lessons and conferences - child led
- Critical friends observed lesssons every second week.
- Observations noted by teacher and critical friends

- End of cycle one questionnaire adminstered to capture the children's ideas and thoughts about their experiences of the Writing Workshop
- Children's suggestions recorded and reflected upon. Children's ideas influence changes for cycle two.

3.5.4 Research Cycle Two

Writing samples were collected and children were re-plotted on the rubric at the beginning of the cycle. From analysing the samples, I noted the children adding more detail to both their pictures and their writing. The children had begun writing across pages, making mini books and they were all writing about their own life. I observed some children relying on the same events to write about in every piece of their work and I recognised the need for using the children's own writing to inform future sight word lessons as they had common errors with words. Guided writing groups were amended according to the new samples.

I modelled constrained writing skills such as full stops and capital letters during mini lessons. The children were given a self-assessment questionnaire (Appendix H) whereby they identified elements of writing they were good at and areas they wanted to improve. I wanted to guarantee that I was listening to the children at all times and allowing them to lead the learning. However, I was surprised when most of the children had focused on the constrained skills in areas they wanted to improve.

Using the children's ideas, I focused on talk before, during and after writing. Talking buddies were introduced which enabled the children to discuss their idea for writing with a friend before engaging in independent writing. This ensured that all children were ready to write independently. As the children noticed the link between reading and writing, more books were used as a stimulus to write. I taught the children the connection comprehension strategy, the children made connections to books we read and then used these connections to write their own story. Story ideas included: If I had a superpower, if I could invent anything in the world and writing about a time they needed a wee. The children practiced their reading skills using their own writing. I recorded the children reading their stories to provide them with a purpose and audience for their work.
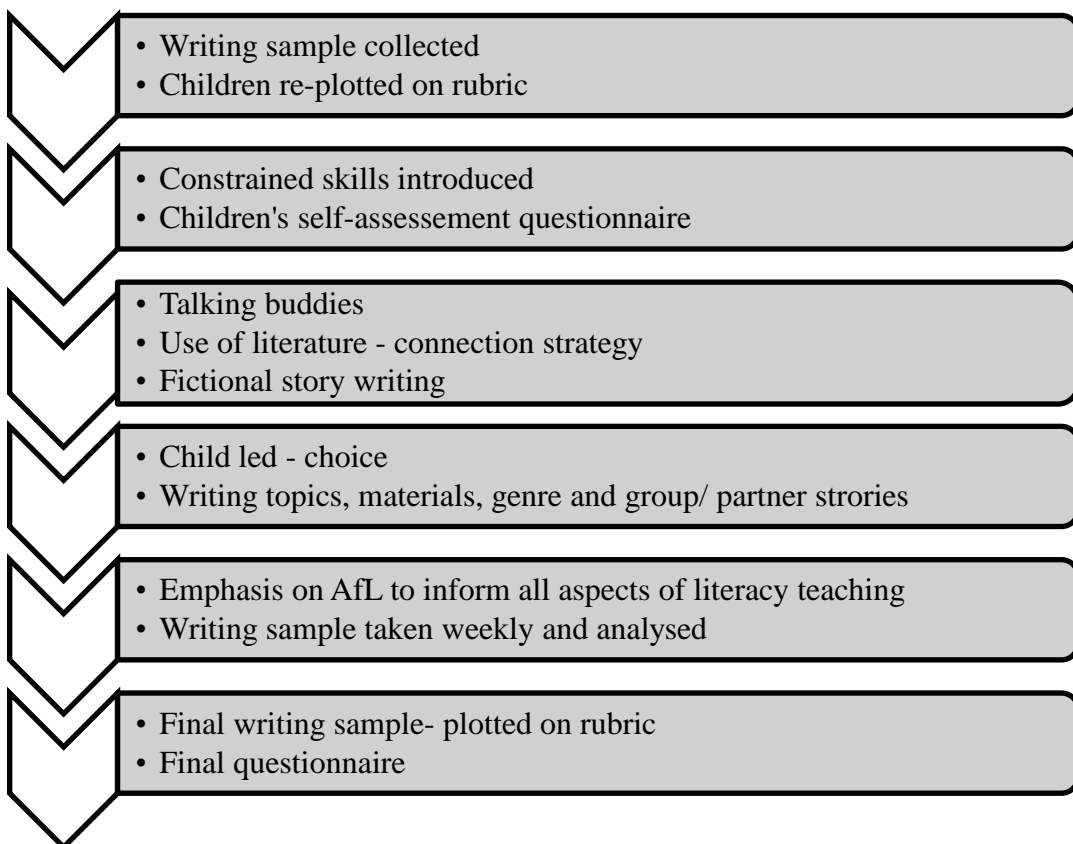
As my confidence grew, I offered the children more choice. They were able to write about the topic of their choice, they could write a book on their own, with a partner or in a small group, they had choice over personal or fictional narrative writing, writing paper and writing materials. By providing the children with choice I was living towards my value of being child centred.

My teaching became more child-led in cycle two. I used AfL to inform all aspects of my teaching. A sample of the children's writing was analysed each week, I noted areas for improvement in writing, word work and phonics (Appendix F). I used this

information when planning my sight word instruction and phonics teaching the following week, focusing on the children's exact needs. Furthermore, mini lessons were centred on the children's current writing development. Guided writing groups became more flexible as children moved around according to similar needs.

At the end of the study, the children's writing was plotted on the rubric and final developments were noted. A final questionnaire, administered by two teachers in my school, was carried out with the children and changes in thoughts about writing were recorded (Appendix J). A critical friend video recorded a full writing workshop lesson, and this was used for reflective purposes. An outline of cycle two is illustrated in Figure 3.7 below.

Figure 3. 7 Outline of Cycle Two

- Writing sample collected
- Children re-plotted on rubric

- Constrained skills introduced
- Children's self-assessement questionnaire

- Talking buddies
- Use of literature - connection strategy
- Fictional story writing

- Child led - choice
- Writing topics, materials, genre and group/ partner strories

- Emphasis on AfL to inform all aspects of literacy teaching
- Writing sample taken weekly and analysed

- Final writing sample- plotted on rubric
- Final questionnaire

3.6 Data

3.6.1 Data Collection

The data was collected primarily during the Writing Workshop. Critical friends provided constructive feedback during observations. Questionnaires were used to track the children's thinking and voice. Figure 3.8 illustrates the data collection tools and how often the data was gathered.

Figure 3.8 Data Collection Tools

Reflections	**Questionnaire**	**Writing Samples**
Reflections will be recorded daily	A pre, during and post intervention questionnaire	Three samples (pre, during and post intervention) and samples plotted on rubric
Teacher Observations	**Critical Friend Observations**	**Assessment Notes**
Conference notes and observations will inform teacher reflections	Two observations during each research cycle	Weekly basis from writing samples.

3.6.2 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to examine the data. As the data was qualitative in nature thematic analysis is a favourable methodology as it provides "rich and detailed account of the data" (Braun and Clarke, 2006:5). Thematic analysis involved the following "identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within the data" (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 6). It is important to note that the themes identified were not necessarily the themes that appeared the most in the data but the ones that captured something

important in relation to the research question (Braun and Clarke , 2006). I utilised Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phase approach to analyse the data.

Phase One: I carried out multiple readings of the data set and began to recognise some meanings and patterns.

Phase Two: The data set was typed up on to the computer, I colour coded different patterns within the data to generate initial codes. At the end of this phase I had 29 codes from the data.

Phase Three: The codes were sorted into different themes: main themes and sub themes.

Phase Four: The themes were refined and reviewed; some themes were collapsed into sub themes. I had to ensure that the themes represented the data set accurately and answered my research question.

Phase Five: The themes were defined and named, illustrated in Figure 3.9 below.

Figure 3.9 Themes and Sub themes

Theme One: Having a child-centred approach to the teaching of writing

- Choice
- Assessment for Learning
- Teacher Support

Theme Two: Differentiatin and supporting children on their writing journey

- Talk
- Literature to enrich writing
- Drawings
- Motivation and children's awareness of writing needs

Phase Six: Themes were written up and discussed. The themes will be examined in chapter four.

When the themes were established, I used Brookfield's (2017) reflective framework to analyse the data through the four lenses: my own perspective, the children's view, colleague's outlook and the literature. This is evident in the data analysis.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was sought and received from the Board of Management, the children, their parents and critical friends to take part in the study. Adequate information was provided to all participants in the research and an information afternoon was held for parents to address any questions. Anonymity was upheld at all times. Codes were designed for all children and were used throughout the study. The data was collected in an honest, caring manner and was stored in a locked cabinet to ensure confidentiality and privacy for all participants. All participants had the right to withdraw at any stage during the research without consequence. Data was signed and dated to ensure credibility and reliability. The data will be stored for a period of time in accordance with Maynooth's ethics policy. See appendix K for ethical forms.

3.7.1 Research Involving Children

As children are a vulnerable group, I adhered to Children's First Guidelines, GDPR, Maynooth University Ethics Policy and my school's child safeguarding policy during all stages of the research process. When carrying out research with children, Dockett et al. (2009) invites us to consider for potential ethical tensions: issues of consent, considering who is represented in the research, interpreting data and the impact of the children's participation.

3.7.1.1 Informed Consent

Dockett et al. (2009:286) asks the question "what constitutes informed consent in research with young children?" In legal terms, once the children's parents/ guardians have given consent then the children can participate however during this study I also received the children assent whereby they agreed to participate in the study themselves. When gaining the children's assent one child decided that he did not want to be involved. I had a discussion with the child and explained that he could still be involved in the writing lessons, but his work and contributions would not be shared outside the classroom. The child agreed to this and his work was omitted from the data analysis. Informed consent was an ongoing process, during each step of the study I explained to the children why I was giving them a questionnaire and what I was going to use their writing samples for. The children could choose to not be involved in particular elements if they felt uncomfortable.

3.7.1.2 Representations in the research

This research invited all the children in my class to participate in the study, no child was excluded. This insured that children from different backgrounds and experiences were represented during the study. Dockett et al .(2009) raises the tension of who is represented in the research when researchers self-select children to be involved which does not respect and recognise the diversity that children bring to the study.

3.7.1.3 Interpreting Data

An ethical issue raised by Dockett et al. (2009) concerns the children's role in interpreting data collected about them. The children's role is not only to generate data, but their voice should be considered when analysing the data (Dockett et al., 2009: 290). They found that researchers usually draw on their own expertise to interpret data with little consideration of the children's views. To overcome this tension, I used feedback loops in my classroom whereby I discussed trends that arose from questionnaires and

my own observations. The children and I engaged in dialogue about these issues and they helped validate these findings. I used individual conferences as an opportunity to listen to the children and record what they were noticing about their own writing and asking them if my observations were in line with how they felt their writing was going.

3.7.1.4 Impact of Children's Participation

Often in research, the children's views are sought but little feedback is provided in return (Dockett et al., 2009). It is important to treat the children with respect as co-participants by providing regular feedback and sharing with them any changes to policy or practice that has occurred from their participation. As my practice changed and new approaches were used, I recognised the children's role by explaining that I listened to their ideas and feedback in my questionnaires and from working with the children in small groups and individually.

3.8 Validity, Reliability and Credibility

Validity is the process of "showing the truthfulness of something" (McNiff and Whitehead, 2010: 190). As the overall aim of this research is to generate new knowledge it is vital that my claims to knowledge and the process in which this knowledge was created is open to the scrutiny of others for validation. Presenting my research will strengthen the validity of my study as if I was to simply make a claim based on my own opinions and experiences then the research could be viewed as invalid (McNiff and Whitehead, 2010: 194).

