

**Ainm / Name:** Maria Dillon

**Bliain / Year group:** Master of Education 2020-2021

**Uimhir mhic léinn / Student number:** 20251545

**Ábhar / Subject:** Thesis

**Léachtóir / Teagascóir:**

**Lecturer / Tutor:** Aoife Titley

**Sprioclá / Due date:** 24<sup>th</sup> September 2021

**Teideal an tionscadail / Assignment title:** How can I use Student Voice to Enhance my Understanding of the Learning Experiences of the Child?

**Líon na bhfocal / Word Count:** 21,977

**Líon leathanach / Number of pages:** 147

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

Dearbhaím gur mise amháin / mise mar bhall grúpa (cuir ciorcal timpeall na rogha a bhaineann leis an tionscadal thuas) a rinne an saothar seo. Aithním go soiléir aon chabhair a fuair mé ó aon duine eile, baill fhoirne nó gaol clainne san áireamh. Mo chuid scríbhneoireachta féin atá sa tionscadal seo ach amháin nuair a úsáidtear ábhar ar bith as foinsí eile. Tugtar aitheantas do na foinsí seo sna fo-nótaí nó sna tagairtí.

Dearbhaím go bhfuil treoirínthe an choláiste do thionscadail léite agam agus go dtuigim iad. Tá cóip den tionscadal coinnithe agam dom féin.

I confirm that I alone / I as part of a group (please circle whichever applies in the case of the above assignment) produced this project. I clearly acknowledge any help I received from any other person, staff members or relatives included. This project is my own composition except for material of any kind taken from other sources. These sources are acknowledged in the footnotes or references.

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

**Síniú / Signature:**



**Dáta / Date:** 20/09/2021



OLLSCOIL NA hÉIREANN MÁ NUAD

THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND

MAYNOOTH

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

**M.Ed. (Research in Practice)**

**(2020– 2021)**

How can I use Student Voice to Enhance my Understanding of the Learning Experiences of the Child?

Maria Dillon

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

**Date: 20/08/2021**

**Supervised by: Aoife Titley**

## Declaration



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

Student: **Maria Dillon**

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Maria Dillon". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'M' and a long, sweeping tail.

Date: **20/09/2021**

## Abstract

This self-study action research project investigated: *How can I use student voice to enhance my understanding of the learning experiences of the child?* This study was inspired by the growing interest and research surrounding the need for schools to incorporate the voice of the child in relation to their learning and decision making affecting their learning experiences. This study resulted from a personal interest with the aim of including the voice of the student more within my everyday practice to help me live closer to my values.

I designed and planned an intervention which involved two components: teacher designed lessons based around student voice (what it is, why it is important, the child's right to a voice, the many positives to using their voice etc.) and the implementation of the activity called PhotoVoice. Action research was selected as the methodology as it enabled me to investigate and improve my own practice. Throughout the research, I collected qualitative data using baseline and post intervention interviews, reflective journal, feedback from critical friend(s) and validation groups, unstructured observations and samples of children's work.

The generation of a living theory was formed through engagement with the reflective process which enabled me to live in the direction of my values. The findings which emerged from the research resulted in three main themes which include:

- Teacher as facilitator
- The power of student voice
- The child as an active agent in their own learning

Using student voice to gain a deeper understanding of the learning experiences of the child is a powerful way to encourage and establish more participation, involvement and agency in school life by students. Student voice, when implemented with a genuine interest and betterment of the student's experience in school, can promote a sense of empowerment, increase confidence, motivation and awareness of their right to a voice and can bring about positive change not only for the student but also in relation to the teacher's own practice. For student voice to be effective, there are many factors needed which include, creating a safe and comfortable space for children to express their opinions, views and thoughts, ensuring that there is a mutual respect and trust and a positive healthy relationship between teacher and student has been developed prior to the implementation of any student voice initiative. Providing choice and opportunity as well as facilitating talk and discussion are all required when accommodating student voice. This research has also inspired a compelling change in my own practice, and in how I include the voice of the child going forward.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank all the people who supported and encouraged me through this thesis. This thesis would not have been possible without my family and friends, colleagues and students in my school as well as the staff from Maynooth University.

To Aoife Titley, my supervisor thank you sincerely. Your guidance, encouragement and supportive and positive comments were invaluable throughout this process. You went above and beyond your role and duty and for this I am extremely grateful. Thank you for all your support.

To the amazing fourth-class students of 2020-2021. You have taught me things about myself that have helped me become a better teacher and person and for that I will be forever indebted to you. You are the most wonderful group of children, and this research study would not have been possible without your support, commitment and feedback each week.

I want to acknowledge and express my thanks to the Principal, BoM and colleagues of the school (who I am lucky to call my friends) who have supported me from my first day in the school but more importantly for facilitating me in this research study.

Lastly, to my friends and family. Thank you to my parents, John and Mary, siblings Sarah and Seán and Aunt Melly for your continual love and support and always encouraging me to reach my potential. To my nearest and dearest friends, you know who you are, my sincere thanks for listening to me, encouraging me and reassuring me and above all picking me up on the days I thought I'd never get this thesis finished.

## Table of Contents

### Contents

Declaration.....	<b>iii</b>
Abstract .....	<b>iv</b>
Acknowledgements .....	<b>vi</b>
Table of Contents.....	<b>vii</b>
List of Appendices .....	<b>xiii</b>
List of Abbreviations.....	<b>xiv</b>
<b>Chapter One: Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.1 Rationale .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.2 Values Statement .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>1.3 Purpose of the Research .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>1.4 Self-Study Action Research .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>1.5 Conceptual Framework Underpinning this Research Project.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1.6 Thesis Structure .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Chapter Two: Literature Review .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>2.1 Introduction.....</b>	<b>8</b>
2.1.1 Literature Search .....	8
2.1.2 Literature Map.....	8
<b>2.2 Defining Student Voice.....</b>	<b>9</b>
2.2.1 The Terminology of Student Voice.....	9
<b>2.3 The Significance of Student Voice .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>2.4 The Emergence of Student Voice .....</b>	<b>12</b>
2.4.1 Student Voice as a Right.....	12
<b>2.5 The Importance of Student Voice.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>2.6 Critical Theorists of Student Voice.....</b>	<b>14</b>
2.6.1 Theoretical framework: The Lundy Model of Participation .....	15
2.6.2 Student Voice: Power and Participatory Democracy .....	18
<b>2.7 The Irish and International Context of Student Voice .....</b>	<b>19</b>
2.7.1 The Development of Irish Policy .....	19
2.7.2 The International Context of Student Voice .....	21
<b>2.8 The Positives and Challenges of Student Voice.....</b>	<b>23</b>

2.8.1 Positives to Prioritising Student Voices .....	23
2.8.2 Challenges of Implementing Student Voice Initiatives.....	24
2.9 Conclusion .....	<b>27</b>
<b>Chapter Three: Methodology .....</b>	<b>28</b>
3.1 Introduction.....	<b>28</b>
3.2 Research Approach .....	<b>29</b>
3.2.1 The Nature of Qualitative Research.....	29
3.3 Data Collection.....	<b>29</b>
3.3.1 Research Site and Participants .....	30
3.3.2 Data Collection Instruments .....	30
Unstructured Observations .....	30
Critical Friend and Validation group.....	31
Interviews .....	32
Reflective Journal .....	32
Focus Groups .....	33
PhotoVoice.....	34
3.4 Data Analysis .....	<b>35</b>
3.4.1 Thematic Analysis.....	35
3.4.2 Validity and Credibility.....	36
3.5 Ethical Standards, Considerations and Informed Consent .....	<b>37</b>
3.5.1 Child Assent.....	38
3.5.2 Data Storage .....	39
3.6 Overview of the Research Design of this Study.....	<b>40</b>
3.6.1 Timeline and Overview of Intervention .....	40
3.7 Overview of Findings .....	<b>41</b>
3.8 Conclusion .....	<b>42</b>
<b>Chapter Four: Finding One: Teacher as Facilitator .....</b>	<b>43</b>
4.1 Introduction.....	<b>43</b>
4.2 Teacher as facilitator .....	<b>43</b>
4.3 Logistics.....	<b>45</b>
4.3.1 Space .....	<b>45</b>
4.3.2 Barriers/practical problems .....	47
4.4 Values.....	<b>49</b>



4.4.1. Respect .....	49
4.4.3 Inclusion.....	51
<b>4.5 Role of the Teacher .....</b>	<b>53</b>
4.5.1 Providing Choice and Opportunity .....	53
4.5.2 Talk and Discussion .....	54
4.5.3 Power.....	55
<b>4.6 Conclusion .....</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>Chapter Five: Finding Two: The Power of Student Voice .....</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>5.1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>5.2 The Power of Student Voice .....</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>5.3 Empowerment.....</b>	<b>59</b>
5.3.1 Voice Matters .....	59
5.3.2 Increased Motivation and Engagement .....	61
<b>5.4 A Sense of Belonging.....</b>	<b>62</b>
5.4.1 Shared learning .....	63
5.4.2 Inclusion.....	64
<b>5.5 Awareness.....</b>	<b>66</b>
5.5.1 Rights .....	66
5.5.2 Change .....	67
<b>5.6 Conclusion .....</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>Chapter Six: Finding Three: The Child as an Active Agent in their Learning.....</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>6.1 Introduction.....</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>6.2 The Child as an Active Agent in their Learning .....</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>6.3 Agency.....</b>	<b>73</b>
6.3.1 Active Participants.....	74
6.3.2 Making Decisions .....	76
<b>6.4 Cooperative Learning .....</b>	<b>78</b>
6.4.1 Expression of Ideas .....	79
<b>6.5. Conclusion .....</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>Chapter Seven: Conclusion.....</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>7.1 Introduction.....</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>7.2 Study Conclusions .....</b>	<b>83</b>

**7.3 Dissemination of Data .....84**

**7.4 The Significance of my Research.....85**

**7.4.1 The Need for Student Voice Education in the Primary Curriculum .....85**

**7.4.2 Creating Real Change in School .....86**

**7.5 My Personal Living Theory .....87**

**7.6 Limitations.....88**

**7.7 Conclusion .....89**

**References.....90**

**Appendices.....110**

## List of Figures

Figure 1.2 Lundy’s Model for Participation .....	6
Figure 2.1 Literature Map .....	9
Figure 3.2 Gibb’s Reflective Cycle .....	33
Figure 3. 3 Braun and Clarke’s (2006) 6-Phase Framework of Thematic Analysis.....	36
Figure 3.4 Sample of Codes, Categories and Themes Generated.....	37
Figure 3.6 Emerging Findings .....	41
Figure 4.1 Sub themes of Teacher as Facilitator.....	43
Figure 4.2 DJ’s Comment in Focus Group .....	44
Figure 4.3 Amy’s Photovoice Image .....	46
Figure 4.4 Mia’s PhotoVoice Image.....	47
Figure 4.5 Iris’s comment in Focus Group .....	48
Figure 4.7 Seán’s Comment in Focus Group.....	50
Figure 4. 8 Mia’s comment in the focus group.....	51
Figure 4.9 Reflective Journal Excerpt 2 .....	52
Figure 4.10 Sample of Children’s Work (25/03/21).....	53
Figure 4.12 Reflective Journal Excerpt 3 .....	55
Figure 4.14 Reflective Journal Excerpt 4 .....	56
Figure 5.1 Sub themes of The Power of Student Voice.....	58
Figure 5. 3 Reflective Journal Excerpt 5 .....	61
Figure 5. 4 Reflective Journal Excerpt 6 .....	61
Figure 5.5 Reflective Journal Excerpt 7 .....	62
Figure 5.6 Iris’s PhotoVoice image .....	63
Figure 5.7 Unstructured Observation 1.....	64

Figure 5.9 Mia’s Comment in Focus Group .....65

Figure 5.10 Janet’s Definition of Student Voice .....66

Figure 5. 11 Niall’s Comment in Focus Group.....67

Figure 5.12 Unstructured Observation 2.....67

Figure 5.13 Issy’s Comment in Focus Group .....69

Figure 5.14 DJ’s Comment in Focus Group .....69

Figure 6.1 Sub Themes of The Child as an Active Agent in their Learning .....71

Figure 6. 2 Seán’s PhotoVoice Image.....72

Figure 6.3 Reflective Diary Excerpt 8 .....73

Figure 6.5 Critical Friend Comment 2.....75

Figure 6.6 Issy’s PhotoVoice Image .....76

Figure 6.7 Niall’s Comment in Focus Group.....77

Figure 6.8 Niall’s PhotoVoice image.....77

Figure 6.10 Reflective Diary excerpt 9 .....79

Figure 6.11 Amy’s Sample of Work.....80

Figure 6. 12 Critical Friend Comment 3.....

Figure 7.1 Outline of Chapter 7 .....83

Figure 7.2 Constructions of Children as Educators (Haynes & Murriss,2013: 222) .....87

**List of Appendices**

Appendix A Template for Unstructured Observation Checklist..... 110

Appendix B Template for Critical Friend Observations..... 111

Appendix C Baseline Interview Questions ..... 112

Appendix D Interview Questions about PhotoVoice Image..... 113

Appendix E Sample Reflection Questions..... 114

Appendix F Ethical Approval Form ..... 115

Appendix G Letter to Board of Management ..... 124

Appendix H Information Letter to Parents ..... 125

Appendix I Consent Form for Parents ..... 127

Appendix J Information Letter to Children ..... 128

Appendix K Assent Form for Children..... 129

Appendix L Framework for Action Plan ..... 130

Appendix M Codes, Categories and Themes Generated from the Data ..... 132

### **List of Abbreviations**

<b>BOM</b>	Board of Management
<b>DES</b>	Department of Education
<b>INTO</b>	Irish National Teachers' Organisation
<b>NCCA</b>	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development
<b>SET</b>	Special Educational Teacher
<b>SSAR</b>	Self-Study Action Research
<b>SV</b>	Student Voice
<b>UNCRC</b>	United Convention on the Rights of the Child

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **1.1 Rationale**

The main goal of this research was to use student voice (SV) to enhance my understanding of the learning experiences of the child. Upon embarking on this course, we were asked to reflect on our teaching practice and choose an area which we would like to focus and improve on. A concern surfaced as the reflection process developed and I felt the need to investigate further. I had noticed that the children in my class were becoming more passive knowledge absorbers rather than active participants of their own learning (Cook-Sather, 2006; 2014). I felt that I had fallen for the pressures and requirements expected of us as 21st Century teachers where the teaching had become a tick box exercise rather than a truly meaningful experience. I wanted to investigate how I can encourage SV more in my classroom, encourage a more active and shared learning along with discovering what methodologies are considered effective in promoting and enabling SV practices in my classroom.

The concept of SV has become a widely discussed and researched topic over the last twenty years (Cook-Sather, 2006). Due to the increased interest around this topic, there are many meanings and interpretations surrounding the concept of SV. This study will use the definition of SV to be: students in “dialogue, discussion and consultation” with their teachers, school leaders, management and other students on issues and decisions that involve teaching and learning which directly affect their education ((Fleming, 2013; Fleming 2015: 223; Cook-Sather, 2014).

## 1.2 Values Statement

As my values are the foundation on which this research has come about, I feel that it is of utmost importance that I outline and define my values at the outset of this research study. Throughout this research journey, my values have become clearer and more defined. Initially, to characterise my values, I examined the core motives and actions that guide my everyday practice and then located these actions within conceptual frameworks (Glenn, 2006). The main motivation that I focused on was my everyday interactions with my students. My core values are healthy relationships, care and inclusion all of which are underpinned by the concept of love.

I know that I always take time to get to know every student in my class. I dedicate and set aside time to spend with each child in my class to build the relationship. I believe that children learn best when they feel safe and trust you as their teacher. Teachers need to be committed in getting to know the children they teach and “find out what the students bring to school in terms of background and experiences” (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004; Bishop, et al., 2009; Parry, 2014: 17). For them to feel safe and secure in class, I need my students to know that I do not just care about their learning but more importantly about them as human beings first. I believe that healthy relationships are the foundation on which all learning will transpire. When children feel comfortable, safe, and reassured, they will find it easier to share their thoughts with the teacher. The student-teacher relationship must be developed and treasured for engaged learning to happen, much like the need to develop student-teacher relationships for SV to be most effective. (Fielding, 2004).

The writings of Nell Noddings guided me in my journey to clarify my values especially the value of care. Noddings (1995) discussed the role of care in education and states that “when



we care, we want to do our very best for the objects of our care” (Noddings, 1995: 676). Noddings (1995) also talks about the attitude of the teacher towards children is crucial in developing caring relationships with students. She states that teachers can have a great influence on children and “it should be legitimate... to spend time developing relations of trust, talking with students about problems that are central to their lives, and guiding them toward greater sensitivity and competence across all the domains of care” (Noddings, 1995: 679).

Inclusion is the third core value I hold. I must see every child as first and foremost a child, I am open to seeing the “whole” of the child and that all children are included. I had the pleasure of being introduced to Elizabeth Campbell who coined the phrase “loved into learning”. When I started to think about these core values of healthy relationships care and inclusion, I realised having listened to Elizabeth Campbell that my three core values are underpinned by the concept of “love”. SV is at the heart of good student-teacher relationships, care and inclusion and I believe all these values need to be present for genuine SV practices to be effective. Furthermore, both my philosophy of education and my epistemological and ontological values are strongly rooted in Froebel's principles which are reinforced by the following key principles:



*Figure 1.1 Froebelian Principles*

Froebel's ideas are embedded in many of today's practices and teaching styles (Tovey, 2013). As the main core values I hold as a teacher are healthy relationships, care and inclusion all of which are underpinned by the concept of love, bountiful findings of this research are in line with both the Froebelian principles and my core values and will be outlined throughout the finding's chapters (four, five and six) later.

### **1.3 Purpose of the Research**

The purpose of this research was to improve my understanding of children's learning experiences using SV. I wanted the children to recognise that I value their thoughts, opinions and ideas about their education and that what they have to say is important. In conjunction with this, I wanted to gain more knowledge in relation to the methodologies which are considered effective in enhancing SV initiatives along with the learning experiences the children have had in terms of SV. The multifaceted nature of SV means that the participants were engaging with numerous activities which would benefit them in becoming more informed about the importance of SV in relation to their education. Furthermore, I wanted to ensure the child would feel more comfortable, an equal in the relationship, respected, heard, and more importantly listened to, therefore enabling me to live more closely in the direction of my values.

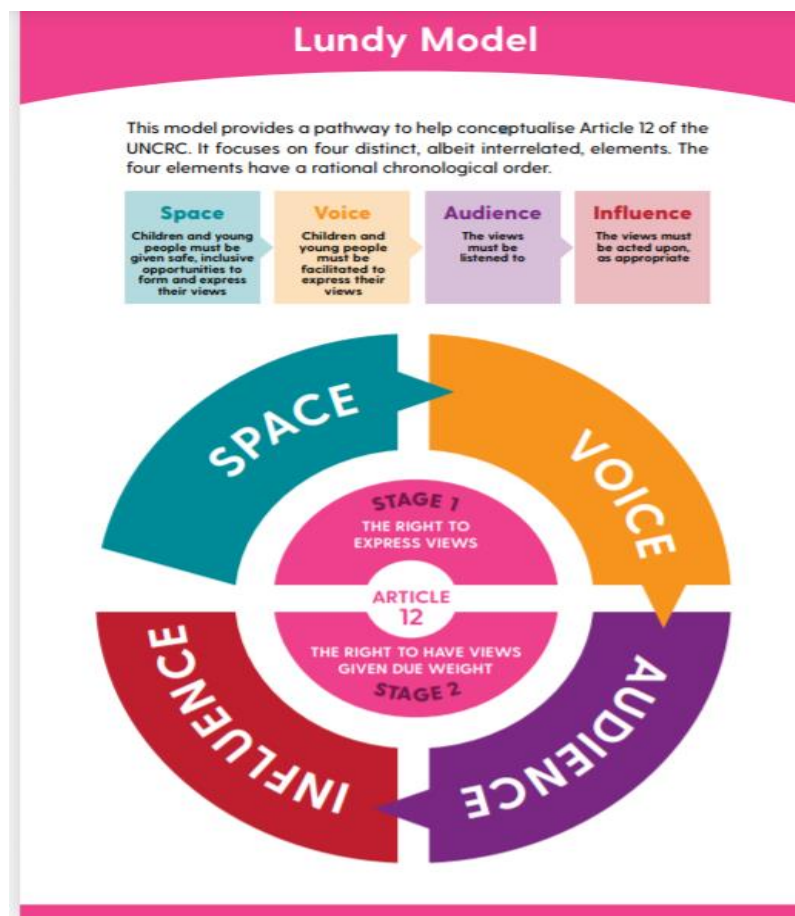
### **1.4 Self-Study Action Research**

"Action Research is a powerful tool for change and improvement at the local level" (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007: 297). Action research is often referred to as a 'self-study enquiry' carried out by participants who wish to improve their practices, "their understanding of these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out" (Carr & Kemmis, 1986: 162). Similarly, Sullivan, Glenn, Roche and McDonagh (2016) states that self-study action

research (SSAR) is unique to the researcher and by investigating their own practice will enhance their practice further. Action research is a process of “seeking knowledge about ... practice” in order to “learn more about our professional lives” (Sullivan et al., 2016: 26). The action researcher will stand to gain a better insight into their way of teaching and reflect on their values as a person, therefore leading to a more informed understanding of their professional practice. Furthermore, it will allow the researcher to evaluate whether their values are being lived out in their practice or is the ‘I’ in the question, ‘How do I improve my practice?’ existing as what Jack Whitehead coined as a “living-contradiction” (Whitehead, 2018: 12). The focus throughout the process will be on what ‘the self’ can learn from the experience and about their own practice (McNiff, 2002). “Teachers must be open at all times and must be willing to acknowledge what we do not know” (hooks, 2010: 10). This acknowledgement of not knowing will focus and motivate one to delve deeper into their professional practice and improve upon it. The SSAR approach will be elaborated upon further in chapter three.

### **1.5 Conceptual Framework Underpinning this Research Project**

The framework which underpins this research study is Lundy’s Model for Participation (see figure 1.2 below). Recently, Lundy’s Model for Participation has been endorsed by the Irish Department of Children and Youth Affairs in their publication of the National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making (2015 – 2020). I firmly support Lundy’s model as a guide to achieving meaningful SV initiatives, effective active student participation and a genuine interest in involving students in the decision-making process which are directly related to their learning experiences. This conceptual framework will be discussed in greater detail in chapter two and many links will be made with the Lundy model and the findings (in chapter, four, five and six) from this study.



*Figure 1.2 Lundy’s Model for Participation*

Source: (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2015: 15)

## 1.6 Thesis Structure

Chapter One: An introduction to the research which also outlines my value statement and the decision and justification to use a SSAR approach to this study. It also highlights my rationale which underpins this research.

Chapter Two: A review and analysis of the current and relevant literature with regards to defining SV, the emergence and significance of SV, a contextual framework for SV, the Irish and international context of SV, and finally the positives of prioritising SV and challenges to implementing SV initiatives.

Chapter Three: A methodological approach and details of the research paradigm employed in this study are defined and justified. Ethical considerations connected with this study are also highlighted. Research design and an outline of the cycles undertaken along with the data collection instruments and the data analysis chosen for this study are also explained in detail.

Chapter Four: Contains the analysis of the first theme which emerged from the data: Teacher as facilitator in relation to relevant literature.

Chapter Five: Contains the analysis of the second theme which emerged from the data: The power of SV and is situated among the applicable literature.

Chapter Six: Contains the analysis of the third and final theme which emerged from the data: The child as an active agent in their own learning and discussed in line with the corresponding literature.

Chapter Seven: This study's conclusion of the learnings and outcomes of this research along with my personal living theory and how I am living more closely to my values are outlined. It also highlights the significance of this study and discusses the dissemination of data while also noting some limitations to this study.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the relevant literature based on SV in terms of understanding the learning experiences of children. Through an in-depth literature review I will outline the current thinking and research on SV in relation to the learning experiences of children. I will first discuss the terminology, background, and emergence as well as the significance of SV in educational contexts. Secondly, I will outline the theory based on SV, the Irish and International context of SV as well the positives of prioritising SV and challenges to implementing SV initiatives.

#### **2.1.1 Literature Search**

To inform this study, document analysis including books, journals, articles, government documentation and policies as well as relevant websites will form the basis of this literature review. Google Scholar, SAGE journals, Taylor & Francis journals, JSTOR and ERIC international through the Maynooth University Library were chosen as a means of sourcing the relevant material.

#### **2.1.2 Literature Map**

The literature map provided in figure 2.1 below indicates how the literature review was formed and how each key area within the topic of SV was linked.

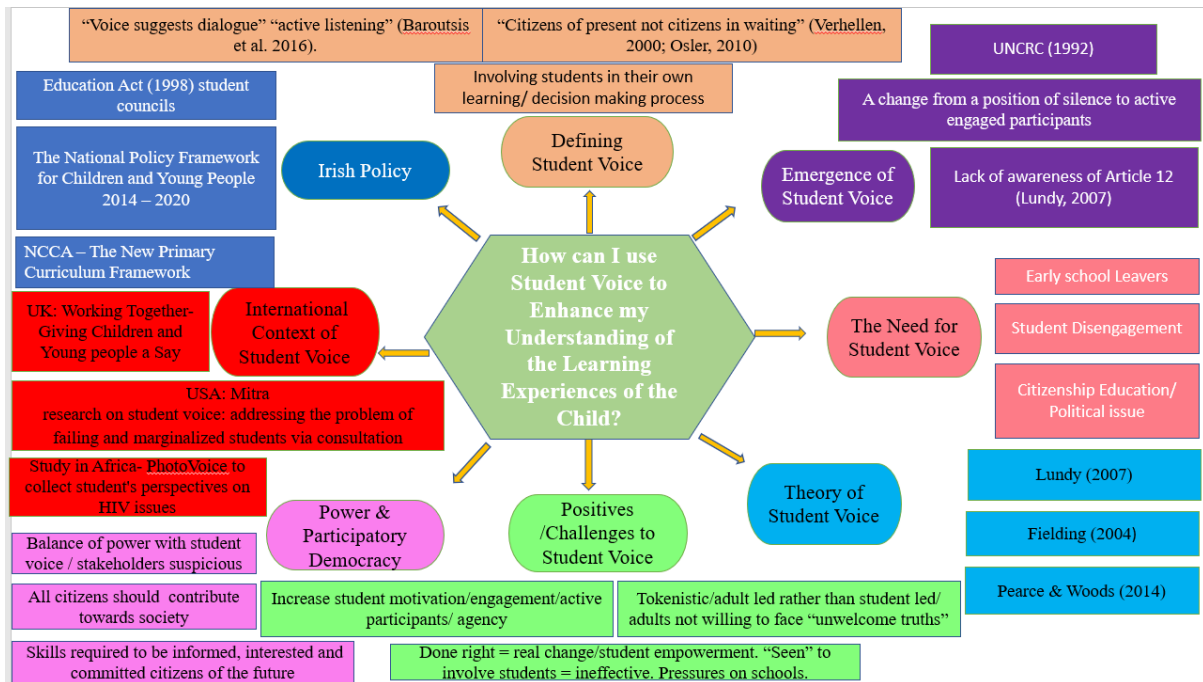


Figure 2.1 Literature Map

## 2.2 Defining Student Voice

### 2.2.1 The Terminology of Student Voice

The terms “student voice” and “pupil voice” are often used interchangeably and simultaneously (Robinson & Taylor, 2007). To complete a review on SV, it is of paramount importance that a common terminology is adapted. For the purposes of this literature review, I will follow the implementation of using “student” and “pupil” synonymously (Robinson & Taylor, 2007) and the definition of SV mentioned in chapter one. The concept of SV is therefore portrayed using a variety of terms that address the shifting role of students to become more engaged and involved in their education (Fleming, 2015). Although there is an increased use of the term, “none such clear and definite conception exists for student voice” (Cook-Sather, 2006: 360). The language and terminology used when referring to SV varies across a range of literature, research and policy documentation (Fleming, 2015). These terms include “participation of students”, “involvement of students”, “listening to students”,

“consulting with students”, “dialogue with students”, “researching with students”, “students’ perceptions”, “students’ perspectives”, “evaluation by students” and “empowering of students” (Fleming, 2015: 223). Additionally, the terms “consultation, communication, debate and dialogue are often used interchangeably and seen as inherent to the practice of successful SV work” (Robinson & Taylor, 2007: 8). In addition to this, “voice suggests dialogue” where “active listening” must take place by all involved for it to be meaningful (Baroutsis, McGregor & Mills, 2016: 126). As the term “voice” is used to express many different processes in educational policy, practice and research, it has become “almost meaningless - it works as an empty jug in which people can pour any meaning that they choose” (Thomson, 2011:19).

