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Slow has become Urgent

How can I Foster a Slow Pedagogy in a Preschool for Children with Special Needs?

Audrey Mary Finnegan

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Supervised by: Dr. Triona Stokes

Ainm / Name: Audrey Mary Finnegan

Bliain / Year group: Master of Education (MEd) – Research in Practice

Uimhir mhic léinn / Student number: 20251513

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Léachtóir / Teagascóir: Lecturer / Tutor: Course Co-Ordinator (Bernadette Wrynn).

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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: Audrey Mary Finnegan

Date: November 22nd 2021

Abstract

The purpose of this research was to investigate how I could foster a slow pedagogy with young children with special needs in a preschool. ‘Slow is about connecting to self, others and place.’ (Tanti, 2019). Nutbrown (2012: 3) calls for teachers of early years children ‘to become effective pedagogical leaders who understand the learning and development needs of children and can enhance and extend learning opportunities.’ I would like to include in this, children with special needs, who, when given a voice and an opportunity, have the power to effect change. Fostering a slow pedagogy gave me the opportunity.

The research was conducted in a preschool for children with physical disabilities. Their primary disability is physical, and some had additional medical, sensory, and/or social needs. Six pupils were engaged in the study. All children had a different physical disability and required various forms of additional support to access curricular and play resources. The research participants were in the researcher’s class. Three Special Needs Assistants took on the role of critical friends throughout the study.

A self-study action research methodology allowed me to explore my own teaching practice with the aim of improving it. The study was qualitative in nature. It consisted of two research cycles; each cycle was four weeks. Cycle One explored the introduction of daily movement activities based on themes. The movements were to promote body awareness and exploration of the children’s physicality through fun, creative themes. Cycle Two extended these themes through the lens of a slow pedagogy. My values of care, inclusion and positive relationships became more visible, more explicit as this second cycle progressed.

Data was collected using a variety of tools through questionnaires, observation field notes, notes from meetings with critical friends and validation group, reflective journal, photographs and documentation to build a valid source of evidence. The key findings revealed that a slow pedagogy allows children’s curiosity to be seen and extended by adults. Time allowed learning activities to flow naturally, in tune with each child’s internal rhythms of themselves. The children could exercise choice and control at their level of ability, over aspects such as duration and pace of activity and area of exploration. The connectedness within the group created opportunities to work with others and learn from them, thus ‘Slow’ became about connecting to themselves, with each other and to their classroom environment.

Throughout the research I have questioned my personal epistemology and I can now conclude that I have improved my teaching practice and developed deeper connections with the children while fostering a slow pedagogy, I have created my own epistemology, I have lived closer to my values and progressed my claim to knowledge.

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List of Abbreviations

SSAR	Self-Study Action Research
SNA	Special Needs Assistant
RJ	Reflective Journal
AR	Action Research
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
PDST	Professional Development Service for Teachers
NDA	National Disability Authority
NAEYE	National Association for Education of Young Children
INHA	Irish Neonatal Health Alliance
NCSE	National Council for Special Education
CECDE	Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This thesis sets out to examine how I nurtured a slow pedagogy in a Preschool for children with special needs. I provide an overview of the focus and aims of the study. I identify the research questions that guided my study throughout. I will next provide a brief background to my research and the rationale for it. I then provide a context for this study and lastly provide the potential contribution of my study, to my own practice and the wider school community.

1.2 Focus and Aims of the Study

The aim of this study is to explore how I can foster a slow pedagogy in a preschool which caters for children with physical disabilities. My aim was initially to focus on children's physical and emotional engagement with the learning process. These have the possibility to positively impact on their cognitive performance but also their emotional state. However, it became apparent as the research progressed that the activities and their outcome were becoming central to the research and not the effect they were having on children's engagement, developing relationships or my role as teacher.

I re-adjusted my focus from when and what activities are best employed to engage children to the how and why activities best engage children. I set out to cultivate a slow pedagogy. Slow education or pedagogy emphasises the value of a deep understanding of the context that a school is in. It understands that education is a fundamental social experience with relationships at the very

core of learning experiences, as espoused by Malaguzzi, Froebel and Dewey. The power of relationships to assist children's development and learning has been supported by theories like bioecological theory (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006), sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978) and attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969). Likewise, Shahjahan (2015) observed that 'slowing down is about focusing on building relationships, not about being fixed on products, but accepting and allowing for uncertainty and being at peace without knowing outcomes.' Slow education then is about taking time to go deeper, to deliberate, to consider, leading to a way of engaging and investigating the world that we live in.

The aim of the study evolved as the research got under way and further questions emerged.

1. How would a slow pedagogy look through the eyes of the children and their learning experiences?
2. How would a slow pedagogy look in a classroom setting?
3. How would a slow pedagogy foster relationships?

Throughout the research my guiding lights were my values. I value care for each child. I care that each one is given the best start to their education. I care that their strengths shine and continue to develop through fun and happy experiences. I value inclusion. Every child has the right to be seen, to be heard, to be listened to. Every child should be included in all activities, no matter what adjustments must be made. I value positive relationships. Relationships are what everything else is based on. It is the first and foremost most important aspect of a child's development that a teacher begins with. As espoused by Loris Malaguzzi, relationships need to be warm, responsive and reciprocal.

Making connections with the children takes time and an openness to learn about each child, to make that connection. I have taken time to find the values that matter to me the most and my research focus has been to weave these values into fostering a slow pedagogy.

1.3 Background to the Research

Growing up I was privileged to live within walking distance of a beautiful park and not far from the sea. Every Sunday, my dad would walk my sister and I down through the park, amongst the trees and roses and back home. I knew at some point along the way I would take a deep breath and feel all was well in the world. Mortlock (2018) makes a reference to fostering children's connection to the natural world and how it reflects the values of Slow Education because this connects individuals to what is unique about the location, they find themselves within. I feel a connection to this reference from my own childhood to have the old values sit alongside new, or to 'reclaim' them as taken up by Angela Clark.

My childhood was exposed to other sensorial inputs too. Time seemed to stand still back then when as a child, I would be allowed to explore and create with a multitude of paper, colour and inks, in my father's printing workspace. Froebel places an emphasis on sensory-rich, natural, open-ended resources with infinite possibilities and combinations, Malaguzzi (1994) speaks about how 'children get to know each other through all their senses.' Our own experiences through life have moulded us to who we are today. This is evidence and it should not 'be discounted as

inherently invalid'. (Brookfield, 2017: 69). Entering school each morning, you bring pieces of your life with you, just the same for each child in the class with you.

Brookfield (2017) points out that as teachers we need to be aware, every week, of how our students are experiencing learning. Without this knowledge, he says, we are working in the dark. Undertaking this research study has illuminated for me these experiences of learning and what and how I can begin to make a change.

1.4 Context and Intervention

The research was conducted in a Preschool for children specifically with physical disabilities. Many of the children have additional needs, some medical and some social. The research was carried out after ethical approval was received and parents gave their consent. There were six children in total for this research study. Research instruments used were varied and in keeping with a qualitative study. I used a post-questionnaire with parents, my reflective journal and observation notes, observation notes from my critical friends and photographs and documentation of the children. The study took place over two cycles. Research cycle one focused on movement activities to enhance children's learning and develop creative collaborations between each other. Research cycle two focused on fostering a slow pedagogy.

1.4.1 Research Cycle One

Cycle one began on March 1st until March 26th for four weeks. The focus was on introducing daily movement activities that would engage the children in moving and relaxing their bodies, becoming more in tune with their abilities and having fun, at the same time. Two days were allocated for relaxation, gentle movement activities. Two days were allocated for movement with artful expression and one day for music and movement. Observations were noted by the researcher and critical friends. Observations reflected children's engagement with the activities but more so how I was engaging with them during the activities.

1.4.2 Research Cycle Two

After cycle one I reflected on the feedback from relevant data collection sources. The initial findings revealed I was deeply involved with the activities and their completion. After further reflection it became apparent, I had lost connection with the children, and I decided to change my focus for cycle two (May 10th to May 31st). My focus was now on nurturing a slow pedagogy over the remaining four weeks of research. I began, at first, to extend time spent on playful experiences. We played and taught and shared together, in extended moments. I responded to the needs and interests of the children because now, I listened with my ears and eyes, and I could see what these were. I gave the children time and in return I was rewarded with a complex, yet deep knowledge about connection.

1.5 Potential Contribution of the Study

There is potential for my colleagues to engage in a slow pedagogy in their own classrooms, to choose a time in the school day that would lend itself to nurturing a slow pedagogy. Slow pedagogy is at the infant stage of research so the potential to continue its impact in the classroom has further possibilities for researchers. As the world begins to establish itself after the pandemic, this is a great opportunity to start a conversation about new ways of educating children. Slow pedagogy is beginning to find momentum, Clark (2020), French (2021) and there is a possibility of disseminating my research to educational journals or educational conferences.

Despite the inclusion of children with disabilities in children's rights policy, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the voices of children with disabilities have traditionally been ignored in research (Kelly, 2004). This study is one small step to giving a voice to young children with physical disabilities.

1.6 Format of the Study

Chapter Two (Literature Review) reviews literature about research, action research and self-study action research. It explores literature around curriculum, special needs children and relationships. It details the environment and the teacher and pedagogy of special education. The chapter leads to an introduction to slow pedagogy that is beginning to enter the domain of education and the discourse around this,

Chapter Three (Methodology) outlines the methodology used to undertake the research, self-study action research (SSAR) and the rationale for it. Then it outlines the research design and what data collection methods were used. Next, the research study is detailed and finally considerations on ethics, validity and limitations are presented.

Chapter Four (Data Analysis) details the findings, and an analysis of the research is conducted. Key findings of each theme and conclusions are put forward. Critical reflections are woven throughout the analysis.

Chapter Five (Conclusion and Recommendations) concludes with a summary of the research and findings. The learning consequences for the researcher and the children are discussed. Limitations of the research are described and recommendations for further research provided. Methods for dissemination of the research are given and the potential of this study in practice is discussed.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Early childhood is a unique time in life, children are developing physically, emotionally, socially and intellectually. Walsh and Gardner (2005:np) point out that when considering the quality of a school learning experience, the ‘interactional triangle’ needs to be embraced – the children’s actions, the teaching strategies and the learning environment. The aim of this literature review is to explore and consider how a slow pedagogy could be fostered within a preschool setting for children with special needs. The literature review begins with a definition of children with special needs, the participants in the study. Next, the learning environments of best practice for children with special needs within the Irish context will be explored. Pedagogical approaches that are best suited to children with special needs will be investigated. In conclusion, methods of how to introduce a slow movement approach to children’s learning processes and teaching and will be reviewed.

2.2 Definitions for Clarity

2.2.1 Defining the Research Participant

For the purpose of my study the terms ‘children with disabilities’ or ‘children with physical disabilities’ will be used instead of ‘disabled children’ or ‘physically disabled children’, (National Disability Authority). When writing or speaking about people with disabilities it is important to put the person first. In line with Aistear (NCCA, 2009) and the Síolta Practice Guide (CECDE, 2006), a curriculum that reflects the identities of all children and recognises their abilities and

interests should be implemented. Guidelines issued on ‘Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Charter and Guidelines for Early Childhood Care and Education’ (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2016) endeavour to support and guide practices and families. It states that the sector will strive to

‘Ensure that children of all abilities have equal access to culturally and developmentally appropriate play-based educational activities, both indoors and outdoors, which develop their understanding, dispositions, skills and holistic development’. (DCYA, 2016: 5)

The voices of children with physical disabilities have been largely absent from research, not only in Ireland but internationally. There has been much criticism about research carried out with or usually about children with disabilities in terms of its aims. These have often not been child-centred, or rights-based and in also in terms of its lack of provision for supporting participation in the research process (Whyte, 2006). More recently, ‘Mind The Gap’ – research on the barriers to the realisation of rights of children with disabilities in Ireland, was launched in March 2021. The research was commissioned by the Ombudsman for Children’s Office.

Mind the Gap is a starting point to ensure the inclusion of children with disabilities in laws, policies and practices which affect them, and respect, protect and fulfil their human rights under both the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. (Ombudsman for Children’s Office, 2021: np)

My research focus encompasses children with disabilities accessing the curriculum, their relationships with each other and staff, and their learning environment.

2.2.2 Defining the Curriculum for Children with Special Needs

The purpose of *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* (NCCA, 2009), hereinafter referred to as *Aistear* (2009), is to provide information for adults to support them in planning and providing enjoyable and challenging learning experiences to enable all children to grow and develop as competent and confident learners within loving relationships with others (*Aistear: Principles and Themes*: 6). The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment has developed *Curriculum Guidelines for Teachers of Students with General Learning Disabilities* (2007) which are designed to assist teachers in differentiating the curriculum for learners with special educational needs. Instead of looking at individual developmental domains such as physical, social, broad learning goals are set out. *Aistear* (2009) adopts a thematic focus providing many sample learning opportunities for teachers under the four themes: Well-being, Identity and Belonging, Communicating and Exploring and Thinking. In New Zealand, the early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki*. (Ministry of Education, 1996b) acknowledges the idea that warm, understanding, respectful relationships are important for learning at all levels of education. This curriculum document reflects the emphasis on relationships and holistic development of the child. The way curriculum priorities are identified and enacted in each early childhood setting should ensure that children have the best possible environment to grow, flourish, and progress in relation to all components of *Te Whāriki*. (Ministry of Education, 1996b).

In planning themes for each week, the research study focused on seasonal as well as children's emerging interests, incorporating aims from each of the defined *Aistear* themes – Well-Being, Communicating, Identity and Belonging and Exploring and Thinking. Implementing the plans

would be through a playful pedagogy and ensuring ‘extended periods of uninterrupted time allow for engagement and involvement’ (Tovey, 2017: 31).

2.2.2.1 Towards a Physical Literacy Framework

Children with a physical disability need to be supported and encouraged with physical activities that engage them holistically. Physical literacy can be expressed as the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding that provides children with the movement foundation for lifelong participation in physical activity (London.gov.uk, 2017). With this knowledge, the weekly activities that the children involved themselves in and were planned for comprised of gross and fine motor development skill activities combined with mindful, relaxation skill activities. Miller (2019: 89) makes a very valid claim when he says ‘The holistic curriculum explores the relationship between mind and body so the student can sense the connection between the two. The relationship can be explored by mindfulness, movement, drama, dance, and yoga’. There is a need to explore connections with physical literacy, movement and learning amongst children, fundamentally children with a physical disability. ‘A child’s special educational need does not define the whole child.’ (National Council for Special Education, 2019).