A mixture of personal validity and social validity was used during the research. Personal validity was achieved as I am satisfied that I am now living more in the direction of my values (McNiff and Whitehead, 2010: 195), the values that were originally identified as being denied in my practice. Social validity (Habermas, 1976) was the main process in

which validity of my research was obtained. Habermas (1976) believed that we can "use dialogue to come to a consensus of agreement on what is valid…it is through dialogue that the validity of your research claims in some educational settings can be challenged" (Sullivan et al., 2016: 103). Social validity was sought through the use of a validation group, critical friends and feedback loops.

3.8.1 Validation Groups

When establishing a validation group, it is important that it "consists of individuals whose opinions and capacity for making critical and balanced judgements you trust" (McNiff and Whitehead, 2010: 197). The members of the validation group need to be prepared to offer critical feedback. A validation group was established consisting of five members of staff from my school who agreed to be a part of this group on a voluntary basis. Two meetings were held during the research, an initial meeting gave me the opportunity to explain the research to the participants of the group and discuss how I plan to gather data to illustrate changes to my practice. In the final meeting I shared my claims to knowledge with the group and showed evidence of the data collected to back up my claims. The participants were invited to ask questions, offer feedback and ultimately validate that the data I had collected supports and strengthens my research claims.

3.8.2 Critical Friends

During the research process critical friends offered their opinions and advice. The role of critical friends was to discuss the progress of my research, they gave advice on different directions I could take whenever I came to a new finding and they were pivotal to validating my claims to knowledge. Sullivan et al. (2016:118) suggests the appropriateness "to invite your critical friend to observe some of your classroom practice, so as to be well placed to note changes and improvements in your practice".

During my study critical friends were invited in to observe me teaching once a week. They made observational notes and validated whether I was living in the direction of my values and if I was showing more support and being more child-centred in my teaching of writing.

3.8.3 Feedback Loops

As I view the children as co-participants in the research I strived to give the children opportunities to validate the data collected on them using feedback loops and regular formative dialogue (Baumfield et al., 2013). I consulted with the pupils about writing lessons, I shared some observations I had made and asked for their own opinions about my teaching, their learning and my interpretations of what I noticed was happening during writing time. The children's feedback was used to inform future lessons and it helped to validate the data I had collected during the process.

Figure 3.10 Feedback Loops
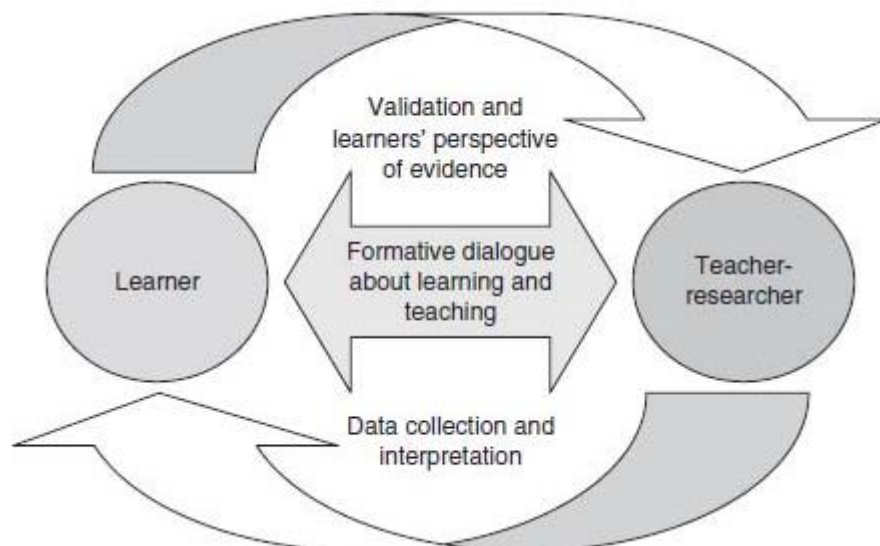
(Baumfield et al., 2013: 96)

3.8.4 Triangulation

Triangulation is the process of "cross-checking your work from different perspectives, which can show the accuracy and validity of information you gather" (Sullivan et al., 2016: 82). Triangulation was used to enhance the validity of the research claims as "by bringing together data from different sources, by means of different methods and reflecting different perspectives, the validity of the research findings can be enhanced and trustworthiness of the research process can be strengthened (Denzin, 1970 and Elliot, 1991 cited it Burton et al., 2008: 170). Four types of triangulation put forward by Denzin (1970 cited in Campbell et al., 2004: 85) were considered during the research:

1. Methodological

2. Investigator

3. Theory

4. Data

Methodological triangulation involves "comparing findings from different methodological tools such as quantitative and qualitative data" (Sullivan et al., 2016: 107). Both quantitative (rubric) and qualitative (reflections, writing samples, questionnaires) were used to gather data.

Investigator triangulation occurred by cross checking my observations and notes with critical friends and the children. Critical friends viewed my teaching and commented on my classroom practice.

I engaged with literature throughout the research and constantly turned to theory when a new observation or outlook was documented, this was used as theory triangulation.

Data triangulation involved collecting data from multiple people (researcher, pupils, critical friends) and collecting data at various times.

A variety of triangulation approaches not only helps validate the data but "provides you with innovative ways to analyse your new learning from your action research project and shows openness to critique and challenge (Sullivan et al., 2016: 107).

3.8.5 Reliability and Credibility

Reliability and credibility of the research was addressed at both personal and social levels. Personal reliability and credibility were achieved through the accurate dating and recording of all data collected during the research (Sullivan et al., 2016: 105). To attain social reliability and credibility the research was made public and open to the critique of others (Sullivan et al., 2016: 106) through the use of validation groups, triangulation, meetings with critical friends and presenting my research to fellow colleagues and researchers at the end of the research process. I presented my research to my fellow staff members during a professional development day, critique and questions were invited. My research paper has been accepted at an International literacy conference and will be presented later this year.

3.9 Conclusion

The research question "How can I foster a more child-centred approach to the teaching of writing?" was formulated through reflecting on my current practices and my assumptions I held about the teaching of writing. A self-study action research approach was undertaken to investigate this question with an emphasis on generating qualitative data. Two action research cycles were carried out and data collection tools were selected to ensure that all participants' views in the research were considered. Ethical considerations were discussed and particular tensions that exist when working with children were addressed. A detailed description of how reliability, credibility and validity were achieved during the process is illustrated. Thematic data analysis was

used to examine the data and define themes and sub themes within the data. These will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

Chapter Four: Data Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Introduction to Data Analysis

This chapter will present and discuss relevant and appropriate data collected during the study. The aim of this chapter is to analyse themes relating to my research question "How can I foster a child-centred approach to the teaching of writing? The data will be critically analysed using Brookfield's (2017) lenses: my own perspective, the children's views, colleagues' outlook and the theoretical stance. By examining the data using a variety of perspectives, the data will be triangulated adding to its reliability and credibility. Strengths and limitations of the data collected will be considered. Using thematic data analysis two themes were identified, as seen in figure 4.1 below. These themes will be the focus of discussion throughout this chapter. The impact of these themes on my practice and professional learning will be considered during the discussion.

Figure 4.1 Themes and sub themes identified in the data
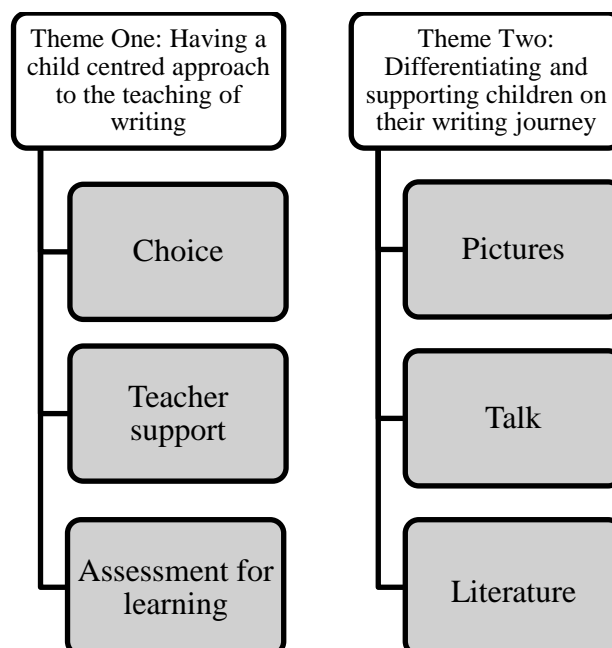
4.2 Theme One: The Importance of having a Child-centred Approach to the Teaching of Writing

Prior to the intervention, writing instruction focused on shared writing activities with the teacher as scribe. Writing topics were dictated by the teacher based on the monthly theme and the children's role to transcribe writing from the board. Independent writing consisted of the children adding their own sentence to the whole class piece. I reflect back on my old style of teaching and experience myself as a "living contradiction" (Whitehead, 1969) as my instruction was heavily teacher led. This does not correlate with my value of being child centred.

During this study, the Writing Workshop was the primary method of formal writing instruction. This approach enabled the children to lead their own learning as they chose their writing topics and their own interests and ideas were at the fore. This compliments my Froebelian philosophy as the children were leading the curriculum rather than the curriculum leading the child (Brown, 2012:30). My practice became more child centred as through relevant assessment my lessons were aimed at writing strategies the children needed in order to progress. Furthermore, my instruction was child focused as using a variety of whole class, group and individual lessons facilitated me to support the children according to their current level of writing development.

The importance of having a child-centred approach to the teaching of writing will be discussed under three sub themes: choice, teacher support and assessment for learning. See Figure 4.2 below.

Figure 4.2 Theme One: Child-centred approach to the teaching of writing
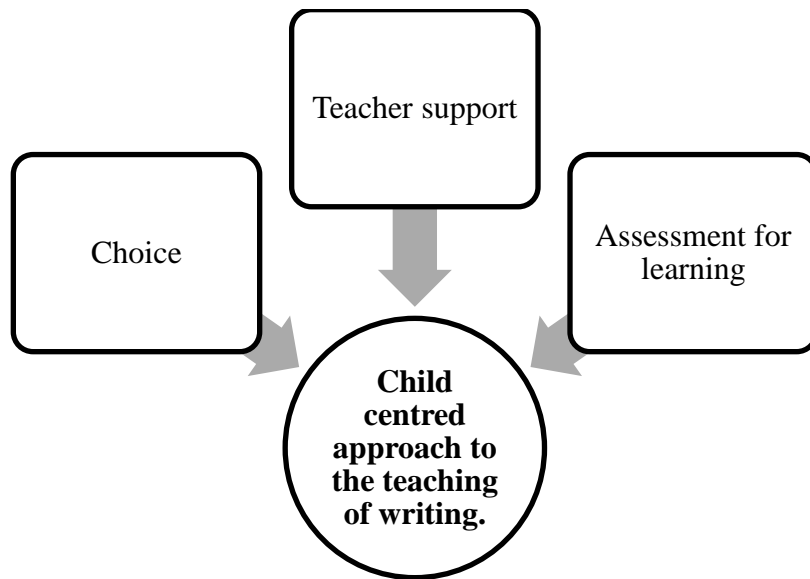
4.2.1 Choice

Providing the children with choice over writing topics and writing genre ensured that my writing instruction was child led. During independent writing time the children were encouraged to include their own life in their work. Initially, I was hesitant about giving young children choice over their work however the children embraced the opportunity and were able to make informed decisions about their writing. Graves (1994) and Calkins (1986) highlight the importance of giving children choice and ownership over their writing as fundamental to successful writing experiences. The children commented:

- "I like using my imagination and write whatever I feel like" (Child O4, February 2019).