Students are often removed from decisions made regarding their education (Islam, 2012) leaving decisions to be made by educators and policy makers instead (Nelson, 2014). Beattie (2012) informs us that students are inclined to be compliant with the education system. Notably, if students are involved in decision making, they are “sought only after significant decisions have already been made and the curriculum has been determined by officially approved persons” (Brooker & MacDonald, 1999: 83). Similarly, Oldfather (1995) noted that as we expand our knowledge in the field of educational research, we are usually leaving out the main participants in education: students. According to Busher (2012), SV recognizes the rights of the child. She states that “students are citizens, not merely citizens in preparation, whose rights should be respected in the present as well in the future” (Busher, 2012: 113). Likewise, children should be seen as “citizens of the present not citizens in waiting” (Verhellen, 2000; Osler, 2010: 122). Classroom traditions, instructional practices and whole school procedures can all be transformed and improved by utilising SV (Bourke &



Loveridge, 2016). Learning and teaching improve when teachers have the tools and grasp the value of being learners in their own classrooms (MacBeath, 1999).

At the outset, one must acknowledge that SV is a concept which is emergent and complex and poses many challenges when attempting to define and understand it in an educational context (Pearce & Woods, 2019). In the field of education, SV has gained much attention, yet it remains a complex concept (Cook-Sather Clarke, Condon, Cushman, Demetriou, Easton, Evans, Fritz-Mauer, Himeles, Mitra Mausner, Pincus & Youens, 2009). Throughout this literature review, I will attempt to break down the various components of SV.

### **2.3 The Significance of Student Voice**

A way of thinking has formed that attempts to “reposition students in educational research and reform” (Cook-Sather 2006: 359). It stems from the fact that we have failed to recognize the value of student’s viewpoints but in recent times started to acknowledge that “listening to pupils does not lead to a dangerous place” (MacBeath, Myers & Demetriou, 2001: 78). Cook-Sather (2006) believes that this way of thinking is due to the many new beliefs and ideas which have emerged recently throughout the education sector internationally. These beliefs and ideas include students being actively involved in their learning and their insights and suggestions are not only given attention to but also listened to and responded to (Cook-Sather, 2006). Although these beliefs and ideas may mean various things as well as look different in various settings and practices, there has been one term used to attain the “reposition of students on educational research and reform”: “student voice” (Cook-Sather, 2006: 359). Involving students in their own learning experiences and as active participants in education has escalated and grown both nationally and internationally and this increased

interest in SV is often credited to the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (Lundy, 2007; Cook-Sather, 2014).

## **2.4 The Emergence of Student Voice**

Fielding (2011) acknowledges that SV has progressed significantly internationally. So much so that he believes we may be about to launch into a “new phase” which could lead to “substantial change” within the topic of SV (Fielding, 2011: 4). He adds that if we are to create better schools and improve society we must first recognize and appreciate where we have come from to improve the direction in which we want to go (Fielding, 2011). The notion of SV has gained significant attention within the Irish educational context particularly since Ireland ratified the UNCRC in 1992 (Fleming, 2015). Up until this important documentation was brought into effect, SV did not get much attention, nor the benefits of SV appreciated. However, there are many people who believe that this has either started to change or needs to change.

### **2.4.1 Student Voice as a Right**

The notion that children “should be seen and not heard” is constantly being challenged (Lodge, 2005: 127). Thomson (2011) defines SV as children using their voice to express their opinions about their education. This indicates the rights of students to have a voice “which has volume in pursuit of action” (Fleming, 2015). Cook-Sather (2006) also refers to student’s rights where students need a “change from a position of silence to active engaged participants” (Fleming, 2015: 224). The UNCRC 1992, was an “important contemporary indicator” of the significance of children’s voice and “the right to have a say about things that affect them” (UNCRC, 1992, Article 12). The implementation of Article 12 is “dependent on the cooperation of adults”, some of which may decide not to comply with the legislation

(Lundy, 2007: 929; Thomson, 2011). The reason for this “non-compliance” can stem from certain attitudes from adults in relation to children which include the view that children lack capacity, that SV will in turn undermine authority and that enabling SV in education requires too much time and effort (Lundy, 2007). Lundy (2007) states that there is a lack of awareness of the existence of Article 12. More importantly there is a lack of realisation and understanding that Article 12 is a “legally binding obligation...and applies to all educational decision making” (Lundy, 2007: 930). Countries who ratified the Convention now have initiatives, programmes, requirements and policies which support the provision for the “voice” of the student to be heard. However, one must also be aware that just because these countries have established certain SV initiatives, it does not automatically mean that SV is implemented with genuine respect and interest of the child. This will be further discussed in section 2.9.2 below in relation to the challenges of implementing SV.

## **2.5 The Importance of Student Voice**

Students who have become disengaged or isolated themselves from school life have reported feeling that they are unheard or furthermore treated unfairly and this leads to them wanting to leave school early (Curtis & McMillan 2008; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, [OECD], 2011; McGregor & Mills 2012). “Early leavers are more likely to become unemployed, stay unemployed for longer, have lower earnings, and over their life course accumulates less wealth” (Lamb & Rice, 2008: 1). Evidently, there is a need to find ways to keep students in school, so the dropout rate reduces. SV initiatives provide a meaningful approach to address “such socially unjust outcomes” (Baroutsis et al., 2016: 126).

Furthermore, the interest in SV can be viewed in terms of a political issue where governments are calling for young people to have an increased involvement in their communities (McNeish & Newman, 2002; Bragg, 2010). Citizenship education calls for students to become competent participants in their school rather than just obtaining information about citizenship (Bragg, 2010; Osler, 2010). “Students are the experts on their own perceptions and experiences as learners” (Oldfather, 1995: 131) and therefore consulting young people about their educational experiences enables teachers and management to better facilitate and meet their needs.

## **2.6 Critical Theorists of Student Voice**

Throughout this section I will attempt to explore some of the theoretical underpinnings of SV work. Firstly, I will briefly discuss Fielding’s (2004) framework for SV. I will then explore the post structural and critical theories of SV (Pearce & Wood, 2019). Lastly, I will explore Laura Lundy’s model for participation (2007) which is the framework which underpins this research study.

Fielding offers a framework to explore SV in which he examines two main categories: ‘Deconstructing the presumptions of the present’ and ‘the necessity of dialogue’. For this literature review, I am going to discuss one of the features of “deconstructing the presumptions of the present”: “the problems of speaking about/for others” (Fielding, 2004: 296). Fielding (2004) draws on the work of Alcoff, (1991;1992) in his attempt to explain this problem and refers to Lydia Alcoff’s (1991/92) idea that when speaking for people there is an overlap in terms of speaking about others (Fielding, 2004: 297). Speaking about others can be very problematic as it can turn into you “speaking for them” (Fielding, 2004: 297). The

problem with this, is that when a person speaks for another person their values and views are what determines the formation of their account (Fielding, 2004). Furthermore, when speaking for others, “a speaker’s location is epistemically significant” (Alcoff, 1991/92: 7). “Who is speaking to whom turns out to be as important for meaning and truth as what is said, in fact what is said turns out to change according to who is speaking and who is listening” (Alcoff as cited in Fielding, 2004: 301). Fielding (2004) also talks about “getting heard”. He argues that the person who is speaking, will determine how well they are listened to and whether their voices are heard (Alcoff, 1991/92; Fielding, 2004).

From a poststructuralist framework viewpoint, “voice cannot exist in a vacuum” (Pearce & Wood, 2019: 115). Voices appear only in relation to other voices, “both in response and in expectation of a response, as well as through a shared history of use in similar contexts for similar purposes” (Pearce & Wood, 2019: 115). Furthermore, from a post structural perspective, “students’ voices are not stable, coherent or autonomous but instead are always contingent on their context” (Pearce & Wood, 2019: 116). This viewpoint is like the “feminist, sociolinguistic or cultural studies perspectives” (Pearce & Wood, 2019: 116). Closely related to this perspective of voice is the critical theory where voice is seen as a “symbolic resource, an abstract form of capital or a kind of power” (Pearce & Woods, 2014: 116).

### **2.6.1 Theoretical framework: The Lundy Model of Participation**

Lundy (2007) offers a framework for conceptualizing Article 12 which focuses on four key factors which were highlighted in chapter one. These factors guide school leaders and teachers in achieving effective SV practices in their school. These factors are interrelated, especially in relation to a) space and voice and b) audience and influence (Lundy, 2007: 933).

As these factors support this research study and its findings, I feel it is important to outline them in detail in the following section.

### **Space**

A safe and comfortable space must be provided for children to express their views freely for meaningful engagement to occur. Children must be afforded the choice in which matters they would like to discuss and if they would like to be involved in the decision process (Lundy, 2007). Furthermore, children have the right to not want to be involved in decision making and this must be equally respected. What children have to say must be taken seriously but also the children must be protected from abuse (Lundy, 2007). They must be aware that what they have to say will be treated with respect without consequences (Lundy, 2007). The space provided to children must also be inclusive in which a wide range of diverse views are heard and not just from children who are articulate but children from disadvantaged backgrounds and children with disabilities also (Lundy, 2007).

### **Voice**

The right to have a voice is afforded to all human beings, however, within Article 12 it is afforded to a child 'who is capable of forming his or her own views' (UNCRC, 1989: 5). Often, there is confusion over what 'capacity to form a view' is. However, Lundy (2007: 935) states, that "children's right to express their views is not dependent upon their capacity to express a mature view; it is dependent only on their ability to form a view, mature or not". In certain instances, children will need assistance and guidance in forming a view for example assistive technology or interpreters (Lundy, 2007: 936).

**Audience**

This element of the framework is concerned with the fact that children's views should be given due weight, that is, their views should not just be heard but more importantly listened to by those involved in decision making (Lundy, 2007). Lundy (2007) also states that training is required by those who are implementing SV initiatives. Furthermore, even when children express a strong view, there is no guarantee that their views will be taken on board, shared with people in a positive way to create change or even taken seriously. Lundy (2007: 937) argues that "children at least have a 'right of audience'—a guaranteed opportunity to communicate views to an identifiable individual or body with the responsibility to listen".

**Influence**

A criticism of Article 12 is that it can be simple for adults to adhere to the consultation process yet "ultimately ignore children's views" (Lundy, 2007: 938). School leaders and teachers are in breach of Article 12 if they do not comply with the requirements outlined. Additionally, Lundy (2007) states that it is also counterproductive. Schools must find ways of listening to children's views and taking what they have to say seriously. One way to ensure children feel respected and heard is to keep them informed about how their views were considered during the decision-making process and why certain decisions were made (Lundy, 2007: 938). This highlights the need to ensure safeguards are in place to make a more openness and transparent view to including the voice of the child. Change will not be successful without a genuine cultural shift to a "position where participation is not seen just as a desirable add-on but something that is firmly embedded" (Sinclair, 2004: 114).

### **2.6.2 Student Voice: Power and Participatory Democracy**

Voice and matters of power have created controversy over the years (Ahmadi, 2021). Shohamy (2001), states that when a shared power and collaboration materialises, “mutual effort via dialogical respect” transpires (Ahmadi, 2021: 2). Furthermore, Freire (1994) states:

By sharing power with students, by listening to them and seeking to follow their advice, we have learned that educators, researchers and policy makers are more likely to promote contexts through which the voiceless have voice, the powerless have power and from such spaces hope can emerge. (Freire, 1994: 491).

“Liberal perspective” on the increased interest in SV initiatives is a “mark of a new enlightenment and readiness to share power on the part of adults” (Bragg, 2003: 344). However, Bragg (2003) also notes that this perspective fails to address the balances of power which shifts greatly when students can express opinions freely in relation to their experiences of education (Bragg, 2003). It is the “power relations” that Bragg (2003) explains is becoming something in which educationalists and others, including those who champion SV, are more suspicious of in recent years. Now that SV appears to be high on the agenda for government policies, one must question “the real interests of those in power” and furthermore, we must not let SV become “cynical and manipulative” (Bragg, 2003: 344).

Underpinning the evaluation of ‘voice’ are “deeper sociological ideas about democracy and self-determination within the constraints of existing societal structures” (Hipkins, 2010: 87). Participatory democracy is the idea that all citizens contribute towards society, particularly those that are “characteristically excluded from privilege and power” (Hildreth, 2012; Cannon, 2017: 41). Cook-Sather (2002, 2006, 2007) makes an argument that SV is an essential feature of democratic education and that involving students in bringing about change in teacher practices is a must. Including meaningful SV initiatives in education equips students with the necessary skills required to be informed, interested and committed citizens



of the future. Involving students in decisions which affect them highlights to them how their views, and opinions matter which in turn will hopefully enable these students to see how their voice can ultimately create change. Furthermore, since Article 12 states that the child has the right to express views freely ‘in all matters affecting the child’ “it seems important that these young citizens living in a democracy, who show an understanding of political debates, should have an opportunity of contributing to those debates that affect their lives less directly” (Osler, 2010: 123).

## **2.7 The Irish and International Context of Student Voice**

### **2.7.1 The Development of Irish Policy**

As mentioned previously, the concept of SV was brought to the fore in Irish educational policy following Article 12 (UNCRC) in 1992. Student councils were established in Irish schools, mainly post-primary schools but an increasing number of primary schools also formed student councils, to fulfil the requirements of Article 12. Furthermore, the Education Act (1998), also highlighted the need for SV to be heard in schools and so the establishment of student councils became the central medium in which students had a platform to participate in decision-making in schools (Fleming, 2015). Guidance on how student councils should be organized and implemented in schools was provided in the publication: “Student Councils: A Voice for Students” by the Department of Education and Science (DES) in 2002. (Fleming, 2015). This document gave rise to the SV being central to the operation of the student council and referred to terms such as “partnership” and “involvement”.

The National Children's Strategy (2000-2010) "Our Children - Their Lives" was established in Ireland and made a "valuable contribution to policy development in subsequent years" (DES, 2014: 17). Following a review of The National Children's Strategy (2000-2010) by the Children's Rights Alliance in 2011 found that there was evidence of progress made in two of the three national goals: "Children will have a voice" and "Children's lives will be better understood" (DES, 2014: 17). The advancement of these goals was highlighted by many implementations funded by the government such as the "establishment of *Dáil na nÓg* and *Comhairle na nÓg*...and the commencement of the national longitudinal study on children, *Growing Up in Ireland*" (DES, 2014: 17). This evaluation informed further initiatives or policies that were to come and in 2014, *Better Outcomes, Better Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014 – 2020*, was developed. "This is the most recent element of national policy discourse that has informed the emergence of student voice" (Fleming, 2015: 230). This policy identifies six transformative goals, one being "listening to and involving children and young people" (DES, 2014: 24). The importance of SV was further supported in the Quality Framework section of the *School Self-Evaluation Guidelines (2016-2020)*. It promotes "active citizenship and lifelong learning" "and the education that schools provide for students must be "explicitly learning-centred" (Inspectorate, 2016: 16). It is also noted that students are very conscious of what works best in relation to their learning and their views can be very discerning (Inspectorate, 2012). The Teaching Council of Ireland "which promotes and regulates professional standards in teaching" has developed a *Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers (2016)*. Teachers registered with the Teaching Council must adhere to and always follow this *Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers*. The code sets out four main ethical values which "underpin the standards of teaching, knowledge, skill, competence and conduct" (The Teaching Council, 2016: 6). These ethical values include care, respect, integrity and trust.

In 2017, The Ombudsman for Children established “Child Talks” which gives children a “platform to talk about children’s rights and the issues that matter to them” (OCO, 2020). This is a recent and welcomed initiative and highlights the continued effort that Ireland is contributing to the inclusion of SV. In 2017, The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) conducted a study with post-primary students where they were provided with the opportunity to have their say in curriculum structure for the first time in the Republic of Ireland (NCCA, 2017: 2). This experience was mostly positive, and it was noted how the students appreciated being part of the consultation process. However, it was also observed how schools varied in relation to student’s confidence levels in articulating their views (NCCA, 2017). Furthermore, the NCCA are currently developing a new primary curriculum framework. This new curriculum will be informed from teacher feedback in relation to the current curriculum - The Primary School Curriculum (1999). Data gathered from children in the recent study conducted by University College Dublin, called The Children’s School Lives study “will feed directly into the NCCA’s work in reviewing and redeveloping the primary curriculum in the coming years” (NCCA, 2020: 2).

### **2.7.2 The International Context of Student Voice**

The context in which SV initiatives and practices have emerged differ across various countries, some of which have materialized through international or national directive while others have formed due to local involvement (Cook-Sather, 2014). However, while the ratification of the UNCRC (1989) played a significant impact in many countries in terms of SV initiatives, “other, less formal, sources have made similar assertions” in terms of student’s rights (Cook-Sather, 2014 :133). In this section, I will highlight the many studies that have taken place and the initiatives being implemented to support SV internationally.

In the United Kingdom, research to investigate the “inclusion of SV in understanding development of major national educational reforms” was undertaken by Elwood (Elwood, 2013: 107). During the student focus groups a variety of topics were discussed such as “whether their schools consulted them on institutional-level policy reforms; their opportunities within their institutions to choose qualifications and educational pathways; and their experience of teaching and learning” (Elwood, 2003: 102). As a result of her research, students felt somewhat included in terms of “educational experience locally” but felt excluded from “decisions at regional or/and national levels” (Elwood, 2013: 107).

The government of England have provided national frameworks from the Department of Education and Skills (DfES; 2004b) which provide guidance to educational settings “that consider students” experience and perspectives on their education” (Cook-Sather, 2007: 345). All these initiatives and guidance around implementing SV enterprises “attempt to make student voice a normal rather than marginal aspect of schooling” (Bragg, 2007: 343; Bragg, 2010).

In New Zealand, teachers are encouraged to “look for ways to involve students directly in decisions relating to their own learning” (Ministry of Education, 2007: 34). Using the national curriculum in New Zealand as a guide, schools are required to develop their own curriculum meeting the needs of and “aspirations of their local school communities” (Nelson, 2014: 92). While developing this curriculum, some schools have chosen to include their SVs throughout the process (Nelson, 2014). New Zealand tends to enact SV through pedagogical practices such as student inquiry learning, student leadership, e-learning and teaching for diversity (Hipkins, 2010).

In the USA, Mitra (2001, 2003, 2004, 2007) has completed much research on SV, in particular “addressing the problem of failing and marginalised students through consultation and facilitating schools and teachers to listen to the voices of their students” (Fleming, 2013: 48). One such research study took the form of investigating ‘youth-adult partnerships’ by conducting semi-structured telephone interviews and in-depth observations (Mitra, 2009: 316-317).

In Canada, a 15-year, state-wide project named the Manitoba School Improvement Programme (MSIP) has “developed an understanding of the importance of SV in creating meaningful change” and in some cases provided “the tipping point to shift the culture and practices of student voice” (Pekrul & Levin, 2007: 711).

A study in Southern Africa used PhotoVoice as a means of collecting students’ perspectives and commentary to represent their understanding of HIV issues with primary school children (Fleming, 2013: 49). Student’s created short documentaries and participated in focus group discussions on their PhotoVoice image to aid the development of curriculum for sexuality education (McLaughlin & Kiragu, 2011). It is evident from international research cited above that there is a great interest in SV as well as many SV initiatives being implemented across the educational system.

## **2.8 The Positives and Challenges of Student Voice**

### **2.8.1 Positives to Prioritising Student Voices**

There are many positives to using SV including increased communication, collaboration, empowering students, active participants, increased student agency and more student engagement in their learning experiences (Cook-Sather, 2006; Reeve, 2006; Lundy, 2007;

Charteris, 2016). SV can alter “power imbalance between adults and young people” (Cook-Sather, 2006: 366). Likewise, when researchers allow themselves to become “partners with students in the research process” they are seen as less distanced and work with the students to become more informed (Mitra, 2007; Cook-Sather, 2014: 135). Cook-Sather (2006) also highlights how respect enables a more positive contribution and facilitates a relationship where the teacher and student learn from each other. Closely related to the concept of respect is that “if students speak, adults must listen” (Cook-Sather, 2006: 367). Rodgers (2006) proposes a process called “descriptive feedback” where a conversation between student and teacher occurs with the intention being that students describe their learning experiences thus strengthening the student-teacher relationship and fostering an effective community. Likewise, extra student engagement and a “sense of ownership” is achieved when utilizing SV. (Busher, 2012: 113). Similarly, Reeve (2006) highlights how ensuring a supportive classroom environment can in turn increase student’s engagement in learning. Additionally, SV work recognises “students” rights as active participants - as citizens-in school and beyond it” (Cook-Sather, 2006: 266).

### **2.8.2 Challenges of Implementing Student Voice Initiatives**

While the use of SV in schools is seen to have many positive outcomes, as outlined above, one must also consider the problems and adverse impacts encountered in relation to SV in education. School leaders who advertise the use of SV are often doing so to be ‘seen’ to be endorsing SV or enhancing school improvement rather than being actively involved in making change or developing individuals (Rudduck, 2006; Frost, 2008; Thomson, 2011). This is often seen as merely “passive” or tokenistic and will unlikely assist the students in terms of improvement or change in their learning experiences (Robinson & Taylor, 2007: 14). This idea of tokenism is not a new idea as Hart (1992: 9) pointed out over

a quarter of a century ago that there are “many more instances of tokenism than there are genuine forms of children’s participation in projects” and research lately suggests that little has changed (Lundy, 2018: 340). Similarly, SV initiatives created to be student led can result in being adult led and “ineffective in acting upon what young people view as important” (Simmons, Graham & Thomas, 2015: 131). Moreover, some SV initiatives have the potential to “reinforce a hierarchy of power and privilege among students and undermine attempted reforms” (Silva, 2001: 98). If SV work is not “combined with genuine respect” for all involved, it can lead to “claims not acted on in practice” (Cook-Sather, 2014: 134). The use of the word “voice” has been debated to a great extent as it implies that a group of students only have one voice as well as implying that it is just the words spoken by students that are important (Robinson & Taylor, 2007). Pearce and Woods (2019) highlight this further by stating that adults need to ensure that their involvement in SV initiatives is considerate to how young people choose to convey their thoughts, feelings and views on matters that affect their learning experiences. Adults need to be creative in their methods to communicate and require information, thoughts, feelings and views from children, ensuring that it is appropriate to their ability (Marchant & Kirby, 2005; Lundy, 2007; Piper & Frankham, 2007; Pearce & Woods, 2019).

A project that took place in inner city London where researchers worked with children with challenging behaviours, outlines how they used a range of creative arts methods to gather feedback from students. The intention of this initiative was to gain a better insight and a more holistic view of children who are viewed as “troubled” or difficult, “treating them as social actors in context rather than outcome variables” (Gillies & Robinson, 2012: 162). The theme for this project was focused on “being me” and the aim was to illicit participation using innovative creative methods. The use of creative arts methods such as drawing, painting,

constructing and photography, enables young people to express their views, participate and “communicate ideas and experiences that are not easily articulated using words” (Tinkler, 2008: 256).

A challenge in relation to SV is that some adults may not be ready or furthermore “willing to face” what young people have to say regarding their learning experiences (Cook-Sather, 2006). It is “very hard to learn to hear the voices we don’t want to hear” (Cook-Sather, 2006: 368). Enabling SV in schools means that sometimes stakeholders may have to hear things that they may not want to hear, what Charteris and Thomas (2017) called the “unwelcome truths”. However, a study undertaken by McIntyre, Pedder and Rudduck (2005) in England, found that teachers' reactions to their student’s feedback was generally helpful and delivered the feedback in a polite manner. Resistance to change is also another challenge that school leaders can face when attempting to introduce SV initiatives (Fink & Stoll, 2005; Fullan, 2007; Casey-Schöner, 2019).

One also must consider that some students may not feel comfortable sharing their views on matters that involve teachers and so therefore, their true opinions and views may not be reflected honestly. One must acknowledge that school personnel are perhaps not the most effective people to “ask questions that allow people to get to the root of key issues, or subsequently get honest answers from students about things that matter to them” (Crane, 2001: 54). Frost (2008) recognises that schools have the desire to implement SV initiatives, however, due to the increasing demand, pressures and performativity being placed on teachers this leads to an inconsistency when encouraging SV throughout education.



## 2.9 Conclusion

It is evident from the literature discussed throughout this chapter that there is a strong argument and place for SV in the educational context. SV has gained noteworthy attention not only in the Irish context but internationally also. The UNCRC was a landmark for SV developments in education. While there are many terms and phrases used to describe students and teachers collaborating, listening to, sharing views, making decisions and respecting everyone opinion, “student voice” is the term most frequently used to describe these actions. SV can empower, motivate, increase confidence as well as giving students a “credible voice” and impact on the institution that plays a major role in their lives” (Pekrul & Levin, 2007: 711). SV can ensure that students are not only listened to and more importantly heard, and an environment of inclusiveness is adopted (Laitala & Kenopic, 2006). However, SV if not implemented effectively, can end up being “tokenistic” or “passive” (Robinson & Taylor, 2007). SV calls for commitment from both the student and the teacher for real change to come about. Concurring with (Fielding, 2004: 296) SV “requires a transformation of what it means to be a student; what it means to be a teacher. In effect, it requires the intermingling and interdependence of both”. It is noted on numerous occasions throughout the literature (Cook-Sather, 2006; Arnot & Reay, 2007; Fielding, 2011; Thomson, 2011; Fleming 2013) that SV has many layers to it. Throughout the literature discussed, it is evident that SV is warranted and thus has an imperative place within education. It is what we do with SV that will indicate how successful it can be to enhance the learning experiences of the child. The following chapter will define and justify the methodological approach and outline details of the research paradigm employed in this study.