2.2.2.2 Physical Activity and Learning

Children need to move physically to grow a range of skills that are crucial to learning. Physical activity and exercise have been shown to be linked to cognitive development. Neaum (2017) discusses how these physical movements enable children to begin developing competencies that

directly support literacy learning. Competences such as spatial awareness, bilaterality, and tracking. Hannaford (2005) writes about the awakening of our mental capacities from movement. She states how movement is essential to all the actions by which we incorporate and convey our learning, our understanding, and ourselves. While these insights are not directly linked to fostering a slow pedagogy, they provide the reasoning as to why the outdoors and the indoor environment were instrumental in providing for a wide range of extended play and exploration through 'stretched time' (Cuffaro, 1995: 42).

2.2.2.3 Playful Experiences

This study incorporated many Froebelian and Reggio Emilia aspects of play indoors and outdoors. Tovey (2017) mentions how a Froebelian setting is arranged to ensure increased periods of time for play. Play can take time and does take time to progress. She writes how 'extended periods of uninterrupted time allow for engagement and involvement' (Tovey, 2017: 31) Play and children with special needs requires an approach that is supportive and experiential. Dewey (1916) also supported experiential learning as it provides for a hands-on, collaborative learning experience that assists the children to learn new skills and knowledge (Sikander, 2015).

Resnick (2017) recognises Froebel's emphasis on the importance of 'engaging children's senses through physical, manipulative materials.' Children learn and play best through a multi-sensory experience. Reggio Emilia classrooms contain experiences that appeal to all the senses. Children will be touching, seeing, hearing, moving, speaking and listening. Children express their ideas,

thoughts, feelings, questions and emotions through singing, dancing, painting; they are not limited by the spoken word. A multimodal approach to co-constructed meanings by eye gaze, facial expression and body movements draws similarities to Malaguzzi's 'Hundred Languages of Children'. (Rinaldi, 2006:7).

Research suggests that guided play is a successful pedagogical tool for educators in a variety of areas. (Weisberg et al. 2016). Guided play keeps the fun child-directed aspects of free play but adds an extra focus on learning goals through non-intrusive adult scaffolding. It is also an example of an active, engaged, meaningful, and socially interactive learning context (Hirsh-Pasek et al. 2015). Learning goals should be general rather than specific at this age and stage of development. Children's play needs time and time allows play and learning to be fostered.

2.2.3 The Teacher in a Learning Environment for Children with Special Needs

This section details what a teacher in a special needs setting needs to do to ensure all children are included and relationships are nurtured. Children with special needs require both instruction from the teacher and 'activities in which they learn through exploration, experimentation, and discovery. These approaches work best in different situations and for different kinds of learning'. (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2015). Warmth and encouragement from the teacher and other adults in the room will stimulate more active engagement during playful experiences. Interactions that are supportive, have been found to promote object control,

locomotion, social competence, and cognitive abilities in children with various disabilities (Apache, 2005; Martin, 2006; Menear & Davis, 2007).

Reggio's way of thinking is about choosing to understand the child as 'rich, competent and intelligent, a co-constructor of knowledge, researcher actively seeking to make meaning of the world.' (Dahlberg et al.1999: 7). Bruce considers that the role of an adult is to 'observe, support and extend' (Bruce 1997: 97). To summarise, a teacher needs to be present and open to caring and committed to building attachments with each child.

2.2.4 The Enabling Environment for Children with Special Needs

An enabling environment that promotes the motor abilities of children with disabilities is as important as focusing on cognitive development and language. Inside the report *Development of a Framework for Action for the Inclusion of Children with Special Needs in Early Childhood Education Settings* (2010), it is reported that practitioners were 'aware of the need to adapt the learning environment to suit the needs of children with special needs.' Katherine Zappone (2019), Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, in the Universal Design Guidelines for Early Learning and Care Settings, states 'In striving to create safe, functional environments for children, we must also ensure opportunities for interaction, exploration, learning and play.' An enabling environment therefore needs to support children's learning needs and teaching so each child can reach their potential.

Active learning and play encourage children to be actively participating in their playful learning in a wide variety of ways. Using their senses to explore and work with the objects and materials around them and interacting enthusiastically with the adults and other children that they meet. 'An inviting environment encourages and helps children to explore and take advantage of opportunities for fun, choice, freedom, adventure, and challenge'. (Aistear, 2009: 12). Viewing children as 'powerful learners, motivated from birth to explore, investigate and be curious about the world' (Tovey, 2017:2). Children with disabilities may require special support to engage with active playful experiences and Trawick-Smith (2009) states that appropriate supportive devices should be provided to facilitate free movement, such as walking frames, canes or postural support for those children not moving unaided yet. Therefore, an enabling, active learning environment creates the opportunity for children to engage as fully as their abilities allow.

Bergin and Woodin (2017) suggest that teachers and parents should be aware of the impact that a healthy environment and positive early experiences have on brain development. Children need to be exposed to a wide range of positive, creative and secure opportunities early in life. Research says that it is during this time the foundations of 'personalities are being established and the synapses that are predisposed to faculties of love, communication, curiosity, reciprocity and creativity are more likely to grow strong and connected.' (Dower, 2020). A pivotal point to ensure an enabling environment is established and continually grows with the children over time provided.

2.2.4.1 Differentiation

Heacox (2002) defines differentiation as ‘changing the pace, level, or kind of instruction you provide in response to individual learners’ needs, styles or interests’ while Willis & Mann (2000) states that ‘differentiation is a teaching philosophy based on the premise that teachers should adapt instruction to student differences’ in the Professional Development Service for Teachers booklet ‘Differentiation in Action!’ (PDST: 3). Taking into consideration the cognitive, physical, social and emotional strengths of each of the children, activities will be designed to accommodate these, allowing each child to participate to their full potential, cognitively and physically. Trawick-Smith’s study on children’s physical play and motor development supports this when he states, ‘that the motor interventions that are most effective are those that are planned with each individual child’s needs in mind.’ (Trawick-Smith, 2009:16)

2.2.4.2 Relationships with Children

The creation of positive relationships is largely dependent on the ability of adults to accurately read and appropriately respond to children’s cues (Reeves, 2017). Supporting a child’s intentions or cues means focusing on their every movement, gesture, expression of intent. French (2021) explains that ‘the input and example of the adult helps the young child to moderate stress, which contributes to the child’s developing capacity for self-regulation.’ A vital element in most human relationships is observation. Children with special needs require that attention to detail in observations, to read their signals. Luff (2008) speaks about ‘noticing their facial expressions, being aware of their body language, tone of voice and general behaviour, provides valuable cues about how they are feeling and how to respond’. Observing and tuning into the child’s cues builds

attachment, nurtures relationships and informs the planning for their daily learning and playful experiences.

Darby (2005) described the two important aspects of pedagogy as instructional pedagogy, which fosters understanding, and relational pedagogy, which nurtures relationships. Rinaldi (2006:196) argues that ‘there is reciprocal control in education – you control the child, and the child controls you.’ This is a good control. Within a slow pedagogy, the children imitate what we are doing as adults, they are taking control of us. They are observing us as we are observing them. This is significant because when adults working with the children can begin to understand and find confidence in their own creative potential that ‘environments for a positive, engaging and limitless creativity which comes from the core of who children are and grows through their reciprocal relationships with caregivers.’ (Dower, 2020: 87). All the time, gathering knowledge, slow knowledge, that the children’s curiosities are revealing to us as we nudge towards a slow pedagogy.

It might be concluded that in approaching the pedagogical responsibility of promoting students’ growth, educators use a relational lens. A relational perspective involves establishing a climate of care in the classroom, “such a climate is not ‘on top’ of other things, it is underneath all we do as teachers. When that climate is established and maintained, everything else goes better” (Noddings, 2012:777).

2.2.4.3 Documentation

Learning stories and displays of documentation to make the children's learning truly visible are being used in many settings now. Observation and documentation are invaluable tools, they are the very connection between teaching and learning. They provide feedback to learners as they revisit the stories and allow teachers to reflect on their pedagogy. Edwards et al. (1998:10) point out that educators in Reggio realise there are three key functions to documentation – it provides the children with ‘a concrete and visible “memory” of what they said and did’, it provides ‘the educators with a tool for research and a key to continuous improvement and renewal’ and lastly it provides ‘parents and the public with detailed information about what happens in schools.’ The stories connect children and teachers, teachers and families, children and their peers as they are shared and discussed. Documentation, along with highlighting children's learning, it also shines a light on the teacher's vulnerability. It is, after all, revealing what the teacher has noted as learning within a child. Rinaldi (2006) suggests ‘in reality you don't document the child but *your* knowledge, *your* concept, *your* idea.’ It is making your connection visible. The visibility, the vulnerability that is on display, also shines a light on how the child is valued. Rinaldi offers the teacher another way of looking at documentation, that it is valuing what you see about a child's doing, a child's thinking.

2.3 Pedagogy and Children with Special Needs

There is no definitive pedagogy for children with special needs. Attentive listening, observations and reflection on teaching and learning give shape to pedagogical thinking. Always at the core of

the work in the classroom is the child, a child who possesses many strengths and talents and skills. This is where, as an educator, we start.

2.3.1 What is Pedagogy?

There are a variety of approaches to pedagogical practice. Pedagogy can be defined as ‘the practice (or the art, the science or the craft) of teaching. Pedagogy is the interactive process that takes place between the educator and the child to enable learning to take place’ (French, 2013: 20). Working with children with special needs requires skilful observation to ensure that their care needs are best met for them to feel secure, safe, content and ready to learn. Slow pedagogy informed the development of the study over two research cycles as I deconstructed my former pedagogy.

2.3.2 What is Slow Pedagogy?

‘Slow knowledge can be understood as relating to the process of meaning-making.’ (Clark, 2020). The result of a flexible curriculum that is meaningful to the children and the teacher is the formation of a learning environment that supports all learners. Grenier (2013b) argues that providing ‘for a rich, active learning experience which is not rushed, where there is sufficient time to engage and learn and where high value is placed upon the quality of the interactions between teacher and learner’ curriculum and physical environment will follow. Holt (2014a) continues ‘In slow education, the concept of process is central to the way the curriculum is conceived and experienced’.

We need to change our state of mind. A slow mind state encourages us to ‘translate experience into meaningful learning’ (Tanti, 2019). This state of mind is grounded in mindful moments, collaborating, responding, listening. Listening has been ‘pushed to the margins’ as more and more pressure for results permeates through the school. Special education schools are not excluded. In fact, it is one of the few areas that these types of schools are part of mainstream education. Moss (1999) mentions ‘knowledge is co-constructed, in relationship with others, both children and adults, and in this process, listening is critical, listening both to others and to ourselves.’ Tuning into the children’s rhythms of life is possible when we listen. Nurturing a slow pedagogy enables more time for interactions to occur, bonds to develop and fosters a togetherness. Slow needs time.

‘Slow pedagogy is not sluggish or frozen. It is not intended to cast a spell, putting action into slow motion.’ (Clark, 2020). Learning took place, as a constructive process, over whatever length of time it needed, there was much power in this. As Clark (2020) refers to as ‘lingering, revisiting, rethinking’...or ‘dwelling’. In practice, attention is focused on the children’s pace, their interactions with each other, the adults and their environment. These interactions are the schedules we endeavour to listen to.

2.4 Conclusion

Across Ireland, there is a debate between educators and health practitioners, about how best to support children with special needs. Educators would like a move away from a medical model of

disability to a more holistic profile that acknowledges the biological, social and psychological aspects of learners with special needs. In this chapter I have defined what a child with special needs is and how their learning environment presents itself.

‘Physical literacy has great potential as a framework beyond thinking movement because it focuses not only on movement (motor skill) and physical activity, but also affective (fun) and motivational areas such as competence and confidence’. (Cairney et al., 2016). Young children’s learning depends on both a positive emotional and physical environment. Children need to move physically to develop a range of skills that are vital to learning. It is vital to the process of learning that children explore every facet of movement and balance in their daily interactions with each other and independently. To enable children to move through some of the physical developmental pathways, as pre-schoolers, they need opportunities, and time and space to engage in appropriate physical activity, because physical capabilities emerge from physical movement.

The Hundred Languages approach (Reggio Emilia) makes a very valid claim about empowering children to ‘develop a sense of self, to explore new forms of expression and to interact and communicate with others.’ Concepts of voice, visibility and participation are connected here. Tuning in to children’s voice (gesture/facial expression, vocalisation/body movement) brings forth knowledge about and within the child that may have gone unnoticed. The ‘pedagogy of listening’ is underpinned by this understanding.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the approach to research, my research question and the instrumentation I chose to foster a slow pedagogy in a preschool catering for children with physical disabilities and additional complex needs. To address my research question, my SSAR study, together with my values of care, inclusion and positive relationships provided me with a structure to explore the concerns I had in relation to my practice.

I set about establishing tailored activities to suit all needs, a strengths-based set of activities that would include the children at their level and pace of ability. A strengths-based approach means focusing on what the child can do, not what they cannot do because of their disability. Reflection played a central role throughout the study and will be discussed during the two action research cycles. Reflection offered a lens through which the developments and challenges could be viewed and how I analysed the data. Data instruments are discussed, with advantages and limitations considered. Ethical considerations for research on children are highlighted and the section concludes with addressing the validity and rigour of the research.

In this research study, some of the children have additional complex needs relating to sensory processing disorder and global developmental delay. ‘A sensory processing disorder is present when a child cannot respond to sensory information to behave in a meaningful, consistent way’ (Irish Neonatal Health Alliance). The term global delay can be defined as ‘significant delay in two or more developmental domains: gross and fine motor; speech and language; cognition; personal and social development; or activities of daily living’ (McDonald et al. 2006:

701). Regardless of the above, all the children, when guided by adults can interact with the activities and social participation can be facilitated. Guided support needs to be provided when and where needed and as appropriate. Providing indirect support that enhances rather than interrupts play is for children who only need a little guidance.