- "I like when I get to write about my sister, my mum, my dad and when I go to boxing and football" (Child 05, April 2019).

- "You get to make stories fiction and other ones" (Child 01, April 2019).

IES/NCCA. (2018: 34) explain "when students choose their own topics, they may become more engaged and motivated to write. Such engagement and motivation could potentially lead students to write more frequently and become more involved in the writing process and the writing community". This idea is developed by Dennis and Votteler (2013) "when children self-select a topic they will become more motivated to create, complete and share their story with others because it is more meaningful for them" (Dennis and Votteler, 2013: 441).

My perspective is evident in my reflective journal

"*Today I considered the idea of choice during independent writing time. I want the children to enjoy writing and to have the intrinsic motivation to write. As I have been reading more fictional stories to the children, I think it is important to allow the children full choice over the type of story they want to write. One of the children came in this morning and the first thing she wanted to know is "are we writing nonsense stories today?" This new realm of fictional writing has ignited a new motivation to write. I wonder how my outlook on writing as a child would have been different if I had been given more choice over writing topics. Would I have struggled with writing stories if my own interests were reflected in the writing task? My own experience of writing in primary school was very much teacher led and I had no confidence in my ability to write as a result. I hope that by giving the children choice and allowing them to take charge of their own writing I will be developing life-long writers*" (Reflective Journal, 2019, entry fifty seven: 113).

Reflecting on this entry, I feel that it fails to articulate why I had initially been reluctant to give the children choice. As a newly qualified teacher (NQT), there was a certain pressure associated with handwriting and having the children at a certain stage in their writing development. I didn't feel that allowing the children to write freely would

develop these skills and strategies. I believed the children couldn't engage properly in choice-based writing until they understood the constrained skills and had a bank of sight words that they could write. However, I now acknowledge that children should be given opportunities to engage in free writing from the start of school to build on their writing confidence. If children are engaged in mark making from the beginning of infants whereby, they tell their stories using drawing and marks they would be more enthusiastic to write as they get older.

During cycle two, I noticed the children's desire to create books with each other, "group stories" (Child O4, February 2019) and "make a book with your talking buddy" (Child O3, February 2019) were suggested by the children as ways to help them with their writing. This corresponds to Calkins (1986) , she explained that "writers need ownership over the process , and that students want to confer with each other as well as us" (Calkins, 1986:164). As I value the children's voice, I offered them the option to craft books with friends. It was challenging to let go and allow the children to lead the workshop. However, it is clear that the children enjoyed having the flexibility to work alongside their friends during writing time. The value of social interaction in emergent writing is highlighted by Vygotsky (1978). In the final questionnaire when answering "What helped you with your writing?" their responses favoured working with other children:

- "My partner helps with the drawings. I am the author and she is the illustrator" (Child O3, April 2019)
- "my friends looking and helping me write and when they stretch out the words for me" (Child B4, April 2019).

Furthermore, one child reported,

"my favourite part of writing is when I do stories with other people because it gets me more ideas" (Child O3, April 2019).

The data illustrates that even young children enjoy and thrive on having a choice over their learning. By giving the children choice over writing topics, genre and independent or group stories, see figure 4.3 below, I have displayed a value of being child-centred in my teaching of writing. I will now discuss the role of teacher support and how it impacted on having a child-centred approach.

Figure 4.3 Examples of Personal and Fictional Narrative and Partner Book

Personal Narrative: Child O3 (17/01/19)

"I went to the park with my mum and my dad and me and we were on the swings and we fed the ducks and we went to the slide when I went down the slide I was excited."

Fictional Narrative: Child G1 (02/03/19)

My Super Power

"My super is very fast I help people. When they fall off their balcony 'I will save you', said me."

Partner Book: Child G4 and Child O3

4.2.2 Teacher Support

The variety and frequency of teacher support provided to the children resulted in child-centred writing instruction. The support provided during mini lessons, group and individual conferences was purposeful and child led, guided by the children's current needs and abilities and informed by assessment for learning. Kennedy and Shiel (2014:28) favour this style of support stating that "the content of the whole class, group and individual mini lessons is based on ongoing formative assessment of children's learning needs".

Modelling writing strategies was paramount to the success of the intervention. The children commented,

- "It helps when she draws her story first" (Child O2, March 2019) and

- "When teacher does some writing then I get an idea" (Child G4, April 2019).

Critical friends remarked on how the teacher,

- "Clearly and explicitly modelled strategy (CF1, 01/02/19)" and

- "Modelled previous strategies-stretching out words, labelling their pictures. This helped to scaffold the children as they moved to independent writing" (CF1, 01/02/19).

Dennis and Votteler (2013: 442) discuss the importance of modelling "it is crucial for teachers to model and think out loud about the writing process. The teacher's writing should mirror where the children are developmentally". Likewise, in a study carried out by Kennedy (2010) the metacognitive approach to strategy instruction was praised as a key tool to support children "teachers explicitly modelled and demonstrated strategies within a think-aloud approach that illuminated the use of the strategy by making visible the invisible thought processes of expert readers and writers"(Kennedy, 2010:6).

Mini lessons, guided writing and individual conferencing were implemented to support the children. Enhancing the support I provide across all aspects of my teaching is critical, Calkins explains "adjusting and differentiating your teaching across all realms of your writing workshop (individual, small group and full class) will provide students with everything they need to have success in their writing lives, both inside and outside of the classroom walls" (Calkins, 2015:39) My critical friends observed, "great use of conferencing - group, pair and individual" (CF2, 08/01/19), with "a clear value of care displayed, teacher zoned in on two children who required scaffolding and encouraged and helped them with their writing, reminding them of strategies to use" (CF1, 01/02/19).

The children felt supported on an individual basis and when asked how the teacher helps them, the responses included,

- "she comes over to you and says "what are you working on? If you are stuck on a word, she writes it up on the whiteboard, so you won't get it wrong" (Child O4, March 2019)

- "she helps me doing words with "stretching out" or clapping" (Child B4, March 2019) and

- "my teacher checks on me to see what I am doing or if I need help" (Child R2, March 2019).

Although the children's responses all favour teacher support, I realise a potential bias in the question posed to the children. When asking the children "how does the teacher help you?" I was eliciting positive comments. A more appropriate question might be "what helps you during independent writing?" This would encourage more open-ended responses, not necessarily directed at the teacher.

Conferencing supported children on an individual basis. Hale (2018: 651) endorses conferencing as they "give us a unique opportunity to teach students about something they are doing well in writing that they might not already know". Similarly, Calkins (2015:37) highlights conferencing as a method to "invent instruction on the spot to address problems you may not even have known existed ". Conferencing favoured child-centred support as the children's writing led the conference and the teaching objective stemmed from the conversation with the child. At the end of each conference, the child selected a goal that they wanted to work on in their writing, see Figure 4.4 below.

Figure 4. 4 Conference Notes

When reflecting on my observations in the classroom, I realised more flexibility in my writing instruction was needed to teach in accordance with the children's needs.

"*By letting go and working from where the children are at, I will be supporting the children more effectively. The lessons will be authentic and sincere focusing on what the children need to be taught in order to progress with their writing. I will be teaching with the children rather than teaching to the children*" (Reflective Journal, 2019: 94-95).

Guided writing groups were established, and children were grouped according to similar needs and abilities. I differentiated my teaching more effectively as "in small groups, teachers can tailor instruction to meet the specific needs of each child…teachers can teach to the specific strengths and weaknesses of each child (Wasik, 2008: 519). Objectives for small group instruction was based on AfL carried out on the children's writing. This allowed me to be child-centred as my instruction was based on what the

children needed to know to progress. Figure 4.5 below illustrates two levels of conferencing used to support children during the Writing Workshop intervention. Objectives in these plans were child-centred based on children's previous writing samples. The colour coded groups are guided writing groups and the letter and number codes are for individual children.

Figure 4. 5 Weekly Conferencing Plan (group and individual support)

Child friendly resources were provided to support the children during independent writing.

A writing checklist guided the children through the writing process and a visual cue with each step helped to reach all learners. Each child had an alphabet chart with pictures to aid them with their letter formation and sounds. My critical friend commented on the resources used to differentiate my teaching, "great scaffolding, talking buddy puppet, visual aids, visual checklists and prompts" (CF2, 08/01/19), and a child referred to how the teacher, "helps me look at the ABC chart" (Child B4, March 2019) during writing time.

Figure 4.6 below are examples of resources provided to the children.

Figure 4. 6 Resources to support children
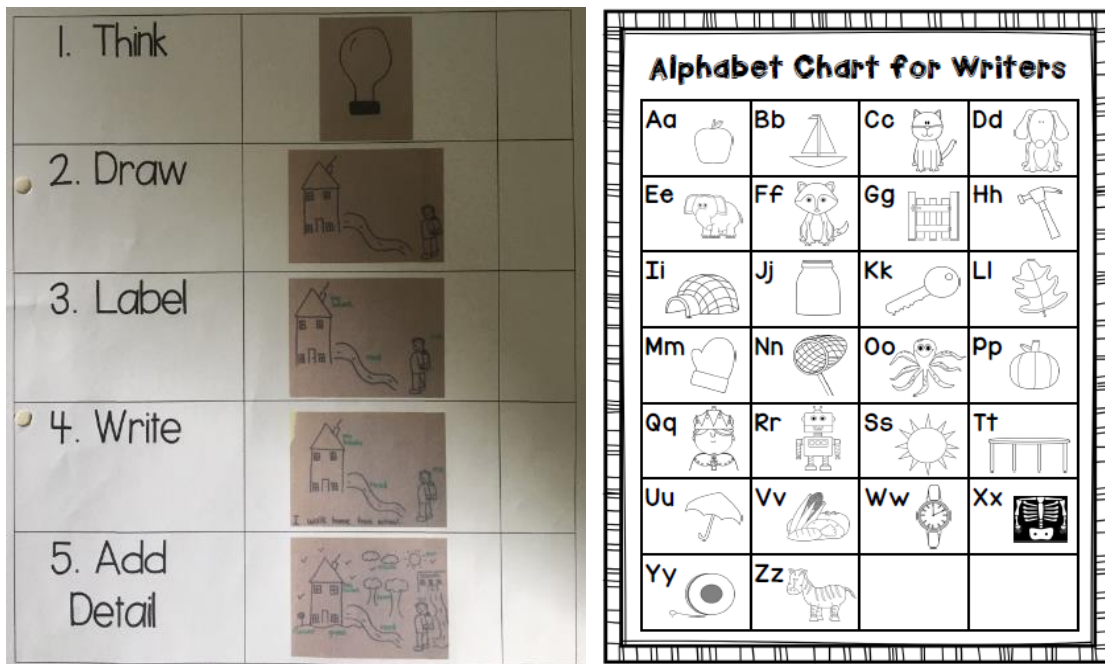
Figure 4.7 below illustrates the levels and variety of teacher support utilised in order to achieve a child-centred approach to writing.