## Chapter Three: Methodology

### 3.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to describe, justify and explain the methodology process undertaken for this study. I will outline the research rationale and approach, data collection instruments, data analysis, ethical considerations, research design, a brief timeline of the intervention and an overview of the teaching methods employed during this project. The data collection methods used were a combination of verbal and non-verbal tools. By adopting these methods, I hope to examine how SV can enhance my understanding of student's learning experiences. In doing this I also hope to consider and reflect upon my ontological values, better my practice and increase my understanding of how children learn (Kavanagh, 2020).

The research questions of this study are threefold:

- 1 • What learning experiences have students had in terms of using student voice in the class context?
- 2 • What methodologies are considered effective to enhance student voice?
- 3 • How has my understanding of student voice progressed?

*Figure 3.1 Research Questions*

## **3.2 Research Approach**

An action research approach was used when undertaking this study as it focuses on the self and one's practice (McNiff, 2002). A qualitative research methodology for gathering the data was adopted for this study.

### **3.2.1 The Nature of Qualitative Research**

This study chose a qualitative approach to achieve the aims of the research. Qualitative research refers to “research that produces descriptive data - people’s own written or spoken words and observable behaviours” (Taylor, Bogdan & DeVault, 2016: 17). Qualitative research allows for a flexible research plan where the research works within a theoretical framework (Taylor et al., 2016). Taylor et al., (2016) also highlights that one must become familiar with one’s setting before deciding upon what additional data one might need to find answers to their original question(s). Qualitative research allows for the researcher to gather and experience first-hand knowledge and understanding of a social situation where one can observe people in their day-to-day routines (Taylor et al., 2016). Qualitative research was chosen as it was best suited to my epistemological values where knowledge can be created and is ever changing (O’ Dwyer, 2019: 35).

### **3.3 Data Collection**

Methodological triangulation is a means of comparing findings from various data collection tools. As well as providing consistency, triangulation in a SSAR project “provides opportunities to open up deeper meaning in the research” (Sullivan et al., 2016: 107). For this reason, a variety of data collection methods were employed to carry out this research and will be explained in detail in the following sections.

### **3.3.1 Research Site and Participants**

The research site was a co-educational primary school located in Dublin. Two hundred and thirty children attend the school which employs thirteen teachers, eight classroom teachers and four Special Educational Teachers (SETs) as well as three Special Needs Assistants. The school is an upper middle-class school. Families who attend the school would have a reasonably prosperous socio-economic background. The intervention took place over a ten-week period from 08<sup>th</sup> March 2021 to 28<sup>th</sup> May 2021. Through consultation with the class teacher, eight children in fourth class were chosen and were agreeable participants in this study. This group of participants were chosen as I worked very closely with these children daily. Being the SET, I felt there was a good student-teacher relationship developed from the onset and I knew the children very well.

### **3.3.2 Data Collection Instruments**

Multiple data collection instruments were applied during this study. The methods included: unstructured observations, critical friend and validation group, interviews, reflective journal, focus groups, and PhotoVoice. I observed these approaches of data collection to be the most suitable for obtaining the required information for the research question. Rouvali and Riga (2019: 1000) highlight the importance of having “flexible approaches to enable more enhanced listening of young children’s voices to promote the freedom of expression and participation”.

#### **Unstructured Observations**

The characteristic feature of observation during the research process is that it enables the researcher to collect ‘live’ data from natural settings or “everyday social settings and their behaviour in them” in this case, the classroom (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011: 465). This

gives the investigator an opportunity to detect directly what is happening “in situ” rather than referring to second-hand information (Cohen, et al., 2011). Furthermore, observation of children supports the Froebelian approach (Tovey, 2013). As the children are in their natural setting, they are unaware of the observations taking place and therefore the researcher gets true and valid information. For the above reasons, it was decided that unstructured observation was the best fit for the purpose of this study. Observational notes were taken throughout the process, and these initially provided insight into the children’s learning from a teacher’s perspective (see appendix A for a template used for the unstructured observations). During the implementation of PhotoVoice, observational notes were also taken, and these were then used as a focus for reflection. Observations can assist the investigator with beneficial knowledge in the “interpretation of children’s opinions and ideas collected” (Rouvali & Riga, 2019: 1003).

### **Critical Friend and Validation group**

As mentioned previously, SSAR requires collaboration, dialogue and ideas from others “who provide support as well as constructively challenge and critique” (Lassonde, Galman & Kosnik, 2009; Sullivan, et al., 2016: 28). Therefore, it was vital to have a critical friend throughout this research project to ensure an all-inclusive study. I had a critical friend who was a colleague and the class teacher of the co-participants. As my critical friend was the class teacher of the participants for this study, she was able to offer valuable insights, observations and thoughts around the children’s learning. My validation group consisted of a colleague who was a SET and the third-class teacher who I work with daily. I felt that I had developed a healthy working relationship with the SET and third-class teacher and so I felt they would be a good selection for the validation group. The information that my critical friend and validation group provided informed my focus group lessons as well as highlighted

the times when my values were and were not being lived out in my practice. See Appendix B for a sample template for Critical friend observations.

### **Interviews**

It is vital to understand the world of children “through their eyes rather than the lens of the adult” (Cohen et al., 2011: 433). There are many aspects which must be considered when interviewing children such as attention span, cognitive and linguistic development, ability to recall, status and power (Arksey and Knight, 1999:116). The interviewer must also be mindful to establish trust with the participant prior to the interview. Furthermore, one must ensure that the interview is enjoyable and non-threatening, use simple language and allow time for the child to think about the questions. I chose to complete interviews with the children as I wanted to hear their opinions and reasons for choosing their PhotoVoice image. Furthermore, as this study is based on SV, I wanted the children to know that I respect their opinion and wanted them to know that their voice was heard. Baseline interviews (see Appendix C for questions) were carried out prior to implementing the intervention to gather data on the children’s prior knowledge of SV. Interviews (See Appendix D for questions) were also carried out with the children in the focus groups once they had selected their PhotoVoice image for them to have an opportunity to discuss their image.

### **Reflective Journal**

The use of a reflective journal in a SSAR project enhances the reflective process thus exploring the importance of critical thinking (Sullivan et al., 2016: 41). Reflection is a tool or an approach one uses to understand one’s practice, what Schön referred to as ‘reflection on practice’ (Sullivan, et al., 2016: 15, 51). Valli (1997: 70) in light of Dewey’s (1993) definition of reflection states that when teachers reflect, they “can look back on events, make

judgments about them and alter their teaching behaviours in light of craft, research, and ethical knowledge”. Being a reflective practitioner enables one to become more involved in the research itself by including one’s own thoughts and opinions, therefore the researcher is studying their own lives rather than the lives of others (McNiff, 2002). Using a reflective journal enabled me to examine my practice more closely and identify areas for improvement. Journal entries were documented weekly based on discussions, interactions, observations, activities and lessons which had taken place. Gibbs (1988) model of reflection was utilized as well as stimulus questions set by lecturers, supervisor and critical friend(s). (See also Appendix E for sample reflection questions used)



*Figure 3.2 Gibb's Reflective Cycle*

## **Focus Groups**

The use of focus groups in research is seen as a means of producing knowledge and generating data between people through discussion (Kvale, 1996; Cohen et al., 2011). Focus groups permit a “collective rather than an individual view...it is from the interaction of the group that the data emerges” (Cohen et al., 2011: 436). The focus groups took the form of

circle time for this study (Mosley, 1996; Pascal & Bertram, 2009 as cited in Lundy, McEvoy & Byrne, 2011). Circle time enables the participants to be ‘listened’ to in a supportive environment (Lundy et al., 2011) as well as making it less formal and more part of a daily routine (Cohen et al., 2011). The photos taken during the PhotoVoice activities as well as other activities and lessons were used as a stimulus during the focus group sessions each week. The focus groups occurred for one hour each week on Thursday afternoons. Ground rules for the focus groups were set prior to implementing the focus groups so the children understood what was expected of them as well as ensuring mutual respect was achieved within the group. The children were given an opportunity at the beginning of each session to discuss matters that affected them that week. Once everyone had the opportunity to speak, we then began the focus of the lesson for that week. Utilizing the focus groups, enabled me to get a deeper insight into the children’s view and opinions as it was a smaller class size, so everyone felt they were heard.

### **PhotoVoice**

Visual techniques have many advantages such as altering the power dynamics between teacher and child (Wall & Higgins, 2006), age appropriateness (Cook & Hess, 2007), and capturing a more holistic view of the child (Gillies & Robinson, 2012). PhotoVoice, is an approach “that allows participants to use photography to document various aspects of their lived experience” (Wang, 1999 as cited in Miller, Deacon & Fitzgerald, 2015: 98). Participants take photos to document, reflect and engage in dialogue to bring about action and change in their community (Wang & Burris, 1997 as cited in Lofton & Grant, 2020 :2). Photography enables one to express his/her view of the world around them (Sánchez, 2015). This data collection method was chosen for the study as it enabled the co-participants from fourth class an opportunity to express their opinions and views about their learning



experiences in a non-threatening way. A pilot of PhotoVoice was completed with the focus group prior to introducing the main topic. I felt this was important as the children had the opportunity to become familiar with the method, ask questions, practice using a camera and understand that there was an extra layer to the assent process in how their chosen PhotoVoice image was going to be used throughout the research.

### **3.4 Data Analysis**

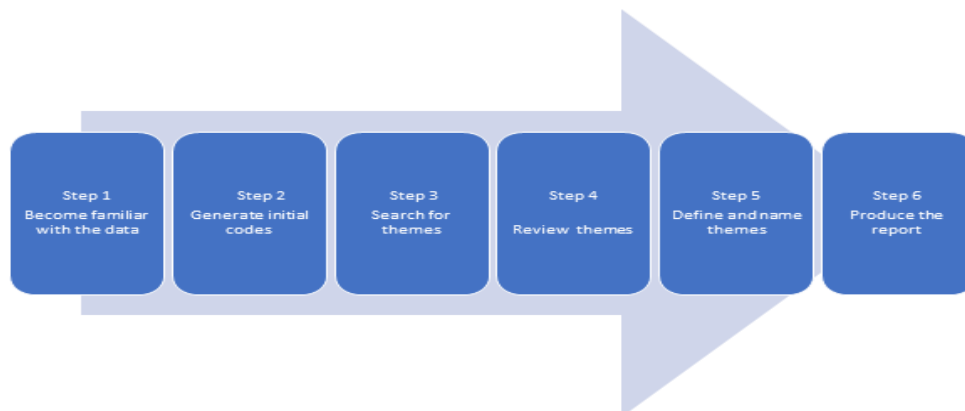
How one decides on the form of data analysis for their research study must be appropriate and relevant to the types of data collected (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). As this study was based on qualitative data collection, qualitative data analysis was then applied to examine the data gathered. Qualitative data analysis involves arranging, considering, interpreting and describing the data collected where one must understand the data in terms of the participants' perspectives of the phenomenon, common patterns and themes which emerge from the data (Cohen et al., 2011; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Qualitative data analysis does not follow one method, instead one must observe a “fitness for purpose” approach (Cohen et al., 2011: 537). In the following section, I will outline the method of analysis selected for this research study.

#### **3.4.1 Thematic Analysis**

Thematic analysis is a “method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 79). By using this form of analysis, it enables the researcher to report the data set as well as interpreting some elements of the phenomenon and making sense of the data presented (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Unlike other qualitative methods of data analysis, thematic analysis is not connected to a

certain epistemological or theoretical position, therefore enabling this form of analysis to be a flexible process (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017).

My first step in analysing the data was to establish how the transcribing of the data was going to be carried out. I made the decision to transcribe the data by hand as I felt it would give me a greater insight and picture of the emerging data. It was decided upon to use Braun and Clarke's (2006) 6-Phase Framework of Thematic Analysis and was applied in a systematic way to the study. Using a systematic approach to data analysis can be "transparently communicated to others" (Sandelowski, 1995; Malterud, 2001; Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). Once patterns and themes were identified in the data, they were then applied to the research question to establish if they represent something important (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017).



*Figure 3.3 Braun and Clarke's (2006) 6-Phase Framework of Thematic Analysis*

### **3.4.2 Validity and Credibility**

Educational research requires the researcher to follow a certain set of standards and procedures (Cuff & Payne, 1979; Oluwatayo, 2012). Validity is an essential component to any research (Cohen et al., 2011). Convenience sampling and purposive sampling was selected for the research. All data gathered was dated to illustrate personal reliability and

credibility (Sullivan et al., 2016). Once the data was collected, I organised, analysed and categorised it into key codes, themes and then identified connections between the data (See Figure 3.4 below for a sample of the coding process). Sullivan et al., (2016) state that using a social setting to test your research will secure reliability and credibility. Being open to critique of my research using a validation group and a critical friend allowed for validity and credibility of my work. Triangulation was ensured with the use of my critical friend, co-participants and validation group and by including and respecting various perspectives guaranteed validity was achieved (Sullivan et al., 2016). Furthermore, the researcher was true to the aim and purpose of the research, which was to use SV to enhance my understanding of the learning experiences of the child.

Evidence from Data	Code	Categories	Theme
I find it is a real calm quite place	Space	Logistics	<b>Teacher as Facilitator</b>
Yes. You need to be able to trust them (teachers)	Trust		
no one really asked us that before, we are just told how or why we should learn.	Respect	Values	
it was important and nice that we got a chance to talk about how we.	Providing opportunity	Role of Teacher	
for my opinions to be shared.	Talk and discussion		

Figure 3.4 Sample of Codes, Categories and Themes Generated

### 3.5 Ethical Standards, Considerations and Informed Consent

Researchers must always “act in such a way as to preserve their dignity as human beings: this is their responsibility to participants” (Cohen et al., 2011: 84). As this study involved “real life participants” I ensured that the ethical procedures were always adhered to (Sullivan et al., 2016: 93). The ethical proposal for this study was approved by the Maynooth University Ethics Board (see Appendix F). Informed by the Maynooth University (2020) Research

Ethics Policy, Maynooth University (2021) Research Integrity Policy, this research study was also guided by the school's Child Protection Policy and the Data Protection Act (2018). Approval was sought from the principal and Board of Management (BOM) prior to beginning the data collection (see Appendix G).

Parental consent and child assent was sought before data was gathered. Informed consent from the parents/guardians was sought via email informing them that I was undertaking a Masters in Action Research at Maynooth University. Details of the study and the planned research process which included the aims were provided as well as an information leaflet (see Appendix H). Parents were invited to sign the consent form if they were happy to have their child involved in this research. (See Appendix I).

### **3.5.1 Child Assent**

Lewis (2002) states that child assent is the capability of the child to make a choice about their participation in research. As one of my core values is having respect for the child, I felt that it was of paramount importance that I received child assent. The information and assent form for the student was in simple, child friendly, age-appropriate language and reading ability as well as adequate information, aims, methods and possible outcomes of the research outlined (DCYA, 2012) (See appendix J). I sought permission from the student by asking them to write their name on the form (see Appendix K). I also reassured the child that they could withdraw from the research at any time without any consequences (Bourke & Loveridge, 2014).

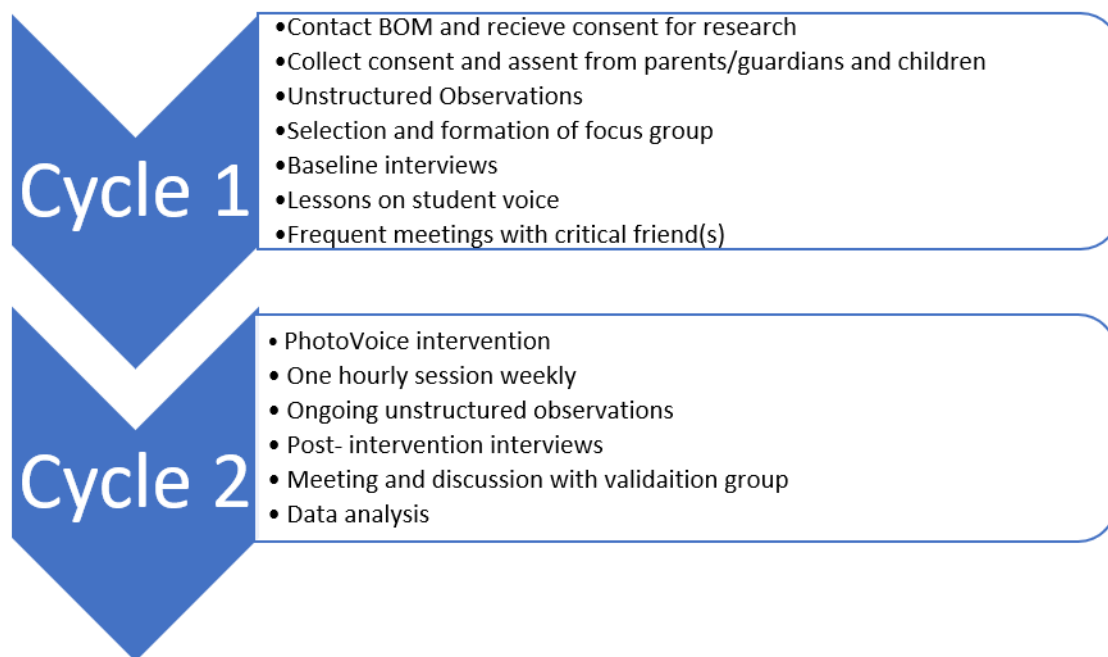
All humans have the right to privacy (Cohen et al., 2011). Confidentiality was respected throughout this research by ensuring no disclosure of information (Cohen et al., 2011: 92). When completing interviews with the participants, I ensured that they did not write their

name or any other personal means of identification (Cohen et al., 2011). As my research is based on SV, I wanted the children to be part of the entire research process. I gave the children the opportunity to select their own pseudonyms. According to the UNCRC (1989), Maynooth University Policy for Child Welfare and Maynooth University Research Ethics Policy, the best interests of the child must be at the centre of the research project. As this topic aimed to research the children's views, opinions and feedback, some children may have felt that I did not agree with the information they provided or that they felt they had to say what I wanted to hear. I ensured the children always felt safe when carrying out the research. As I worked with many children in a small group setting as a SET, I had built strong and healthy relationships with all my students where I fostered a safe, happy and open environment where children knew they could come and talk to me if they were upset or worried. Furthermore, I assured them that there were no consequences to any of the information they provided to me. Ennew (1994: 57) states that "evasions are less likely when a researcher has built up a relationship of trust with children". I was also mindful that if any child disclosed any sensitive information, I would have informed the Designated Liaison Person in my school immediately.

### **3.5.2 Data Storage**

I acknowledged the importance of data storage and the protection of privacy of the participants throughout this research project. I always ensured confidentiality, anonymity and non-traceability were always adhered to. I safeguarded all data by ensuring it was stored securely, with "appropriately restricted access", either in a locked cabinet (hard copies) or a password protected laptop (soft copies) (Cohen et al., 2018: 650). All information will be destroyed in a stated time frame in accordance with the Maynooth University guidelines.

### 3.6 Overview of the Research Design of this Study



*Figure 3.5 Overview of the Research Design of Study*

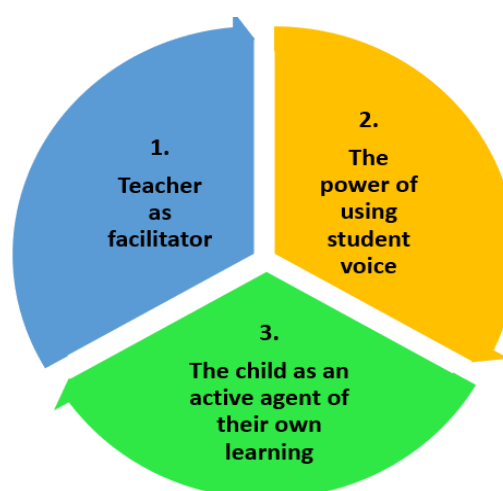
#### 3.6.1 Timeline and Overview of Intervention

Sharing of the research with the students and collecting consent and assent began in February 2021. Cycle one began March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021. Cycle two began May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021 and ending on May 28<sup>th</sup>. Data analysis took place between May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2021 and June 18<sup>th</sup>, 2021. Throughout both cycles of this intervention there were various teaching methods used to help implement the intervention successfully. I will briefly outline the teaching methods used now. Teacher modelling was used during each lesson with the focus group. Role modelling by the teacher was used to show children how to listen and show respect when someone is talking and sharing their ideas with the group. Teacher modelling was also used to introduce PhotoVoice to the children so as they understood what it was, how it would work and what was required of them. The implementation of child led lessons rather than teacher led lessons was also explored during the weekly focus groups. Once I felt confident that the children knew how the focus groups worked and what was expected of them, I felt it was right to give some control to the children in relation to the lesson and how they wanted to complete it. This

enabled the children to have a more active role in the learning experience. Finally, cooperative learning was also used as a teaching method, where the children worked together to complete tasks, find out information, discuss outcomes and report back on the information learned (See appendix L for details of the framework for the action plan). These teaching methods were applied throughout the weekly lessons which included a detail discussion about ‘needs’ versus ‘wants’, what SV is and what it means to the children, understanding that SV is a right of each child and should be respected by all adults, the impact their voice can have on their learning experiences and sharing their ideas, and views about various issues which arose for them while in fourth class. The children also took part in walking debates where various situations were discussed among the group.

### 3.7 Overview of Findings

The data collected for this research was gathered over a ten-week period both online (during school closures) and in the classroom (once schools reopened). The data collection was broken up into two completed research cycles. There were three main findings from the data analysed defined in figure 3.6 below.



*Figure 3.6 Emerging Findings*

Each of these findings will be discussed in detail starting with the first finding in chapter four. While the themes of the data are broad, they are further deconstructed into three sub themes to further enhance the understanding and each of these will be unpacked, outlined and discussed in detail in chapter four five and six respectively. The codes, categories and themes which emerged are outlined in appendix M. I examined, reviewed and developed themes before choosing extracts and writing a report on each finding based on the data collected (Braun & Clark, 2006).

### **3.8 Conclusion**

This chapter outlined the methodological approach and paradigm utilized in this study along with the data collection instruments chosen and the ethical considerations discussed. A description of the research site and how potential bias was reduced was outlined also. The following chapter will discuss the findings which became apparent in the data and describe in detail the first key theme.



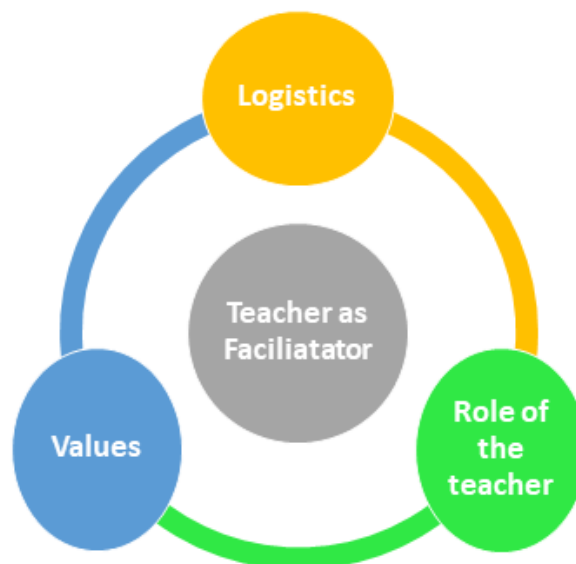
## Chapter Four: Finding One: Teacher as Facilitator

### 4.1 Introduction

This section seeks to analysis the data collected throughout the first and second cycle of this research project. As acknowledged previously, parts of my research were affected and delayed due to the worldwide outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, I did collect sufficient data for analysing which resulted in the emergence of three main themes. Each theme will be discussed throughout chapter four, five and six.

### 4.2 Teacher as facilitator

The first theme to be discussed in detail is: Teacher as facilitator. This theme can be further broken down into three sub themes. The three main sub themes that emerged from the main theme are outlined below and will be discussed throughout this chapter.

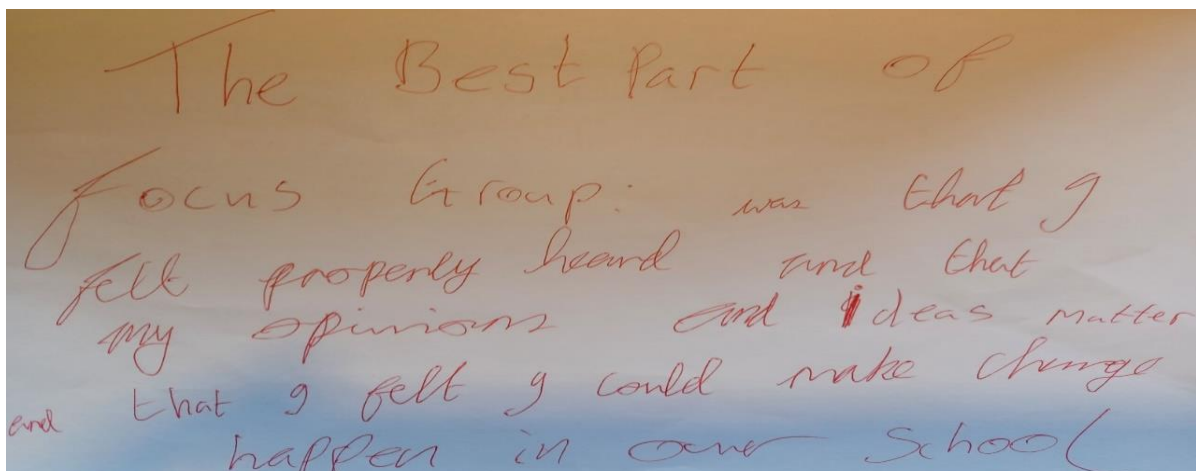


*Figure 4.1 Sub themes of Teacher as Facilitator*

Reeve (2006: 225) acknowledges that children are sometimes “proactive and engaged” in classroom exercises. However, he also recognises that they can also only be “reactive and

passive”. Reeve (2006) makes an argument for providing supportive classroom environments so in turn the student’s engagement will increase. As part of this supportive classroom climate, effective student-teacher relationships and interactions are of paramount importance (Reeve, 2006). Reeve (2006: 225-226) further emphasises that when successful student-teacher relations occur, “teachers function both as a guide to structure students’ learning opportunities ... and to enable students to internalize new values, develop important skills, and develop social responsibility”. Many of the findings from the data support the Froebelian approach to education and will be discussed throughout the finding’s chapters. Friedrich Froebel (1782–1852), was possibly the most noteworthy educational philosophers of education and care (Tovey, 2013) and his approaches were outlined in chapter one.