3.2 Research Methodology

I have chosen to complete a self-study action research (SSAR) project to research my teaching practice in a Preschool for children with special needs, and in so doing, to develop and improve my teaching (McNiff, 2014; Vanassche and Kelchtermans, 2015; Sullivan et. al., 2016). I will engage with critical reflection and action with a view to enhancing my practice as I weave my personal educational theory through my thinking. (McDonagh et al., 2020: 3).

I wanted to explore how children with special needs could engage in movement-based activities for learning, that were fun and creative and were not simply a reflection of therapy-based exercises. In recent years, illuminating research has revealed ‘the strong neural links between areas in the brain involved with movement and those involved with cognitive activity’ (Hannaford, 2005: 110). These movement activities would take place in the classroom, an experiential and safe environment.

3.2.1 My Values

Action Research (AR) is used when it is referring to ‘a practical way of looking at your own work to check that it is as you would like it to be’ (McNiff, 2002: 2). Teachers investigate and

evaluate their work in the classroom and create their own theories of practice, as part of action research. ‘The reasons for our actions are often rooted in our values base, that is, the things we believe in and that drive our lives’ (McNiff, 2002: 10). I could evaluate my practice by drawing on my values as a sort of lens. These values came to act as my ‘guiding principles’ (McNiff & Whitehead, 2005:28). My values of inclusion, care and positive relationships were nurtured and sustained throughout my research.

3.2.2 Paradigm

“Paradigms are general frameworks or viewpoints: literally ‘points from which to view’. They provide ways of looking at life and are grounded in sets of assumptions about the nature of reality” (Babbie, 1998). When research is being conducted, paradigms provide common rules with methods that are applicable to specific areas of study. A research paradigm is “the set of common beliefs and agreements shared between scientist about how problems should be understood and addressed.” (Kuhn, 1970).

Through our research we generate educational theory, it is a ‘living’ form of theory. (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006). The integral concerns that I had for my practice, my values of care, inclusion and positive relationships are woven into my daily ‘living’ practices. To realise my values through my practice I engaged in critical reflection on myself and with colleagues. Freire (1972) called this praxis, and therefore the SSAR paradigm was best suited to my research.

3.2.3 Action Research (AR)

Action Research (AR) is a practical way of looking at teaching and checking if it is as you would like it. An area that you wish to enhance or improve on is identified and a solution is trialled. When I began thinking about my research question and the methodology I would conduct, it was the Living Theory Methodology that was most appropriate. Throughout the research process, practice and methodology continually emerge and transform. It has been acknowledged that there is no one specific way of defining or characterising action research (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Elliott, 1991; McNiff & Whitehead, 2006; Somekh, 2006; Altrichter et al., 2008). Lawrence Stenhouse in the 1970s was a major influence on promoting the idea of ‘teacher as researcher’ (McNiff, 2002b). Stenhouse promoted the idea that the curriculum should be about the student’s experiences and meaning making for them. Engaging in AR felt right for the research I wished to conduct and at a point in my career where I still wished to enhance and improve my teaching. It offers personal and professional satisfaction for me to address my concern. I was ready to research myself researching my practice. It was therefore the reason why a SSAR methodology was chosen.

AR enables teacher empowerment. ‘Empowered teachers are able to bring their talents, experiences, and creative ideas into the classroom; implement programs and strategies that best meet the needs of their students’. (Johnson, 2019). The research would create new knowledge about my practice and in so doing my own living theory on how I can foster a slow pedagogy in my classroom.

3.2.4 Self-Study Action Research (SSAR)

Self-study action research is an approach to research that puts you, the practitioner, at the centre of the research as you explore how you might improve your practice, celebrate it or develop new insights into it (Glenn, 2017).

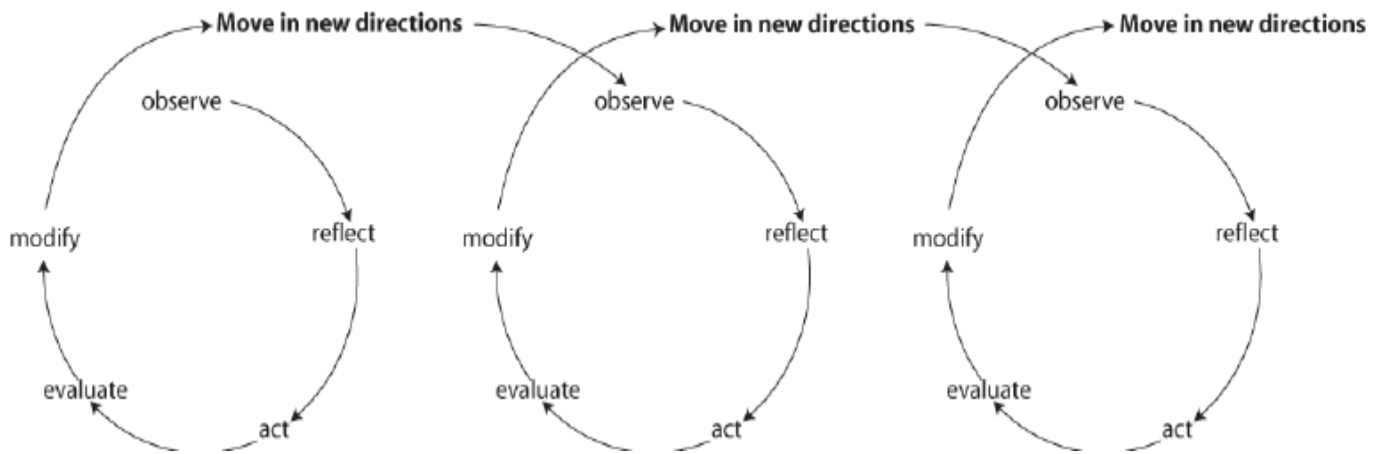


Figure 3.1: The Action Research Cycles (based on McNiff and Whitehead 2006)

The above AR cycles demonstrates the following actions “observe, reflect, act, evaluate, modify, move in new directions.” (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006) It shows three AR cycles. Each cycle has been informed by the previous cycle, informed each time by the researchers’ reflections. According to McNiff and Whitehead (2005: 44) learning for the researcher comes from action and feeds back into the action as an ongoing action-reflection cycle. The focus always being ‘how can I improve my practice and improve my educational influence in my own learning and life?’ Whitehead (2018a: 1). I held my values close to me throughout the research study and as a light was shone on my practice it revealed how I was denying my values of including children

and caring for their social and emotional wellbeing. Through SSAR I planned to show a development in my thinking and learning and how values came to influence my practice.

3.3 Role of the Researcher

As a self-study action researcher, my awareness had grown of ‘experiencing oneself as a living contradiction’ as summarised by Whitehead (1989) and referred to living like an imposter by Brookfield (2017). It would take my research study to bring my experience and knowledge as an educator, much critical ‘reflection-in-action’ and ‘reflection-on-action’ (Schön, 1983) to construct a living educational theory.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Conducting the research for my SSAR study, with young children with a disability required many ethical matters to be considered. These were power dynamics, vulnerability, gaining consent and assent.

3.4.1 Ethics Approval

Throughout my research I strictly adhered to ethical principles of Maynooth University in how I went about my study, the privacy and storage of data and dissemination and publication. The researcher must adhere to Child Protection Guidelines and observe the school’s child safeguarding policy, data protection regulating guidelines and sensitivity. I wrote to the Board of

Management of my school and the principal seeking approval for my research study, which they subsequently approved. I had to further sign and adhere to the guidelines of the Ethics Committee within my school's organisation.

3.4.2 Informed Consent and Assent

All the parents of the children in my class gave their consent for their child to participate in the study. I wanted to give the children a voice and an opportunity to decide to participate. I sought their assent by taking their handprint. Assent is sought for anyone under eighteen years of age. Assent means that they agree to take part. Conducting research within the social model of disability underlines the need to focus on how individual children communicate. Communication in this context encompasses all methods of transferring information and participating in dialogue, children communicated their assent through speech, writing, signs, body language and facial expression. (See Appendix 4, 5 and 8 for consent and assent forms). As each stage of my research unfolded, I explained what was involved and revisited the issue of consent. Dockett (2008) termed this 'process consent', the children had multiple opportunities to withdraw or give consent. I remained vigilant and mindful that some of the children were non-verbal and during activities I would watch for changes in the children's body language, facial expressions and engagement. Gray and Winter (2011) feel strongly that consent with children needs to be viewed as ongoing and requiring regular review rather than a one-off process.

All the adults involved, my critical friends, my validation group were provided with detailed information about my research and they gave their consent to participate.

3.4.3 Confidentiality and Anonymity

At all times information pertaining to the children and their participation was kept confidential. This applied to my research data and my critical friend's observation notes. Information was stored safely to ensure confidentiality was upheld. Pseudonyms for the children and critical friends were used throughout the data collection for anonymity.

3.4.4 Data Storage

Data collected during the research remained in a locked cabinet in school. Data on digital devices are stored in a secure location with password protection. All data collected in the form of handwritten observations, notes from informal meetings with critical friends and their observation forms were stored according to GDPR guidelines 2018.

3.4.5 Vulnerability

Undertaking my research, I believe the ethical rigour of research involving children with special needs and vulnerable groups should be considerably greater' (Gray & Winter, 2011: 28). The children in the research were 4 and 5 years old. They were children with a physical disability and other additional needs. The anonymity of the children was crucial throughout the writing of my research study. I had to be mindful of how I coded information about the children as there is a greater likelihood of exposure in qualitative data. This is especially true as each child has a unique disability and two have a low incidence disorder. In accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Maynooth University Policy for Child

Welfare, always the child and their interests remained central. It was always utmost that each child felt safe and comfortable participating in the activities.

3.4.6 Power Dynamics

Each child was treated respectfully, acknowledging their own individual ways of participation and differentiating to allow participation in the research. Children had the option to opt out should they so choose, without repercussions, at any stage. Also, when working with the children, appropriately sized, movable stools were used by the adults in the room. We often chose to work at floor level which can minimize the physical space between the child and the adult. Each child communicates in their own unique way, verbal or non-verbal, communication aid or symbols board. The children use these to signal 'more' or 'stop'.

In respect of the class team of three Special Needs Assistants, I sought their permission to participate and work collaboratively. They were my critical friends throughout the research. Brookfield (2009) questions power relations in respect of rooting out hegemonic aspects of power. I was aware that the balance of power fell more in my favour, as the teacher, I have a duty of care to each child and I am in 'loco parentis', responsibility for the class falls to me. I did not want any of them to feel under pressure. Fortunately, we have a long working relationship and we have always maintained open, trusting and honest communication. It is for this very reason I decided that they would be excellent critical friends. Throughout the research I saw them as co-participants, just as I saw them before undertaking my study.

3.5 Validity

The methodology I used is based on reliability and validity throughout the research. To ensure this I reflected throughout my study on notes, observations from myself, my critical friends and my validation group. I discussed photographs of observations with the children, the parents and as already mentioned.

3.5.1 Critical Friends

I had asked the three Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) in my class to be my critical friends. As McNiff (2002) points out ‘critique is essential for helping us to evaluate the quality of the research.’ Before commencing on the research, I had held an informal discussion circle, detailing my research focus, my values and their role now in class. I wanted them to be my critical friends as they knew the children and they knew me. Whyte (2006) has a comprehensive checklist for researchers working with children with special needs. One quality she states is ‘...experience in working with children in general and also with children with disabilities, in the age group participating in the project.’ They were also present throughout the day, during the explicit activity and after. Their eyes could observe how true I was living in the direction of my values and if I was having an impact that would benefit the children. Feedback was given through their observation form or during our informal discussions at the end of the day. I would note their feedback in my journal.

3.5.2 Validation Group

My validation group consisted of a visiting visual artist with whom I have collaborated on some projects with. Within this group too was the class physiotherapist and the Preschool 1 teacher. Initially, I met them individually as their work schedules did not coincide with one another. They expressed an interest in my research study and I explained their role. They were prepared to listen to updates of my research as it progressed and offer critical feedback. Weekly, I met with the two members of staff, the physiotherapist and the class teacher. They listened to progress reports and offered ‘professional judgements about the validity’ of my reporting offering critical feedback (McNiff, 2002). I met the visual artist over Zoom, due to COVID restrictions. I met with her twice over the course of the research. At the final meetings of all three, I invited them to ask further questions and offer feedback. I recorded their feedback in my journal and one of the members wrote it in an email. (See Appendix 18) .The evaluation of my progress offered by them validated the data collected and help strengthen my ‘claim to enhanced practice.’ (McDonagh et al. 2020:190).

3.6 Limitations

3.6.1 Sample Selection Size

My research study was based in my class of nine children. Due to COVID, two children did not return to school in September. It was hoped they would eventually return but unfortunately, they did not. Another child had a medical procedure which prevented her return to school in February, when special schools had a partial return. Child07 remained at home throughout the term. The study proceeded with six children in all. It is a small number, yet my learning has been substantial.

3.6.2 Researcher Bias

Getting other perspectives on qualitative data to show its credibility by cross-checking data (Flick 2018) is called triangulation. Researcher bias was mitigated against by inviting rich and varied perspectives to my research data (Flick 2018) and informed the research by my critical friends and validation group. Their perspectives were critical in assisting me with the direction that the research took.

3.7 Data

3.7.1 Qualitative

Naturalistic observations, a reflective journal, documentation and learning stories of children's learning (Appendix 17 and 18), an observation checklist form (SNA team) and weekly informal meetings with my critical friends. These provided critical and constructive feedback.

Qualitative data gathered pre-intervention using a discussion circle revealed that the team of SNAs wanted to gain a deeper understanding of individual children's learning. The discussion highlighted the need for further information about their involvement with how data was gathered and where they saw their role. During this meeting I detailed the resources, organisation and plan for the study.

3.7.2 Interpreting Data

I considering the voice of the child in reflecting on the data. A collection of photographs was set out in an album and together, the children and I reflected on what we saw. I compiled a group of 'I Can' statements on paper and the children chose the photograph they liked the best. (Appendix 20).