Figure 4.7 Levels and variety of teacher support
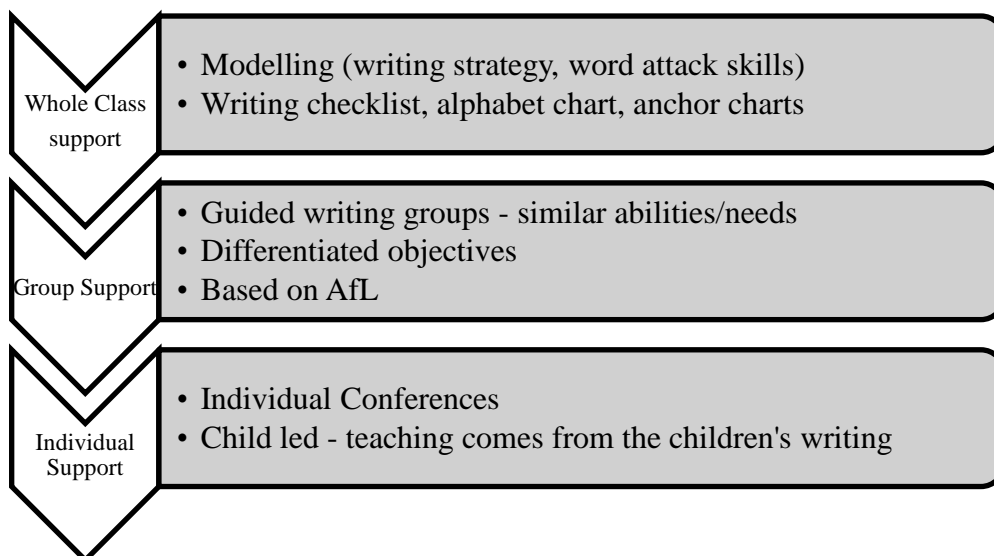
The next section will examine the role of AfL and how it promoted child-centred teaching during writing instruction.

4.2.3 Assessment for Learning (AfL)

The use of AfL was critical in developing a more child focused approach to writing as I was enabled to pinpoint the children's writing development and plan future lessons and conferences according to their current needs. It facilitated the implementation of the New Primary Language Curriculum (NCCA, 2015) as I was able to plot the children on different milestones.

When I initially began planning the intervention, I researched other teacher's schemes of work particularly focusing on the content and order of the mini lessons. My aim was to have a pre-designed plan of what I was going to teach each week. I originally designed a 12-week programme based on lessons I had researched; my assumption was that these lessons would be successful as they have been tried and tested by other practitioners. However, at the end of cycle one I realised that this process was not the most effective or child-centred method:

"*How would a pre-designed scheme of lessons suit the children in my class? I don't believe in a one size fits all model so how did I think that following an already designed plan would work for me? Was I trying to make the children fit this programme or was I living towards my values and adapting the programme to be more in line with the children's currents level of development? This experience highlighted a larger issue to me in relation to schemes made by publishers and sold to schools and branded as "best practice". My experience of using literacy schemes and workbooks made me feel under pressure as a teacher to meet high/unrealistic goals for the children in my class. If I had followed these schemes I would not be teaching in a child-centred manner…After discussing similar issues with my supervisor she asked me to think about the role of assessment and how I was using assessment of the children's writing to inform future lessons. This made me more aware of examining the children's writing, my notes form*

conferences and observations to inform my planning, by doing this I am ensuring that I am attending to the children's most pressing needs and putting my lessons in line with what the children need there and then to progress" (Reflective Journal, 2019:n.d.).

Using assessment to inform my practice ensures that I am more child-centred as I will be planning in accordance with the children's readiness. Kennedy and Shiel (2014: 98) discuss the need for AfL during the Writing Workshop "the content of the whole class, group and individual mini lessons is based on ongoing formative assessment of children's learning needs derived from anecdotal records taken during conferences with children, interactions amongst children in the share sessions and assessment of writing samples". Spending time getting to know the children "listening to children- taking lessons from them" (Calkins, 1986:10) and "observing them as they write and meeting with them in conferences to learn about their interests and hopes for their writing" (Serravallo, 2017: 2) is essential in order to support the children effectively.

During the study, conference notes, observational notes and children's writing samples informed my planning and grouping of the children. Writing samples not only informed writing lessons but also helped me "*identify common mistakes that the children are making and use this information when planning word work and new sight words*" (Reflective Journal, 2019: 99-100). Calkins mirrors this observation "if you are keeping an eye on your students' progress, this means you can individualise your instruction, helping students with the exact skills they need to work on and noticing which teaching strategies work best" (Calkins, 2015: 3). Figure 4.8 below is an example of AfL and how it is used to inform future writing lessons, word work and phonics instruction. The children's writing was analysed and areas for improvement in writing strategies, phonics and word work was noted.

Figure 4.8 Example of AfL notes

Child:	Writing:	Phonics:	Word work:
O5	Full stops Speech Feelings	ee- need oo- football, room	then
O3	Use speech in text Feelings	Ing- crying	then was but
O2	Adding more detail 5 w's Feelings, speech		when was
G4	Speech Feelings Full stops		was
R1	Full stops Capital I Speech in text	ee- need	when was
R5	Adding more detail Using 5 w's to plan story Feelings	ed- ending needed	when school

While carrying out assessment I noticed the children's own awareness and understanding of their writing needs. The children articulated what aspects of their writing they wanted to improve. They developed a new vocabulary around writing which they referred to when discussing their work with teachers and other children. Questionnaires illuminate the children's attentiveness to their own needs,

- "I need some help with my letters" (Child R2, February 2019)

- "teacher helps me with words, pictures and sentences" (Child G2, February 2019)

and when asked what helps you with your writing one child stated,

- "by stretching out the words and sounding out hard words" (Child O1, April 2019).

As the children's awareness of their own needs increased my style of conferencing changed to a more child led approach whereby the children self-selected their own writing goals (see figure 4.9 below). From an early stage the children were self-assessing their work, even at a young age of five and six, the children were able to choose an area

for improvement. In week three of the research, the children were already selecting targets, examples include:

- "adding more labels, detail and sentences" (Child O2, January 2019) and

- "getting all the words right without any help" (Child O3, January 2019).

An interesting pattern in the data, highlights the children's writing objectives became more focused on the constrained skills of writing as their exposure to the workshop increased. "Neat writing" (Child O3, February 2019), "using speech marks and speech bubbles" (Child O4, March 2019) and "putting full stops at the end of sentences" (Child O1, March 2019). Reflecting on this data, it is evident that once I modelled and drew the children's attention to constrained skills, they became focused on these elements. It forces me to consider whether we really need to introduce these skills to young children at all. Should we focus more on enjoyment and writing craft and delay these skills until the children are confident in their ability to create a story independently. In future, I will be more aware of the children's readiness before teaching constrained skills. This interrogates my prior assumption that children could not engage in free writing unless they understood capital letter, finger spaces and full stops.

Figure 4. 9 Children's Self-Assessment
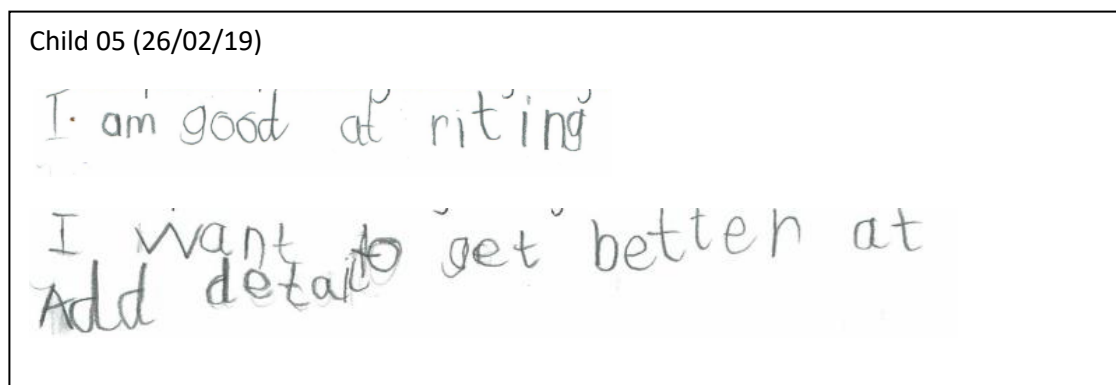
Child 05 (26/02/19)

I. am good at riting

I want to get better at
Add detail

Child R5 (26/02/19)

I am good at doing my setts

"I am good at doing my sentences".

What parts of writing do you want to improve?
I want to get better at doing
my folstps

Child G3 (26/02/19)

I am good at neatwriting.
I am good at sreing pienur

"I am good at neat writing. I am good at drawing pictures".

Through analysing the data and examining the perspectives of the children, my colleagues, my own outlook and the literature it is evident that having a child-centred approach is important when teaching writing. By providing the children with choice, supporting the children throughout the writing process and using AfL to inform future lessons I have shown that I am living more closely towards my value of having a child-centred approach. The next section will discuss the methods of support that help children on their writing journey.

4.3 Theme Two: Differentiating and Supporting Children on their Writing Journey

This study aimed to discover which methods of support are suited to the children in my class when teaching writing. From examining the data, I am satisfied that I now know

what strategies help children when learning to write and I am more aware of what I can do as a teacher to support early writers.

When beginning the Writing Workshop, it was fundamental to create a "have a go" attitude and to praise all children's efforts. I firmly believe that the atmosphere for writing established in my classroom had a direct impact on the children's confidence, motivation and enjoyment of writing and the children become "deeply and personally involved in writing" (Calkins, 1986: 5). These conditions were reflected upon from the outset

"I feel that our teaching of writing is too formalised. We don't give the children opportunities to play with writing in their early years in school. For the children it must be a shock to the system when they go from having little experience of writing in junior infants to being expected to write for a variety of purposes in senior infants. I believe therefore in the importance of creating a safe environment for emergent writers where all children's efforts are praised and celebrated. …Going forward I need to ensure that the children are willing to have a go and this can only be achieved by the atmosphere and environment I create in the classroom…The more experience and exposure the children have with the writing process the more confident they will become". (Reflective Journal, 2018: 15-17).

This reflection signifies a significant change in my own thinking and challenges my assumption that children can only write when they understand the constraint skills and have a bank of high frequency words. When looking at the children's learning journey it is vital that children get the opportunity to play with writing. This compliments the Froebelian philosophy of being child-centred and using play as a key methodology as play is seen as the "highest form of learning" (Bruce, 2012:13).

The data highlights the value of pictures, talk and literature when children are learning to write. See Figure 4.10 below. These sub themes will be discussed in detail and supported by relevant data.