When examining the data, it became evident that by facilitating the weekly focus group activities gave the children an opportunity to be part of something, to feel included and respected and to participate in a talk and discussion around issues that matter to them. These are very much in line with the Lundy Model (2007) and will also be discussed throughout the finding’s chapters. See figure 4. 2 for a comment from DJ explaining why he best liked the focus group.



*Figure 4.2 DJ's Comment in Focus Group*

Additionally, the children's responses outlined below, when asked what part of the weekly focus group activities they enjoyed the most indicates that the teacher's facilitation of the weekly focus groups had a positive impact on the children:

“I liked hearing other people's ideas...” (Amy, interview, 26/05/21).

“Um, I liked the fact that we could give feedback without being judged entirely”  
(Seán, Interview, 26/05/21).

### **4.3 Logistics**

When I refer to logistics, I am attributing it to the fact that for a teacher to become a facilitator of SV, certain resources must be available or perhaps are unavailable which make 'teacher as facilitator' of SV more challenging. The following two sub themes: space and barriers/practical problems will be discussed in detail below.

#### **4.3.1 Space**

Naraian (2011) states when spaces are made available in schools for SV, it is presumed that engagement will increase. The stimulation of 'voice' (and linked closely to the development of identity and agency) is not naturally controlled by the "individual alone" rather it exists on "pre-existing social conditions" (Naraian, 2011: 246). Depending on the environment, ethos, atmosphere and general attitude towards the children in a school, SV will present differently in every school setting. The Lundy Model states that an opportunity for involvement or moreover a space where children can share their views and opinions needs to be created to encourage purposeful interactions. However, this 'space' must include certain factors so that each voice feels that they are respected. The space must also be inclusive and safe as well as being free from the "fear of rebuke or reprisal" (Lundy, 2007: 934). When examining the data, it became clear that creating the right space for children to feel comfortable and safe was of paramount importance so that they could express their views. More importantly space allows the children to feel more included and facilitates more one to one time between teacher and student.

“Well, yeah, I like, ah you, ah it’s more quiet and, it’s not like 30 people in one class. You have more of a chance of being heard in a smaller space” (Amy, Interview, 26/05/21).



*Figure 4.3 Amy’s Photovoice Image*

Equally, generating a space where children feel comfortable and safe was highlighted throughout the data which corresponds with the Lundy Model also. When asked why she chose the sensory room in our school as the place where she feels heard the most, Mia responded with;

“...it is a really calm, quiet place where I can talk about my feelings and be heard” (Mia, interview, 26/05/21)



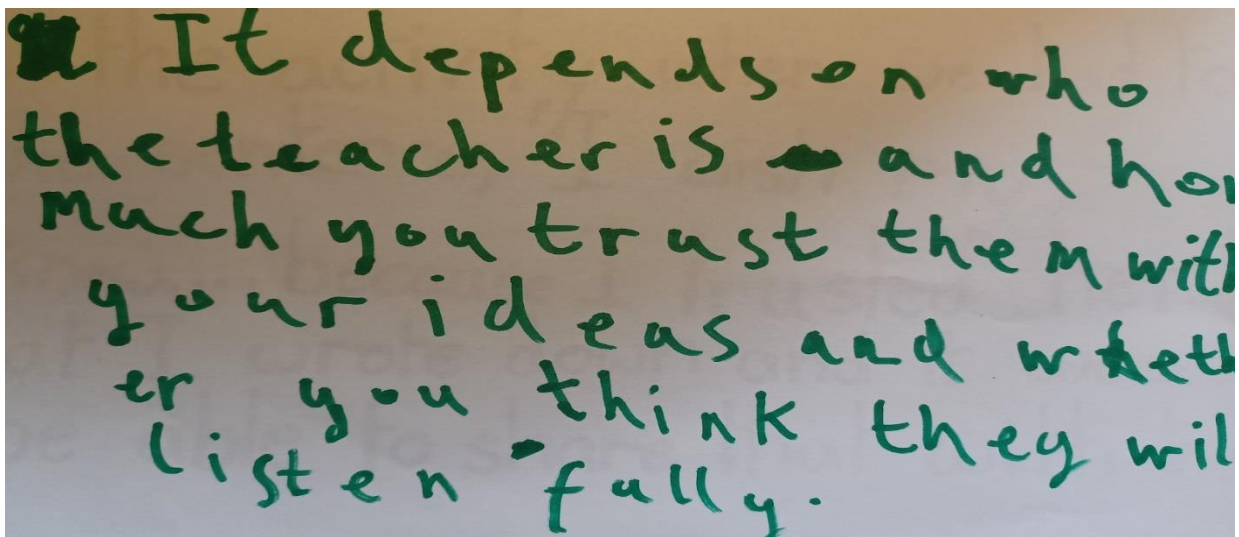
*Figure 4.4 Mia's PhotoVoice Image*

#### **4.3.2 Barriers/practical problems**

While there has been progress in the field of SV in educational reform, there is little evidence that the movement in SV practices has made any noteworthy impact in how teachers, leaders and management in schools treat students as equals in decision making (Fullan, 2007; Frost, 2008; Rudduck, 2006; Thomson, 2011). Fullan (2007) notes that a significant reason for this is since adult's favour students as recipients of educational change rather than active participants (Kelly Gentile, 2014; Lundy, 2018). During the examination of the data, it became clear that some of the students were aware of how SV initiatives such as the student council were more tokenistic than a genuine interest in what the children had to say (Lundy, 2007; Robinson & Taylor, 2007) as indicated by the following comment from a student during the baseline interview.

“...well, I don't think they're kind of like listened to...very little of the suggestions get actually through I find” (Seán, focus group, 2/03/21).

Similarly, the teacher must be fully willing to take the SV seriously and furthermore willing to hear the voices we might not want to hear (Cook-Sather, 2006; Lundy, 2007). This is also very much in line with the Lundy Model where influence is highlighted as an important factor when it comes to listening to SV. This idea of teachers taking SV seriously was noted in the data and this can be seen from Iris's comment in figure 4.5 below.



*Figure 4.5 Iris's comment in Focus Group*

Moreover, commitment to SV can often be neglected or overlooked due to the pressures of delivering a curriculum for the 21st Century (Islam, 2012; Giordano, 2021). Likewise, the Lundy Model states how there is a lack of commitment by stakeholders in given "due weight" to children's views (Lundy, 2007). When exploring the data, this became apparent. See the expert taken from my reflective journal below.



<b>Reflective Journal Excerpt</b>	When talking to two of the children, I asked them what they thought about the focus group so far. One child responded that they feel like even though it's good to be part of it, she wasn't sure what the point was. She mentioned at one point that once this year was over, that would be it, other teachers won't listen or hear them. I thought this was a very interesting comment from the student and I feel that it is my duty to ensure the voice of the child is heard throughout the school by hopefully sharing the results of this study. (Dillon, reflective journal: 22/03/21)
-----------------------------------	--

*Figure 4.6 Reflective Journal Excerpt 1*

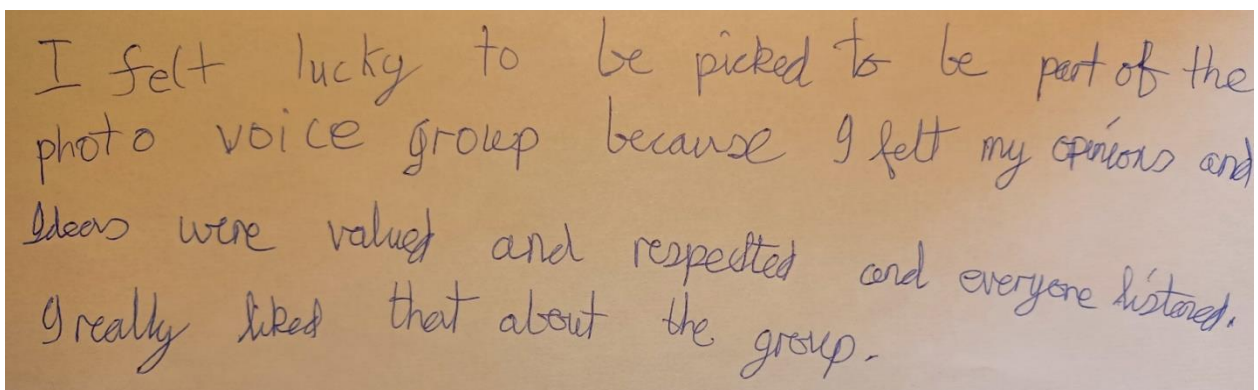
#### **4.4 Values**

As stated previously, the core values I hold as a teacher and try to live by in my everyday practice are healthy relationships, care and inclusion. The idea that teaching is a moral undertaking has been well documented and discussed for many years and is not something new to education (Campbell, 2003). I believe it is of utmost importance when working with and teaching children. (Willemse, Lunenberg, & Korthagen, 2005). Brady (2011: 57) states that both teachers and students bring different values to the classroom relationships making relationships a “dynamic process” (Brophy & Good, 1974; Adalbjarnardottir, 2010). Healthy relationships take time to develop, and children need to know they can trust and rely on their teacher (Spilt, Koomen & Thijs, 2011). From the sub theme of values, three core values emerged from the data which are also closely related to the core values I hold as a teacher and will be discussed in the following sections.

##### **4.4.1. Respect**

Respect underpins all values and is a core value that a teacher must obtain. As mentioned in chapter two, teachers registered with the Teaching Council must adhere to and always follow this Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers. The ethical values of this code include care, respect, integrity and trust. When we choose to listen to SV, we must ensure that we are being respectful of all student's ideas, opinions and thoughts, that the student is aware that they can trust us to listen to them and moreover that we care about what they have to say. The only

way to uphold these values as a teacher is to act, show the children that you respect them, that they can trust you and above all that you care for them and about the issues they want to discuss (Lundy, 2007). Having the weekly focus group enabled me to dedicate time to interact with a small group of children and take the time needed to listen to what they had to say. This is very much consistent with the framework for the Lundy Model. See Seán commented on how he felt about being picked for the focus group.



*Figure 4.7 Seán's Comment in Focus Group*

This is in line with what Beattie (2012) states that we as humans blossom when we are respected and seen as an equal. When DJ was asked what he liked the most about the weekly focus group, he explained that it was nice to get a chance to talk about how they learn best but more noteworthy he stated that;

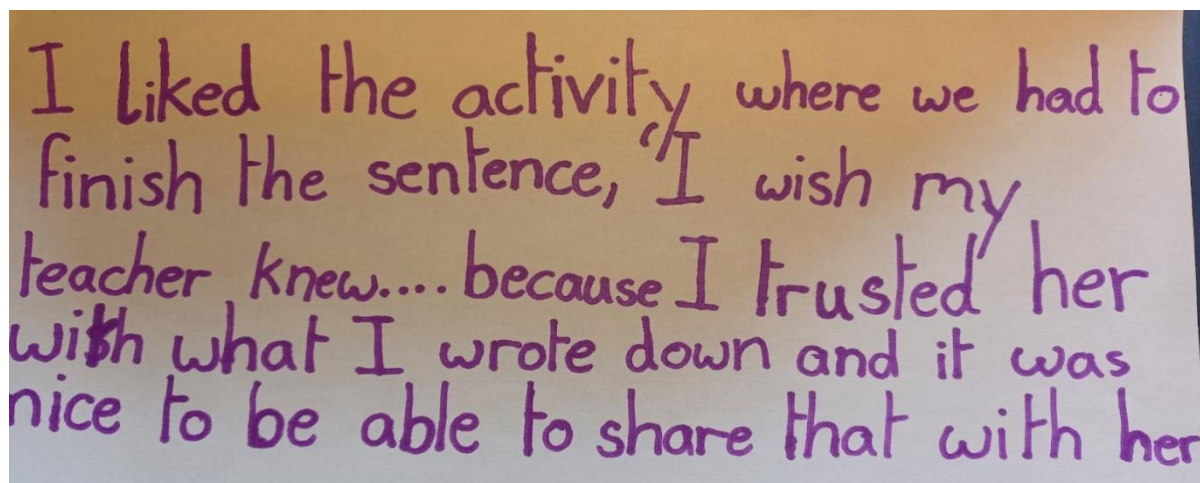
“...No one really asked us that before, we are just told how or why we should learn”  
(DJ, interview, 26/05/21).

#### **4.4.2 Trust**

“Although it is rarely articulated as such, the most basic premise upon which different approaches to educational policy and practice rest is trust” (Cook-Sather, 2002: 4). Without the student's trust in their teacher, real change will not exist. The evidence of a strong student-teacher relationship must be obtained before there is effective communication from



the student about matters that affect them directly. As outlined earlier, for a healthy student-teacher relationship to occur, I must dedicate time at the beginning of the year getting to know them. By doing this, I am showing them that I care about them, I care about what they have to say and more importantly I care about them as human beings, setting time aside to listen to their stories and their interests. As I worked very closely with the eight fourth class students as their SET, I felt, when it came to asking these students to be part of this research project that I had developed a relationship where mutual trust was developed. As Lumpkin (2008: 47) states “the emergence of mutual trust is a vanguard of education”. See figure 4.8 and comment which follows below regarding the value of trust.



*Figure 4. 8 Mia's comment in the focus group*

“I think it's the smaller group. And I only have my friends and then people who I trust” (Amy, interview, 27/05/21).

#### **4.4.3 Inclusion**

At times it is assumed that inclusion in education is concerned only with children with special educational needs (Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018). However, it's related to the “inclusion of all children” (Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018: 803). The Lundy Model states that, for SV to be successful, all students regardless of ability, gender, race or needs must be included (Lundy, 2007). In the recent framework for the new primary curriculum framework published by the

NCCA (2020), it outlines eight overarching principles of teaching and learning that schools must adapt when implementing the curriculum vision. One of these eight principles is ‘inclusive education and diversity’ and highlights that “inclusive education (should) celebrate diversity and respond to the uniqueness of every child” (NCCA, 2020: 6). When analysing the data, it became clear that the children enjoyed being part of something different and appreciated being able to share their thoughts as well as listen to what others had to say as indicated in the following comment from DJ.

“.... because I’m finally part of something and um, I really like you know like learning new stuff about like telling you, like where my I’m most heard and talking about it”  
 (DJ, interview, 26/05/21)

As humans, students have a strong yearning to feel valued and seek approval (Giordano, 2021). Moreover, there is a great deal of evidence from my reflective journal which highlights the importance of including all voices as seen in figure 4.9. Figure 4.10 is an image of the children’s work based on the lesson ‘needs’ and ‘wants’.

<b>Reflective Journal Excerpt</b>	This week we discussed the difference between a ‘need’ and a ‘want’ are and I was really impressed with how they took on the challenge, how they worked together, listened to each other’s opinion and how at times when they had different opinions, respected each other. This activity worked well in the small group. Because it was a smaller setting, each voice was heard as they all got to explain why they chose certain headings to go under a ‘need’ or a ‘want’. The children were very happy to share their opinion and when asked if they liked discussing these topics, one child responded “it’s really nice to be asked these questions and feel like our opinion counts” (Dillon, reflective journal: 25/03/21).
-----------------------------------	--

*Figure 4.9 Reflective Journal Excerpt 2*

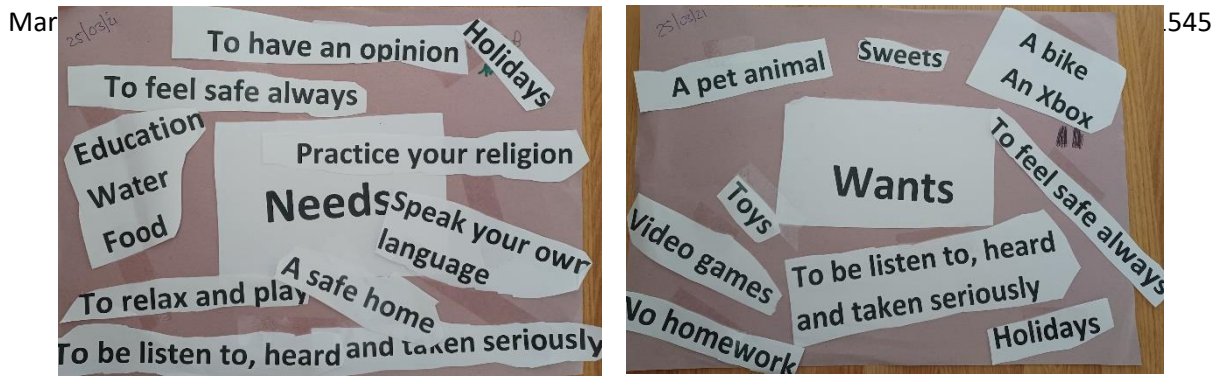


Figure 4.10 Sample of Children's Work (25/03/21)

#### 4.5 Role of the Teacher

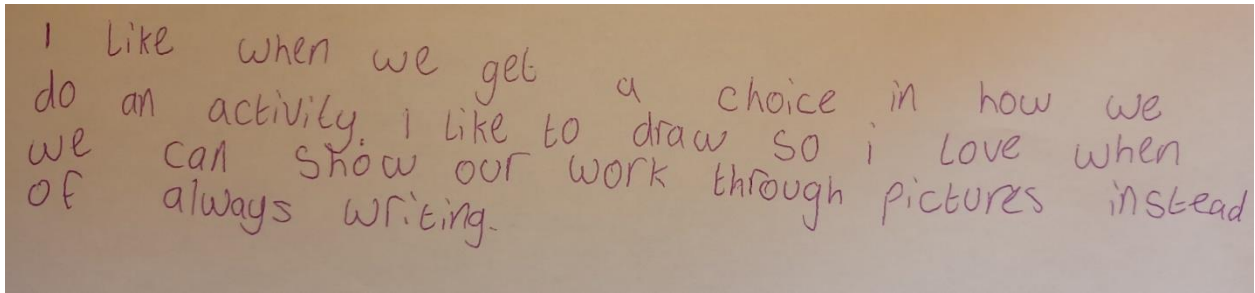
As mentioned previously, many aspects of the Froebelian approach were highlighted in the findings from the data collected. One such finding is the important role of the teacher in facilitating SV. Froebel stressed the complexity of the adult role in providing education:

The true educator and teacher has to be at every moment and in every demand two-sided. He must give and take, unite and divide, order and follow; he must be active and passive, decisive and permissive, firm and flexible. (Froebel, in Lilley 1967: 55)

Some of the key Froebelian approaches were found in the data and these include providing choice and opportunity, talk and discussion, and power and highlight an important element of the role of the teacher in SV and these will be discussed below.

##### 4.5.1 Providing Choice and Opportunity

“Authenticity of listening to SV is supported through choice” (Donnini, 2015: 26). Our job as educators is to prepare each student for their futures and how this is best achieved is by empowering them (Giordano, 2021). Empowerment starts with providing choice and opportunities and appreciating SV's (Giordano, 2021). When examining the data, it became apparent that student's desire for choice was strong. It is our duty and privilege as teachers to be able to provide this choice for the students we teach. See figure 4.11 and the comment from Mia for how providing choice facilitates a more enjoyable learning experience for her.



*Figure 4.11 Niall's Comment in Focus Group*

“It was a great opportunity for my opinions to be shared and listened to”  
(Mia, interview, 27/05/21).

#### **4.5.2 Talk and Discussion**

Children are profoundly curious about the world around them (Tovey, 2013). They express this curiosity through questioning and such questions need more than just invigorating surroundings (Tovey, 2013). While it is important for the teacher to ask some questions, it is equally important to give the children an opportunity to provide the questions and discuss the answers too. Furthermore, the Lundy Model highlights how teachers must be willing to listen and listen with the desire to hear what children have to say (Lundy, 2007; 2018; Robinson & Taylor, 2007) or what Adams, Costa & Kallick (2013: 51) state teachers must “listen with learners’ ears”. This comment from DJ explaining his PhotoVoice image indicates how significant providing talk and discussion among children is when facilitating SV.

“It was important and nice that we got a chance to talk about how we learn best or what we like learning and feel we were being heard”. (DJ, interview, 26/05/21)

Moreover, the reflective journal shared moments in which the theme of providing talking and discussion opportunities is considered.

<b>Reflective Journal Excerpt</b>	<p>Today I decided that I was on going to take a step back in leading the conversation and hand the flow of the lesson over to the children. The main topic we were discussing was why is it important for each child’s voice to be heard. We have completed some previous work on this topic but not in a lot of depth. I was both shocked and surprised at the level of discussion which emerged from the children, how each child respected the others’ opinions, yet they weren’t afraid of sharing their own insight even if it didn’t seem to match the other opinions. On one occasion a child expressed his concern that he feels that it is only the children who shout the loudest in the class that are heard or the ones who put their hands up first. (Dillon, reflective journal: 18/03/21).</p>
-----------------------------------	--

Figure 4.12 Reflective Journal Excerpt 3

### 4.5.3 Power

Wyness, (2006: 210) states that despite the movement of children’s issues being brought to the fore in recent times there is little devotion to “providing children with decision-making powers”. Perceptions of children as being “citizens-in-the-making rather than citizens in their own right” indicates that adults are not only not ready or prepared to listen to children fully, but they are also not ready to really hear what they have to say (Verhellen,2000; Osler, 2010: 122). This is further highlighted in the data, where Janet's response to the question; ‘how much do you feel your voice is heard in relation to the kind of things you learn in the classroom?’ See figure 4.13.

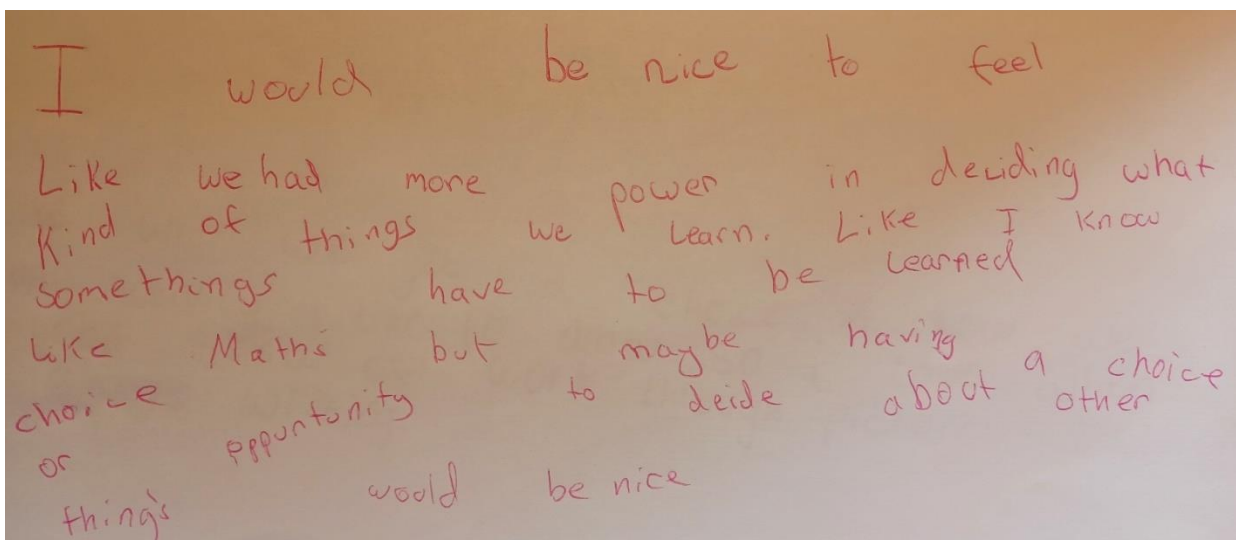


Figure 4.13 Janet's Comment in Focus Group

On reflection of this particular focus group session, it struck me how this comment was so insightful, and this is indicated more in my reflective journal. See figure 4.14.

<b>Reflective Journal Expert</b>	<p>Today at the end of the day, the class teacher (also critical friend) and I were talking about how my focus group session went. I was explaining that the lesson was about providing choice in the classroom and how a comment from a student had really resonated with me. The comment was in relation to why primary school children do not get to pick the subjects they learn but secondary school children do. I got me thinking and on reflection now, I feel it is a very good point from the student but moreover, I feel that teachers are very confined to the curriculum and with pressures of trying to ensure the whole curriculum is taught by the end of the year, it leaves very little room for teacher choice which then results in little time or space for giving children a choice in wat they want to learn. (Dillon, reflective journal: 16/04/21)</p>
----------------------------------	--

*Figure 4.14 Reflective Journal Excerpt 4*

From this reflection, I decided to suggest to the staff that we ask the students opinions on the new spelling programme, implemented for the first time in September 2020. The staff agreed to leave the decision up to the students and to achieve this, we asked them to fill in a questionnaire about the new spelling programme. We informed the students that the decision on what spelling programme was going to be used in the school was going to be their choice. Listening and responding to children’s voices “is the first step towards fundamental change in classrooms and schools (Rudduck & Flutter, 2003: 141).

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

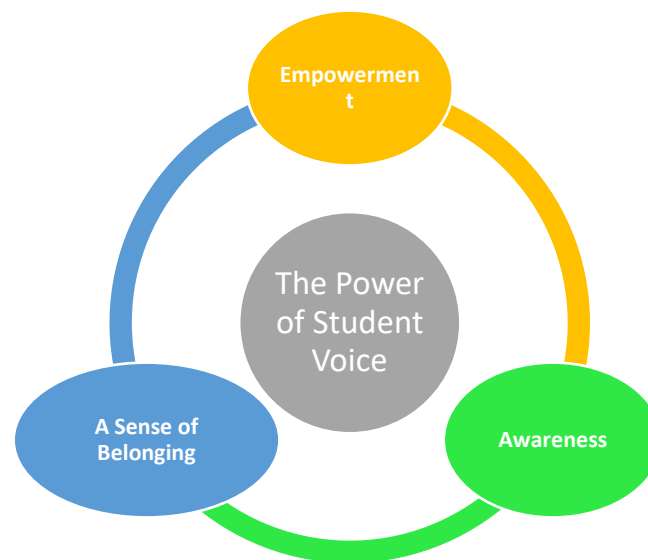
Understanding children’s learning experiences using SV is the primary goal of this research. This chapter has outlined the first finding, teacher as facilitator. These findings have important implications for SV to have its place in the primary classroom. SV, when utilised effectively and taken seriously by teachers and management can have a very positive impact on the learning experiences of the children. For SV to be implemented successfully in schools, there must be mutual respect, trust and the voices of all students must be heard.

Furthermore, a safe place must be provided where children will feel comfortable in sharing their views, opinions and ideas as well as providing choice and opportunity for SV to be not only heard but listened to. One must also be aware of the power dynamics between teacher and student and that by giving the time to develop positive relationships between teacher and student, this power dynamic should lessen over time, therefore, enabling both the student to feel more comfortable sharing honest opinions with the teacher and the teacher equally feeling comfortable and ready to genuinely hear what their students have to say. The succeeding chapter will outline and examine the second theme which emerged throughout the data.

## Chapter Five: Finding Two: The Power of Student Voice

### 5.1. Introduction

This chapter will explore and report the second main finding which emerged from the data: The power of SV. This theme can be further broken down into three sub themes to further enhance the understanding of the theme. The three sub themes which evolved from the main theme are outlined in figure 5.1 and will be discussed in detail throughout this chapter.