3.8 Data Collection

The research conducted was a collaborative study using qualitative data gathered by myself and the class team of three Special Needs Assistants (SNAs), my critical friends. They work alongside me every day and would provide "support as well as constructively challenge and critique" (Sullivan et al., 2017: 27). The children's thoughts and reactions gave insightful feedback, which helped reveal what was working for them and what needed further reflection and planning from me. Brookfield (2017: 1) referred to this as the lens of the students' eyes, which 'helps us uncover when and how certain assumptions need further investigation'. The children's feedback was recorded through photographs, daily news home to parents and my observation notes.

3.9 Data Collection Instruments

Data was collected from the research participants through both research cycles. There were several different methods used to collect data including observation feedback forms for my critical friends, observation noted with reflections, reflective journal, photographs, feedback from research participants through sharing learning stories, feedback from parents and a post-study questionnaire to parents.

3.9.1 SNA Observation Feedback Form

I have worked with the same team of three SNAs for several years. I value their opinions, their expertise and their knowledge. As we have prior working knowledge of each other, we have a firm and trusting working relationship. Prior to the research study, feedback on the children, based on my observations of them during work and play was free flowing, yet unstructured. As I commenced on the research study, it was vital that their observations and feedback had direction and structure. Each SNA had an observation feedback form which they could fill out when activities were finished. (See Appendix 11, 12 and 24)

3.9.2 Agency as an Aspect of Children's Engagement using a Checklist

At the end of the research study, children were shown photographs of themselves participating in each activity. The photographs were placed on cards which read 'I can' at the top. A checklist was used to assess understanding of the activities, identifying or naming them by the children and choosing their favourite (Appendix 20). In addition to this data, children offered unanticipated further feedback. Comments of 'fun' and 'again' were noted, along with

smiles. Reeve & Tseng (2011) point out ‘that educators’ understanding of how students learn and profit from potential learning experiences can only be enhanced by adding agency as a fourth aspect of students’ engagement during learning activities.’ This task gave ownership of the activities back to the children, it gave them a voice and the children’s agency was enacted further.

3.9.3 Observations

I observed my classroom practice and the children’s interactions with one another, in small groups and as a whole group. I remained cognisant of my role as researcher and as teacher to the best of my ability throughout observations, maintaining a natural and participatory approach. It is an effective approach in smaller research projects that have a short time frame (Cohen et al., 2018). I am at the centre of the action and at the centre of the research. Observation notes were short, and I would formulate them into a reflective observation piece later, as Schön (1983) calls ‘reflection-on-action’. (See Appendix 21)

3.9.4 Reflective Journal

McNiff (2002) discusses how the reflective diaries, at the end of the research study provide essential data that details the learning that has occurred “during action research it is important to not only show the actions of your research but also your learning involved throughout the process” (McNiff: 2002: n.p.). My journal recorded gathered data from observations and commented on progress or lack of as the research proceeded. The many questions, newfound knowledge and awareness that I had written in my journal from the beginning of my Master’s study was revisited throughout my research and after when writing the data analysis. A reflective journal (RJ)

provides data both related to the researchers practice but will also generate data on their given topic (Sullivan et al., 2016). The points and accounts written encouraged reflexivity on what I learned, the significance of it and how the learning would bring about new actions. (Appendix 23).

Brookfield (2017) discusses our ‘assumptions’ that we may not be aware of or have even missed. He suggests using four lenses which may help ‘illuminate a different part of our teaching’. These lenses are the ‘students’ eyes, colleagues’ perceptions, theory, and personal experience’. (Brookfield, 2017:62). Going forward and using Brookfield’s framework I obtained a fuller view of myself.

3.9.5 Documentation and learning stories

Learning stories are a powerful communication tool that brings the child’s family together, builds the child’s confidence and makes the child visible in the community where they live and belong. Learning stories are described by Margaret Carr as structured narratives that are ‘written vignettes of individual children’ (Carr, 2001:90). Learning stories were written as a way for me to evaluate and document my thoughts on the children’s learning through meta-reflection. Photographs and details documenting the children at work and at play were displayed and commented on by school staff. The learning stories and photograph albums were re-visited by the children regularly, opportunities for them to conduct their own reflections.

3.9.6 Post-Questionnaire to Parents

When the research was complete, I followed up with parents using a questionnaire (see Appendix 22) online. It was a simple, direct questionnaire to ascertain how they felt their child was now

engaging with sensory activities. It was to establish if time would allow for these to continue at home.

3.10 My Research Study

3.10.1 Research Participants

Six children in total participated in the research study. All six children in the preschool class, with their parents, consented and assented to participating in the study. A seventh child had given her assent but due to medical reasons could not participate. An online class with the child and parent was trialled but unfortunately, it was not feasible. The following table details the children involved in the study; names are excluded for anonymity. There are three boys and four girls in the class. The table details the needs of each child in the areas of mobility, mode of communication and fine motor skills.

Child	Mobility	Mode of Communication	Fine Motor
Child01	Independent with Supervision	Multimodal/AAC	Independent with Hand under Hand assistance
Child02	Independent with Supervision	Verbal	Independent
Child03	Independent	Verbal/AAC	Independent
Child04	Dependent	Multimodal/AAC	Dependent
Child05	Dependent	Multimodal/AAC	Dependent for some Tasks
Child06	Independent with Supervision	Multimodal/AAC	Independent
Child07	Dependent	Multimodal/AAC	Dependent for some Tasks

Table 3.2: Participant breakdown of needs

I will clarify the terminology used in the above table, as follows:

Mobility	Explanation
Independent with Supervision	Child can move independently, wearing leg supports. Will need supervision ascending/descending steps and navigating small areas.
Independent	Child can move about, walking and unaided.
Dependent	Child needs an adult to be moved in their wheelchair.

Table 3.3: Mobility Needs Explained

Mode of Communication	Explanation
Multimodal/AAC	Child communicates using one or a combination of vocalisations, body gestures, facial gestures, eye gaze, communication picture board, Lámh, Recording device (Big Mac), Objects of Reference. See Appendix AAC is Augmentative Assisted Communication – this includes all the above and communication devices.
Verbal	Child uses speech.
Verbal/AAC	Child uses speech and may need assistive technology to augment speech sounds.

Table 3.4: Mode of Communication Needs Explained (See Appendix 16)

Fine Motor	Explanation
Independent with Hand under Hand assistance	Child can hold objects yet needs assistance to maintain grip or direct object.
Independent	Child can hold, grip and direct object unaided.
Dependent	Child needs full assistance to hold object and maintain grip for directing.
Dependent for some Tasks	Child needs assistance for smaller objects and/or directing/extending with objects.

Table 3.5: Fine Motor Needs Explained

Along with these needs, some children have other underlying conditions which may impact their involvement, temporarily during the activity. These are epilepsy, sensory intolerances, autistic tendencies and having their peg feed running (a special tube that has been inserted into the child’s abdomen through which they receive their nutrition from a fluid mix).

3.11 My Research Design

I planned multisensory, movement-based activities for the children each day, focusing on the pace of delivery as much as the learning. I wished to see my values of care, inclusion and positive energy more evident in my teaching, with the children and in the classroom. I planned to have a cycle of implementing a ‘plan, observe, reflect and adapt’ to ensure I was living closer to my values (McNiff, 2013).

3.12 Action Cycles

3.12.1 Action Research Cycle 1

Daily movement-based activities, ranging from low level to high level movement were introduced and implemented. Assessment, as the key to focused development and growth of the learner, demands an involved relationship: it is not only about making a judgment, but rather about being with the learner every step of the way and being prepared to recognise learning difficulties in a respectful and dignified way and through genuine sharing of acquired knowledge and skills guiding the learner with compassion to the achievement of the intended outcomes. (Whitehead, 2009).

The following themes were followed over the course of the eight-week research study.

Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8
Theme: Me and My Body	Theme: Me and My Body	Theme: Spring	Theme: Spring	Theme: Friends	Theme: Friends	Theme: Our Favourite Things	Theme: Our Favourite Things

Table 3.6 Weekly Themes in Research Study

Each week consisted of daily activities that all the children could engage in. The activities varied between relaxation activities to movement activities. Time was given so all children could engage with the activities at their own pace. Each week, activities continued as shown on the table below. Activities included TacPac/Sensology Workout, movement-arts based activity for two days, Music and movement and Qi Gong.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
TacPac/ Sensology Workout	Movement- Art activity	Music and Movement	Movement-Art activity	Qi Gong

Table 3.7 Daily Activities in Research Study

A more detailed timetable of each week can be found in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2.

3.12.1.1 TacPac

TacPac draws together touch and music to create a structured half hour of sensory communication between two people. TacPac creates sensory alignment and helps people of any age who have sensory impairment, developmental delay, complex learning difficulties, tactile defensiveness, and limited or pre-verbal levels of communication. (www.tacpac.co.uk). Each child has their own pack with the necessary resources inside. Parents have been given the TacPac resources for home so they may engage with the programme too. (See Appendix 14).

3.12.1.2 Sensology Workout: Waking up the Senses

Sensology workout is a session to wake up the senses! It allows pupils to engage in experiences that stimulate each specific sense in turn (see, hear, touch, smell, taste) and movement related sensory systems: the vestibular and proprioceptive. It embraces the importance of the theory of early learning through multisensory environments. This session provides important opportunities for pupils to begin to show awareness and engagement and to develop preferences. (See Appendix 15).

3.12.1.3 Music and Movement

Music is present in the classroom every day. It is used during circle time, relaxation time and during art sessions. Instruments, scarves, and the classroom space were our resources. Music and dance engage the brain and it helps cultivate communication skills. Children can express themselves and it helps foster physical skills too. Music and dance contribute to creativity and imagination. Aistear (2009) under the principle of Exploring and Thinking, suggests a learning goal for children, in partnership with an adult to ‘engage, explore and experiment in their environment and use physical skills including skills to manipulate objects and materials.’ (Aistear, 2009: 44)

3.12.1.4 Qi Gong

When translated, Qi Gong means ‘energy work’. Qi gong can harmonise, strengthen, and have a healing effect on the functioning of all the internal organs and bodily systems. It increases the

supply and flow of energy throughout the body, can have a variety of rejuvenating effects and is believed to increase longevity, and it induces calm mental and emotional states. A fun, focused intervention that all the children were able to do, some independently and others with adult support (See Appendix 13).

3.12.1.5 Movement-Art Activity

Movement-based strategies during this intervention focused on gross and fine motor skills. Art develops a child's hand-eye coordination and bilateral hand use. It is also a fun, creative, expressive form of individuality. The children immersed themselves in these activities.

3.12.2 Reviewing Research Cycle One

Each day had a specific focus to it. The focus being on the intended activity for that day. Day One began with a relaxation activity, TacPac. I had not anticipated such an attunement to the music and the tapping movements. Some of the children clearly could have remained in a relaxed state for some time after. I looked forward to the next session of TacPac. My critical friends and I had spoken at the end of each day, discussing their observations, while I collected their observation forms and noted their feedback.

Day two and Day five focused on art-based movement activities. The children enjoyed the freedom of exploring the materials – open-ended materials of large cylinders and boxes. Paint, paper and glue was provided for further decorative purposes. On day three, music and movement

with scarves. Finally on Day four, Qi gong was introduced and there was great focus and imitation of the exercises.

Week one completed, feedback from critical friends was supportive and positive. Yet, there was an underlying sense of urgency. I discussed the feedback with my validation group, one by one, and their questions began to revolve around my urgency to make lots of 'Wow!' moments. My friend, the visual artist relayed back to me her first memory of working in my class. *'Audrey, it wasn't what you were doing but how you were working with the children'*. Brookfield (2017) discusses how critical reflection with colleagues is a great way to allow new ways of thinking and acting to open.

I began week two as intended and planned, after all it was just the beginning. 'Each ending is a new beginning. Each event carries its own potentials for new creative forms.' (McNiff, 2002). Week two ended with similar feedback from my critical friends and I sensed a tension unravelling before me. I sensed it because I was feeling it myself. The activities were busy, children and adults were being rushed. Concerns with the aesthetics of daily activities were now concerns that we would never have had before. The children's agency and voice were being put to one side. I had to take responsibility for my own thinking and action. My personal perspective, as Brookfield (2017) highlights of the many tensions and dilemmas are the same for many others as they were for me. I discussed both my tensions and the tensions of my critical friends with members of the validation group. Where were my values of care and inclusion being evidenced in my teaching? I care for the social and emotional development of each one of the children. This is and always has been the starting point of my plans and teaching. I value that each

child is included, at their level of ability, in every activity within the class day. I had pushed aside my knowledge about the children, in terms of their skills, their prior knowledge and learning styles. Somehow, somewhere, my focus for the research became about activities and not about the children. I reflected on my reflection (meta-reflection) from my RJ. I noted the line about *'needing time'* and I knew then what I should try to do.

Weeks three and four began with a deep intake of breath from myself and my critical friends. I endeavoured to turn the focus of activities more in line with my values of care, inclusion and positive relationships. Time was stretched out to ensure children and adults were not rushed. Children were given time to digest the content of the activity. TacPac began fifteen minutes earlier, this ensured relaxation time was given the focus it needed at the end of the session. Tuesday and Thursday art sessions began earlier too to allow children time to make their choices of paint, or perhaps spend longer at the wash up after. Wednesday's music was chosen by the children. The children chose their instruments, they explored their instruments, they swapped their instruments, all before music was played. The music was played but only after they requested it. Qi gong lasted for as long or as short as the children needed. We tried it outdoors too, while we walked through the school grounds.

3.12.3 Reframing the Research Focus

Reflections from my journal, my critical friends revealed very different feedback. We were all noticing the children noticing themselves. There was a calmness descending on each of us. Could this last? When I relayed my reflections to my validation group I did feel not, as Brookfield (2017) writes about, like an 'imposter'. Much of my teaching and learning relates back to my own school

days and it is what I bring to class each day. There was time between cycles one and two due to Easter holidays and restrictions after due to the pandemic. Research resumed on May 10th 2021 for cycle two. This had given me much time to pause and think and reframe my focus. It also enabled me to speak with each parent and to explain the lens of a slow pedagogy and time. It was important that parents gave their continued consent to allow their child remain part of the study. Brimberg (n.d.) suggests that content has to be made accessible in different formats and media, and time is a key element. What happens too often is that pacing is driven by the content. Fostering a slow pedagogy was chosen as the element of time had been to the forefront of reflection from cycle one.