Figure 4.10 Differentiating and supporting children on their writing journey

```
        ┌─────────────┐
        │ Talk before,│
        │ during and  │
        │   after     │
        │   writing   │
        └─────────────┘
┌──────────────┐   ↓   ┌──────────────┐
│   Drawing    │       │ Literature to│
│   pictures   │  ↘ ↙  │ enrich writing│
└──────────────┘       └──────────────┘
           ╱  Theme Two:  ╲
          │ Differentiating │
          │  and supporting │
          │   children on   │
          │  their writing  │
          │     journey     │
           ╲               ╱
```
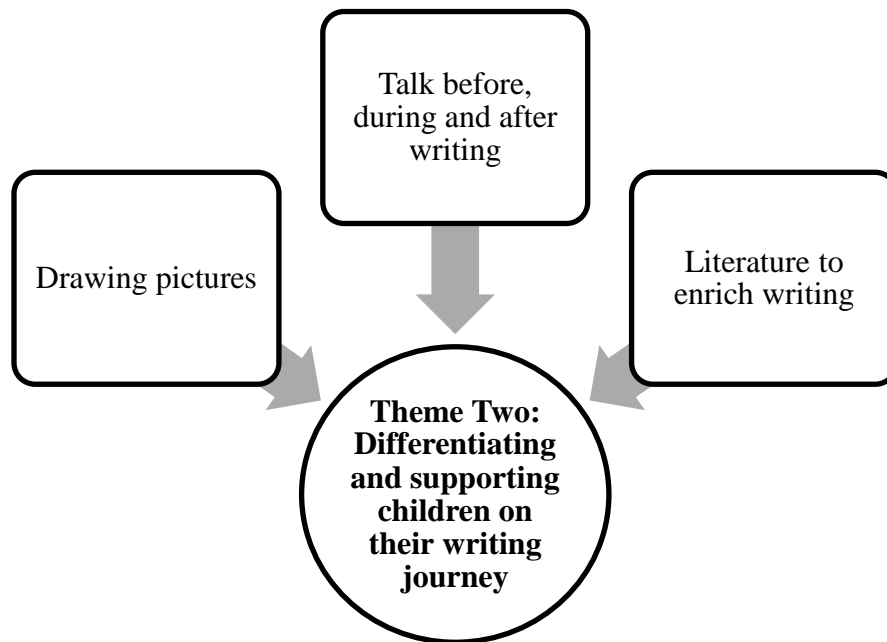
4.3.1 Drawing Pictures

Prior to my research, I underestimated the value of drawing pictures as a stimulus for writing. I placed more emphasis on the written text and viewed pictures as a secondary task that could be drawn after the writing was complete. This approach did not take into account the different developmental stages of the children and I realised that it *"would have only suited the more able learners but for most children the picture is the key part as it is through the drawings that the children illustrate their story…all the children will get a sense of achievement as all are capable of drawing pictures"* (Reflective Journal, 2019: 69-70). As there are children with EAL (English as an additional language) in my class the use of pictures is a good support to enable them to access story writing. Through the drawing of pictures these children can illustrate and explain their story without the pressure of having to write sentences.

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During this study, the value of drawing pictures was highlighted by the children as an important stage in their writing development,

- "I like when I get to draw all of my pictures" (Child G3, February 2019) and
- "My favourite thing about writing is drawing pictures" (Child O2, April 2019).

Serravallo (2017) recognises pictures as a crucial stage in the writing process as "even before children are able to write conventionally with words, they can compose pieces of work using what they can do-draw pictures. As children get older, using pictures as a way to practice qualities of good writing, and as a way to plan their writing has lots of value" (Serravallo, 2017:3). Likewise, Clay 1998 cited in Dennis and Votteler (2013:441) discuss how "drawings actually generate ideas for writing and help the child remember the ideas when he or she attempts to use writing for self-expression" (See figure 4.12 below). Graves (1994:49) values pictures as they "help the child to think about what might be said in the text that follows".

Some children in my class have poor fine motor skills therefore by valuing pictures as a method to tell their story I was enabling all children access to writing and the opportunity to succeed. For these children if we "focus too much on handwriting skills, which rely heavily on children's motor development, children with less developed motor skills will avoid writing opportunities" (Bingham et al, 2017: 42). Figure 4.11 is an example of how children used picture stories as a differentiated approach to engage with the writing process.

My own outlook on my practice has changed as I now understand the value of drawing pictures prior to writing for both young and older children. Using pictures as a tool to engage with writing means that all children, regardless of age and ability, can engage

with the writing process. By creating opportunities for children to work at their own

level, I feel that the children will have more interest and motivation to write.

Figure 4.11 Picture stories prior to formal writing

Square invention. When I stand in
the square it bounces up and down

Child B1 (11/03/19)

Figure 4.12 Pictures as a Planning Tool
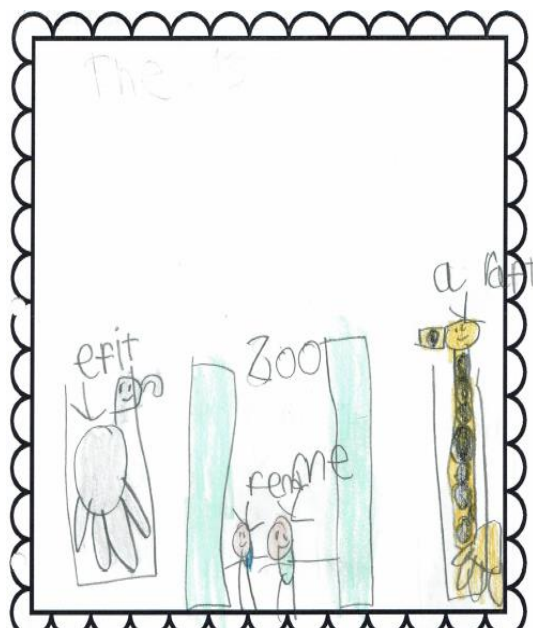
Child O4

The next section will examine the value of talk when supporting children on their writing journey.

4.3.2 Value of Talk

The value of talk before, during and after writing is a key trend within the data. Fountas and Pinnell (2017: 229) highlight the "necessity to talk about topics and ideas with children, providing them with rich vocabulary before they are expected to write". The children's perspective signifies talk and discussion as a vital support in the writing process. They recognised that author's get ideas for writing "from a friend" (Child R5, April 2019) and "from a partner" (Child O1, April 2019).

When the children were asked what would support them with their writing, talk was a considerable feature, the children suggested:

- "talk about what we are going to write" (Child R3, February 2019) and
- "talk with your talking buddy" (Child O5, February 2019).

This reflects Vygotsky's (1978) viewpoint that social interaction is pivotal in the emergent writing construction. Setting aside time for talk prior to independent writing was beneficial as the children were given the opportunity to share their ideas with a friend, ask questions to encourage more detailed stories and were ready to begin writing straight away.

The use of talk as a method to support the children was observed by critical friends:

- "children given time to think about and discuss ideas" (CF1, 01/02/19) and
- "there were lots of opportunities to generate and share ideas before beginning to write" (CF3, 04/04/19).

The importance of talk is highlighted by Graves who explains "the first entry point to writing is simple conversation" (Graves, 1994: 49). Similarly, Gibson (2009:326) recognises that "discussion immediately prior to and during individual writing expands students' language base and prepares them to write well".

Throughout writing time, the children engaged in conversation with one another, they shared their stories and supported each other by providing help when needed. The children explained,

- "if I don't know something, I can ask my friends" (Child G4, March 2019) and
- "my friends helped me with my writing" (Child B3, April 2019).

The data highlights the children's own recognition for the importance of talk to support them during the writing process. Setting aside time for talk is not typically seen in the Writing Workshop framework, however by listening to the children I have learned the value of talk and will continue to include aspects of talk when teaching writing in the future. I will now discuss the link between reading and writing and examine how literature supported children on their writing journey.

4.3.3 Literature to Inform Writing

The connection between reading and writing is a key finding. Although, I did not set out to examine this element the data strongly favours the use of literature to support children during the writing process. Interestingly, it was the children's own awareness of using literature as a stimulus for writing that led me to utilise books as a valuable support. The children discussed how reading books would help them with their own writing:

- "I could read more books because I like reading" (Child B4, February 2019) and
- "read more funny and happy stories" (Child B2, February 2019).

The children's comments challenged my own assumptions about story time in senior infants.

"When I began teaching senior infants, I didn't place a huge emphasis on story time as I didn't see the tangible learning objective associated with this activity. Throughout this intervention and from listening to the children's needs and ideas it became clear that books are a powerful influence, they really helped the children and encouraged them to use their imagination. Previously, I would have underestimated the value of simply reading books for enjoyment but now I know that I need to include the reading and exploring of books more in my teaching" (Reflective Journal, 2019: 120).

This research has encouraged me to think critically about the role of picture books and story time in my teaching. My assumption was challenged, and I now realise the depth that literature has to offer in the classroom. Not only did literature support the children when deciding on an idea for writing but it also provided the children with mentor texts and authors by which the children could aspire to.

Serravallo (2017) recognises this link "when we help them (children) study the work of other authors "mentor texts" who have written something similar in form or genre to what they want to write, they can study it, "reading it like a writer", to learn about the craft techniques and strategies authors must have employed to write it, and then they can transfer those discoveries to their own writing" (Serravallo, 2017: 25). Likewise, Calkins (1986:18) discusses the interaction between reading and writing "writers become readers and then writers again" and "because children perceive themselves as authors, they will make connections with the books they read" (Calkins, 1986:221).

In an Irish study carried out by O'Rourke, she discovered that children recognised the purpose of writing was to write books which indicated "the power of using authentic

literature during mini-lessons on the children's perception" (O'Rourke, 2010: 188). Using the children's own writing as a stimulus to practice reading skills was another way in which the link between reading and writing was strengthened during the study.

Likewise, Jones et al. (2010) investigated the effects of using the writing workshop on children's early reading skills. Their study took place in a kindergarten classroom, senior infant equivalent, and they discovered that using the writing workshop was effective in promoting the acquisition of early reading skills. There was a growth in the children's phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge and word reading ability (Jones et al, 2010: 337). This highlights the reciprocal processes of reading and writing.

My own reflections shed light on how I took the children's ideas on board and used every opportunity to connect reading and writing skills in my teaching.

"*One aspect of writing that I have tried to improve is the link between reading and writing. Every writing lesson now becomes an opportunity to practice our reading skills. Before this study I would have never expected the children to read back over their stories and add expression and build fluency. However, I have already began to notice an improvement in the children's fluency and expression when they re-read their stories. After talking to a friend, she suggested recording the children reading their stories to build on this link. I attempted this strategy and the children loved it, especially listening to each other's work. I got the impression that it added another dimension of ownership and motivation to write*" (Reflective Journal, 2019: 106-107).

Whilst in discussion with my critical friend about how some of the children were struggling with idea generation for stories, she recommended using literature to support and scaffold the children. She suggested using the connection comprehension strategy when reading books to allow the children to make connections to the stories they were

reading. Modelling and teaching the connection strategy enabled all the children to think of new and exciting ideas for stories (see Figures 4.12 and 4.13 below for examples).

Figure 4. 13 Connecting to the story "I Need a Wee" by Sue Hendra and Paul Linnet

wen I weht
bAK FrDm SKooL I
I hEEdii A WEE!

Child R5 (26/02/19)

I wen it Aed lb
a WEE i dun a
I WEE In my
car my mam
u d'z ? n d.

Child R2 (26/02/19)

Figure 4.14 Connecting to the story "Audrey the Amazing Inventor" by Rachel Valentine

wen I prres Theis
buTin lt bing me In
too my rimy
I allwz HaffH bnes lt
wen I go in and euT.

The Magic Button

"When I press this button it brings me to my room I always have to press it when I go in and out"

Child G2 (12/03/19)

The Magic Arm Invention

"A magic arm I said. The magic arm will tidy for you said the teacher."

Child O2 (12/03/19)

It is evident that using literature is a beneficial support for children during the writing process. Future research could examine the link between the children reading their own writing and how this contributes to their overall reading development.

The data collected and analysed illustrates the importance of differentiating and supporting children on their writing journey. Using pictures, talk and literature were all favourable supports recognised by the children, my colleagues and the literature. The use of these supports along with providing the children with choice resulted in the children's enjoyment of writing and an increased development of their writing ability. These will be discussed in the next section.

4.4 Results from having a child-centred approach and providing appropriate supports

4.4.1 Writing Enjoyment

A significant finding is the children's increased enjoyment of writing. Prior to the intervention, 100% of children stated that they liked to write, however their reasons were academically focused,

- "I like to be clever" (Child R2, December 2018)

- "it is good for school and for learning" (Child R4, December 2018)

- "it helps your brain, you can do amazing things" (Child O3, December 2018) and

- "I like to get things right to be good at writing" (Child B4, December 2018).