*Figure 5.1 Sub themes of The Power of Student Voice*

### 5.2 The Power of Student Voice

There has been a significant increase in research which highlights both the positive and powerful impacts of consulting students and teachers about their learning and teaching (Demetriou & Wilson, 2010; Arnot, McIntyre, Pedder & Reay 2004; Fielding, 2004; Flutter & Rudduck, 2004; MacBeath et al., 2001; Rudduck & McIntyre, 2007; Lundy, 2007). When children observe that they are being listened to, they begin to develop a sense of belonging, empowerment and feel included which will in turn increase their motivation and confidence as well as an increased awareness of their rights and a need for change. In the following



sections, I will discuss these key concepts and benefits of SV through examining and analysing the data found.

### **5.3 Empowerment**

When children are consulted by teachers it can help them feel that they are both respected, belong to a community that cares about them and feel that they are being treated in an adult way all of which enables the child to feel empowered (Demetriou & Wilson, 2010: 63). Additionally, this sense of empowerment and participation has the potential to magnify a pupil's self-esteem which in turn increases the sense of belonging which can lead to fostering a genuine interest towards learning (Demetriou & Wilson, 2010: 63). When examining the data, it became evident that by providing the weekly focus groups, the children began to feel like they mattered and furthermore, what they had to say was important to me. See Mia's response below which highlights this sense of empowerment.

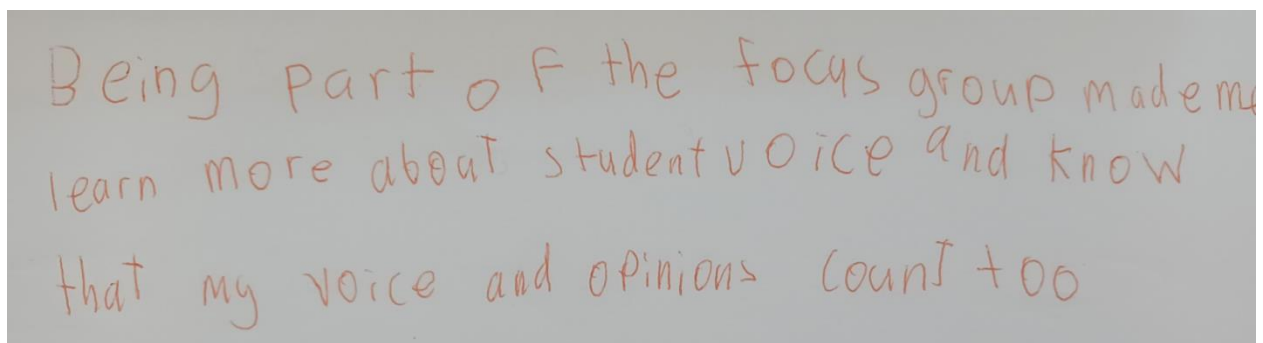
“...how everyone has an opinion, and it should be respected and listened to always including children, not just adults. Children's voices are just as important I think”.  
(Mia, interview, 26/05/21).

Voice matters and increased confidence and motivation were two codes which emerged from the main theme; empowerment and will now be discussed below.

#### **5.3.1 Voice Matters**

When children take part in decision making in school life, research shows that they are more prosperous academically, perform better in tests and attend school more frequently (Sussman, 2016: 13). However, Sussman (2016) also recognises that while the academic impact is greater when SV is heard this is only one part of the story. SV matters not only because of the positive academic advantages but also because when students feel heard, they feel valued, and this leads to increased motivation as well as the development of better, healthier student-

teacher relationships (Sussman, 2016). Moreover, while it has been acknowledged and outlined in the literature throughout this study, that SV presents many potential benefits, it is also worth remembering that listening is not enough (NCCA, 2017: 4). Children not only need to be listened to but more importantly they need to know they are heard and that their opinions are respected (NCCA, 2017). This is in line with the Lundy Model where children's view should be given due weight and an audience. It became apparent from the data, that the children began to realize that their voice and opinions mattered to me.



*Figure 5.2 Seán's Comment in Focus Group*

Furthermore, throughout my reflective journal it is evident that there has been a change in my thinking about SV since the beginning of my journey in this action research project. Both my perspective and the value of SV has gradually transformed, and this has in turn had a positive impact on the learning experiences of the child. The extract below taken from my reflective journal in January 2021 indicates a realisation of how SV was not prevalent or evident in my classroom or school wide.

<b>Reflective Journal Excerpt</b>	Having just completed the baseline interviews with each of the eight students in the focus group, it is evident, how little they know about or are aware of what student voice entails. I am shocked to discover that, only two students mentioned that we had a student council and many of the children could not explain what they thought student voice was. It has proven to me the need to incorporate more student voice initiatives into the everyday school life for children to become more educated about the importance of their voice. (Dillon, reflective Journal, 29/01/21)
-----------------------------------	---

*Figure 5. 3 Reflective Journal Excerpt 5*

However, the next extract taken from my reflective journal from May 2021 indicates a more positive viewpoint following the SV intervention.

<b>Reflective Journal Excerpt</b>	Today during the focus group session, it became obvious how far the children have come in terms of their awareness of student voice and their knowledge of how their voice can make a difference to their learning. Listening to them...made me feel very proud as they were using a lot of the terminology related to student voice and spoke with confidence when giving their suggestions. I feel that while I was very passionate about listening to the child before, I also now realise how much more aware I am of informing the child about their right to be heard and the impact it can have on their education when their views are taken seriously. (Dillon, reflective journal, 21/05/21)
-----------------------------------	---

*Figure 5. 4 Reflective Journal Excerpt 6*

### 5.3.2 Increased Motivation and Engagement

Individual teacher practice has been recognised as a powerful factor in school improvement (Cuban 2009; Priestley, 2011; Treacy & Leavy 2021) and it is claimed that the classroom environment has more of an influence over the school environment in terms of student outcomes (Teddlie & Reynolds 2000; Stoll 2009; Treacy & Leavy, 2021). As part of the weekly focus groups, the children were given various choices as to how they would like to represent their work. Additionally, at the beginning of the weekly focus groups, the children were asked if there was anything that they would like to learn in relation to SV. Involving the voice of the student encourages student engagement by enabling a “sense of ownership of the process” (Busher, 2012: 113) which can lead to an increase in motivation and engagement in the learning experience. The Lundy Model requires the creation of the right space for children to feel confident and safe in expressing their views and the weekly focus group was

a space for the children to express themselves in a space where they felt comfortable. The data highlighted that as the weekly focus groups progressed the students were more willing to share their opinions, participate in the discussions and offer their ideas around certain topics.

<b>Reflective Journal Excerpt</b>	When I first began the focus groups a few weeks ago, I noticed that the children were a bit sceptical. They were very quiet and did not contribute much to the conversation/discussion. However, now that I'm into week 3 of the intervention, I feel that the children are becoming more confident in expressing themselves. They are not necessarily all great friends, so it took a few weeks to build that relationship and trust. Now, each week, they ask me are we doing focus group, what we are going to be doing and I have had a few parents come to me to inform me that their child is really enjoying the focus groups and that they have started talking about what we are learning in the groups at home as well. For me, this is what education is about, instilling a love of learning in the child but more importantly that they share their learning with others. (Dillon, reflective journal: 15/04/21)
-----------------------------------	---

*Figure 5.5 Reflective Journal Excerpt 7*

#### **5.4 A Sense of Belonging**

“Humans are social beings with a basic need for interpersonal relationships” (Weiss, 2021: 93). Researchers have highlighted that students’ sense of belonging is a key element in creating “positive aspects of students’ school-related experiences” (Freeman, Anderman & Jensen, 2007: 203). Like adults, children have the need to feel like they are part of something and respected within that organization. When analysing the interviews with the children in relation to their PhotoVoice image, it became clear the desire children have to belong within the classroom environment. When Iris is explaining why she felt her voice was heard the most in her PhotoVoice image (See figure 5. 6 below) she states:

“This photo represents how I feel my voice is heard and listened to... I feel like I am in the centre, so you had your moment... I belonged with that group on stage, and everyone could see it” (Iris, interview, 26/05/21).



*Figure 5.6 Iris's PhotoVoice image*

This accords with Article 13 of the UNCRC, which states that children's right to freedom of expression includes a right to impart information 'either orally, in writing or print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice' (UNCRC, 1989: 5; Lundy, 2007). Two additional codes emerged from the sub theme: A sense of belonging, which are shared learning and inclusion and will be examined below.

#### **5.4.1 Shared learning**

Incorporating the voice of the child not only has benefits for the student but it can also have enormous benefits for teachers too (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). When SV is promoted and listened to, the teacher receives a unique insight into what the child is thinking and they can also observe how the child is making sense of the knowledge being shared (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012: 25). It enables the teachers to reflect critically on their practice to improve and enhance their teaching further (Busher, 2012: 113). In this sense, a shared learning is occurring where both parties benefit from the encounter. When investigating the data, it was noticeable that there was an increased learning by the children but also by the class teacher

and I. Being open to what the children had to say in relation to our teaching, meant that we could use this new information and create change in our practice. It is evident from both the unstructured observation and the comment from my critical friend below that a shared learning was occurring.

<p><b>Unstructured Observation</b></p> <p>29/04/21</p>	<p>Today the children were able to recall some of the information learned in last week’s focus group with confidence.</p> <p>I noticed during ‘in class support’ today, that the class teacher gave the children a choice in how they represented their work and at different points gave them the choice in what order they wanted to complete three subjects that day.</p> <p>I noticed myself yesterday, asking the child what part of the maths question they found hard and what I could do to help them understand it better. When she responded with “please just do it again, but slower” I was glad I had asked her and not just moved on to the next sum.</p>
--	---

*Figure 5.7 Unstructured Observation 1*

<p><b>Critical Friend</b></p> <p>06/05/21</p>	<p>From observing Maria during a few of the focus groups and from our discussions recently, I have become much more aware of the importance of giving the children a voice and a choice in their learning. Today, instead of just giving them a project on the Vikings with a list of all the points that needed to be covered, I explained to the children that the project could be represented whatever way they wanted e.g., PowerPoint, art, drawings, typed or handwritten etc. and they could choose 5 they were interested in researching and learning about.</p>
---	---

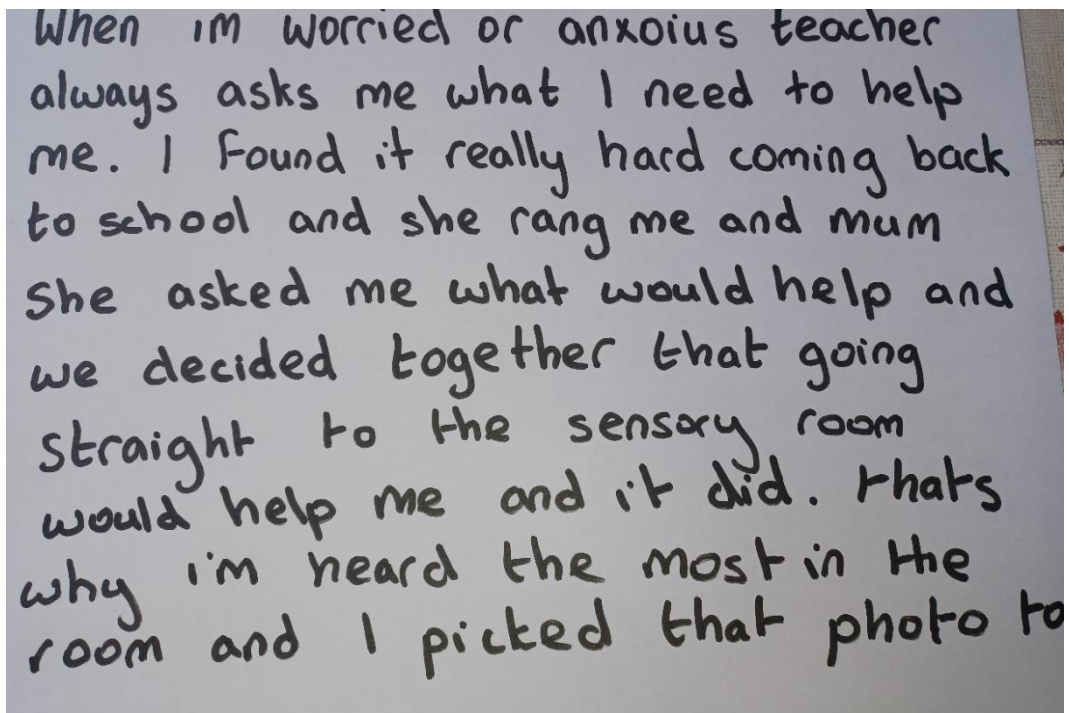
*Figure 5.8 Critical Friend Comment 1*

**5.4.2 Inclusion**

“Children and young people have expertise in their own lives” (Langsted 1994; Clark, 2004; Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration & Youth, 2021: 6) while also recognising that adults also have a considerable knowledge on the lives of young people but may not also know how they are feeling. Therefore, it is important when making any decision that affects a student, we must include the child in the process. Recently the ‘National Framework for Children and Young People’s Participation in Decision-making’ was developed in Ireland which provides support and guidelines for organisations working with

children to improve their practice in listening to and involving students in the decision-making process. One of the overarching principles which guides this framework is inclusivity. As mentioned previously, the Lundy Model of participation includes voice as a factor. All children should be given the right to express their voice freely which indicates that all voices must be included in the classroom.

When evaluating the data, it became clear that the children felt included when they were asked their opinion. Mia was part of the focus group. I worked very closely with Mia this year as her SET as she has a diagnosis of chronic anxiety and returning from lockdown in March 2021 was a huge step for her. In one of her comments Mia wrote below, about how she felt her voice was heard and included when she was asked what would help her in the process of returning to the classroom.

A photograph of a handwritten note on a piece of paper. The text is written in black ink in a cursive, slightly slanted script. The note describes Mia's experience of returning to school and how her teacher's involvement helped her feel included.

When im worried or anxioius teacher  
always asks me what I need to help  
me. I Found it really hard coming back  
to school and she rang me and mum  
She asked me what would help and  
we decided together that going  
straight to the sensory room  
would help me and it did. thats  
why im heard the most in the  
room and I picked that photo to

*Figure 5.9 Mia's Comment in Focus Group*

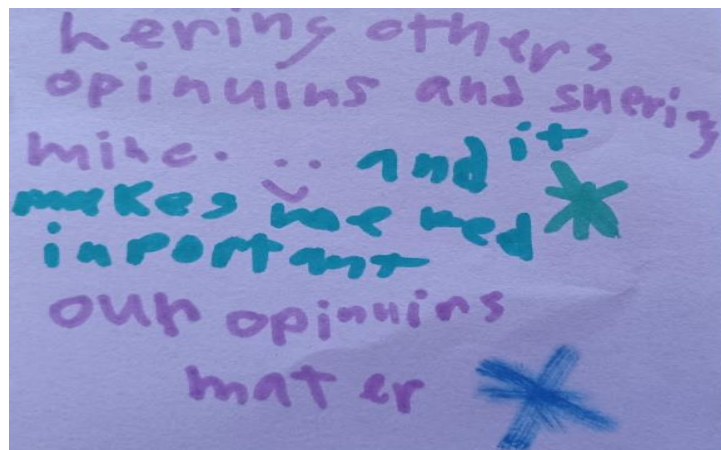


## 5.5 Awareness

When discussing awareness, it is a twofold process. The first is the students' awareness of the importance of SV, and the positive impacts when they voice their opinions, ideas and thoughts. The second aspect of awareness is in terms of teachers becoming aware of SV, how it should be used effectively and meaningfully for the greater good of the students' learning experiences but also for the improvement of their practice. From the data, it was interesting to note Seán's comment in relation to his realisation that SV directly impacts his education:

“Uh, well, I didn't realise that SV completely covered other students like I would have thought it only affected the way you're treated and not all students. I didn't realise that we are entitled to use our voice to express things about our education”  
(Seán, interview, 26/05/21).

It is also interesting to read Janet's definition of SV in figure 5.10 where it is evident that her awareness of what SV is strong.



*Figure 5.10 Janet's Definition of Student Voice*

### 5.5.1 Rights

As stated previously UNCRF (1989) was a hallmark in establishing the need for the voice of the child to be heard in education, especially matters which affect them (Lundy, 2006; 2018; Cook-Sather, 2014). From Niall's comment and the unstructured observation below, it is evident that the children began to realise that their voice was a right rather than a



privilege. This is also very much in line with the Lundy Model where it is very much highlighted how SV is a right.

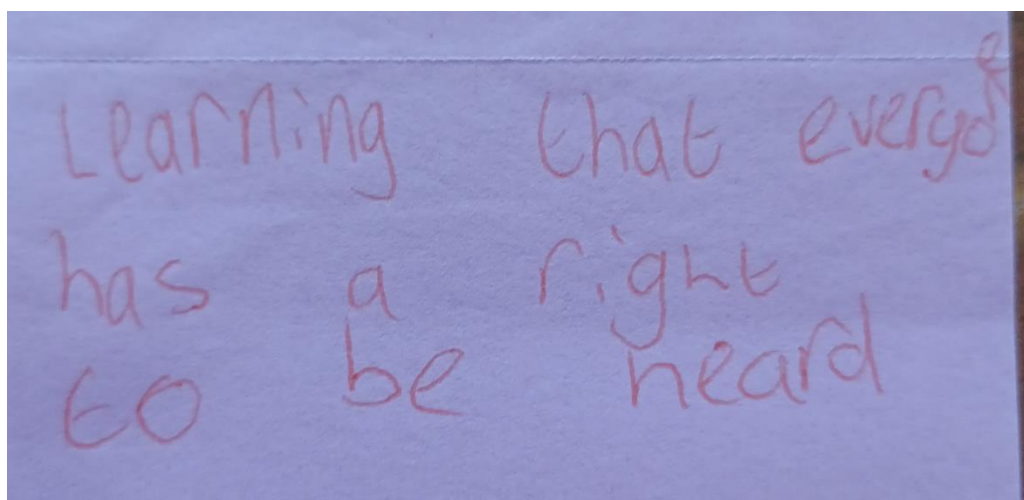


Figure 5. 11 Niall’s Comment in Focus Group

<p><b>Unstructured Observation</b> 25/03/21</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Amy spoke very confidently today when we were completely the activity based on rights versus needs and at one point, she was able to give a very comprehensive reason as to why she thought ‘to be listened to, heard and taken seriously’ should be under the ‘rights’ heading rather than the ‘needs’ heading.</li> </ul>
---	--

Figure 5.12 Unstructured Observation 2

### 5.5.2 Change

SV, when used effectively, can bring about a positive change and enhance the children’s learning experience (Lundy, McEvoy & Byrn, 2011; Lundy, 2018; Cook-Sather, 2006;). However, when used in the wrong and insincere manner, it can “result in disaffection and disillusionment and ultimately disengagement” (Lundy, 2018: 340). This idea of tokenism arose during an interview with Seán when he was asked:

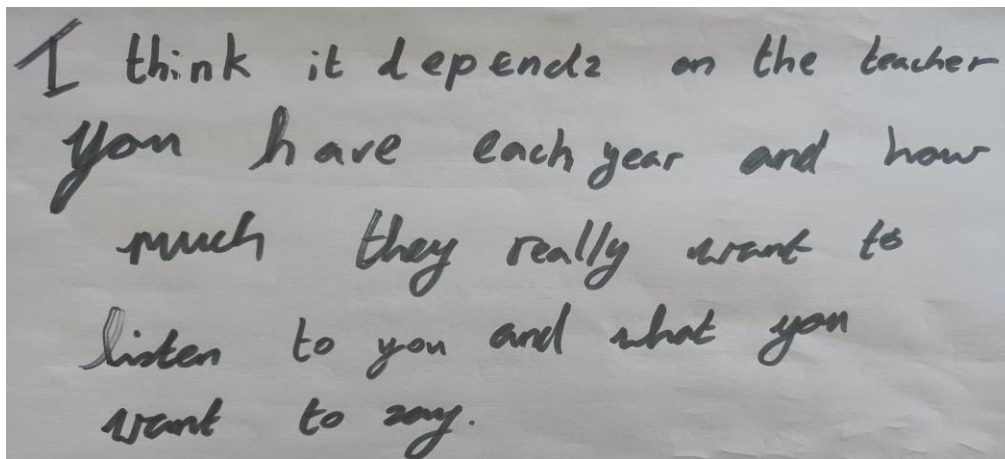
**Researcher/Teacher:** “In what sense do you mean you are not listened to?”

**Child:** “...sometimes if you want to make a change, people might not change. Also, sometimes the teacher is so busy with other things, she says she will take it on board, but nothing ever comes of the suggestion or idea”.

**Researcher/Teacher:** “Okay. Do you find that a little bit frustrating?”

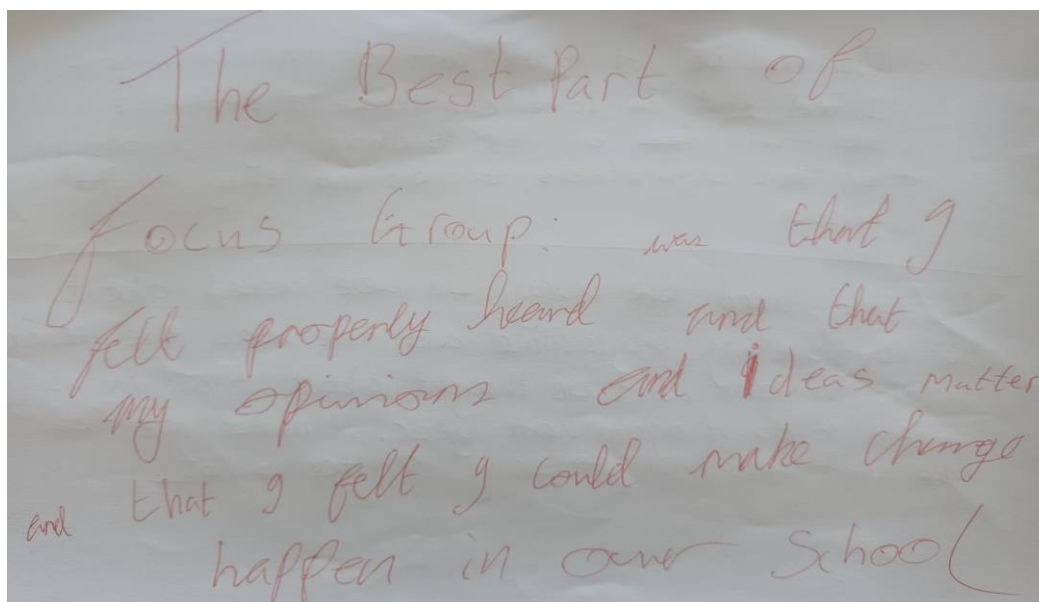
**Child:** “Sometimes, but I accept that. That’s okay.” (Seán, interview, 26/05/21)

This comment from Seán is in line with Ari Sussman’s (2016) explanation of how things get in the way of having meaningful SV initiatives in schools. She highlights that the biggest factor or prevention of SV is the busy-ness of schools (Sussman, 2016). She states that “It’s easy for SV to take a back seat when the stakes for testing, school accountability and compliance are so high” (Sussman, 2016: 13). Similarly, hooks, (1994: 13) states that there are many pressures faced by schools making it challenging to acknowledge and respond to the unique needs of the student. Furthermore, these comments from Seán highlight what Lundy (2018) and others call ‘tokenism’. The use of tokenistic endeavours of SV can often be more harmful than good and this leads to the justification that it is better to do nothing than introduce the notion of SV without it being a meaningful, engaging and above all a beneficial process for the students. For real change to be brought about by SV initiatives, teachers must be aware and avoid the use of tokenistic undertakings. Issy and DJ’s comment below highlight how each teacher will bring with them different viewpoints on SV as well as the need for children to genuinely feel that their voice can lead to real change.

A photograph of a piece of white paper with handwritten text in black ink. The text is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style. The paper appears to be part of a focus group discussion.

I think it depends on the teacher  
you have each year and how  
much they really want to  
listen to you and what you  
want to say.

*Figure 5.13 Issy's Comment in Focus Group*

A photograph of a piece of white paper with handwritten text in red ink. The text is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style. The paper appears to be part of a focus group discussion.

The Best part of  
focus group: was that I  
felt properly heard and that  
my opinions and ideas matter  
and that I felt I could make change  
happen in our school

*Figure 5.14 DJ's Comment in Focus Group*

## **5.6 Conclusion**

It's hard not to see the benefits of SV when we highlight all the positives and advantages of including SV in education. Listening and hearing the children's opinions, ideas and views increases the chances of them having a more positive experience in school. Furthermore, listening to SV's can increase motivation and engagement, bring about positive change for children and teachers as well as empowering the children and ensuring they feel belonged

within the school community. Young people want to be heard but lack confidence in their power to be heard and furthermore create change (Rudduck & McIntyre, 2007:192). As Sussman (2016: 13) states, it can be easy to “treat SV as an add on” but this will not make SV meaningful. For SV to be purposeful, it must be intertwined and fixed throughout the everyday activities of school life (Sussman, 2016: 13). It must be visible and obvious in every corner of the school. The next chapter will outline and discuss the three and final theme which emerged from the data.

## Chapter Six: Finding Three: The Child as an Active Agent in their Learning

### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to discuss the final emerging theme from the data: The child as an active agent in their learning. This theme can be further broken down in two sub themes (below) which enable greater understanding of the over final theme.



*Figure 6.1 Sub Themes of The Child as an Active Agent in their Learning*

### 6.2 The Child as an Active Agent in their Learning

When it comes to learning, agency is an important feature to maximise the learning experience of the child (Charteris, 2016; Charteris & Thomas, 2017). “Agency is the student’s capacity to take up learning opportunities in the classroom; engaging the disposition to learn” (Charteris, 2013: 20). Learner agency is at the centre of SV which strives to foster “confident, connected, actively involved, and life-long learners” (Ministry of Education,

2007: 8). When children recognise that their voice is being heard, their ideas and opinions valued and sharing their thoughts count towards the decision-making process, a sense of student agency, active involvement and cooperative learning develops. The following photo and interview represent how Seán felt his voice was most heard in school. He felt that he was listened to in the whole class setting and felt his teacher gave him the respect he deserved. The Lundy Model highlights how children should be given a ‘right of audience’ and it is evident from Seán’s interview below that he feels very much heard and listened to throughout fourth class.