3.12.4 Research Cycle Two and Reflection

The second research cycle began with the very different important focus of time. Time that would be spent connecting with children's emotional development, social development, building quality interactions and relationships through playful experiences that embodied physical, artful, musical and relaxation activities. How would this look? The daily activities that had been planned, remained the same. However, their completion was not the focus anymore. I tuned into the rhythm of the children as they came to class each morning. The morning routine of greeting each other, packing away bags and coats and washing hands became a very relaxed and social beginning. Time spent checking in with each other. I modelled, along with my critical friends, the social aspect of our morning routine.

We continued to play and learn, but how they moved on to the next activity became more explicit. Children were given choice and there was no 'all finished together' with an activity. We

still needed to have snack and visit the bathroom, and some of the children must stick with a rigid timeframe around these areas. However, the flexibility being intertwined with the rigidity was working.

My teaching, my interactions, my speaking voice slowed. I checked in with my validation group after the class physiotherapist had visited for most of the morning in Week three. He commented on the busy interactions that were happening around the room. Momentarily, he thought that the children had no direction or purpose to their interactions. The ‘imposter syndrome’ came back as I explained how teaching and learning had a new focus. As Brookfield (2017) suggests ‘the feeling of being an imposter can ruin a teacher’s life’. I contemplated this for a short while and I continued to discuss how a slow pedagogy was being fostered in the classroom. The children were demonstrating agency and their voice was being heard. David Orr (1996) might name this ‘messy’ and ‘non-linear’ and I would agree.

Glancing around the next day at the interactions between the children, I produced the very large sheet of paper that we had used now on many occasions to mark make on, creating large circular movements with our whole bodies. Immediately, the children who could, jumped and rolled straight onto it. Each of the other children were gently lifted onto the paper to join their friends. *‘Put Child04 beside me, Child04 made lots of paint splashes on me and I want her to do it again. It was really funny!’* squealed Child02. Child06 remembered the finger lights and he went to Child01 to share them again with him. Through the art and movement activity being on the floor, everyone free to move in their own individual way, it seems barriers were removed, albeit invisible barriers, had disappeared. The remaining time for data collection was time immersed in the activities, focusing on transitions. These had often been difficult for some of the

children. I focused on making transitions more fluid, flexible. Time to finish or move to another activity was not rigid. Children moved or were moved by adults when it was their decision.

3.13 Conclusion

In this methodology section I have discussed how I came to foster a slow pedagogy in a preschool for children with special needs. In summary, I engaged in reflective practice, in line with my values and my current practice of teaching. A SSAR paradigm resulted in generating qualitative data, after two action research cycles were engaged with. This is how knowledge evolves, a process of learning from others and reworking existing knowledge in new ways (McNiff, 2020).

In examining my own practice and reflecting on how I engage authentically with the children and their learning, I have come to understand teaching and learning as “a relationship of influence not one of cause and effect” (McNiff & Whitehead, 2005:22). I adhered to ethical guidelines and data collection tools were utilised to ensure equal participation by all the children and attested to the truth through triangulation, strengthening the rigour and validity of my findings. The next chapter will highlight further these findings using thematic data analysis.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION OF DATA

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, data collected with the staff team is analysed, as well as data obtained from my reflective journal, naturalistic field notes, daily reflective notes, discussions with validation group members and observation checklists from the class team of special needs assistants. I will report and discuss the messiness of data collection, and the potential for future innovations and research.

The chapter presents the findings and a discussion of a research study which sought to establish if I could foster a slow pedagogy as a guiding framework for preschool children with special needs. The purpose of the study was to develop a learning environment where children's learning could become attuned to the depth and pace of their abilities, allowing me to live closer to my values of care, positivity and inclusiveness.

The data will be examined from various perspectives, in so doing the data will be triangulated, which adds to its reliability and credibility. with my ongoing reflections and validation group elucidated three key findings about the pedagogical study that provoked learning in this area: *A slow pedagogy and the powerful impact on the children, a slow pedagogy and the effect on the classroom setting, and a slow pedagogy to foster collaboration and relationships.*

4.2 Overview of Research

My study used an action research methodology to investigate how a slow pedagogy could be fostered. Time to engage with the children, with their learning had afforded me a perspective, one where I could not hope to separate ‘me’ from my teaching. Evidence of my values, personal and educational, were being identified in each of the daily activities. In fact, in trying to understand the daily intervention of this study so began the journey to understanding ‘me’, personally and professionally.

4.3 Data Analysis and Discussion of Themes

Data gathered was analysed using Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-step framework and applied in a systematic manner to describe and explain the process of finding themes. The research question for this study guided the thematic analysis. The lack of focus on rigorous and relevant thematic analysis has implications in terms of the credibility of the research process (Nowell et al, 2017 cited in Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). The following diagram shows the six-step framework used on the data corpus.

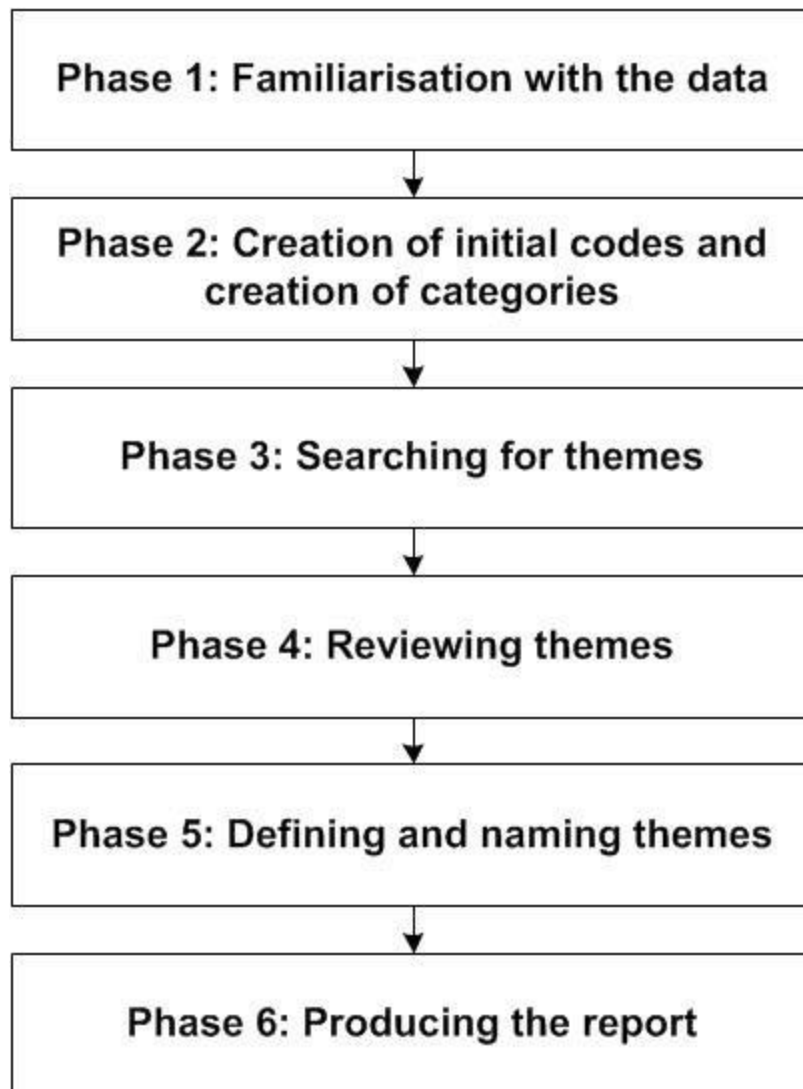


Table 4.1: Braun & Clarke six-step thematic analysis

Some initial notetaking in my reflective journals reveals the volume of notes written.

I have post-it notes everywhere! I feel I'm swimming in them! The amount of notes that I've written, and the team have written! Ahhhh! (RJ, May 2nd 2021)

Coding was best done with my reflections from daily observations printed out and the handwritten notes from class in front of me on paper using a highlighter marker. It took several readings to devise codes, further readings to generate new codes and modify these.

When I had completed this, the codes could be organised into broader themes that were saying something about my research question ‘How can I foster a slow pedagogy as a guiding framework for preschool children with special needs?’

Table 4.2 Findings elicited preliminary themes and sub-themes specific to the research question

Preliminary Themes	Sub-themes
1. Children’s Learning Experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity for their voices to be heard, establishing their identity • Children’s agency
2. Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linking home and class learning • Deepening relationships with familiar friends and extending an interest in others
3. Interactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enabling circumstances opened more possibilities for engaging with others • Active listening and following the child’s lead
4. Educator’s role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating an atmosphere of welcome and valuing all communication here and now • Activator
5. Curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play based, child led • Sensory rich • Holistic
6. Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outdoor spaces/Natural environments • Parents and team perceptions • Time focused vs. Time freed (Tovey, 2020)

Table 4.2: Preliminary Themes and Sub-Themes

The next stage of the data analysis was to review the preliminary themes to check for plausibility, the extent to which the data supports the findings and did the themes work in the context of the entire data set. Themes should be coherent, and they should be distinct from one another (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). I felt the preliminary themes of *Children's learning experiences* and *Challenges* could be grouped as one theme in relation to the impact of the study on the children. I next grouped the preliminary themes of *Relationships* and *Interactions* as I identified they were written about extensively in my reflective journal and observational notes relating to the fostering of relationships and collaborations. Finally, data found relating to *Educator's role* and *Curriculum* came together as an effect on the classroom setting.

Preliminary Themes	Overall Theme
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children's Learning Experiences • Challenges 	Impact of Study on Children
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationships • Interactions 	Fostering Relationships and Collaborations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educator's Role • Curriculum 	Effect on the Classroom Setting

Table 4.3: Preliminary Themes Grouped for Overall Themes

4.4 Analysis and Discussion of Findings

The following section will introduce the three overall themes that were derived from the preliminary themes. First, I will discuss the data on the effect a slow pedagogy had on the classroom setting, with my role as educator and the curriculum that developed. Next, I will analyse how fostering relationships and collaborations amongst the children developed. I will explore the relationships and interactions between children, between children and myself, their teacher. Finally, I will focus on the impact of my study on the children, looking closely at the children's learning experiences and challenges that were encountered.

4.4.1 Introduction: A Slow Pedagogy and the Effect on the Classroom Setting

In this section, A Slow Pedagogy and the Effect on the Classroom Setting will be presented. Firstly, findings about Curriculum will be examined and secondly the Educator's Role will be discussed.

'The mind is not a vessel to be filled, but a fire to be ignited.'

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4.4.1.2 Curriculum

Preliminary findings relating to curriculum included the following: commentary and reflections about the curriculum favouring a play-based, child-led element to the activities. They were sensory rich and holistic too. At the midpoint discussion meeting of cycle one, there was agreement that the activities were fun, children were involved but there were queries about some of the less physically able children.

'Child2 couldn't really find his photos, so he lost interest, but he loved being outside and enjoyed the moving about'. 'Child5 was loving the fresh air and the others laughing and chatting, but I don't think she got much from the activity'. 'Maybe if it was warmer, we could take Child5 out of her chair and she'd like going under the moving curtain'.

I listened and discussed some of the feedback with my critical friend. The activities were play based and sensory rich, but I questioned how much of the curriculum was being allowed to be child led.

'Where were the children? Could I really say that I had differentiated for each child to engage fully? Was I losing the voice of the children amid the study? I was in a rush to get data collected for my study. (RJ, March 15 2021)

I reflected on this and concluded that I needed to discuss this more with my critical friend and SNA Team. The curriculum had been sensory and holistic prior to my research study but I was focusing on a curriculum that was being driven by the study and not by my values. At the end of week three in action cycle one we had a brief discussion meeting with SNA Team and validation group. All agreed that the structure of the week was working well. There was a great mix of movement activities, sensory and playful. However, the time that was set aside for each was sometimes feeling rushed.

'Why do we have to start at 11? Could we do the activity at 9, for the hour until 10, on some of the days?' (SNA2). 'Sometimes, I forget to check the clock and then I realise I am still giving Child5 her snack and I feel I have to hurry up or we won't be ready to

start in time' (SNA1). 'When we're doing TACPAC, they all really love it, and maybe it would be better in the afternoon, could we try it in the afternoon?' (SNA3). Well, sometimes, it takes a while to get into the activity with the children, especially with Child1, and then we have to finish. It would be great if we could continue for longer or even the next day?' (Notes taken from Weekly discussion with SNA Team, March 19, 2021)

That night I wrote in my analysis of the day how the meeting had gone and what way I should continue

'The meeting has given me great feedback and, in a way, it is how I'm feeling too.... I have planned for these activities, but I'm focused on the end product rather than the process.' (Reflection on observations, March 19, 2021).

Moving into Week 4 of cycle one, I felt a deep sense of disappointment in myself, and I knew that the curriculum was not as I had hoped. I value inclusion, yet I was not allowing a child-led curriculum to develop. Some of the observation forms noted this too. The curriculum for children with special needs relies on a sensory-rich, holistic framework so all children of all abilities can maximise their potential. I needed to refocus on curriculum content within the frame of a slow pedagogy.

It is about 'savouring the hours and minutes rather than just counting them. Doing everything as well as possible, instead of as fast as possible.' (Honoré, 2004). I wanted to develop a curriculum that has greater depth than breadth. I read a piece by Alison Clark on the Froebel Trust website, a

study she is conducting presently, titled "Slow knowledge and the unhurried child: time for slow pedagogies in early childhood education." I listened with intent as Alison seemed to be speaking about everything I had been feeling during the study and for several years now.

Research cycle two began in May, the curriculum would be child led, sensory rich. I would endeavour to live more closely to my values of inclusion and care.