Reflecting on these responses, I question where these ideas developed. Was it down to my old style of teaching that I had previously put into practice that relied on handwriting neatness and constrained writing skills?

When beginning the intervention, enjoyment was at the core of all lessons. The children's enthusiasm increased, they wanted to make books every day. Even during playtime. Critical friends observed the children "engaged, motivated and enthusiastic" (CF2, 08/01/19), during writing lessons.

The children's outlook on writing developed from their original thoughts,

- "it's very fun to do. I love it a lot" (Child G1, February 2019)

- "I like using my head to think a lot and use it to write my story" (Child O5, February 2019)

- "It just feels so exciting because you can write about different things" (Child O4, March 2019)

- ▪ "I like the colouring of it, the writing of it and I like to share my stories with other people" (Child O3, April 2019).

In the concluding week of the intervention, the children selected one word or feeling they experience when writing. Figure 4.14 illustrates the variety of words selected. I firmly believe that the children's enjoyment of writing was developed as I allowed them to lead their learning and supported them along the way.

Figure 4.15 One word to describe writing

4.4.2 Increased Writing Ability

From examining the children's writing samples, it is evident that all children's writing abilities have improved. This improvement is a direct result of the children receiving support based on their individual writing stage. AfL was a key factor, as the children were given tailored instruction during all aspects of the writing workshop- mini lessons, guided writing and conferencing. Figure 4.16 below illustrates the results from using the rubric. The children's writing samples from January and April are plotted and a clear difference in writing ability is noted.

Figure 4.16 Results from Rubric
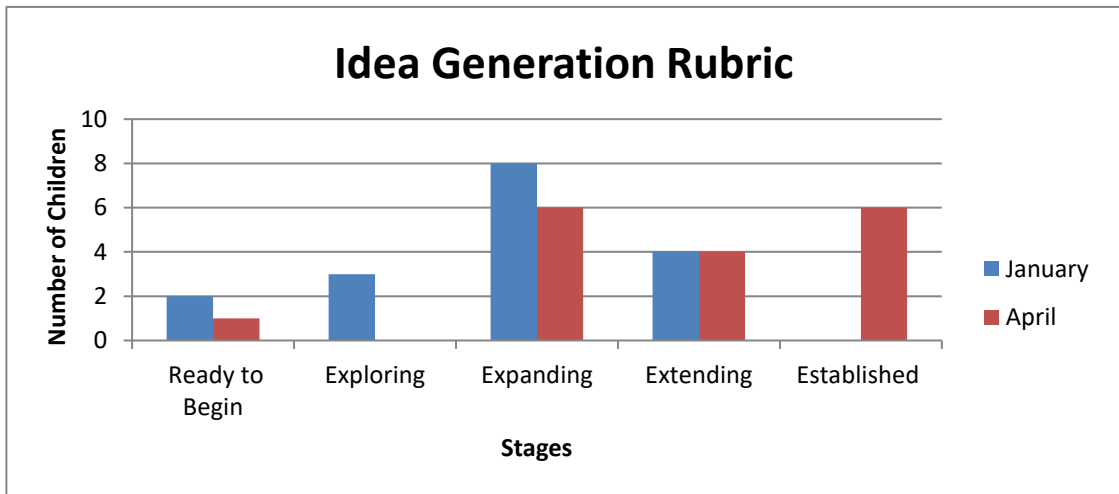
This graph illustrates a clear development in the children's writing ability based on their writing sample at the beginning (January) and end (April) of the intervention. In January, the majority of the children were plotted in *Expanding* with 2 children at the *Ready to Begin* stage and no children at the *Established* phase. However, in April 6 children's writing ability had increased to the *Established* stage, only 1 child remained in the first two stages with the majority of the children in the *Expanding* and *Established* phase.

One child from each group was selected at random and three writing samples from each child are shown to illustrate improvement in writing.

Figure 4. 17 Child's Progress Blue Group (B2)

Child B2 (07/01/19)

"I went to the park"

Child B2 (12/03/19)

"I am not good. I have to learn my school".

"I went to market."

"I went to the market. I love the market. I got cookie. I went with my mum and dad."

"I went to my house. I went home".

Figure 4. 18 Child's Progress Red Group (R2)

Child R2 (07/01/19)

"I opened my presents".

Child R2 (11/03/19)

"I went to get breakfast. And I went downstairs to get something to eat. And it was chocolate cornflakes. It was yummy. And I am playing Xbox in my dad's."

Child R2 (26/03/19)
"I went on our bikes and it was fun on our bikes with my daddy".

"I went with my daddy and we went to costa and I got a hot chocolate and my daddy got a coffee and it was so so fun".

"I went to the park then my daddy needed a wee and then he did a wee in the tree. Then he was nearly done his wee".

Figure 4. 19 Child's Progress Green Group (G4)

I went to the matih

Child G4 (07/01/19)
"I went to the mountain".

I looked at my
invenchon.
It gives me food
I siad "takñou"!
I like this.

Child G4 (11/03/19)
"I looked at my invention. It
gives me food. I said "thank
you". I like this."

I had brecfist aftr
I redide a book.
It was fun.
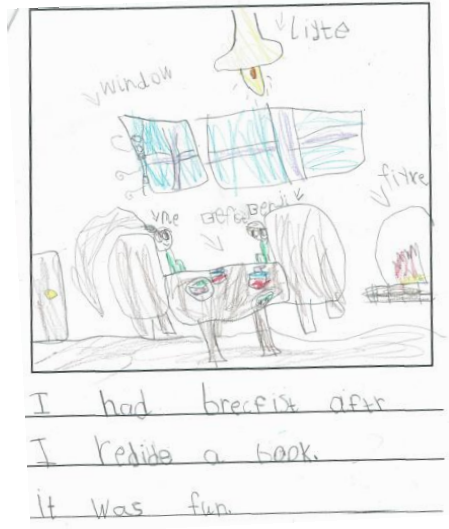
"I had breakfast after. I read a
book. It was fun."

the Srkiss

Child G4 (26/03/19)
"The Circus"

I was in the Srcur
I said "I I love this show!
I had so so fun!
"me to" said benji
I love this Srkiss!
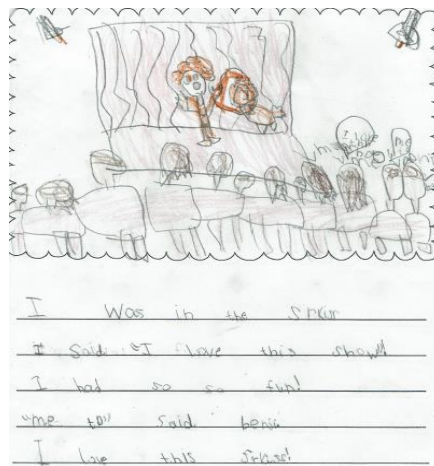
Page One:
I was in the circus. I said "I love this
show!" I had so so fun! "Me too" said
Benji. I love this circus!

the lleih was in the
ring. aftr I was the
toy shop I had slime.
it was fun! "yay" I said
was the srkisc fun" mum said

"I had fun" I sai
It was sor so fun
we was floating I liked
the pessa. it was gate.
it was so fun.
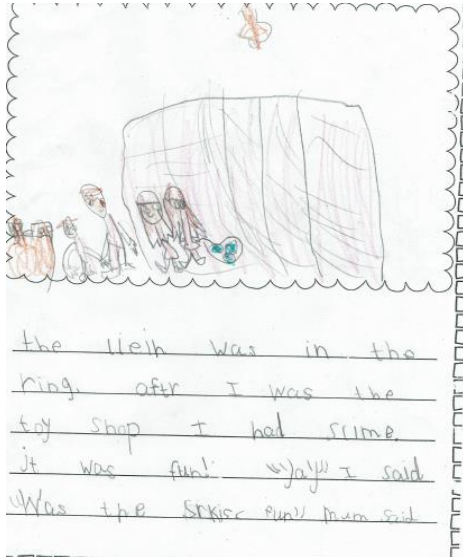
Page Two:
"The lion was in the ring. After
I was the toy shop I had slime.
It was fun! "Yay" I said. "Was
the circus fun" mum said.
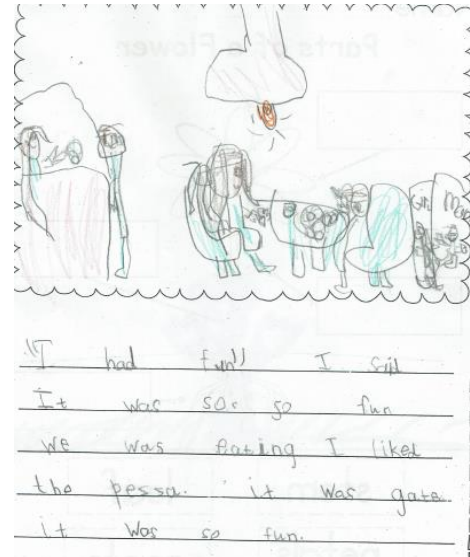
Page Three:
"I had fun" I said. It was so so
fun. We were eating. I liked
pizza it was great. It was so so
fun".

Figure 4. 20 Child's Progress Orange Group (O5)
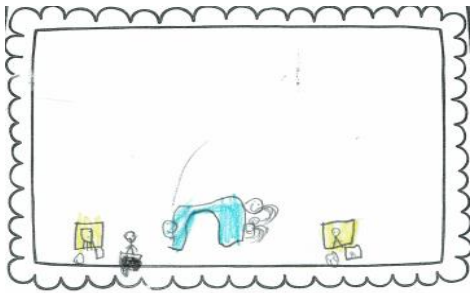
Child O5 (07/01/19)

"Minecraft is cool. I like my xbox. I like my skateboard. I like my octopus."

Child O5 (11/03/19)

"I went to school when I was done I went home and I was playing with my cars. I need a wee so I went to the toilet".

Child 05 (26/03/19)

"I went to the doctor. I was nervous. I was scared. I thought I could get an injection. Phew I thought I will get an injection. Oh my god phew."

"And I went home. I was happy I feel happy we we we. I want to go to the… I don't want to go at the doctor please".

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the two main findings that were evident when analysing the data. Theme one examined the importance of having a child-centred approach to the teaching of writing. The value of choice, teacher support and assessment for learning were considered as important elements that encourage child led teaching. Theme two focused on differentiating and supporting children during writing. The use of pictures, talk and literature were significant supports that were found in the data. As a result of living towards my values and supporting the children more effectively, the children's enjoyment and writing ability increased. The impact that these findings will have on my practice have been discussed throughout this chapter.

Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Summary of Findings

The two main findings arising from this study is the importance of having a child-centred approach to the teaching of writing and supporting and differentiating for children on their writing journey. I am also more aware of what influences my practice as a teacher and what I value in teaching.

From this research, I believe that I am now more child-centred in my teaching of writing as I start from where the children are at, allowing their interests lead the learning and I use AfL to plan my instruction, putting their needs at the forefront of my teaching. Providing children with choice and effective teacher support ensured that I am living towards my value of being child centred. AfL encouraged child led teaching, as the children's writing was informing future lessons. The lessons were designed to bring the children to the next stage of their writing development.

I now have a better understanding of the most valuable methods to use to guide and support children as they learn to write. Modelling and explicitly teaching the children how to use pictures, literature and talk to support them as they write will be central to my teaching. Due to the varying needs within my class and some children still at the pre-writing stage, allowing children the opportunity to share their story using pictures enabled all children access to the writing process.