*Figure 6. 2 Seán’s PhotoVoice Image*

**Researcher/Teacher:** What do you like most about this picture?

**Child:** It captured the essence of the classroom.

**Researcher/Teacher:** Does it capture something about SV for you?

**Child:** Yes. Well, cause you can propose to them, students or the teacher, the more your ideas are put in front of the whole class, I feel there is a greater chance of them being listening to. I feel our teacher is very good at making sure everyone gets a chance to speak and be heard. She’s very fair like that and so I know I will be heard at some point too. (Seán, interview, 26/05/2021)

### 6.3 Agency

SV and student agency are closely related in terms of “students having power to influence practices” within education (Cook-Sather, 2020: 182). SV and agency are “the student’s ability to exert influence in their learning context, to transform their own and others’ learning experiences, and to expand learning” (Cook-Sather, 2020: 182). However, agency is not intended to replace authority but rather it is to work alongside the professionals to optimise shared learning and “democratize education for all involved” (Cook-Sather, 2020: 182). When exploring the data, it became obvious that children appreciate having a say in decisions that affect them. See figure 6.2 for an excerpt from my reflective diary which emphasises the need for more student involvement in school which in turn increases student agency.

<b>Reflective Journal Excerpt</b>	<p>When planning for the upcoming year with the class teacher, we were reflecting on how well we thought the mixed ability maths groups worked this year. We felt that while they were mostly effective, I suggested getting the opinion of the students and I was delighted when the class teacher was on board with this suggestion. (Dillon, reflective journal: 20/05/21)</p> <p>Having asked the students what their opinions were...most of the children felt happy to continue with the spilt maths groups and enjoyed the smaller space for maths. What struck me the most was there was a handful of children who felt very strongly against continuing the maths groups and it was these children that I felt needed to be listened to just as much as the ‘for maths group’ group. I spoke to the next year’s class teacher and SET, and it has been decided with management that because there was a divide in opinion, that the children next year will have a choice when it comes to going out to the smaller maths group or staying in the classroom. On reflection of this, I feel that without the input of SV, we would not have come to this conclusion. It enabled the children to be part of a ‘real’ decision making activity. (Dillon, reflective journal: 28/05/21)</p>
-----------------------------------	--

*Figure 6.3 Reflective Diary Excerpt 8*

Furthermore, the following comment from Janet indicates how students feel important and appreciated when they are given a genuine opportunity to choose something related to their learning leading to increased student agency and a step further towards a love of learning.



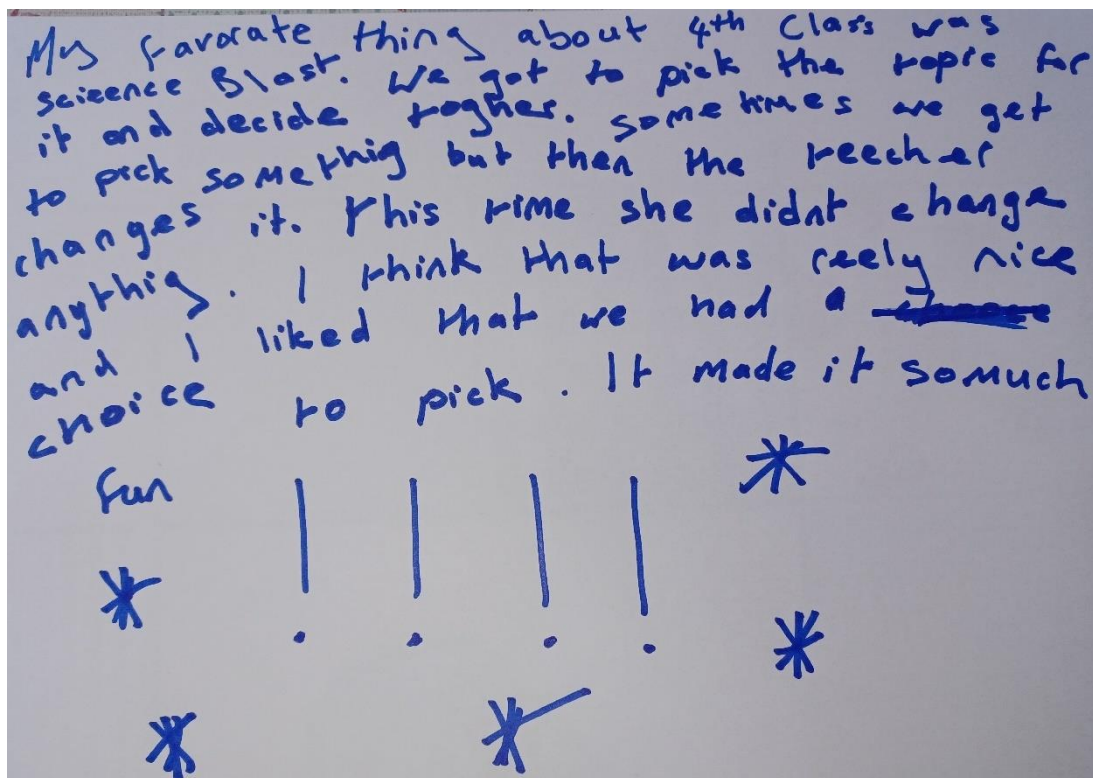


Figure 6.4 Janet's Comment in Focus Group

Additionally, the idea of student agency can be closely linked with the Froebelian principle of freedom where free choice and self-activity are important for the child to learn effectively. Cook-Sather (2020: 182) emphasizes how SV initiatives “require a shift in mindset and a sharing of power”. Without the class teacher’s commitment to involving students in their own learning and sharing the decision making involved in choosing a topic to research for the Science Blast competition, the children’s experiences could have been very different to that of Janet’s experience highlighted above.

### 6.3.1 Active Participants

A requirement for student agency is that children must be active participants in their own learning. Active participation is to actively engage students as “producers of knowledge” such as “students-as-researchers projects” (Taylor & Robinson, 2009: 162; Fielding, 2001) with the goal being to increase student’s representation and participation (Taylor &



Robinson, 2009). By including and involving the students I teach in my research about SV meant I was receiving first-hand insight into what the children's thoughts were. Likewise, it showed the children that I valued their voice greatly, that I wanted them to be part of and directly involved in the research, not just being the 'researched'. My commitment to involving the children's active participants of the research is evident from a comment from my critical friend and the class teacher below.

<p><b>Critical Friend</b></p> <p>28/05/21</p>	<p>This is my first experience of children being part of the research process. Seeing how Maria is involving the children at all stages of the research is very intriguing. I have only heard and read about children being researched but the fact that they are involved in the research process is very interesting and I can see how seriously the children are taking it. They are speaking about it in class and sharing with the others what they have learnt. The responsibility of getting to pick and take the photos for the project was very exciting for them. It's clear that are all active participants in the research project and their input is valued.</p>
---	--

*Figure 6.5 Critical Friend Comment 2*

This is in line with Postma, Luchtenberg, Verhagen and Maeckelberghe (2021) who state that when children are involved in the research process, the children's confidence increases, their awareness of research escalates and shows them how their contribution to the research matters. Additionally, Fielding and Bragg (2003) also note that when students feel that they are contributing to and having an impact on theirs and others' learning experiences, there is an increased positive sense of self and agency. Issy chose the PhotoVoice image below as she felt that by being included in the weekly focus groups, she felt that she was listened to, learn how using her voice can be powerful and enjoyed listening to other's opinions in the group. Once again by creating a safe space (the Lundy Model) the child felt more comfortable and confident which in turn leads to more active participation by the students.

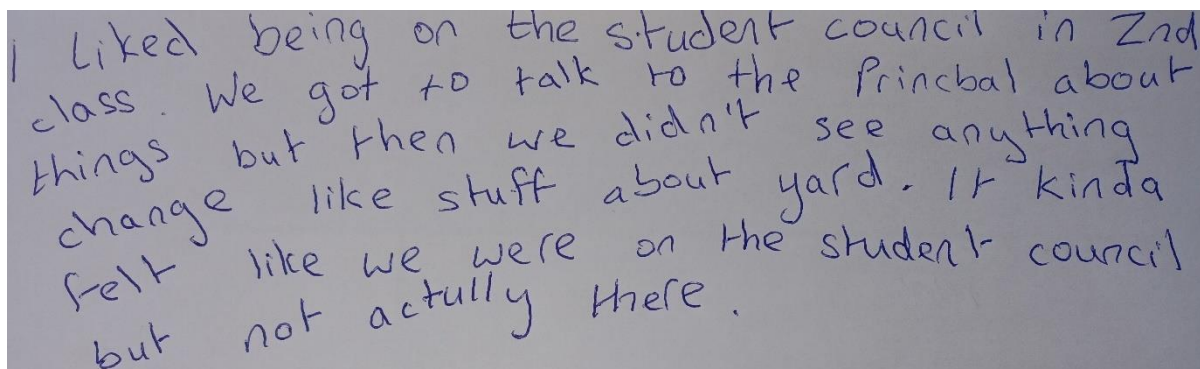


*Figure 6.6 Issy's PhotoVoice Image*

### **6.3.2 Making Decisions**

SV initiatives can take many forms, one of which is to give children the right to make decisions which will directly affect them which links closely with the Lundy Model and the factor, audience. Opportunities for children to be involved in the decision-making process in school throughout Ireland are below the international average (Cosgrove & Gilleece, 2012; Forde, Horgan, Martin & Parkes, 2018). The idea that children are being denied an opportunity to be part of the decision-making process arose while analysing the data. Taking the Lundy' Model and the factor 'influence' which was outlined in detail in chapter two, there is a compelling argument for including children in the decision-making process. Lundy (2007) notes that while adults should be complying with the requirements of Article 12, they ultimately ignore children's views when it comes to listening to what children have to say. When considering the data, it was evident that the children in the focus group had a lot to say

in relation to our student council and making decisions about issues which were important to them. See figure 6.7.



*Figure 6.7 Niall's Comment in Focus Group*

Interestingly Niall selected his PhotoVoice image (see below) of him and his friends playing on yard. When asked during the interview why he chose this image to represent where he feels his voice is most heard in school, his response was:

**Researcher/Teacher:** So, you chose this photo as you feel it represents how your voice is heard most in school. Can you tell me why you picked this photo?

**Child:** Well, and on yards and when we're all playing, if something happens and we tell the teacher I feel they all listen and help us sort it out. (Niall, interview, 26/05/2021)



*Figure 6.8 Niall's PhotoVoice image*

As previously mentioned, this year we decided as a staff to ask the children in fourth, fifth and sixth class what they thought about the new spelling programme introduced to them and we wanted to listen to their opinions about keeping the same programme for next year. See an

observation I made during one of the focus group sessions in which we were discussing the new spelling programme.

<p><b>Unstructured Observation</b></p> <p>20/05/21</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The children had a lot to say and were confident in articulating their opinions about the spellings programme.</li> <li>• They struggled to listen to the other children’s views but once it was explained to them about being respectful, they took it on board.</li> <li>• At one point Niall asked, “why are we getting to pick what spellings we do, the principal will decide anyway”.</li> <li>• When I explained to them that the school was leaving the decision up to them, they took the decision process more seriously and really wanted to get their points across.</li> </ul>
--	--

*Figure 6.9 Unstructured Observation 3*

### 6.4 Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning is about learning together in small groups...the way teachers develop the relationships in that classroom and create a particular environment, or ‘that certain climate’ using methods and strategies to maximize participation and engagement from all students (Ferguson-Patrick, 2020: 5).

Enabling SV through cooperative practices encourages children to become more aware of others' views, how to deal with and resolve conflict, respect others point of view in the hope that they become “active, responsible and engaged citizens” (OECD: 4). When investigating the data, especially my reflective diary and comments from my critical friend, it was notable that some of the children in the focus group had become more involved in group work and contributed their thoughts and opinions with more confidence than before especially one student Mia.

<b>Reflective Journal Excerpt</b>	Today I noticed Mia becoming much more involved in the focus group activity based on wants and needs. She is a quite shy student who often experiences high levels of anxiety. Today when working with two other children they were deciding where each statement should go. One of the children suggested that the right to a voice was a want not a need. Mia spoke up confidently and gave a great explanation as to why she thought it was a need instead of a want to have a voice and the children agreed with her. Afterwards she looked at me with a big smile on her face. (Dillon, reflective journal: 25/03/21)
-----------------------------------	--

*Figure 6.10 Reflective Diary excerpt 9*

#### 6.4.1 Expression of Ideas

This sub theme is very much linked with Article 12 and the right of the child to express his/her views freely (Lundy, 2007). The Lundy Model ensures that the child has the right to express him/herself freely and that their views should be respected by all adults. It became clear during the baseline interviews and weekly focus group sessions with the children that they were firstly, not aware of the true meaning of SV and secondly not aware that it was their right to have a voice. From Amy's comments below during the interview it is obvious that she was not aware of what the SV was.

**Researcher/ Teacher:** What do you understand the term student voice to be?

**Child:** I don't really get that question.

**Researcher/ Teacher:** That's okay. It's just kind of asking you, what do you think student voice means? So, have you heard that term? What would you be thinking about when you hear student voice?

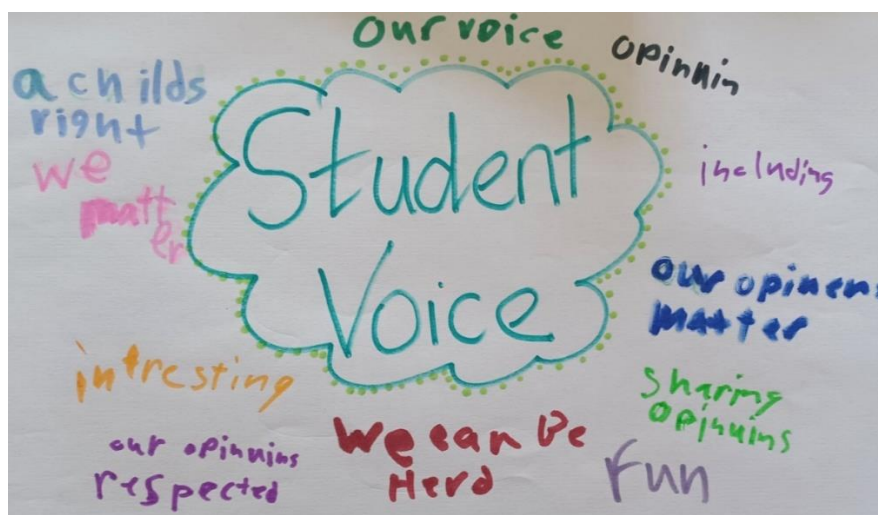
**Child:** Uh, I think that maybe it's about students and uh sorry I don't really know sorry. (Amy, baseline interview, 18/03/21)

However, when I completed the interview with Amy about her PhotoVoice image, it became apparent how much she had learned in relation to what SV was, how confident she had become when speaking about SV and how much more aware she was that it was her right to express her views.



**Researcher/ Teacher:** Do you feel like your voice is only heard in this setting, or is there other places where your voice is heard in this school?

**Child:** There's other places, like the classroom but like this one I think is the most to be heard. I feel like being in here, it's less people and you try to listen to everyone. And being part of this group (focus group), I feel I get SV and why we should use our voice more, be more confident that our ideas are good too and that the teacher might listen then, like we should be allowed to have a say in different stuff. I know now. (Amy Interview, 27/05/21)



*Figure 6.11 Amy's Sample of Work*

As teacher's it is our duty to ensure that the children in our care are fully informed about their rights, that we respect the rights of the child and always adhere to the UNCRC (Lundy, 2007). Seeing Amy's progress in her thoughts and knowledge about SV made me realise that my value of care was becoming more evident in my everyday practice. Additionally, the idea of children expressing their views was further highlighted from my critical friend below.

<p><b>Critical Friend</b> 15/04/21</p>	<p>The children are really enjoying the weekly focus groups. I sat in on one of the most recent lessons and I was shocked at the level of interest and deep conversation about the rights of a student. Their insights about the topic of student voice and the importance of it in school was very intriguing. They were very willing to express their opinions and seemed very comfortable in doing so within the small group setting.</p>
--	--

*Figure 6.3 Critical Friend Comment 3*

## 6.5. Conclusion

It is evident from the discussion above, that when implemented correctly, SV can enable students to become active agents in their own learning. When children become active agents they take learning more seriously, enjoy the experience of learning more and above all empowers them and prepares them for the world we live in today. SV can create openings in children’s learning experiences where they see how their voice has a place in decision making, in collaboration with others and the value of expressing their voice in school to improve not only their learning experiences but the learning experiences of others also.

## **Chapter Seven: Conclusion**

### **7.1 Introduction**

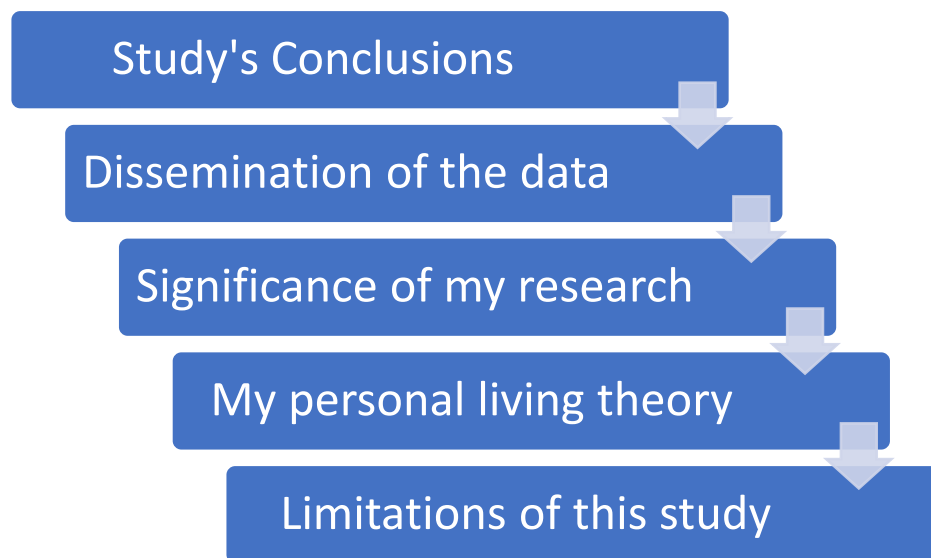
This chapter outlines the main conclusions of this research study as well as reflecting on the research questions which guided this study. The changes in my thinking and a transformation in my practice as well as my educational values are discussed. This study investigated how I engaged in SSAR in using SV to enhance my understanding of the learning experiences of the child. The objectives of this study sought to explicitly develop my relationship with the children and in doing so I hoped that the children recognised that I valued their thoughts, opinions, and ideas about their education. Additionally, I wanted the children to realise how I respect what they have to say and appreciate its importance.

An in-depth analysis of the literature gave insight into the current thinking and research on SV both nationally and internationally as well as highlighting the positives and challenges to implementing SV initiatives. Furthermore, the literature review discussed various educational perspectives as well as outlining the conceptual framework which underpinned this study: The Lundy Model of Participation (2007). Qualitative data was selected to gather the data required for this study and thematic analysis utilised to examine and investigate the data. The findings from this study indicates how I executed changes in my practice to enhance the learning experiences of the child and further improve the quality of my practice. While the investigation was delayed in starting due to school closures because of the worldwide Covid-19 pandemic, this study was successful in attaining the following objectives:



- To investigate the learning experiences of children in terms of using SV in the classroom.
- To explore methodologies which are considered effective in enhancing the voice of the student.
- To improve my understanding of SV while also enhancing my practice further by living more closely to my values.

The preceding section and what this chapter includes is graphically represented below in figure 7.1:



*Figure 7.1 Outline of Chapter 7*

## **7.2 Study Conclusions**

At the beginning of this research study, I identified how I had noticed the children in my class were very uninvolved or passive in the learning experience rather than being active and progressive in the learning environment. I felt the need to investigate this further to create a more shared learning environment where the children were actively involved in their learning.

After implementing the weekly focus groups where children had the opportunity to discuss matters which concerned them as well as listen to other's opinions in a safe and comfortable space using the methodology of PhotoVoice, my new learning and this study's conclusions are as follows:

- Without a genuine interest and commitment from the teacher, SV will be ineffective, and children will lose trust and hope in their teacher to take matters that affect them seriously. The teacher must be a facilitator of SV for it to be successful for both student and teacher.
- SV when implemented correctly, is a very powerful tool in the classroom. It can open spaces where teachers and students learn from each other, promotes a sense of empowerment in children, brings about a positive change for children and teachers alike as well as ensuring children are fully aware of their rights to express their views freely (Lundy, 2007) while ensuring the voices of all children are heard and included.
- SV initiatives enable children to become active agents in their own learning when they are given the freedom of choice (Froebel; Lundy, 2007) and are recognised as partners in the decision-making process.

### **7.3 Dissemination of Data**

As highlighted throughout this study, the concept of SV in education is constantly developing where educational stakeholders are beginning to realise the importance and value of including the voice of the child in education (Cook-Sather, 2006; Lundy, 2007, Robinson & Taylor, 2007; Fleming, 2015). Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that the findings of this study are beneficial for teachers, principals and educational influencers and to create change, the findings of this study must be shared. I presented one of the main findings along with a brief overview of this study to my fellow students who are also primary school

teachers. A summary of my intervention and findings will be submitted for publication to Intouch magazine which is issued to all Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO) members monthly. The main findings from this study will be presented to my staff on return to school in September 2021 with the hope that by sharing this study, my colleagues will see the immense benefit to including the voice of the child in their classroom and become more informed about the effective methodologies when implementing SV initiatives in the classroom.

#### **7.4 The Significance of my Research**

This research is both timely and pertinent considering the Irish Department of Children and Youth Affairs recent publication of the National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making (2015 – 2020). The following section highlights the significance of this research and discusses the need for SV education in schools. Also, the need for role models will be outlined so as SV initiatives are implemented with genuine respect and the interest of the child is at the centre of the actions taken by school leaders and teachers alike.

##### **7.4.1 The Need for Student Voice Education in the Primary Curriculum**

As stated throughout this study, SV has gained increased attention over the last twenty years (Cook-Sather, 2006; Fielding, 2011; Lundy, 2018). Furthermore, there is a strong case for SV to have a central place within education (Flutter & Ruddock, 2004; Lundy, 2007). However, also noted throughout this research is the lack of awareness among children of what SV means and their right to their voice being listened to, heard and respected. If we take Lundy's (2007: 940) argument which has been discussed throughout this study, that children expressing their views is a "fundamental human right", why then do schools, management and educational stakeholders have to be 'sold' on the idea that listening to students can not

only make a powerful contribution to the schools' ethos but foster a community where children's voices are genuinely respected, valued and above all heard. In early September 2021, the SET of the current fifth class in my school came to me to ask me about an 'end of year form' which Janet had filled out in June 2021 (at the end of fourth class). The form had asked the question; 'what was your favourite part of fourth class?'. Janet (who was part of the focus group for this research study) responded with;

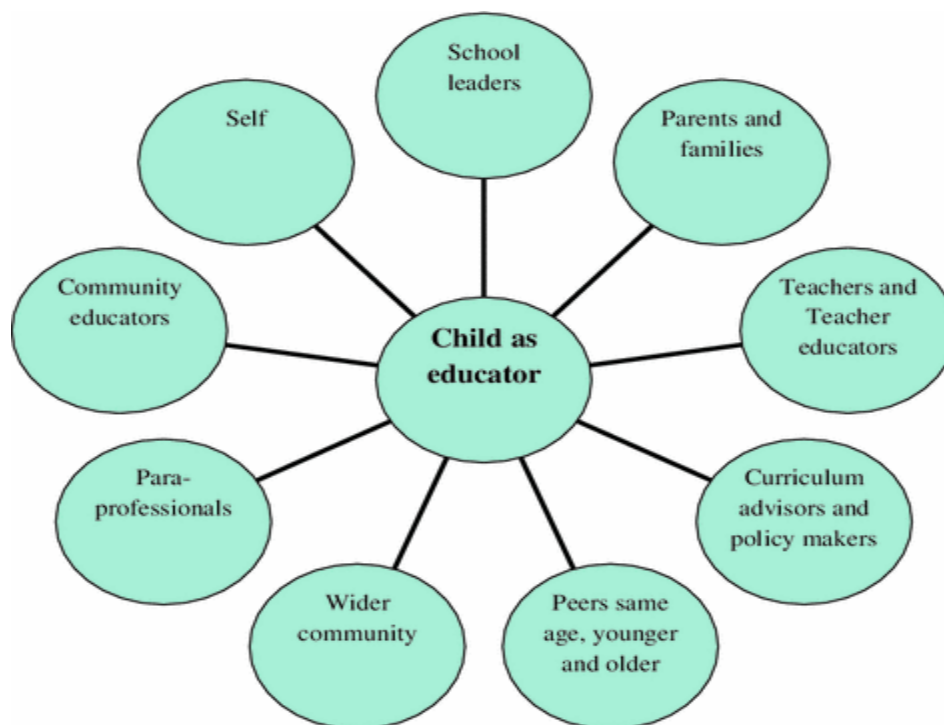
“Being able to go to Ms. Dillon's focus group where I felt I was heard and listened too” (Janet, end of year review form, 25/09/2021).

The SET wanted to know what this focus group entailed, and she expressed her interest in continuing a focus group like the one I had set up with her current fifth class. This is evidence that my practice is being continued and that the children are advocating for themselves.

#### **7.4.2 Creating Real Change in School**

Doyle (2021) states that change brings about disruption and chaos, demands a shift in our thinking and actions and requests that we learn from others. It is evident from the literature explored throughout this study, that a change is slowly emerging around the topic of SV but if it is to be a real and meaningful change all educational stakeholders must be on board for this change to come about and be successful. As seen in figure 7.1 below, children are at the centre of the education system and so it is important that they are remembered and included in all educational decisions which affect them. However, as it is the teachers who work with these children on a daily level, investigate their time getting to know each student and form relationships, I believe a change in thinking around how we see students' needs to happen at ground level, from the teachers themselves. This can happen when teachers observe and learn from other teachers, when we share new knowledge with each other and include all members of staff in bringing about this change. While introducing new policy, frameworks and initiatives is a good starting point in implementing this change in schools, I believe it is the

teachers who will ultimately be the leaders in this change. We need to be the role models for the children by using our own voice and ensure the children's views are taken more seriously.



*Figure 7.2 Constructions of Children as Educators (Haynes & Murriss, 2013: 222)*

### **7.5 My Personal Living Theory**

Having identified my core values at the onset of this research journey, as care, healthy relationships and inclusion all of which were underpinned by the concept of love, I then examined my practice and came to the realisation that these core values were not being truly lived out in my everyday practice. There was a development in my thinking that now needed to be seeing in my practice (McDonagh et al., 2020: 157). Having established the problem, implemented an action, reflected on the process throughout, I believe I have gathered evidence to firmly ground my claim to knowledge (Whitehead 2018; McDonagh et al., 2020).

Refocusing my attention from the monotonous and teacher directed style of learning towards a style of teaching which was more in line with the core values enabled me to become a

teacher where shared learning occurred, active participation took place, an obvious increase in motivation and engagement materialized and furthermore a sense of belonging developed where children felt they were valued, respected and above all listened to daily. I feel now that I am no longer a 'living contradiction' but instead I see my values being lived out in my everyday practice. Giving the students a voice and a role as a co-researcher enabled them to feel empowered and that what they had to say and contribute was of utmost importance to me. Reflecting on my practice and the children's thoughts and insights as well as communicating with my critical friend and validation group enabled me to bring about a change in my thinking which led to a change in my practice. However, while I feel I have had a transformation in both my thinking and practice, I believe that this is only the start of the journey. There is always room for growth and further improvement of one's practice. As teachers, we are constantly learning and improving our practice to become more informed and better equipped for teaching.