'Child04 has been stretched out on the floor, immersed in all the sounds and movement around her. She has been vocalising from time to time, some small leg movements. Staff have been moving softer materials over her head and down her arms in response to her body movements.' (Reflection based on observation notes, May 10 2021)

Moving slowly through the curriculum and embracing every moment, observing and listening to the words and gestures from the children, began the fostering of a slow pedagogy. These sentiments concur what Malaguzzi (1994) cited 'school can never be always predictable. We need to be open to what takes place and able to change our plans and go with what might grow at that very moment both inside the child and inside ourselves.'



The children's curiosity led to hours of doodling.

The first change was the welcome every morning. The welcome was extended for as long as was needed by each child to feel settled and surrounded by joy. Time for snacks was a flexible feast rather than being dictated by adult break time. The children found their own rhythm to their day and activities found their own way to naturally conclude. There was a mix of children choosing their own activities or an adult offering them a choice between two. This new rhythm to our day took several weeks, as adults and children adjusted. Children who wanted to spend time outdoors were facilitated. Children who preferred the indoors had their choice of movement activity set up inside. The time until 12:00pm remained flexible and free flowing.

'Morning time set up now involves children helping out more with their belongings. Ai can help with placing her snack items on the counter. O now puts all her belongings into her box independently and L is still trying hard!' (Reflection Notes based on observations, May 13, 2021).

'Painting with feet! Loved painting the booklet like this.' (SNA01, May 11, 2021).

'Funny how they're so keen to get to snack – they were so ready to start this and lovely to see them helping each other.' (SNA01, May 28, 2012, feedback after introducing snack preparation with children).

The change of pace and focus on the curriculum fostered curiosity about their environment and materials and as I discovered it could be a powerful form of non-verbal communication. Child05 explored the idea that sound can have significant feedback, becoming an effective form of communication. Child05 used gentle full body movements on a resonance board, in response to moving her feet on it.



Spending time on the resonance board.

Child02 reacted so powerfully to paint on his feet against a plastic easel.



Malaguzzi, 1993 reflects how ‘we teachers must see ourselves as researchers, able to think, and to produce a true curriculum, a curriculum produced from all of the children.’ This speaks volumes to me about what direction I was taking through my study.



A whole class group collage. One child, child02, displayed resilience and a motivation to do something she had never done before. A slower, more intentional time allowed for her to learn a new skill and for me to observe it. See Appendix 18 for learning story.

4.4.1.3 Educator's Role

In this section, I will discuss my role as educator. Upon meta-reflection, on why I wanted to be a teacher, I had written

'I want to teach and reach the children who fly beneath the radar, I want to learn how they see and how I can see with them' (RJ, July 2020).

The self-doubt about what it was I was trying to achieve, about what I had become as a teacher and where I saw a possibility to change was unfolding before my eyes. I believe I became something of a combination of all three. I certainly moved away from my 'living contradiction', where I felt I listened and followed children's lead, when, I was doing most of the leading. The SNA Team during one of our reflection meetings (which were now constant and in-depth) felt I had 'embraced the slow pedagogy so quickly, *'like you were after finding out the*

secret of being a great teacher'. I discussed this with a member of the validation group, as I was analysing the data and he concurred.

'I think you are a very good communicator with the children & staff; you give very clear instructions, feedback, support to them & give them time to interact with you. You are very adept at reading the children & getting to know their routine behaviours & what they mean thereby responding to this & acting accordingly to avoid any crisis developing' (Validation group member, July 2021)

As a teacher who differentiates instruction, you become both “a facilitator and a collaborator” (Heacox, 2002: 3). What I had begun, in the children, was seeing their joy in being ‘the authors of their own learning’ (Malaguzzi, 1993: 3).

Working to the slow rhythm of the children and their deep engagement with their play or their discoveries, made it possible for longer observations to happen. It was not a passive activity to do this, but it required a lot of activity on my part. ‘It requires a shift in the role of the teacher from an emphasis of teaching to an emphasis on learning, teachers learning about themselves as teachers as well as teachers learning about children’, (Malaguzzi, 1993: 3).

'I brought some wind chimes to her and placed them beside her ear to listen. I noticed her right foot extending on and off, so I hung the chimes on a shrub, just at the height of her foot. She engaged in some play, making the chimes ding as her foot bumped against them.' (Reflections on observations, May 14, 2021).

I felt I had gained new confidence and empowerment, being a teacher who enables, who activates and who facilitates.

4.4.1.3 Conclusion to a Slow Pedagogy and the Effect on the Classroom Setting

The findings noted above of *Curriculum and Educator's role* were the beginning of a deep learning process for me. In Reggio Emilia, the term 'the competent child' is heard when the pedagogical philosophy is discussed. Some years ago, they started to focus upon the concept of 'the competent educator'. 'The 'competent educator' (Vecchi, 2006) is somebody who decides what to do according to the circumstances, according to the children. The 'competent educator' does not betray those values that he or she has previously decided are important' (Vecchi, 2006). The observations and documentation, the very connection between teaching and learning, used through action cycle one and action cycle two highlighted where I had pushed aside my values of care, positivity and inclusion. Following on from the documentation process of the children's experiences, introducing a slow pedagogy had the effect of impacting my role and the pace of curriculum content, ensuring my values were re-established and being lived again.

4.4.2 Introduction: A Slow Pedagogy and the Impact of the Study on Children

The following section will present and discuss relevant and appropriate data gathered during my study. The aim of this section is to analyse the theme of *A Slow Pedagogy and the Impact of*

the Study on Children. This section is divided into the following headings, *Children's experiences of learning* and the *Challenges* relating to my research question.

'Once children are helped to perceive themselves as authors or inventors, once they are helped to discover the pleasures of inquiry, their motivation and interest explode'
(Edwards, et al., 1998)

4.4.2.1 A Slow Pedagogy and the Impact of the Study on Children

This is my second year working and playing with the children in my class. I met them at three years old and now they are in their second year of Preschool, four turning five years old. Much has happened, in school, with their families and in the world. 'We cannot separate this child from a particular reality. She brings these experiences, feelings, and relationships into school with her. And it is the same for you as adults.' states Loris Malaguzzi (1993:1) delivered at a seminar in Reggio Emilia.

More so than ever, school and home and parents have a common shared experience, living through a pandemic. Prior to my intervention, the children continued to adapt to mask wearing by myself and the support team, restricted movements around the school and lots of hand washing and sanitisation.

Initially, as I discussed in chapter 3, my research focus was providing for movement within the daily interactions of the children and myself. Movement activities that endeavor to allow children's creativity and critical thinking emerge. Each day had an appointed activity assigned to

it, a mix of movements that involved gross and fine motor movements and then relaxation movements to calm the body and mind. Notes taken during preliminary meetings with SNA Team revealed an excited anticipation from all.

'I can't wait to get started. You have some great ideas, and the children will love them!' (SNA2).

Parent messages on Seesaw reflected similar anticipation *'can't wait to see the photos and wishing you lots of luck!'* (Parent3).

4.4.2.2 Children's Learning Experiences of the Process

Our brain learns by being actively engaged in meaningful experiences with content. Children learn in physical ways, we should not suppress this, we should use it. The children engaged and involved themselves with all the physical movement learning activities daily.

Nevertheless, feedback from observation checklists of the SNA Team and my own analysis of the daily activities reflected that I was focusing on the intervention more than what I or the children were gaining from it. On reflection,

'I have to make sure all adult breaks are finished by 10:50 so I can get everything in place for the 11:00 start, sometimes we're beginning the children's breaks too late and

it's having a knock-on effect'. I'll be sure to say it to the team for Thursday', (RJ, March 2021).

On reflection, I was losing the fun element of preparing the activities and they were taking over my planning for the day. I was feeling a little deflated. Discussing same with my critical friend, she commented how the activities appeared to be greatly resourced and engaging and asked where I had gotten the ideas. The combination of my reflections and comments and feedback from SNA Team came in the form of a giant light bulb moment, just as I was going into week three of data collection. I googled the word 'intervention' and the Cambridge dictionary defines it as 'the action of becoming intentionally involved in a difficult situation, in order to improve it or prevent it from getting worse'. I was continually referring to the 'intervention' which is my study. Firstly, my classroom was not a 'difficult situation' and secondly, it therefore did not need to be aided from getting worse. So, I remedied the situation, changed my narrative and used 'my study' from thereon in.

My goal is to support all the children in collaboration with me, their teacher. Prior to my study, I planned a theme every fortnight. Often, these themes were ideas that had come from the children, and I wished to explore them further, 'learning should be meaningful and connected to children's own experiences' (Tovey, 2017) so why was I re-directing myself away from this? I was dictating the content, the pace and the choice. Where were the children's voices and choices in my study? I reflected on the Master's itself, '*it is a self-study action research project and I am studying me, my actions, my methods, my words!*' (RJ, March 2021) and I thought about this further. In researching me, researching them, why did the children feel so apart from the study? I

needed to stop thinking about ‘fixing’ me or them and so I shifted my perspective. From here, I decided I do not need to figure it all out, if I am ready to listen, the children will tell me.



Feeling like a butterfly emerging from its cocoon! Playing inside mosquito nets, at their pace.

Throughout the study, I was learning and developing my practice to support and extend the learning and thinking of each of the children. Working with the children as co-participants, an approach informed by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, enabled children’s agency to emerge. Child04, who is non-verbal, began to use his communication device a lot more. I placed an emphasis on encouraging him to call my name first using his device and then choosing a word that he needed to convey. Time allowed Child04 to do this throughout the day. He was clearly using his device to an end.

‘I am so thrilled to see such progress with Child04 and his device, and the reason why is this happening? I am slowing down my interactions with the children, the whole day will not be dictated by a schedule!’ is how I described this in my reflective journal, (RJ, April 2021)

Although as a team during our reflections, we agreed that the activities were creative and working on children's skills for improving gross and fine motor skills, along with developing their social and emotional skills, the question was asked, where are the children amidst all of this? The children's experiences were positive, yet I continued to reflect on what my goal was. Creativity was coming more from me, and I was a 'living contradiction' in not seeing and allowing time for the children's creativity to surface. Duffy (1998) explains that 'creativity is about connecting the unconnected in ways that are meaningful for the individual.' I showed the children photographs of the activities we had embraced over the weeks and suggested we would do them again, allowing them to choose what they wanted to do. The treasure hunts were proven to be the favourite and this time, they took turns deciding on what they would hide and find outside in the garden.



Having some fun in the sun!

4.4.2.3 Challenges

As cycle two began, with a focus of fostering a slow pedagogy, I had an informal discussion with the SNA Team and my validation group. It was to inform them about slow pedagogy and how I was implementing it for the next four weeks. At the same time, I informed the parents. Feedback

from these discussions highlighted an underlying hesitancy, centering on the word 'slow'. There can be negative connotations associated with this word.

'Slow in my day wasn't a good thing. What do you mean by slow?' (SNA03).

Dialogue and information about slow pedagogy was provided to all and parents were reminded about their freedom to withdraw from the research at any stage. Fortunately, all parents continued to focus on their child's enjoyment, fulfillment and involvement. My SNA Team were curious to see how this approach would impact on the daily schedule, the children and themselves.

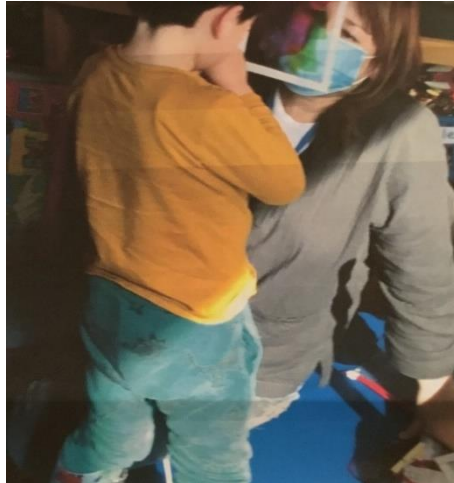
I had noted in my RJ how the children, myself and SNA Team were embracing the outdoors, particularly the garden space leading from the classroom, for play and relaxation -

'I'm not sure if it's because we've been told to be outside more, due to the pandemic, or because I've been reading about Froebelian principles and one of them being how play outdoors is essential or perhaps it's a combination of both?? Either way, we're all appreciating time out in the air!' (RJ, May 16, 2021).

Time outside can sometimes prove to be a balancing act for children with physical disabilities and adult supervision. The main concern being, adult to child ratio, there are more children than adults! The SNA Team voiced their concerns when some children were outside and some were inside,

'How can we watch Child01, while Child03 and Child04 are moving about? What can Child05 and Child02 do while the others are free to walk around? Someone needs to watch Child06 with her walking canes.' (Feedback noted in RJ, May21, 2021)

A slow pedagogy allows for deeper thinking time, so the same time pressure, scheduled time, becomes more fluid. The pressure to have free play outside for a set period, to return for a set time, for another scheduled activity is gone. In its place, in my classroom, after considerable reflection, I allowed play to continue, to flow, letting the children lead with their curiosity. Vecchi (2006: 11) speaks about 'where you see the child's curiosity and listen to the child with genuine curiosity.' Clark (2020) and her discussion on slow pedagogy refers to 'lingering, revisiting, rethinking' and 'listening again or differently' so with intention we can follow the child's curiosity. As I slowed down, the education and learning of the children were given space to become more authentic. 'And the child can help us, he or she can help us to feel again the time that is inside us and the time that we are' (Rinaldi, 2006: 207). I was truly seeing for the first time, each child in front of me. The children with their different abilities were showing me their curiosity at their level. My curiosity in watching them, documenting, and extending these observations, was the beginning of a new journey.



Child01 is observed being curious about the coloured lens and shares his curiosity with me. See Appendix17 for learning story.

4.4.2.4 Conclusion to A Slow Pedagogy and the Impact of the Study on Children

The sub-themes found, as noted above, were *Children's Learning Experiences* and *Challenges*. I wanted to ensure that the impact would be as positive as I could endeavour to achieve. I changed my planning, my timetable and my practice as the study gained momentum to ensure the children remained at the heart. The most important thing I am doing is building the learner's sense of security and belonging and it is not about changing a child but supporting them. 'It means listening carefully, being open and wanting to know more. It means really taking note of what the child is interested in, thinking and feeling, and striving to understand.' (Tovey, 2017). Slow pedagogy gives the educator the power to change to suit the learner.