5.2 Limitations to the Study

As my critical friends were colleagues, one potential limitation could be their biased feedback during observations. Although asked to provide honest responses they may have felt compelled to be overly positive, as they were giving feedback one on one. This may be overcome in future studies by inviting critical friends to observe, discuss and

provide comments in small groups, taking the pressure of one individual to provide honest criticisms.

This limitation is also relevant to the questionnaires provided to the children, while every attempt was made to overcome the power imbalance of the researcher asking the questions, an adult administered each questionnaire. The children could have felt under pressure to give the "correct" answer, resulting in the overly positive feedback.

Finally, the research sample was limited as it was a small class of only seventeen participants. A larger scale study might result in differing results.

5.3 Recommendations for Further Research

Three recommendations for further research have arisen from this study. One area is to explore the effectiveness of using the children's own writing as a context to practice and develop reading skills. Secondly, a comparative study investigating the difference in children's writing development when constrained skills are introduced early (Infants) and when constrained skills are delayed (First Class). Thirdly, as the relationship between reading and writing was observed by the children, it would be interesting to examine the effect of having the reading and writing workshop alongside each other on the children's literacy skills.

5.4 Disseminating the Research

At the end of the research process, I gave a presentation to my colleagues outlining the research procedure and my findings. I used this as an opportunity to have my research validated by a large group. As a staff, we decided to take on the Writing Workshop approach in our School Improvement Plan (SIP).

I was invited to attend a Teach Meet in a local school whereby I presented my study to the staff. Not only did this result in teachers eager to take on similar writing approaches but two teachers are interested in engaging in similar self-study action research projects.

I will be sharing my research at the Literacy Association of Ireland conference this year and I hope to publish a journal article outlining the main features of my investigation in the near future.

5.5 Impact on Practice

From engaging in action research, I have ignited a new passion and commitment for self-improvement. My journey with action research is only in its infancy, I strive to continue to learn more about myself and my practice by engaging in self-study research throughout my teaching career.

Self-study has developed my teacher agency, my confidence to question the influences of power and hegemony on my practice has grown. In relation to pre-designed programmes, I used to believe that they are published to help teachers; however, it is clear that they are not as beneficial as they seem. They work off a one size fits all approach which does not recognise the varying needs and abilities in any class. If I was to simply follow these programmes aimlessly, I would not be living in the direction of my values.

My confidence in my own professional judgement has increased, I now plan all aspects of my writing lessons based on assessments carried out on the children's work. My practice is more child led as it is their interests that lead the learning. The use of AfL will support me as I plan other aspects of my teaching, ensuring I am child focused in all areas.

My original assumptions have been challenged, interrogated and overturned during this investigation. I now believe that children are full of imagination and can effectively choose their own writing topics without teacher direction. Modelling the writing strategy and working with children in small groups and individual basis is more effective than whole class transcribing from the board. Children can engage in the writing process from a young age through mark making and playing. They do not need to understand the constrained skills of writing or have a bank of sight words. Finally, a more child-centred approach to writing is achieved when I plan lessons in accordance with the children's needs, using their own writing as a context to teach writing skills, allowing the children choice over writing topics and putting supports in place to assist children as they write independently.

Through this research, I believe that I now know how I can foster a more child-centred approach to writing in my class.

Appendix A   Idea Generation Rubric

1. Ready to Begin	2. Exploring	3. Expanding	4. Extending	5. Established
-The piece conveys little meaning	- One or more ideas are present in a general way	- Idea is written in a basic sentence	- The writing works by itself to explain a simple idea or story	-Idea is clear and coherent
-Drawings may not be completely recognisable	- Letters and words can be used as clues to the topic	-Simple statement with pictures conveys the topic	- The writing is made up of several sentences on one topic.	- The text is a well-developed paragraph
-Letters are not consistent or standard	- Drawings help to clarify idea	-Basic details present in text with illustrations used to enhance main idea	-Key details begin to surface.	-Elaboration through interesting details creates meaning for the reader
-An oral reading by the writer is needed in order to understand the idea	- Text is composed of letters and simple words	- Text contains real words	- The writing makes sense, but some details may be missing or irrelevant	- The writer shows understanding of the topic trough personal experience.
	-Reader may need writers assistance to understand message completely	- Text and pictures are easily understood by the reader	- Pictures and text work together to encapsulate the idea.	-Pictures enhance key ideas but not necessary for comprehension.

(Culham, 2005:70)

Appendix B   Initial Questionnaire

Initial Questionnaire   04/12/18
Q1: Where do authors get their ideas for books?
Q2: When do you write?
Q3: Do you like writing?
Q4: Why/Why not?

Appendix C   Writing Workshop Daily Plan

Whole Class

- 5-10 minute mini lesson
- Objective for lesson based on AfL of children's writing samples
- Teacher modelling combined with interactive writing

Group Conferences

- Two guided writing groups per day.
- Differentiated objectives for each group based on AfL of writing samples.

Individual Conferences

- Four individual conferences per day
- Lessons come from the children's own writing

Share Session

- Children share their writing with a partner
- 3-4 children share writing using "author's chair"

Appendix D   Resources Provided to the Children

What Writers Do - Checklist:

1. Think		
2. Draw		
3. Label		
4. Write		
5. Add Detail		

Alphabet Chart

Alphabet Chart for Writers

Aa	Bb	Cc	Dd
Ee	Ff	Gg	Hh
Ii	Jj	Kk	Ll
Mm	Nn	Oo	Pp
Qq	Rr	Ss	Tt
Uu	Vv	Ww	Xx
Yy	Zz		

(Learning at the Primary Pond, 2016:39)

Appendix E   Conference Notes

_____'s Writing Conference

Date	Accomplishments	To work on	Comments

Appendix F Critical Friend Observation Form

Date:	Lesson Title:

Prompt Questions:

Motivation/Enjoyment:
- Were all the children engaged in the lesson?
- Was the lesson enjoyable?
- Were all the children motivated to write during independent writing time?

Differentiation/Support:
- What methods of support did the teacher use during the lesson?
- Did the teacher meet with children on an individual/ group basis to target specific objectives?
- How did the teacher successfully differentiate the lesson to meet the varying needs/abilities?
- Did the teacher give the children time to think of an idea before engaging in independent writing?

Other:
- Was the learning objective clear from the outset?
- Were the children given the opportunity to share their work at the end of the lesson?

Comments:

Appendix G   Questionnaire February 2019

Questionnaire #2   February 2019
Q1: Do you enjoy writing?
Q2: When do you like/not like about writing?
Q3: How does your teacher help you with your writing?
Q4: Is there anything that you think would help you with your writing?

Appendix H   Children's Self-Assessment Questionnaire

Children's Self-Assessment Questionnaire
Q1. What parts of writing are you good at? ☺
Q2. What parts of writing do you want to improve? ☹

Appendix I   AfL Assessment Sheet

Assessment of Writing samples:			
Child	Areas for Improvement		
	Writing	Phonics	Word Work

Appendix J   Final Questionnaire

Final Questionnaire   April 2019
Q1: Where do authors get their ideas for books?
Q2: Do you like writing? Why?
Q3: Can you give me one word to describe writing?
Q4: What is your favourite thing about writing?
Q5: What helped you with your writing?

Appendix K   Research Schedule

August	• Developed research question • Reflective journal
September	• Research proposal submitted • Reflective journal
October	• Ethical consideration form • Received approval from the Board of Management to carry out research • Information afternoon for parents • Reflective journal
November	• Received ethical permission • Received permission from parents, children and critical friends • Reflective journal
December	• Consider suitable methods for research • Reflective journal

The following will occur on each week of the research cycle:

- Modelled, shared, independent writing
- Individual and group conferencing
- Teacher observations
- Reflective journal entries

Cycle One	
7th – 11th January	• Collect pre-intervention writing sample • Children's initial questionnaire • Introduce Writing Workshop approach • Discussing how authors get ideas for their stories Strategies: ▪ Using events from our lives to get ideas for our stories ▪ Point around the picture ▪ Telling our stories using illustrations
14th -18th January	• Group children according to similar writing abilities for conferencing • Recap on how authors get an idea for their stories – using own life events Strategies: ▪ Using special people in our lives to get ideas for our stories

	- Adding more detail to our drawings - Using writing tools- alphabet chart
21st -25th January	- Observations and writing samples used to inform conferencing - Introduction of conferencing record sheets - Recap on how authors get an idea for their stories - Introduce steps to follow when writing a story Strategies: - Steps: Think, Draw, Colour, Label, Write, Add Detail. - Adding labels to our pictures - Using who, what and where questions in our story
28th – 1st February	- Introduction of checklist - Focus on drawing detailed pictures - Discuss how authors use strong feelings to get ideas their stories e.g. times when I am happy, sad, excited - Invite critical friend in to view a lesson - Collect writing sample to compare progress Strategies: - Add detail to make pictures easier to read - Make your picture look like the picture in your mind - Using checklist as your write
Cycle Two *Reflect on cycle one of the research and implement any changes based on reflections.*	
4th – 8th February	- Plot children on writing rubric – track development - Introduce time for sharing writing. Strategies: - Carrying on independently as writers - Write across the pages- all pages in the book about the same topic - Stretching a small moment into a bigger moment using who, what, where, when and how questions
11th – 15th February	- Children independently select their own topics for writing using experiences, people, feelings etc. - Create books based on one topic - Talking buddies introduced – discussing our story prior to writing. Strategies: - Using pictures and words like famous authors

	• Stretching and writing words • Expectations for sharing writing • Talking buddy puppet • Writing across the fingers – who, what, where, when, why
25th – 1st March	• Introduce the comprehension strategy of connecting during reading time. [linking reading and writing] • Use text as a stimulus for getting an idea for writing. • Children use the comprehension strategy of connecting to draw and write about own personal experience that connects to the story Strategies: ▪ Comprehension strategy: Connecting ▪ Using a fictional text to help us generate ideas for story writing ▪ Spelling the best we can ▪ Putting full stops at the end of sentences
4th – 8th March	• Revise connecting strategy • Fictional texts as a stimulus for writing • Critical friend to view lesson and provide feedback • Use of speech bubbles in the picture and speech marks in text Strategies: ▪ Getting an idea for writing from a book ▪ Making suggestions about peer writing ▪ Reread and touch each word
11th -15th March	• Introduce the idea of creative writing to the children • Use fictional texts as a stimulus for creative writing • Teacher scaffold writing through prompting based on picture books Strategies: • Using a fictional text to get an idea for stories • Character development
18th -22nd March	• Creative writing using fictional text as stimuli • Modelled, shared and independent writing • Conferencing • Sharing writing • Teacher observation and reflective journal Strategies: • Developing a story based on a character from the book
25th – 29th March	• Creative writing using pictures as stimuli • Critical friend observation

	Strategies: • Creating a catchy opening for the story • Using pictures to create a story
1st -5th April	• Independent writing – notice what strategies the children have gained to generate ideas. • Post intervention writing sample • Invite parents in to view their children's writing folders • Post intervention questionnaire Strategy: • Publishing our writing

Appendix L   Permission Letter (School)

Maynooth University Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education

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

Dear Chairperson,

I am writing to you to seek permission from the Board of Management to undertake a self-study action research project in order to reflect on and enhance my teaching skills and approaches. This is part of the Master of Education (Research in Practice) degree that I have enrolled in for this academic year. I am conducting the research under the supervision of Dr. Bernadette Wrynn and Mrs Niamh Fortune, Lecturers in the Froebel Department of Early Childhood Education, Maynooth.

The focus of the study will be on how I can improve and enhance my teaching of writing to emergent writers in order to benefit the children in my class. I will be implementing a Writing Workshop approach which will allow me to support and differentiate writing activities more effectively for the children in my class.