## **7.6 Limitations**

There were some limitations which influenced this research process. Firstly, undertaking this study while also teaching full time was extremely demanding. Ensuring that I found a balance between researching the topic, implementing actions and reflecting on the process as well as fulfilling my teaching role to the best of my ability was challenging. Unfortunately, it was outside the scope of this study to investigate further factors that influenced the learning experiences of the child, such as parental factors and whole school factors. Additionally, acting as both teacher and researcher posed some limitations as there was always a risk that the child was providing answers to questions in which they thought they should give rather than expressing their honest opinion. Finally, due to the impact of Covid-19 and the closures of school, some adjustments needed to be made to the implementation of the intervention and so the intervention was shorter than I would have liked.

## **7.7 Conclusion**

This research study came about out of a concern I had in relation to my teaching where I felt the children were becoming more passive knowledge absorbers rather than active participants of their own leaning experiences (Cook-Sather, 2006; 2014). Having felt the need to act on this concern, led me to investigating how I can include the voice of the child more within my practice and understand their leaning experiences using SV. The journey that this SSAR project has brought me on has enabled me to transform my thinking in relation to my values and furthermore my practice. Becoming a critical reflective practitioner has enabled me to become more aware of my everyday practice. Identifying my core values at the beginning of this research journey enabled me to focus on these throughout the intervention and this research study. I believe I have generated a living theory of practice that values healthy relationships, care and inclusion which enables the voice of the child in their own learning experiences. I feel that I have attempted to understand each child's learning experiences in my care by respecting and valuing what they have to say, listening to and hearing them. Above all else, I feel that by including the voice of the child and giving them a say in matters that affect their education has enabled me to show the children love. This realisation and understanding of the children's experiences is documented throughout chapters four, five and six of this study. By incorporating and including the voice of the child in my classroom, I demonstrated the importance of the role of the teacher, the power of SV in the classroom and the significance of the child becoming an active agent in their own learning.

## References

- Adalbjarnardottir, S. (2010). Passion and purpose: teacher professional development and student social and civic growth, in T. Lovat, R. Toomey and N. Clement (Eds). *International research handbook on values education and student wellbeing*. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Adams, M.G., Costa, A., L., & Kallick, B. (2013) *Teaching that changes lives: 12 mindset tools for igniting the love of learning*. Berrett-Koehler Publisher, Inc. San Francisco California.
- Ahmadi, R. (2021) Students' perceptions of Student Voice in assessment within the context of Iran: the dynamics of culture, power relations and student knowledge. *International Journal for Academic Development*. 0(0) 1-15.
- Alcoff, L., (1991-1992) *The problem of speaking for others*, Cultural Critique, Winter No. 20., 5-32, University of Minnesota Press.
- Arksey, H and Knight, P. (1999) *Interviewing for Social Scientists*. London: Sage.
- Arnot, M., and Reay, D. (2007). A sociology of pedagogic voice: Power, inequality and pupil consultation. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 28(3), 311–325.
- Arnot, M., McIntyre, D., Pedder, D. and Reay, D. (2004) *Consultation in the Classroom: Developing Dialogue about Teaching and Learning*. Harlow: Pearson.
- Baroutsis, A., McGregor, G., and Mills, M., (2016) Pedagogic voice: Student Voice in teaching and engagement pedagogies, *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, 24(1), 123-140.
- Beattie, H. (2012) Amplifying student voice: the missing link in school transformation. *Management in Education* 26 (3) 158–160.



- Bishop, R., Berryman, M., Cavanagh, T., and Teddy, L. (2009). Tekotahitanga: Addressing educational disparities facing Māori students in New Zealand. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 25(5), 734-742.
- Bourke, R. and Loveridge, J. (2014) Exploring informed consent and dissent through children's participation in educational research, *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 37(2) 151-165.
- Bourke, R., and Loveridge, J., (2016) Beyond the official language of learning: Teachers engaging with Student Voice research. *Teaching and Teacher Education* (57) 59-66.
- Brady, L. (2011) Teacher Values and Relationship: Values and Relationship: Factors in Values Education. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 36(2), 55-66.
- Bragg, S. (2001) Taking a Joke: learning from the voices we don't want to hear. *Forum* 43(2) 49-109.
- Bragg, S. (2003) Student Voice and governmentality: the production of enterprising subjects. Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the British Educational Research Association, Edinburgh.
- Bragg, S. (2007) "Student Voice" and Governmentality: The production of enterprising subjects? *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 28(3) 343-358.
- Bragg, S. (2010) Consulting young people: A literature review 2<sup>nd</sup> (Ed.) *Creativity, Culture and Education Series*.
- Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology, *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2) 77-101.

- Brooker, R and MacDonald, R. (1999) Did we hear you? Issues on SVin a curriculum innovation, *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 31(1) 83-97.
- Brookfield, S. (2017) *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*. 2nd Edition. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Brophy, J. E. and Good, T.L. (1974). *Teacher-student relationships*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Busher, H. (2012) Students as expert witnesses of teaching and learning. *Management in Education* 26 (3) 113–119.
- Calderhead, J., and Gates, P. (1993) *Conceptualizing Reflection in Teacher Development*, Falmer: London Press
- Campbell, E. (2003) *The Ethical Teacher*, Philadelphia: Open Press University.
- Cannon, A.M. (2017) *Students' experiences with a state student advisory council: Implications for Student Voice and participatory democracy*. University of West Georgia. Carrollton, Georgia.
- Carr, W. and Kemmis, S. (1986) *Becoming Critical. Education, knowledge and action research*. London: Falmer.
- Casey-Schöner, C. L. (2019) *Student Voice matters. An exploration of teachers' perceptions of risk when engaging with Student Voice for improving classroom practices*. Unpublished Master of Educational Leadership Thesis, The University of Auckland, New Zealand.
- Charteris, J. (2013) Lerner Agency: A Dynamic Element of the New Zealand Key Competencies. *Teachers and Curriculum*, 13, 19-25.

- Charteris, J. (2016). Envisaging agency as discourse hybridity: A Butlerian analysis of secondary classroom discourses. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, (37), 189–203.
- Charteris, J., & Thomas, E. (2017) Uncovering ‘unwelcome truths’ through student voice: teacher inquiry into agency and student assessment literacy, *Teaching Education*, 28(2), 162-177.
- Children’s Rights Alliance (2011) Ten years on: Did the National Children’s Strategy deliver on its promises? Dublin: Children’s Rights Alliance. Available at: [https://www.childrensrights.ie/sites/default/files/submissions\\_reports/files/ReviewNCS2000to2010-0211\\_0.pdf](https://www.childrensrights.ie/sites/default/files/submissions_reports/files/ReviewNCS2000to2010-0211_0.pdf) (accessed on 29 November 2020)
- Clark A (2004) The mosaic approach and research with young children. In: Lewis V, Kellett M, Robinson C, Fraser S and Ding S (eds) *The Reality of Research with Children and Young People*. London: Sage, 142–161.
- Cohen, L. Manion, L. and Morrison, K. (2007) *Research Methods in Education*. 6th ed. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L. and Morrison, K. (2011). *Research Methods in Education*. 7th ed. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L. and Morrison, K. (2018). *Research methods in education*. 8th ed. New York: Routledge. Palmer.
- Cook, T., and Hess, E. (2007) What the camera sees and from what perspective: fun methodologies for engaging children in enlightening adults, *Childhood*, 14(1) 29–45.
- Cook-Sather, A. (2020) Student Voice across contexts: Fostering student agency in today’s schools, *Theory into Practice*, 59(2), 182-191.

- Cook-Sather, A., (2002) Authorizing Students' Perspectives: Toward Trust, Dialogue, and Change in Education. *Educational Researcher*, 31(4), 3–14.
- Cook-Sather, A., (2006) Sound, Presence, and Power: “Student Voice” in Educational Research and Reform, *Curriculum Inquiry*, 36(4), 359-390.
- Cook-Sather, A., (2007) What would happen if we treated students as those with opinions that matter? The benefits to principals and teachers of supporting youth engagement in school. *NASSP Bulletin, Social Science Premium Collection*, 91(4), 343 – 362.
- Cook-Sather, A., (2014) The Trajectory of Student Voice in educational research. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, 49 (2), 131 – 148.
- Cook-Sather, A., Clarke, B., Condon, D., Cushman, K., Demetriou, H., Easton, L., Evans, P., M., Fritz-Mauer, J., Himeles, D., Mitra Mausner, J., Pincus, M., R., and Youens, B. (2009) *Learning from the Students' Perspectives. A sourcebook for effective Teaching*. Taylor & Francis, Paradigm Publisher.
- Cosgrove, J. and Gilleece, L. (2012) An international perspective on civic participation in Irish post-primary schools: results from ICCS, *Irish Educational Studies*, 31(4), 377-395.
- Crane, B. (2001) Revolutionising School-based Research, *Forum* 43(2) 49 -109.
- Cuban, L., (2009) *Hugging the middle: how teachers teach in an era of testing and accountability*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Cuff, E. G. and Payne, G. C. F. (1979). *Perspectives in Sociology*. London: Allen & Unwin.
- Curtis, D. D., and J. McMillan. 2008. *School Non-completers: Profiles and Initial Destinations: Longitudinal Survey of Australian Youth*. Research Report No. 54. Melbourne, AU: Australian Council for Educational Research.

Demetriou, H. and Wilson, E. (2010) Children should be seen and heard: the power of Student Voice in sustaining new teachers. *Improving Schools*, 13 (1) 54-69.

Department for Education and Skills (DfES, UK) (2004b). *Working together: giving children and young people a say*, London.

Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2012) *Guidance for developing ethical research projects involving children*. Dublin. Ireland

Department of Children and Youth Affairs, (2014). *Better outcomes, better futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014 – 2020*. Dublin. Ireland.

Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2017) *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children*. Dublin: Ireland.

Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration & Youth (2015) *Participation Framework National Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making*. Dublin. Ireland.

Department of Education and Science (2007) *Special Educational Needs: A Continuum of Support*, A resource pack for teachers. Dublin. Ireland.

Department of Education and Science (DES) (2002). *Student Councils: a voice for students*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.

Dewey, J. (1933). *How we think: A restatement of the relation of reflective thinking to the educational process*. Boston: DC Heath and Company.

Donnini, D. (2015) *The role of Student Voice and choice in learner centred competency reform*. Unpublished PhD Thesis. University of New England. Australia.

- Doyle, A. (2021) *Educational Change - A complex landscape*. Moodle. EDF688. Implications for Educational Improvement. National University of Ireland Maynooth. [accessed 6th August 2021].
- Elwood, J. (2013) The role(s) of Student Voice in 14–19 education policy reform: reflections on consultation and participation. *London Review of Education*, 11(2) 97–11.
- Ennew, J. (1994) *Street and Working Children: A Guide to Planning, Development Manual 4*. London: Save the Children.
- Ferguson-Patrick, K. (2020) Cooperative Learning in Swedish Classrooms: Engagement and Relationships as a Focus for Culturally Diverse Students. *Education Sciences*. (10), 1-21.
- Fielding, M. and Bragg, S. (2003) *Students as Researchers. Making a Difference*. Pearson Publishing. Cambridge.
- Fielding, M. (2004) Transformative approaches to student voice: theoretical underpinnings, recalcitrant realities. *British Educational Research Journal*, (30), 295–311.
- Fielding, M. (2011). Student Voice and the possibility of radical democratic education: re-narrating forgotten histories, developing alternative futures. In: Czerniawski, G. and Kidd, W. (eds.), *The Student Voice Handbook: Bridging the Academic / Practitioner Divide*. Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing Ltd.
- Fink, D., and Stoll, L. (2005). *Educational change: Easier said than done*. In A. Hargreaves (Ed.), *Extending educational change: International handbook of educational change*, 17-41. Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer.
- Fleming, D. P. (2013) *Student Voice Vin Irish post-primary schools: a drama of voices*. Unpublished PhD Thesis, University College Cork, Ireland.

- Fleming, D., 2015. Student Voice: An Emerging Discourse in Irish. *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education*, 8(2), 223-242.
- Flutter, J. and Rudduck, J. (2004) *Consulting Pupils: What's in It for Schools?* London: Routledge Falmer.
- Forde, C., Horgan, D., Martin, S. and Parkes, A. (2018) Learning from children's voice in schools: Experiences from Ireland, *Journal of Educational Change*, (19), 489–509.
- Freeman, T. M., Anderman, L. H., and Jensen, J. M. (2007). Sense of belonging in college freshmen at the classroom and campus levels. *Journal of Experimental Education*, 75(3), 203–220.
- Freire, P. (1994). *Pedagogy of hope: Reliving pedagogy of the oppressed*. London, UK: Continuum Publishing.
- Frost, R. (2008) Developing student participation, research, and leadership: the HCD Student Partnership. *School Leadership and Management*, 28(4) 353-368.
- Fullan, M. (2007) *The new meaning of educational change* (4th ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Gibbs, G. (1988) *Learning by doing: a guide to teaching and learning methods*. Great Britain. Further Education Unit
- Gillies, V. and Robinson, Y. (2012) Developing creative research methods with challenging pupils, *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 15(2) 161-173.
- Giordano, K. (2021) Providing Choice and Voice for Your Students In: Quinzio-Zafran, A.M. and Wilkins, E.A. (eds.) *The New Teacher's Guide to Overcoming Common Challenges: Curated advice from award-winning teachers*. New York: Routledge.

Glenn, M., (2006) *Working with collaborative projects: my living theory of a holistic educational practice*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Limerick, Ireland.

Government of Ireland. (1998) *Education Act*, Dublin: The Stationery Office.

Hart R (1992) *Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship* (Innocenti Essay No. 4). Florence: UNICEF.

Hart, A., R., (1992) *Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship*. UNICEF International Child Development Centre. Italy.

Haynes, J., & Murriss, K. (2013) Child as educator: Introduction to the special issue. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*. 32, 217–227.

Hildreth, R. W. (2012). Word and deed: A Deweyan integration of deliberative and participatory democracy. *Caucus for a New Political Science*, 34(3), 295-320.

Hipkins, R. (2012) *Reshaping the Secondary School Curriculum: Building the Plane while flying it? Findings from NZCER National Survey of Secondary Schools 2009*. Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Reform.

hooks, b. (1994) *Teaching to transgress. Education as the practice of freedom*. New York. Routledge.

hooks, B. (2010). *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Thinking*. London: Routledge.

Inspectorate (2012). *An Introduction to School Self-Evaluation of Teaching and Learning in Post-Primary Schools*. Dublin: Department of Education and Skills.

Inspectorate (2016) *School Self-Evaluation Guidelines 2016-2020 Primary*. Dublin: The Department of Education and Skills.



- Inspectorate (2016). *School Self-Evaluation: Guidelines for Post-primary Schools*. Dublin: Department of Education and Skills.
- Islam, A., (2012) Afterword. The space between? The value of Student Voice from a student's perspective. *Management in Education* 26(3) 164.
- Kavanagh, S. (2020) *Supporting Social Emotional Development in the Primary School Setting*. Master Thesis Ed. (Research in Practice) The National University of Ireland, Maynooth, Ireland.
- Kelly Gentile, S. (2014) From listening to empowering: A study of high school principals' perceptions of Student Voice in classroom instruction. PhD Thesis, University of Pittsburgh. United States of America.
- Kilkelly, U., and Lundy, L. (2006) Children's rights in action: using the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as an auditing tool. *Child and Family Law Quarterly*, 18 (3), 331-350.
- Kvale, S. (1996) *Interviews*. London: Sage
- Laitala, N. and Kenopic, T. (2006) Ontario, Canada: Student Voice Initiative. Diversity strengthens Student Voice. *Connect* (220) 1-34.
- Lamb, S., and S. Rice. 2008. *Effective Intervention Strategies for Students at Risk of Early Leaving*. Melbourne: Centre for Post-compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning, The University of Melbourne.
- Langsted, Ole (1994) 'Looking at quality from the child's perspective' In: Moss, P. and Pence, (eds.) *Valuing Quality in Early Childhood Services: new approaches to defining quality*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing.

- Lassonde, C. A., Galman, S. and Kosnik, C. (2009) *Self-Study Research Methodologies for Teacher Educators*, Rotterdam: Sense.
- Lewis, A. (2002) “Accessing through Research Interviews the Views of Children with Difficulties in Learning.” *Support for Learning* 17(3) 110–116.
- Lewis, M. (1993). *Without a word: Teaching beyond women’s silence*. New York: Routledge
- Lilley, I. (1967) *Friedrich Froebel: A Selection from his Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lodge, C., (2005) From Hearing Voices to Engaging in Dialogue: Problematising Student Participation in school Improvement. *Journal of Educational Change*, (6) 125-146.
- Lofton, S. and Grant, A. K. (2020) Outcomes and Intentionality of Action Planning in Photovoice: A Literature Review. *Health Promotion Practice*. October. 1-20
- Lumpkin, A. (2008) Teachers as Role Models Teaching Character and Moral Virtues, *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance*, 79(2), 45-50.
- Lundy, L. (2007) ‘Voice’ is not enough: conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child. *British Educational Research Journal*, 33(6) 927-942.
- Lundy, L. (2018) In defence of tokenism? Implementing children’s right to participate in collective decision-making. *Childhood*. 25(3) 340 - 354.
- Lundy, L., McEvoy, L., and Byrne, B. (2011) Working with young children as co-researchers: An approach informed by the United Nations convention on the rights of the child. *Early Education and Development*. 22(5) 714–736.

- MacBeath, J. (1999) *Schools Must Speak for Themselves: the case for school evaluation*. London: Routledge.
- MacBeath, J., Myers, K. and Demetriou, H. (2001) Supporting teachers in consulting pupils about aspects of teaching and learning and evaluating impact. *Forum*, 43 (2), 78–82.
- Maguire, M. and Delahunt, B. (2017) Doing a thematic analysis: A practical, step-by-step guide for learning and teaching scholars. *All Ireland Journal of Higher Education*, 9(3) 3351- 33513.
- Malterud, K. (2001). Qualitative research: Standards, challenges, and guidelines. *The Lancet* (358) 483–488.
- Marchant, R., and Kirby, P. (2005) *The participation of young children: communication, consultation, and involvement*. In B. Neale (Ed). *Young children's citizenship* (92-163) York: Joseph Rountree Foundation.
- Maynooth University (2020) *Research Ethics Policy*, Maynooth University: Kildare
- Maynooth University (2021) *Research Integrity Policy*, Maynooth University: Kildare.
- McGregor, G., and M. Mills. (2012) “Alternative Education Sites and Marginalised Young People: ‘I Wish There Were More Schools like This One’.” *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 16 (8): 843–862.
- McIntyre, D., Pedder, D. and Rudduck, J. (2005) Pupil voice: comfortable and uncomfortable learnings for teachers. *Research Papers in Education*, 20(2), 149-168.
- McLaughlin, C. and Kiragu, S. (2011). Voices for change: Student Voices on Sexuality and HIV/AIDS Education. In: Czerniawski, G. and Kidd, W. (eds.), *The Student Voice Handbook: Bridging the Academic / Practitioner Divide*. Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing Ltd.

- McNeish, D., and Newman, T. (2002) *'Involving young people in decision making'*. In: *What works for children?* (eds) D. McNeish, T. Newman, and H. Roberts, Buckingham: Open University Press
- McNiff, J. (2002) *Action Research for Professional Development, Concise Advice for New Action Researchers*. 3rd ed. Available at: <https://www.jeanmcniff.com/ar-booklet.asp> [accessed 7th December 2020].
- Mezirow, J. (1990) *Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood: A Guide to Transformative and Participatory Learning*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Miller, C., R., Deacon, Z., and Fitzgerald, K. (2015) Visions of collaboration: The girl power PhotoVoice project. *Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship*. 8(1) 98 - 105.
- Ministry of Education (2007) *The New Zealand Curriculum: for English medium teaching and learning in years 1-13*. Wellington: Learning Media.
- Ministry of Education. (2007). *The New Zealand Curriculum*. Wellington, New Zealand: Government Printer.
- Mitra, D. (2001). Opening the floodgates: giving students a voice in school reform. *Forum*, 43, 91-94.
- Mitra, D. (2003). Student Voice in school reform: Reframing student-teacher relationships. *Magill Journal of Education*, 38, 289-304.
- Mitra, D. (2004). The significance of students: can increasing "student voice" in schools lead to gains in youth development? *Teachers College Record*, 106, 651-688.

- Mitra, D., (2007) Student Voice in School Reform: from Listening to Leadership In: D. Thiessen and A. Cook-Sather, (Ed.) *International handbook of student experience in elementary and secondary school* (727 – 746). Dordrecht: The Netherlands: Springer.
- Mitra, D., (2009) Strengthening Student Voice Initiatives in High Schools. An Examination of the Supports Needed for School-Based Youth-Adult Partnerships. *Youth and Society*. 40 (3) 311-335.
- Mosley, J. (1996). *Quality circle time*. Cambridge, UK: LDA
- Naraian, S. (2011) Pedagogic Voicing: The Struggle for Participation in an Inclusive Classroom. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 42(3) 245–262.
- National Children's Strategy (2000). Dublin: Government Publications.
- National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2017) *The Learner Voice Research Study: Research Report*. [online] Available at: <https://ncca.ie/media/3442/16539-ncca-the-learner-voice-research-study-v2.pdf> (accessed 10 August 2021).
- National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), (2020) *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* [online] Available At: <https://ncca.ie/media/4456/ncca-primary-curriculum-framework-2020.pdf> (accessed 13 June 2021).
- Nelson, E. (2014) Enacting Student Voice through governance partnerships in the classroom: rupture of the ordinary for radical practice. *Forum*, 56 (1) 91-104.
- Noddings, N. (1995) Teaching Themes of Care. *The Phi Delta Kappan*, 76 (9), 675-679.
- Nowell, L.S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., and Moules, N. J. (2017) Thematic Analysis: Striving to Meet the Trustworthiness Criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* (16) 1-13.

- O' Dwyer, A., (2019) *Promoting Independence and Responsibility in the Classroom*. Unpublished Master Thesis Ed. (Research in Practice) The National University of Ireland, Maynooth, Ireland.
- O'Neill, G., and McMahon, S. (2012). Giving student groups a stronger voice: Using participatory research and action (PRA) to initiate change to a curriculum. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 49(2), 161–171.
- Office of Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (OFSTED) (2000). *Framework Evaluating Educational Inclusion*. London. Great Britain.
- Oldfather, P. (1995). Songs “come back most to them”: Students' experiences as researchers. *Theory into Practice*, 34(2), 131-137.
- Oluwatayo, J. A., (2012) Validity and Reliability Issues in Educational Research. *Journal of Educational and Social Research*. 2(2) 391 - 400.
- Ombudsman for Children's Office (2020) *A Day in my life*. [online] Available at: <https://www.oco.ie/childtalks/> (accessed 19 November 2020)
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2011). Education at a glance 2011: OECD indicators. OECD Publishing. [online] Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2011-en> (accessed 24 November 2020).
- Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. *The Future of Education and Skills: Education 2030*; OECD: Paris, France, 2018, 1–23.
- Osler, A. (2010) *Students' Perspectives on Schooling*. New York: Open University Press.

- Parry, H. (2014) Student Voice: Empowerment, Engagement, Efficacy In: *New Zealand Schools, Master of Educational Leadership and Management*. Unpublished thesis, Unitec Institute of Technology.
- Pascal, C. and Bertram, T. (2009). Listening to young citizens: The struggle to make real a participatory paradigm in research with young children. *European Early Childhood Research Journal*, 17(2) 249–262.
- Patton, M. Q. (1990) *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*, 2nd ed. Sage.
- Pearce, C.T., and Wood, E.B. (2019) Education for transformation: an evaluative framework to guide Student Voice in school, *Critical Studies in Education* 60(1) 113-130.
- Pekrul, S. and Levin, B. (2007). Building Student Voice for School Improvement. In: Thiessen, D. and Cook-Sather, A. (eds.), *International Handbook of Student Experience in Elementary and Secondary School*. New York: Springer.
- Piper, H., and Frankham, J. (2007) Seeing voices and hearing pictures: Images as discourse and the framing of image-based research. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 28 (3), 373-387.
- Postma, L., Luchtenberg M., Verhagen, E. and Maeckelberghe, E. (2021) The attitudes of healthy children and researchers towards the challenges of involving children in research: an exploratory study. *Research Involvement and Engagement*. 7(30) 1-10.
- Priestley, M., (2011) Schools, teachers, and curriculum change: a balancing act? *Journal of educational change*, 12 (1), 1–23.
- Qvortrup, A. and Qvortrup, L., (2018) Inclusion: Dimensions of inclusion in education, *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 22 (7), 803-817.

- Reeve, J. (2006) Teachers as facilitators: What autonomy-supportive teachers do and why their students benefit. *The Elementary School Journal*. 106 (3), 225-236.
- Robinson, C. and Taylor, C. (2007) Theorizing student voice: values and perspectives, *Improving Schools*, 10(3) 5-17.
- Rodgers, C. R. (2006) Attending to Student Voice: The Impact of Descriptive Feedback on Learning and Teaching. *Curriculum Inquiry* 36(2) 209-237.
- Rouvali, A. and Riga, V. (2019) Redefining the importance of children's voices in personal social emotional development curriculum using the Mosaic Approach, *International Journal of Primary, Elementary and Early Years Education 3-13*. 47(8) 998-1013.
- Rudduck, J. (2006). The past, the papers and the project. *Educational Review*, 58(2) 131–143.
- Rudduck, J. and Flutter, J. (2003) *How to improve your school: giving students a voice*. London and New York: Continuum Press.
- Rudduck, J., and McIntyre, D. (2007) Improving learning through consulting pupils, *Routledge*.
- Sánchez, L. (2015) Students as Photo Activists: Using Cameras in the Classroom for Social Change. *Theory into Practice*. 54(2) 163-171.
- Sandelowski, M. (1995). Qualitative analysis: What it is and how to begin. *Research in Nursing and Health*. (18) 371–375.
- Shohamy, E. (2001). Democratic assessment as an alternative. *Language Testing*, 18(4), 373–391.
- Silva, E. (2001) Squeaky wheels and flat tires: A case study of students as reform participants. *Forum*, 43(2), 95-99.