4.4.3 Introduction: A Slow Pedagogy to Foster Collaboration and Relationships

The following section will present and discuss relevant and appropriate data on the shared interactions and the relationships that were established during my study. The aim of this section is to analyse the theme of A Slow Pedagogy to Foster Collaboration and Relationships. This section is divided into the following headings, *Interactions* and *Relationships* relating to my research question.

'The true educator and teacher has to be at every moment and in every demand two-sided.'
(Froebel, in Lilley 1967:55)

4.4.3.1 A Slow Pedagogy to Foster Collaboration and Relationships

Embracing and fostering a slow pedagogy enabled more in depth and frequent interactions to occur. A pedagogy of listening was enabled by all staff working and playing with the children. Relationships too deepened between adults and children and most importantly, between the children.

4.4.3.2 Interactions

Often there were times that the adult expectations of the children were challenged. Reflections noted in my journal from a mid-point discussion during action cycle two revealed some surprises, from children and from staff. It followed from an art/movement session. Whole group activities that could last for up to an hour or more, were part of the daily curriculum. The first child being discussed has communication and social interaction needs.

'I never thought Child01 would be interested in getting down on the floor and drawing like that, he kept looking over at what was going on, but still playing with his train. He got closer and closer and then I just said, come on Child01, down we go and make some marks!' (SNA02).

'Did you see how Child03 came up with how to move herself around in circles?' (SNA01).

'Child05, really loved it, she made so many loud vocalisations! It was so nice seeing them all on the floor like that, each one doing their thing.' (SNA03).

My own analysis revealed similar thoughts,

'Today's movement session was an eye opener for me. Taking our time, all relaxed, showing the children what they were to do. As each of the children came to the floor, dictated by their interest, as a team of four, we could get to each child and give them the support, when and if they needed it. Why? Because we eased our way into it, it will be what it will be', and as strange as it might sound, the children seemed to feel our 'no rush' attitudes.' (RJ, May 21, 2021).

Another piece I wrote said

'I really saw how we can approach Child01 learning during today's activity. What really kept his engagement going, during the drawing, was singing! I don't know how many times I sang 'This is the way we move our arms, move our arms, move our arms... '(to the tune Here we go round the Mulberry bush). Singing during transitions is what I use to aid his understanding of change, and now it is for describing his movements!' (RJ, May

22, 2021). Slowing down has ensured my observations and listening to the children are authentic.

During action cycle two, the engagement and level of involvement went from strength to strength, as now time was not ‘filled’ but freed (Tovey, 2017: 42). The children were spending more time, more deeply engaged with their play. At times it was independent play and at other times it was in pairs or small groups. Their interactions were sustained, richer and inclusive.

‘Child2 spent several minutes, vocalising and gesturing to Child5 today. There was an engagement and an interest to engage on both sides. What a lovely moment!’ (RJ, May 25, 2021).



Making a connection

During a time of extended play, a more active and physically able child, Child06, moved over and took the hand of Child05.

‘She began to sing ‘Round and round the garden’. Child04 was clearly delighted to hear a peer’s voice as she moved her head from side to side, softly vocalising and stretching out her legs. (RJ, May 2021).

I documented (photographs) so many moments of interactions between the children who were physically mobile and the children who were less so. Time uninterrupted by adults allowed them to really notice each other and feel the need to extend their friendship. ‘Children learn a lot from other children, and adults learn from children being with children. Children love to learn among themselves, and they learn things that it would never be possible to learn from interactions with an adult.’ (Malaguzzi, 1989). My reflective journal, observation notes and feedback from the SNA Team and validation group corroborate such interactions as being the loveliest moments of this study.



Lots more interactions emerged throughout the study.

‘The children get lots of different learning experiences in your class from painting, nature walks, water play, dressing up, art & crafts it’s quite a show & I’d say for the children one of the main reasons they enjoy their time there so much.’ (Validation group member, July 2021)

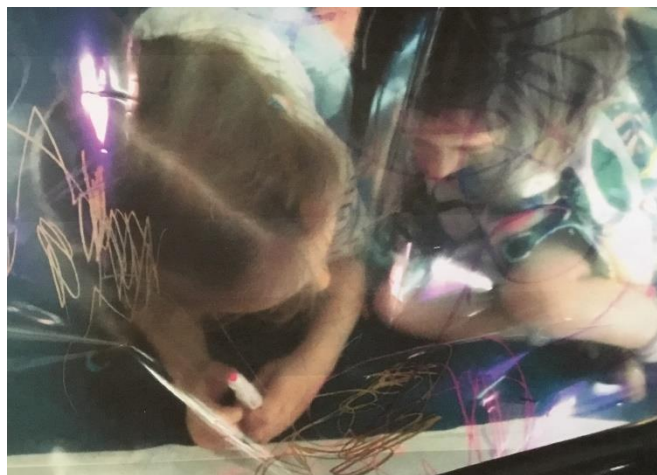
‘My favourite memory from all of this is the photo collage we made using the GoPro. It was an amazing shot of all the children, out on the floor, lying down, no one in their chairs or standing

frames, all at the same level. They were all there, making colourful circles and marks, in their own way. You wouldn't think anyone had a disability' (SNA03)

Children need to enjoy being in school, they need to love their school and the interactions that take place there. Their expectations of these interactions are critical. As the study progressed and beyond data collection, the ethos of a slow pedagogy continued. The adults and the children had found a pace that was fun, engaging. The many stories and photographs displayed this.

'I really loved how you took the children outside when we were pretending to be butterflies, can you believe how Child03 pretended to fly from shrub to shrub?' (SNA03, June 1, 2021).

'You have a delightful calm manner, and you laugh a lot.' (Validation Group Member, July 20).



Deep in concentration creating their aquarium

4.4.3.3 Relationships

The children have had a non-traditional, interrupted two years of Preschool, due to a world pandemic and COVID19 and the resulting school closures. This became the most important time to focus fully on relationships, between adults and children, between adults and parents, and most importantly between the children and each other. Children are trying to understand what friendship is. ‘Children get to know each other through all their senses. Touching the hair of another child is very important. Smell is important. This is the way children are able to understand the identity of themselves and the identity of others.’ (Malaguzzi, 1983: 3). Aistear (1999) believes that relationships are at the very heart of early learning and development.

On reflection, during this time, March 2020 to June 2020 and again in January 2021 to Mid-February 2021, I was slowing down my teaching, to a deeper level, to give parents support. Demonstrating finger rhymes, art and craft ideas and sensory play brought us all together. Parents had started to explore movement and sensory activities at home.

‘Child06 is a very physical child and is always on the move. I feel he benefits from sensory experiences when you get him to slow down and engage with him! I think he has progressed significantly due to the work that has been done with him in school and it would be great if we could carry it over at home to further assist his progress.’ (Parent06)

There was no need to ‘catch up’ in terms of learning but there was a need to reclaim our relationships with each other, with our environment and with the materials in it.

Regular feedback between myself and the parents revealed that the new direction of my study towards a slow pedagogy was deepening relationships, not only between people but also between things, between thoughts, and with the environment. Froebel held such a belief about the connections that exist and need nurturing ‘Humans are relational beings, born to connect with others. Such intimate, reciprocal relationships are vital for our sense of belonging and wellbeing throughout life.’ (Tovey, 2020). Some comments from parents

‘Child02 was previously very reluctant to touch new things particularly if she didn’t like the look of it! She now is much more open to trying out new activities and seems less concerned by ‘new’ things’ (Parent02) and ‘after experiencing Qi gong on the class zoom calls and from Seesaw photos, we tried it at home and found it great for the family.

‘I’m not sure if Qi gong helped Child03, ‘cause I had to help him with it but we are doing a whole lot more sensory stuff now. You’ve given us lots of ideas and we can see now that they work for Child03. I’ve bought in loads of stuff for the long holidays!’ (Parent03).

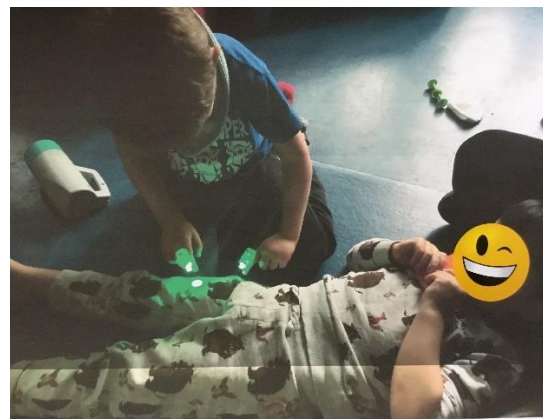
These comments and my reflections, along with observations from the SNA team were evidence that a slow pedagogy had an impact on the daily interactions and relationships in class.

‘When I wrote home our news for today, one Mum replied saying ‘Child01 very calm this afternoon – thank you for whatever magic he received today’. 😊

I'll certainly do TacPac again at this time to see if it's a preferred time for the class as a whole. (RJ, May 17 2021).

4.4.3.4 Conclusion to a Slow Pedagogy to Foster Collaboration and Relationships

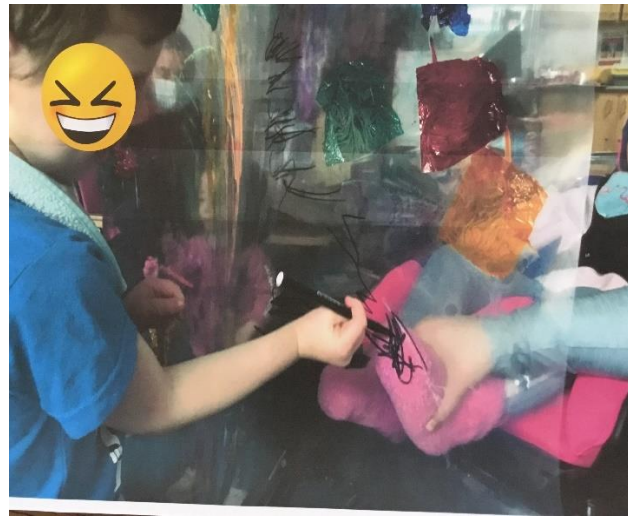
As noted above, two sub-themes of *Interactions* and *Relationships* were discussed. We must know the children we work and play with; we must understand the community that the school serves, the parents and support staff within. 'Slow education understands that education is a fundamentally social experience, with relationships (peer to peer, teacher to pupil, and school to parents/community) at the very core of learning experiences.' (Harrison-Greaves, 2016). Relationships and interactions which are positive, support and challenge, offer opportunities to explore environments and materials and ultimately care about how the child learns. Care, a value I have kept at the heart of my study, has enabled me to embrace the introduction of a slow pedagogy to my class.



Interactions and relationships developed, grew stronger and deeper.

4.5 Conclusion

As stated previously, the three key findings were defined within the impact that a slow pedagogy had on the classroom, the children and my role in setting out the plan for the day. The provision of time, time that was not allocated to a schedule, great resources, and intentional, creative teaching strategies enabled sustained opportunities for deep learning to happen. All findings have informed my claim to knowledge in this research, my validity to this claim is provided by my criteria. There was a messiness with the research and analysis of data, yet new learning and changes to my practice occurred. Evidence was provided about how I lived closer to my values, care, inclusion and positive relationships and will allow future engagement in continued research and learning.



Time allowed for creative fun to emerge between all children.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The impetus for this study was to answer the research question “How can I foster a slow pedagogy in a preschool for children with special needs?” I will bring together the areas of the research to make a claim to knowledge that has evolved from developing my own thinking and learning. The consequence of the study is defined, and its limitations and recommendations outlined.

5.2 Summary of Findings

Educational theory about teaching and playing and working with young children with special needs was embodied in the story I told in my research study. The general aims of my study were to improve my practice by fostering a slow pedagogy. The provision of time freed would allow for deeper engagement with each other, with the environment and learning. I wanted to make an impact on children’s learning and my own learning that would benefit improving the curriculum and interactions between the children and between the staff and children.

My struggle with my teaching was an irritation I have had for several years. As the research progressed, the irritation revealed itself more to me through my ongoing reflections and dialogue with fellow research students, my supervisor, my critical friends and validation group. I saw my teaching and learning having to go in a linear fashion, adhere to educational policy guidelines and frameworks. Yet, my desire in my teaching was to be non-linear. I found by fostering and engaging with a slow pedagogy I could see who the children really are, their tiniest revelations

seen because I was present. I could relish quality over quantity; deeper processing with a smaller amount of material information; creating numerous connections amidst new concepts, the real world, and of course, the individual learner.

Parents had been a huge support to me and the children throughout the study. When I had a change of focus after action cycle one, they listened and were interested in learning more. The post-questionnaire revealed their own learning. Some have embraced the relaxation activities of TacPac and Qi gong within the whole family. Some have expressed thanks for ideas on multisensory exploration that they can share with their child and with other siblings. My concluding findings can be discussed under the following headings.

5.2.1 A Slow Pedagogy and the Impact of the Study on Children

Reviewing the data gathered I found two themes that related to the impact the study had on children. These were their learning experiences and challenges. In conclusion, the children were allowed time to invest in their experiences, to explore new forms of expression and to interact with others. More and more, conversations were had about what the children can do rather than what they cannot.

Indoor and outdoor space were a challenge for managing movement of children. Some children can independently and freely move about. Other children need full assistance to be placed indoors or outdoors and assistance to engage with activities. This was resolved through meaningful conversations and adults took it in turns to move in or out.

5.2.2 A Slow Pedagogy and the Effect on the Classroom Setting

My role as the teacher and the curriculum have seen a remarkable change in scheduling, planning for activities and promoting a ‘pedagogy of listening’ (Rinaldi, 2006) alongside a slow pedagogy. As the teacher, when I saw a child engaged or showing an interest in something, time allowed this to develop and not be lost to an ‘if only’ experience due to having to stop the learning and move on to the next item on the schedule. A schedule is still in place, but it has become more fluid and the children ‘ebb and flow’ between their activities and indoor/outdoor environments.