The Action Research may entail the following elements:

- Observations of children in the classroom
- Collection of samples of a child's work
- Assessments of the children's work
- Audio/ visual recordings (to be used by the researcher only)

All information collected will be treated in confidence and neither the school nor the participants will be identifiable in any aspect of the research. Participants will know

their right to refuse to take part or to withdraw from the research at any stage. If this occurs all data from that student will be destroyed and not used in the research.

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

I would be grateful if you could give permission for me to seek consent from the children and their parent(s)/Guardian(s) to participate in the study. Once informed consent from the parents is received, I will then ask the children for their permission. No incentives or rewards will be offered to the children to encourage them to take part.

The results will be presented in the thesis. They will be viewed by my supervisor, the Head of Department and external examiners. The study may be published in a research journal or available to future students on the course.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. I have attached the Research Consent Form and the proposed letters for parents for your consideration. If you need any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Cara Ellard

Appendix M   Letter of Consent (Parents)

Maynooth University Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education.

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

Letter of Consent for Parents

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s),

I am a student on the Master of Education programme at Maynooth University. As part of my degree I am carrying out a self-study action research project. The focus of my research is based on my teaching of emergent writing and how I can enhance the support that I provide children to bring them to the next stage of their writing development.

In order to do this, I intend to carry out research in the classroom by implementing a Writing Workshop approach to teaching writing. This approach allows me time to meet with children on a group/ individual basis to provide support and differentiated instruction based on the children's current needs in terms of their writing development. Relevant and ongoing assessments will be carried to inform me of the children's most pressing needs and these will be addressed during individualised writing conferences, whereby the teacher meets with the child/children and teaches them a strategy to use when writing that will bring their writing on to the next level.

The data will be collected using observations, samples of the children's work, a daily teacher reflective journal, pupil assessments and audio/visual recordings of my teaching. The audio and visual recordings will be used by the researcher (me), for reflective purposes only and will be destroyed once the reflection has been carried out. The children will be asked their opinions through teacher designed questionnaires and conferencing with pupils on a daily basis. The data collected will be stored in a locked cabinet in the school and will only be accessible to me. The data will be stored for ten years after the research has taken place, as per University regulations; it will then be securely destroyed.

All information collected will be treated in confidence and neither the school nor the participants will be identifiable in any aspect of the research. The child's name and the name of the school will not be included in the thesis that I will write at the end of the research. Your child will be allowed withdraw from the research process at any stage without any consequence.

The correct guidelines will be complied with when carrying out this research. The research will not be carried out until approval is granted by the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education. The results will be presented in the thesis. They will be viewed by my supervisor, the Head of Department and an external examiner. The study may be published in a research journal or available to future students on the course.

I would like to invite you and your child to give permission for him/her to take part in this project. Please complete the written consent form attached to allow your son or daughter to participate. If you have any queries on any part of this research project, feel free to contact me by email at cara.ellard.2013@mumail.ie.

Yours faithfully,

Cara Ellard

Maynooth University Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education

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

PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

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

I voluntarily agree to the participation of my child _____ (Child's name) in this study. I understand that I am engaging in this study on a voluntary basis and I have the right to withdraw at any stage during the study.

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

Parent / Guardian Signature_____

Parent / Guardian Signature_____

Date: _____

Name of Child _____

Child's signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix N   Letter of Assent (Children)

Maynooth University Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education

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

<u>Child Consent Form</u>

Child's name …………………….

I am trying to find out how I can improve my teaching of writing to young writers in primary school. I want to find out ways that I can help you when you are learning to write. I would like to watch you, talk to you and use some of your work to find out the best ways for you to learn and how I can help you improve your writing. I will also write down a few notes about how I am helping you learn. Sometimes, we will use video recordings and audio recordings so that I can look back on my teaching and find out ways that I can be a better teacher. These videos and recording will be deleted after I have looked at them. No one else will be allowed to look at these recordings.

Would you be ok with that? Pick a box   **Yes**   **No**

I have asked your Mum or Dad or Guardian to talk to you about this. If you have any questions, I would be happy to answer them. If you are happy with that could you sign the form that I have sent home?

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

Child Signature: _____   Date: _____

Appendix O   **Critical Friend Consent Form**

Maynooth University Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education

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

CRITICAL FRIEND CONSENT FORM

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

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

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

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

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix P   Ethical Statement

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

Ethics Approval for Master of Education (Research in Practice)
(*Please read the notes in the module handbook (EDF684) before completing this form)*

Student name:	Cara Ellard
Student Number:	12737715
Supervisor:	Niamh Fortune
Programme:	Master of Education (Research in Practice)
Thesis title:	How can I foster a more child centred approach to writing?
Research Question(s):	How can I foster a more child centred approach to writing?
Intended start date of data collection:	December 2018
Professional Ethical Codes or Guidelines used:	Maynooth University Research Ethics Policy Froebel Department Ethical Guidelines

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

Early years / pre-school	
Primary school students	√
Secondary school students	
Young people (aged 16 – 18 years)	
Adults	√

Provide a brief description of the individuals and their proposed role in your research below [Max 50 words]:

All children in my class will be invited to be co-participants in the research on a voluntary basis. They will provide data in the forms of samples of work, questionnaires, assessments, observations.

Critical friends will observe and critique my teaching, ask challenging questions and be a part of the validation process.

1(b) Recruitment and Participation/sampling approach: *How will these participants become involved in your research? What type of sampling is involved? Please describe the formal and informal recruitment processes? Please describe the type of participation and level of engagement of participants? Are there gatekeepers and what is their part of sampling process? [Max 100 words]*

Permission will be sought from the principal and the Board of Management to undergo the research. All children in my class, who were assigned to me by the principal, will be invited to participate in the study. They will engage in school-based activities related to the teaching of writing and will provide data as outlined below. All details of the research, data methods and ethical obligations will be explained to the parents during an information afternoon. The parents will be given a consent form to choose if they want their child to be involved. If parents cannot attend the information afternoon, I will arrange to meet them on an individual basis or phone them to explain the research. An information letter, explaining all the details of the research will also be given to the parents and my contact details will be attached so any questions they may can be answered. The children will have an option to be involved in the study. Written consent will be required from two critical friends who were selected based on their expertise in my research field. Their role is to critique my teaching and thinking and provide feedback.

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

The research site is in a senior infant mainstream class in a DEIS band 2 suburban primary school. The purpose of the research is for me to reflect on my teaching of writing and examine ways in which I can improve the support and differentiation offered to students during writing instruction. I plan to assess the children in my class using observations and samples, the children will then be grouped according to similar needs. Children in these groups will be using different writing strategies based on their current level of writing development. Individual conferences will be held whereby goal setting and on the spot support and scaffolding can be given to the children. The Writing Workshop approach will be implemented during my formal English lessons, as it allows time for me to carry out group based and individual support. Data including observations, work samples, assessments, lesson plans, audio and video recording, feedback from parents and critical friends and my own reflective journal will inform my next step in the research cycle and will be used to see if I am living my closely to my values of equality, care and respect by differentiating work effectively for the children. Video and audio recording will be taken during writing lessons as a method of reflection, so that I can evaluate my own teaching. Where possible the children's faces or identifying features will be avoided. These recording will be destroyed after I have used them for my reflections. The data will be examined through different perspectives to ensure validity, credibility and reliability.

September – December 2018:
- Reflective journaling – daily basis
- Ethical approval – consent from Board of Management, Parents, Children and Critical Friends
- Reading literature around topic

January – April 2019
- Carry out research – implementation of planned supports
- Data collection

May – June 2019
- Analysis of data
- Write up research

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

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

As children are a vulnerable group, I will adhere to Children's First Guidelines, GDPR, Maynooth University Ethics Policy and my school's child safeguarding policy. The children will be given the right to not partake in the research or to at any stage; their data will not be used in the study if this occurs. I will ensure that the children fully understand their role by using clear and comprehendible language; they will know that they are not under any pressure to perform as the focus of the study is on the teacher. Anonymity and confidentiality will be upheld, and no identifiable descriptions will be used. The children's self-esteem, dignity and trust will be protected when analysing data and writing up the research paper. If the children are uncomfortable with video and audio recordings they will not be recorded during these sessions.

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

The children will not be offered any incentives to participate or to 'perform' during the study. I will not coerce the children to participate. The children will know that there will be no consequences if they choose to withdraw from the research. When talking to the children about the research I will not use my position to encourage them to give more favourable results. I will ensure that my colleagues will not be harmed by their participation and no incentives will be rewarded for their input. As I will be using audio and visual recordings the children who are not comfortable with this form of data collection will not be recorded at any stage in the research. As the research is taking place during formal English lessons, assessment for learning will be based on children's content (unconstrained skills) of writing and on the strategies, they utilise during craft development. All participants, including parents and the Board of Management, will be debriefed after the research has taken place. Debriefing will be in the form of overall findings from the research. No particular children, groups of children will be identified. The findings will be based on my own learning and teaching rather than on the children's results.

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

Informed consent from the Board of Management and the principal will be sought. Consent from parents/ guardians and from the children will be needed for the children to take part. Consent will be presented to the children in a manner that suits their age, maturity and competence. Assent from critical friends and validation groups will be sought so that conversations, recommendation etc from these people can be used in the research. A final draft of the report will be issued to BOM, parents and critical friends at their request to ensure they are satisfied with the paper before it is published. The researchers contact details will be provided so that the participants have a platform to ask any questions or get more information. All types of data that will be used in the study will be included in the consent letters.

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

If a child decides to withdraw from the study all that child's data will be withdrawn from the data archive and none of the child's samples will be used. For children with high levels of absenteeism, this will be noted when analysing the data to ensure the data is true and valid. If a new child joins the class, they will have the option to be a part of the study however his/ her initial assessment will be dated accordingly and I will refer to this when analysing data results. The data will be collected in a sensitive and non-stressful manner. If a child makes a sensitive disclosure, I will consult my principal who is the Designated Liaison Person for Child Protection in my school. In this situation, school protocol will be adhered to.

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

The data will be stored in a locked cabinet in the school and will only be available for my viewing. In relation to video/ audio recordings, these will serve for reflective purposes only and will be destroyed once the reflection is complete, usually within a week of the initial recording. All data will be signed and dated to ensure credibility and reliability. The data will be stored for a period of time in accordance with Maynooth's ethics policy. The data will be available for viewing by my supervisor or examiners upon request.

Declaration *(Please sign and date)*

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

Signed: *Cara Ellard*   Date: 21/10/18

Supervisor use only:

Date Considered: _____

Approved	√
Approved with recommendations (see below)	
Referred back to applicant	
Referred to Department Research and Ethics Committee	

Recommendations:

Signature of supervisor: _____

Department use only: *(only where applicable)*

Date Considered: _____

Approved by Froebel Department Research and Ethics committee	
Approved with recommendations (see below)	
Referred back to applicant (changes to be approved by supervisor)	
Referred to Maynooth University Social Research Ethics Subcommittee	

Recommendations:

Signature of Dept. Ethics Committee Chair:

_____

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

Date Considered: _____

Approved

Referred back to applicant and supervisor

Signed:

_____
FSS Research Ethics Committee nominee

Checklist for students

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

Declaration by Researcher

This declaration must be signed by the applicant(s)

I acknowledge(s) and agree that:

    a)   It is my sole responsibility and obligation to comply with all Irish and EU legislation relevant to this project.

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

    c)   That the research will be conducted in accordance with the Maynooth University Research Ethics Policy.

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

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

Signature of Student: *Cara Ellard*

Date: 21/10/18

List of References

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