- Simmons, C., Graham, A., and Thomas, N., (2015) Imagining an ideal school for wellbeing: Locating student voice. *Journal of Educational Change*, (16) 129 – 144.
- Sinclair, R. (2004) Participation in practice: making it meaningful, effective and sustainable. *Children and Society*, (18), 106–118.
- Spilt, J.L., Koomen, H.M.Y. and Thijs, J.T. (2011) Teacher Wellbeing: The Importance of Teacher–Student Relationships. *Education Psychology Review*, 23, 457–477.
- Stoll, L., (2009) Capacity building for school improvement or creating capacity for learning? A changing landscape. *Journal of Educational Change*, 10 (2–3), 115–127.
- Sullivan, B., Glenn, M., Roche, M., and McDonagh, C. (2016) *Introduction into Critical Reflection and Action for Teacher Researchers*. London: Routledge.
- Sussman, A. (2016) Why Student Voice matters. Excerpts from a conversation with Ari Sussman. *Connect, Supporting Student Participation*, 2021 (198) 13-14.
- Taylor, C. and Robinson, C. (2009) Student voice: theorising power and participation, *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, 17:2, 161-175,
- Taylor, S. J., Bogdan, R. and DeVault, M. (2016) *Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods: A Guidebook and Resource*. 4th ed. New Jersey. Willey & Sons.
- Teddlie, C. and Reynolds, D., (2000) An introduction to school effectiveness research. In: C. Teddlie and D. Reynolds, (eds.) *The international handbook of school effectiveness research*. London: Falmer, 3–25.
- The Teaching Council of Ireland, (2016) Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers. 2nd Ed.

- Thomson, P. (2011). Coming to terms with voice. In: Czerniawski, G. and Kidd, W. (eds.), *The Student Voice Handbook: Bridging the Academic / Practitioner Divide*. Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing Ltd. Chapter 2
- Tinkler, (2008) A fragmented picture: reflections on the photographic practices of young people. *Visual Studies*, 23(3), 255-266.
- Toshalis, E. and Nakkula, M. J. (2012) Motivation, engagement, and student voice. The students at the centre series. *The Education Digest* 78 (1) 29-35.
- Tovey, H., (2013) *Bringing the Froebel Approach to Your Early Years Practice*. Oxon: Routledge
- Treacy, M., and Leavy, A. (2021): Student Voice and its role in creating cognitive dissonance: the neglected narrative in teacher professional development. *Professional Development in Education*. (17<sup>th</sup> Jan) 1-20
- United Nations General Assembly. (1989). Convention on the Rights of the Child. Retrieved from <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law>
- Valli, L. (1997). Listening to other voices: A description of teacher reflection in the United States. *Peabody Journal of Education*.72(1) 67–88.
- Verhellen, E. (2000) Children’s rights and education, in A. Osler (ed.) *Citizenship and Democracy in Schools: Diversity, Identity, Equality*. Stoke-on Trent: Trentham.
- Wall, K. and Higgins, S. (2006). Facilitating and supporting talk with pupils about metacognition: a research and learning tool. *International Journal of Research and Methods in Education*. 29(1) 39-53

- Wang, C. and Burris, M. A. (1997) Photovoice: Concept, Methodology, and Use of for Participatory Needs Assessment. *Health Education and Behaviour*. 24(3) 369 - 387
- Weiss, S. (2021) Fostering sense of belonging at universities. *European Journal of Education*. 56 (1) 93-97.
- Whitehead, J. (2009) Generating living theory and understanding in action research studies. *Action Research*. 7(1), 85–99.
- Whitehead, J. (2018) Living theory research as a way of life. *Brown Dog Books*, Bath, UK Available at: <http://insight.cumbria.ac.uk/id/eprint/3893/> [accessed 7<sup>th</sup> December 2020].
- Willemsse, M., Lunenberg, M., and Korthagen, F. (2005) Values in education: a challenge for teacher educators. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 21, 205–217.
- Wyness, M. (2006) Children, young people and civic participation: regulation and local diversity, *Educational Review*, 58(2), 209-218.

## Appendices

### Appendix A Template for Unstructured Observation Checklist

Do the children understand what SV is and can give examples?	
Are the children actively engaged in the group work activity?	
Is there evidence that the children are enjoying themselves?	
Is there evidence that the children are contributing towards the conversation?	
Are the children respecting others' views and opinions?	
What would you do differently for the next lesson if any?	
Is there evidence that the children feel comfortable expressing their views?	
Have you noticed anything about the children's behaviour/ interactions in the small focus group?	
What was the most effective part of that lesson?	
How did you address any power dynamics if any?	
Is there choice provided in the lesson?	
Were the children using the new terminology they have learned about student voice?	
Are all children's voice being heard throughout the lesson?	
Are all children being given the opportunity to give feedback at the end of the lesson?	
Other comments	

**Appendix B Template for Critical Friend Observations**

Are all children's voices being heard?	
Are all children listening and respecting others' views and opinions?	
Is there evidence that all children feel comfortable sharing their ideas in the focus group setting?	
Are the children given choice throughout the lesson?	
Any ideas or points you would take from this observation?	
Any observation on the children's behaviour in a small setting compared to a whole class situation?	
Is there anything you would do differently?	
Did the children get to make or be part of any decision throughout the lesson?	
Was there more teacher talk or child talk during that lesson?	
Was the lesson teacher led or child led?	
Were all needs of each child in the group met at some point during the lesson?	
Other comments and observations	

### **Appendix C Baseline Interview Questions**

**Question 1**

What do you understand the term ‘student voice’ to be?

**Question 2 (a)**

Do you think this school is good at including the voice of the student? Yes / No

**Question 2(b)**

If yes, how does this school include your voice?

**Question 3**

Do you think Ms. Dillon is good at listening to students' voices in 4th class? Yes / No

**Question 4 (a)**

Do you feel that your thoughts, ideas and opinions are respected in Ms Dillon’s classroom?  
Yes / No

**Question 4 (b)**

If yes, can you think of an example when Ms. Dillon listened to your idea/thought/ opinion?

**Question 5**

Ms. Dillon always shares and explains the lesson targets in each lesson? Yes / No

**Question 6**

In what ways could Ms. Dillon include your voice more?

---

**Question 7**

Does Ms. Dillon do anything that makes you feel proud?

**Question 8**

Does Ms. Dillon do anything that makes you feel sad?

**Question 9**

Do you feel safe and comfortable when in Ms Dillon’s classroom? Yes / No

**Question 10**

Do you feel you are included in Ms Dillon’s classroom? Yes / No

## **Appendix D Interview Questions about PhotoVoice Image**

### **Question 1**

You chose this photo as you feel it represents how you feel your voice is heard most in school; can you tell me why you picked this photo?

### **Question 2**

What do you like most about this picture?

### **Question 3**

Do you feel like your voice is only heard at this time or are there other times your voice is heard in school?

### **Question 4**

Did you like doing this Photovoice activity and why?

### **Question 5**

Was there any part of the focus group that you didn't enjoy or would change?

## **Appendix E Sample Reflection Questions**

### **Whitehead (2009)**

- How do I improve what I am doing?
- Am I a living contradiction in my professional life?

### **Calderhead & Gates, (1993)**

- How will critical reflection change you? Will it result in a process of growth? How can that growth be measured, assessed, or experienced?
- To what extent is critical reflection an individual activity? How should we think of context, profession, relationality?

### **Brookfield (2017) The Four Lenses of Critical Reflection**

- Student's Eyes
- Colleagues' perspective
- Personal experience
- Theory

### **McDonagh et. al (2020: 24-31)**

- What do I consider to be the main differences between a teacher centred classroom and a student- or learning-centred classroom?
- How can I ascertain if I value a learning-centred or a child-centred classroom?
- How do I see knowledge – a product or a process or as something else?
- What kind of student do I consider to be a 'good' student?
- Why do I think this? Where did I learn this?
- Does professional reading have any importance in my life?
- What causes me to have most satisfaction about my work? Why?
- What gives me least satisfaction about my work? Why?
- Do my gut feelings relate to my immediate professional life, my classroom or institution or the wider educational arena?

### **Questions related to my own research topic**

- Why is this topic of interest to me?
- What made me apply for a master's in education?
- Do I listen to the voice of the child in my class and take on board what they have to say?
- What methodologies will I use for this study?
- What role do I play as teacher?
- What did I contribute to that lesson?
- Was there more teacher-talk or student-talk during that lesson?
- What are the ethical considerations for this research?
- What have I learned to date?
- How can this learning reflect my practice and improve upon it?
- How can I ensure that all children's needs are met?
- How can I ensure that this new learning will be shared with others?



**Appendix F Ethical Approval Form**



**Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education  
 Master of Education (Research in practice) (MEd)  
 Ethics Approval for Master of Education (Research in Practice)**

<b>Student name:</b>	Maria Dillon
<b>Student Number:</b>	20251545
<b>Supervisor:</b>	Dr. Aoife Titley
<b>Programme:</b>	Master of Education (Research in Practice)
<b>Thesis title:</b>	<i>How can I use Student Voice to enhance my understanding of the learning experiences of the child?</i>
<b>Research Question(s):</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What learning experiences have students had in terms of using student voice in the class context?</li> <li>2. What methodologies are considered effective to enhance student voice?</li> <li>3. How has my understanding of Student voice progressed?</li> </ol>
<b>Intended start date for data collection</b>	Dec 2020
<b>Professional Ethical Codes or Guidelines used:</b>	Maynooth University Research Ethics Policy Maynooth University Policy for Child Welfare Guidance for Developing Ethical Research Projects Involving Children

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

Participants/group (*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

The individuals that will be used in the research will be children aged from 8-10. As I am a Special Educational Teacher (SET), I work with small groups/ individual children. I will seek permission from these children (assent) and their parents (consent) to participate in my research project. The reason for this is I feel I have built up a good relationship with my students and I feel it is important that they trust me and feel comfortable when participating in this research project. The adults used in this research will include some colleagues.

**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]*

In June 2019, I had a conversation with my principal to discuss this action research project. I wrote a letter to the BoM to inform them that I will be doing this research in the coming school year. I informed them about what exactly action research was and how it will benefit the school and my practice as a teacher. I will use convenience sampling and purposive sampling during the research process (Etikan et al., 2016). The participants for this research will be required to fill out a questionnaire, feedback forms and take part in an interview.

**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]*

**Research site:** multi-Denominational primary school located in Dublin city. Co-educational school with thirteen teachers. SET working with 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> class.

**Purpose of research:** The purpose of my research is to...

- Investigate how the use of SV will enhance my understanding of the child's learning experiences and therefore enhance my practice.
- Ensure the child will feel more comfortable, an equal in the relationship, respected, heard, and more importantly listened to, therefore enabling me to live more closely in the direction of my values.

**Aims of research:** The aim of this research is to...

- Make the learning experiences of the child more effective by enabling them to express their opinions, feelings, and thoughts about their learning experiences.
- Build relationships with my students to be more open and honest so that I can become more informed about them as a person first and then a learner.
- Become more informed about the benefits and importance of utilising SV in education.
- To enhance my use of SV in my practice.

**Research question:** *How can I as a teacher enhance my awareness of the learning experiences of the child using SV as a methodology?*

**Design:** Self-study action research

**Methodologies and time frame:** The values of the researcher will underpin this research. The valuable qualitative data will be collected using interviews with children and adults, focus groups with children, baseline interviews with children and interviews after the intervention of PhotoVoice with children, personal teacher reflective diary, audio recording samples of children and adults, critical friend(s), samples of children's work, collaboration with colleagues and semi-structured/teacher-designed templates of unstructured observations during the action. The time frame for this research will begin in August 2020 with data collection starting once the ethics committee has approved my research. The research is estimated to end September 2021.

**Process of analysis:** Qualitative data analysis will be used. Once data is collected, I will organise and categorise it into key themes, concepts and identify connections and relationships between the data. I will ensure that all the key data included in the findings are 'fair, coherent and defensible' (Cohen et al., 2018 :644). Including various perspectives for this researcher will allow for triangulation to occur when analysing the data (Sullivan et al. 2016). I will use thematic analysis as the formal framework for analysis.

**Ethical Issues:** Please outline the main ethical issues which may arise while undertaking this research. *Outline the nature of consent and assent about participants.*

Recruitment for this research will be voluntary. As children will form part of my data collection, personal and sensitive information may be disclosed. I will ensure “to do no harm to participants” (Cohen et al., 2018: 650). I will guarantee anonymity, confidentiality and privacy will always be respected and adhered to. I will transcribe the data myself to ensure no crossover of information being released to outside parties. Voluntary informed consent will be sought from the parents/guardians, carers, or relevant responsible others of the child before any contact is made with the child. (Cohen et al., 2018). I will ensure that the information form for parents/ guardians is written in easy-to-understand language and will outline in detail what the researcher is intending to research. The assent form for the student will be in simple and child friendly language and I will seek permission from the student by asking them to write their name or place their fingerprint using paint on the form. In seeking assent from the child, I will ensure that the adequate information, aims, methods and possible outcomes of the research will be outlined in a child friendly form and each child will be given time to absorb the information and ask questions (DCYA, 2012). I will also ensure that the child is aware that they can withdraw from the research at any time.

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]

Cohen et al., (2018) states that children are vulnerable especially when it comes to interviewing them. When completing interviews with children I will ensure to adapt more of a conversational style rather than a structured interview style. I will place the welfare of my participants above my own i.e., protecting all participants even if that means not being able to use some of the data gathered. I will ensure to protect the participants from harm and minimise the risk to them (DCYA, 2012) by ensuring that the child is comfortable and permit them to pick a time when they feel would suit them best. It will be particularly important to build a strong rapport and trust with all children involved in this process especially in coping with unforeseen circumstances. Working with small groups and individual children regularly allows me to give the time required to build relationships where the child trusts me and know that I am putting their needs first. *Rational for doing interviews with children:* As I am investigating how I can improve my practice using student voice, I feel that it is of paramount importance that I hear the voices of students and their opinions, so I can enhance my practice. Carrying out interviews with children, enables me to gain a better insight into how they view me as a teacher and whether I use SV throughout my teaching. Their perception of SV will enable me to enhance my practice. I will endeavour to answer all questions or concerns that children or parents have in relation to this research. Furthermore, I will be very transparent throughout the entire process of this research.

Outline the potential for increased risk to participants considering changing circumstances in the school environment because of immediate closure or threat to privacy or anonymity. Consider implications for a change or changes in methodological tools (virtual formats). [Max 50 words]

If schools close or I am unable to gather data in person, I will adapt my methodologies accordingly. I will carry out interviews online only recording the children's voices (no video recording of children's faces) PhotoVoice (using photos to voice people's concerns or opinions) will be used to capture the children's insights about student voice. I will adhere to the school's GDPR guidelines when completing research virtually.

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

I am very much aware that the research I am hoping to carry out poses some problems in relation to the power dynamics between student-teacher and working with my colleagues. To overcome this, I must ensure good relationships with all participants before carrying out any data collection. I will build a reputation of good practice and good faith by keeping promises, showing manners and respect for all thus reducing the risk of harm to all participants. This will show that I can be trusted and hopefully the chosen participants will be happy to engage in my research project. I will let all participants but most importantly the children in this research know that I have more to learn from them than they do from me (McNiff & Whitehead, 2005).

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.)*)

I will seek permission from the parents of my participants but more importantly from the children who will form my participants for this research. I will also seek permission from the student's class teachers and the BoM of my school. I will inform each participant that they have the right to withdraw from the research at any stage and I will be aware that the parent's consent will not override the right of the child to withdraw. Furthermore, I will seek permission from my colleagues who will form my critical friends and validation groups. Permission will be sought via consent and assent forms. Parents, BoM, principal, and teachers will be given information leaflets and children will be given a child friendly version of the information leaflets also.

If school closures occur and/or a participant is unavailable due to a short-term illness, I will conduct my research virtually. When seeking consent and assent, I will include a section in relation to gathering data virtually or online via email (parents and teachers), virtual interviews and PhotoVoice.

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]

According to the UN convention of the rights of the child, Maynooth University Policy for Child Welfare and Maynooth University Research Ethics Policy, the best interests of the child must be at the centre of the research project. As my topic aims to research the children's views, opinions and feedback on student voice, some children may feel that I will not agree with the information they provide, or perhaps unexpected outcomes may occur from the data collected. I will ensure all children always feel safe when carrying out research. As I work with many children in a small group setting as a SET, I have built a strong and healthy relationship with all my students where I foster a safe, happy and open environment where children know they can come and talk to me if they are upset or worried. Furthermore, I will assure that there will be no consequences to any of the information they provide to me. If a child discloses any sensitive information, I will inform the Designated Liaison person in my school immediately.

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

I acknowledge the importance of data storage and the protection of privacy of the participants. I will always ensure confidentiality, anonymity and non-traceability are adhered to throughout this research process. I will safeguard all data by ensuring it is stored securely, with ‘appropriately restricted accesses’ either in a locked cabinet (hard copies) or a password protected laptop (soft copies) (Cohen, et al., 2018 :650). All information will be destroyed in a stated timeframe in accordance with the Maynooth University guidelines. My research will not be published and will only be made available to my supervisor and the selected markers.

**Declaration**

‘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.

**Signature:**



**Supervisor use only:**

Date Considered: \_\_\_\_\_

Recommendations:

Signature of supervisor: \_\_\_\_\_

**Department use only:** (only where applicable)

Date Considered: \_\_\_\_\_

(Tick as appropriate)

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

Recommendations:

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

Signature of Dept. Ethics Committee Chair:

\_\_\_\_\_

Approved by Froebel Department Research and Ethics committee	
Referred to applicant (changes to be approved by supervisor)	

*(Tick that apply)*

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

Date Considered: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed:

\_\_\_\_\_

FSS Research Ethics Committee nominee

<p><b>Please complete the checklist below to confirm you have considered all ethical aspects of your research.</b></p> <p><b>(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).</b></p>	<p><b>Please tick</b></p>
<p>I have attached (an) proper consent form/s, assent form/s and/or information sheet/s</p>	<p>✓</p>
<p>Each form and sheet is presented to a high standard, as suitable work carried out under the auspices of Maynooth University</p>	<p>✓</p>
<p>Each consent form has full contact details to enable prospective participants to make follow-up inquiries</p>	<p>✓</p>
<p>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</p>	<p>✓</p>
<p>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</p>	<p>✓</p>
<p>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</p>	<p>✓</p>
<p>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 supply a reason</p>	<p>✓</p>
<p>Please include here any other comments you wish to make about the consent form(s) and/or information sheet/s.</p>	



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

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

### **Declaration by Researcher**

This declaration must be signed by the applicant(s)

I acknowledge(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: *Maria Dillon*

Date: 09/11/2020



**References:**

- Cohen, L., Manion, L., and Morrison, K., (2018) *Research Methods in Education*. 8<sup>th</sup> ed. Abingdon, Oxon OX: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group
- Etikan, I., Abubakar Musa, S., and Sunusi Alkassim, R., (2016) Comparison of Convenience Sampling and Purposive Sampling *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics* 5 (1) 1-4. DOI: 10.11648/j.ajtas.20160501.11
- Mc Niff, J., and Whitehead, J., (2005) *Action Research for Teachers: A Practical Guide*. Abingdon, Oxon OX: David Fulton Publications
- Guidance for Developing Ethical Research Projects Involving Children (2012) Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) Dublin: Government Publications
- Sullivan, B., Glenn, M., Roche, M., McDonagh, C. (2016) Introduction to Critical Reflection and Action for Teacher Researchers *Routledge*

## Appendix G Letter to Board of Management



**Roinn Froebel Don Bhun- agus Luath-  
Oideachas, Ollscoil Mhá Nuad  
Maynooth University Froebel Department of  
Primary and Early Childhood Education**

The Board of Management,

\*\*\*\*\*

Dublin

RE: Master of Education – Carrying out Research

Dear Mr. \*\*\*\*\*,

I am writing to you to request approval to carry out research in \*\*\*\*\* during this academic school year. As you are aware, I am completing a Master of Education (Research in Practice) in the National University of Ireland, Maynooth.

The focus of my research is how I as a teacher can enhance my understanding of the learning experiences of the child using Student voice and to enable me to become more informed about the children’s learning styles. SV is described as “students in dialogue, discussion and consultation” on matters that are associated with their schooling but more importantly on matters related to their teaching, learning and their experiences in school.

I intend to carry out research in the classroom by having small focus groups. The data will be collected using observations of children, interviews and questionnaires with children, audio recording samples, photovoice and a daily teacher journal. During this data collection process, children will be asked questions about their feelings, thoughts, and opinions on SV and how well I as a teacher enable SV to be used in my everyday teaching.

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. Each child will be allowed withdraw from the research process at any stage.

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

I would like to invite you to give written permission for me to carry out this research in \*\*\*. If you have any queries on any part of this research project, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Maria Dillon

## Appendix H Information Letter to Parents



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

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

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s),

I am a student on the Master of Education programme (Action in Research) at Maynooth University. As part of my degree, I am doing a research project. The focus of my research is how I as a teacher can enhance my understanding of the learning experiences of the child using Student voice and how this can lead to me becoming more informed about how students learn.

To do this, I intend to carry out research in the classroom by having small focus groups and whole class questionnaires and feedback forms.

The data will be collected using observations, interviews, questionnaires, feedback forms, focus groups, audio recording samples, photovoice and a daily teacher journal. Photovoice is a way of collecting children's answers, views and opinions on a certain topic through photos. During this data collection process, children will be asked questions about their feelings, thoughts, and opinions on Student voice and how well I as a teacher enable Student voice to be used in my everyday teaching.

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

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

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

If you have any queries on any part of this research project, feel free to contact me by email at [maria.dillon.2021@mumail.ie](mailto:maria.dillon.2021@mumail.ie).

Yours faithfully,

Maria Dillon

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Maria Dillon'.

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



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

**Information Sheet  
Parents and Guardians**

**Who is this information sheet for?**

This information sheet is for parents and guardians.

**What is this Action Research Project about?**

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

**What is the research title?**

How can I as a teacher enhance my awareness of the learning experiences of the child using Student voice as a methodology?

**What are the research questions?**

- What learning experiences have students had in terms of using Student voice in the class context?
- What methodologies are considered effective to enhance student voice?
- How has my understanding of Student voice progressed?

**What sorts of methods will be used?**

- Observations, teacher reflective Journal, open-ended questionnaires, interviews, photovoice, and audio recording samples.
- If schools close due to Covid-19, virtual interviews will be carried out for data collection. Only the child's voice will be recorded.

**Who else will be involved?**

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

**What are you being asked to do?**

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

**Contact details: Student: Maria Dillon**

**E:** [maria.dillon.2021@mumail.ie](mailto:maria.dillon.2021@mumail.ie)

**Appendix I Consent form for Parents**

**Appendix I Consent Form for Parents**

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



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

**PARENTAL CONSENT FORM**

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

Parent / Guardian Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Parent / Guardian Signature \_\_\_\_\_

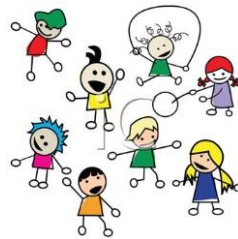
Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Child \_\_\_\_\_

Child's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Appendix J Information Letter to Children



**Child's name .....**

I am trying to find out about the learning experiences of children and understand more about student voice. Student voice means that we (staff in this school) listen to your opinions, thoughts, and ideas about a certain topic. I would like to find out more about this and how well you feel I do this in my teaching. I would like to ask you some questions and write down some notes and observe you in the classroom.

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 is ok too.

Would you be ok with that? Pick a box

 Yes No

## Appendix K Assent Form for Children



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

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

### Child's assent to participate

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

**Name of child (in block capitals):**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_



### Appendix L Framework for Action Plan

<b>Week</b>	<b>Date (2021)</b>	<b>Action</b>
<b>Pre-Action</b>	<b>February 22<sup>nd</sup>- 26<sup>th</sup></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share research with class</li> <li>• Distribute information letters, consent &amp; assent forms via email</li> <li>• Answer any questions parents or children have in relation to the research</li> </ul>
<b>Week 1</b>	<b>March 8<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online discussion with critical friend(s) regarding research</li> <li>• Collect consent &amp; assent forms from parents and co-participants</li> <li>• Answer any questions parents or children have in relation to the research</li> </ul>
<b>Week 2</b>	<b>March 15<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formation of focus groups</li> <li>• Cycle 1 - Baseline activities - completion of baseline interview with focus group</li> <li>• Discussion with critical friend</li> </ul>
<b>Week 3</b>	<b>March 22<sup>nd</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cycle 1 - focus groups</li> <li>• Pilot of PhotoVoice</li> <li>• Lessons based on student voice</li> <li>• Observations</li> </ul>
<b>Week 4</b>	<b>April 12<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lessons based on student voice/ student rights</li> <li>• Observations</li> <li>• Focus group discussions and dialogue – PhotoVoice as stimulus.</li> <li>• Observation by critical friend</li> <li>• Discussion with critical friend</li> </ul>
<b>Week 5</b>	<b>April 19<sup>th</sup> -24<sup>th</sup></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completion of Cycle 1</li> <li>• Meet with critical friend(s)</li> <li>• Focus group discussions and dialogue</li> <li>• Observations and reflective journal entries</li> </ul>
	<b>Evaluation of Cycle 1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluation and critical reflection of cycle 1</li> <li>• Analysis of children’s work- PhotoVoice</li> <li>• Preparation for cycle 2</li> </ul>
<b>Week 6</b>	<b>May 3<sup>rd</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PhotoVoice and weekly intervention class</li> <li>• Inform parents that cycle 2 commencing</li> <li>• Discussion with critical friend(s) regarding cycle 2</li> </ul>
<b>Week 7</b>	<b>May 10<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cycle 2 - PhotoVoice implementation</li> <li>• Observations</li> <li>• Needs V wants activity followed by discussion</li> </ul>
<b>Week 8</b>	<b>May 17<sup>th</sup> -21<sup>st</sup></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continuation of Cycle 2</li> <li>• Observations and reflective diary entries</li> <li>• Interview about PhotoVoice images with each child in focus group</li> <li>• Focus group discussions and dialogue about PhotoVoice image</li> </ul>
<b>Week 9 &amp; 10</b>	<b>May 24<sup>th</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continuation followed by completion of Cycle 2</li> <li>• Meet with critical friend and reflection of cycle 2</li> </ul>



<b>Week 11 - 12</b>	<b>May 31<sup>st</sup> – June 18<sup>th</sup></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Data Analysis</li><li>• Reflective journal entries</li><li>• Meet with validation group</li></ul>
-------------------------	---	---

**Appendix M Codes, Categories and Themes Generated from the Data**

<b>Codes</b>	<b>Categories</b>	<b>Themes</b>
space	Logistics	<b>1. Teacher as facilitator</b>
Time		
barriers		
respect	values	
fairness		
trust		
Inclusion		
Providing feedback	Role of a teacher	
Talk and discussion		
power		
Providing choice		
Providing opportunities		
Praise and recognition		
Teacher feedback		
Voice matters	Empowerment	<b>2. The power of using student voice</b>
Increased motivation		
Confidence		
Shared learning	A sense of belonging	
Opinions shared		
Inclusion		
Confusion/tokenism	Awareness	
Rights		
Change		
		<b>3. Child as active agent in their learning</b>
Agency/ownership	Agency	

Informed		
Active participants		
Taking control		
Making decisions		
Choice		
Fun learning	Cooperative Learning	
Motivation		
Positive dependence		
individual responsibility		
Interest		
Interactions		
Expression of ideas		
Turn taking		
Receiving choice		