5.2.3 A Slow Pedagogy to Foster Collaboration and Foster Relationships

Interactions and relationships were the first clear observation that revealed the positive impact that a slow pedagogy had on the children. More time and more collaborative art-based projects allowed children to become deeper involved, sharing resources and space with each other. The children may have worked individually sometimes but they were a part of something bigger. They learned from each other, they learned to wait, they learned to collaborate and share. It was a very happy conclusion that new relationships were fostered, and connections made as a by-product to fostering a slow pedagogy. It is by no means a by-product but the most substantial finding from my research. A slow pedagogy in my context revealed time as the essential element to forming relationships, time spent together.

5.3 Limitations of the Study

5.3.1 Documenting evidence

This research study was conducted in a preschool for children with physical disabilities. There were six participants, three boys and three girls. The observations were conducted in the classroom and in the outside surroundings of the school. There is a mix of verbal and non-verbal communication abilities among the children. Observations of a child's input (non-verbal) to an activity was multi-dimensional – using a photograph, writing an observation, recording and reflecting on these in my reflective journal. Although, much evidence of participation was captured on the part of the child and on my co-participation with the child, recording our time on video may have provided a fuller picture of how a slow pedagogy allows a non-verbal, more dependent child reveal what they are thinking and learning. Is it time to harness the potential of digital tools to document and assess, broaden and deepen the meaning-making to establish that all children's learning is valued, in its many forms.

5.3.2 Previous Research

As I began to read about slow pedagogy, I discovered a lack of previous research on the topic, literature on slow pedagogy is embryonic. I am aware of a research project, soon to be published, a collaboration of Froebel Trust and Angela Clarke on 'Slow Knowledge and the unhurried child: time for slow pedagogies in Early Childhood Education'. It is a most welcome study.

I discovered too that research on children with disabilities in a preschool setting is difficult to find. Some possible reasons may be that researchers see the ethical rigour of working with young

children much greater. The use of multi-media approaches would need to be employed to facilitate all children's participation and freedom of expression. I had to draw upon literature from Irish settings catering for some children with disabilities mixed with mainstream children. I read literature from other countries which have further developed their preschool settings to be inclusive of all abilities. Reggio Emilia use the term 'children with additional needs.'

5.3.3 Researcher Bias

Within SSAR there is the potential for researcher bias to influence findings. However, this influence was controlled by having the data and findings reviewed by my critical friends and validation group. Observation notes were written up as soon as was possible to ensure clarity of these observations recorded.

5.4 Recommendations for Further Research

Firstly, an area to explore would be a comparative study with a mainstream preschool and the introduction of a slow pedagogy. Secondly, as the children progress to reception class in the same school, a slow pedagogy may or may not be feasible for their new teacher. Thirdly, the impact of a global pandemic allows educators a reason to view a slow pedagogy as a new way of thinking about children. Froebelian principles certainly reflect many of the aspects of a slow pedagogy.

Research into fostering slow pedagogy on a whole school basis could be the next step in this model. Certainly, pinpointing one area that would be a starting point for every class, within their school day, would be feasible. The morning greeting and settling in time created a calm start to our day.

5.5 Disseminating Research

I have been asked to give a presentation to my colleagues in school discussing my research procedure and outline of my findings. My colleague in Preschool, who was part of the validation group, has already expressed an interest in working with me and developing a slow pedagogy for the two years of preschool. A recommendation has been suggested by the principal to present my findings at a future staff meeting for possible implementation in other classrooms.

I am a member of Early Childhood Ireland and possibly they may have an interest in hearing about my research as part of their Scéalta blog series.

Submissions to REACH, a journal of inclusive education in Ireland can be made and it is something I would consider doing. The journal provides an opportunity for those involved and interested in inclusive and special education to publish articles based on their practice, research and experience.

5.6 Impact on Practice

The most significant impact of this research study has been on the children in preschool. They now have an effective thinking environment; they are getting an opportunity to think. I am getting to view their thinking, through verbal and non-verbal contributions and behaviour. I am more present to extend their thinking, if needed or to move their thinking to another interest.

The aim of SSAR is to improve the practice of the teacher. The aim of my SSAR was to foster a slow pedagogy in the preschool. I am confident that I have achieved this aim. I have learned how to question and deconstruct my teaching, and I have embraced an alternative way of thinking of the child, myself, the team of SNAs, the preschool environment and the content.

Being Slow means that you control the rhythms of your own life. You don't decide how fast you have to go in any given context. If today I want to go fast, I go fast; if tomorrow I want to go slow. I go slow. What we are fighting for is the right to determine our own tempos.

Carlo Petrini

Appendices

Appendix 1. Research Schedule

August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Research question explored ▪ Reflective Journal Begun
September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Research proposal is submitted ▪ Reflective Journal ▪ Discuss with Principal
October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ongoing lectures which inform ethical research and reflection ▪ Reflective Journal
November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Receive permission from Board of Management ▪ Seek Ethical Approval from Charity which the School is governed by ▪ Reflective Journal
December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ethical approval received ▪ Information relayed to parents over telephone ▪ Permissions received from parents, children, critical friends ▪ Reflective Journal
January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reflective Journal ▪ Plan for research themes written ▪ School closed, online learning resumes
February	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reflective Journal ▪ Re-engagement with children face-to-face ▪ Date decided to begin research

Research begins on Monday, March 1st 2021. Fortnightly themes are used.

Daily:

Observations by Special Needs Assistants and myself begin. Observation notes and observation checklist used. Daily reflection through informal discussion with SNA team and reflective journal written.

Weekly:

Meeting face-to-face/on-line/telephone with validation group members. Informal discussion on activities with critical friends on week finished and week ahead.

Appendix 2**Research Cycles and Themes****Cycle One**

March 1st – March 5th

Theme: Me and My Body

Story: From Head to Toe – Eric Carle

- Identifying/Naming some body parts
- Can you...? I can do it!

March 8th – March 12th

Theme: Me and My Body

Story: Here we go round the Mulberry Bush - Barefoot books

- Movement with our bodies – indoors and outdoors

March 15th – March 19th

Theme: Spring

Story: The very Lazy Ladybug – Isobel Finn & Jack Tickle

- Resting our bodies. Exploring the insects found in the garden and how they move – fast/slow
- Hide and Seek

March 22nd – March 26th

Theme: Spring/Easter

Story: Wow! Said the Owl – Tim Hopgood

- Colour hunts – indoors and outdoors
- Rainbows – colours and sounds

- Creating arcs and circles on the floor using our whole body on a large sheet of paper and crayons/chalks

Research was collected and reflected on throughout Cycle One. Strategies were changed for Cycle Two to reflect the fostering of a slow pedagogy. The themes chosen for cycle two were planned based on the emerging interests of the children.

Cycle Two

May 10th – May 14th

Theme: Friends

Story: The Rainbow Fish – Marcus Pfister

'I'm glad you're my friend' booklet

- Modelling how to ask someone to play
- Emphasis on changing partner and taking turns to dance/move/hold hands with another child.
- Moving to 'Aquarium' from Carnival of the Animals
- Waterplay outside, going fishing.
- Child-led co-creating

May 17th – May 21st

Theme: Friends

Story: The Rainbow Fish – Marcus Pfister

- Colouring on a large sheet of hanging plastic, recreating an underwater world. Using markers, paint and tissue paper to stick onto the plastic surface. Stretching up and bending

down, working in partners and in a whole group

- Connecting with a friend on the other side, reaching out and saying hello through the plastic.
- Painting outside on the see-through easel
- Child-led co-exploration

May 24th – May 28th

Theme: Our favourite things

Story: The very Hungry Caterpillar

- Choosing and preparing our favourite food for snack and lunch. Chopping our bananas, spreading crackers and toast with butter. Mixing a smoothie.
- Exploring the space within a large mosquito net, how would we use it? Compare to the cocoon of the caterpillar. Moving and stretching and wriggling. Sharing our cocoon.
- Child-led co-exploration

May 31st – June 4th

Theme: Our favourite things

Story: The very Hungry Caterpillar

- Create a whole group collage of coloured cellophane and then cut into butterfly shapes. Stick to pegs and clip butterflies onto shrubs/our clothes. Stretching to pull them off.
- Large arm movements like the fluttering butterfly. Wear large translucent, colourful scarves as wings and fly like a butterfly. Invite our friends to fly together, indoors and outdoors.
- Child-led co-exploration

Reflective journal and observational notes continued to be used. Alongside these, children's photographs augmented the slow pedagogy and documentation process. These were placed in photograph folders and formed part of some learning stories. These helped towards enriching the learning of the children, learning by the adults when revisited at another time.

Appendix 3 Letter Seeking Permission from Parents

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

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

Dear Parent(s),

I am currently studying for a Master's degree in Education (Research in Practice) at Maynooth University Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education. As part of my degree, I am doing a research project. The focus of my research is based on improving children's engagement with their learning and how I, as their teacher, can foster a slow pedagogy in the Preschool using movement-based activities to awaken their engagement.

To do this, I intend to carry out research in the classroom and/or through online learning by incorporating movement for learning, movement for relaxation and movement for body awareness and coordination using fun and creative activities.

The data will be collected using observations, photographs (no faces), a daily teacher reflective journal, questionnaires, observations and informal interviews. The children will be asked about the extent to which they enjoyed the activities through discussion, the use of assistive technology and through pictures and objects of reference.

Your 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 to withdraw from the research process without comment or question.

All information will be destroyed in a stated timeframe in accordance with University guidelines and School policy. Research will not be carried out until approval is granted by the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education.

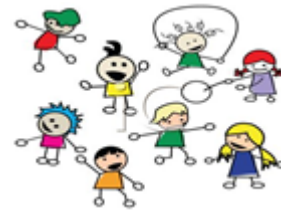
I would like to invite you and your child to give permission to take part in this project.

If you have any queries on any part of this research project, feel free to contact me by email at audrey.fagan.2021@mumail.ie

Yours faithfully,

.....

Appendix 4 Children's Information and Consent



Child's name.....

I am trying to find out how children like to move when learning. How do they like to move their arms and legs? I would like to join you when you are playing, are you happy for me to do that?



I have asked your Mum and Dad to talk to you about this. If you have any questions about it, I would be happy to answer them. If you are happy to take part, please make a fingerprint or handprint on the form that I have sent home. If you change your mind after we start, that is ok, we can stop working on it at any time.

Appendix 5

Parental Consent form



**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 I voluntarily agree with the participation of my child in this study. I understand that I can withdraw my child at any time without consequences of any kind. I understand that all data collected in this study will be destroyed in a stated timeframe in accordance with University guidelines and School policy. I am aware that I will receive a copy of this consent form for my information.

Parent / Guardian Signature _____

Date: _____

Parent / Guardian Signature _____

Date: _____

Name of Child _____

Child's consent/Identification Mark (Finger or handprint)

Appendix 6**Information for Parents**

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

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

**Information Sheet
Parents**

Who is this information sheet for?

This information sheet is for parents of the children involved in the research.

What is this Action Research Project about?

Students of the Master of Education in the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood, Maynooth University are required to conduct an action research project in their classroom. Self-study Action research is a method of research whereby you study an area of your practice which you seek to improve or transform and to develop new knowledge within. I am doing this research to find ways of encouraging children to move while learning pre-numeracy and pre-literacy skills. Data will be generated using observation, reflective notes, interviews, and questionnaires. The teacher is then required to produce a thesis documenting this action research project.

What sorts of research methods will be used?

- Observation, Daily Journal, Photographs (no faces), Reflective tasks, Note taking and post research questionnaire.
- Informal interviews will occur with each of the participating child's parents. Questions will be semi-structured and open-ended in nature and be provided to parents beforehand.

Who else will be involved?

The study will be carried out by me, Audrey Fagan as part of the Master of Education course in the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education. The class team of three Special Needs Assistants will be part of the process also. The research will be based in the children's classroom and/or online. To enable all the children, access the activities to the best of their ability, I will engage the class Physiotherapist and visiting Visual artist, when required.

What are you being asked to do?

You are being asked for your consent to permit me to undertake this study with the children in my class. Adults engaged with the children will partake in an informal group interview as part of the data collection process. I would see the informal interview happening over the phone. They will be done twice over the course of the research study – firstly after the initial four-week research and then secondly on completion of the research.

Please note, you can withdraw from the study at any time without reason.

What will happen to the data collected?

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.

Throughout the writing of the thesis, I will be supervised by Dr. Triona Stokes, Maynooth University. The thesis will be submitted for assessment to the module leader Dr. Bernadette Wrynn and will be examined by the Department staff at Maynooth University. The external examiners will also access the final thesis.

I would be grateful to have your permission to use any evaluation or feedback that you might give me, as data for my research. If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to ask.

Contact details: Audrey Fagan **E:** audrey.fagan.2021@mumail.ie

Appendix 7

Declaration by Researcher

**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:

Date:

Appendix 8

Child's Assent



**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 Mum and Dad have read the information sheet with me and
I am happy to take part in moving activities in class or
online with my friends.**

Name of child (in block capitals):

Handprint

Date: _____

Appendix 9**Information for Critical Friends and Validation Group**

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

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

Information Sheet**Who is this information sheet for?**

This information sheet is for adults involved in the care and development of the children and with whom I share the classroom. It is for the class teacher from Preschool 1, the Resource teacher, the visiting visual artist, and the class physiotherapist.

What is this Action Research Project about?

Students of the Master of Education in the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood, Maynooth University are required to conduct an action research project in their classroom. Self-study Action research is a method of research whereby you study an area of your practice which you seek to improve or transform and to develop new knowledge within. I am doing this research to find ways of encouraging children to move while learning pre-numeracy and pre-literacy skills. Data will be generated using observation, reflective notes, interviews, and questionnaires. The teacher is then required to produce a thesis documenting this action research project.

What are the research questions?

- How can I engage children in movement-based activities that will stimulate their learning, productivity, and creativity?
- What movement-based activities do the children enjoy at present? How do I differentiate activities for children?
- What range of physical movement can each child achieve now and how challenging should I create movement-based activities?
- How did the children, who completed the movement-based intervention, respond, and feel about the activities?
- How did the parents of the children offer feedback on their children's experience of movement-based intervention?

- How did adults participating in the intervention offer feedback on their experience of movement-based activities?

What sorts of research methods will be used?

- Observation, Daily Journal, Photographs (no faces), Reflective tasks, Note taking and Questionnaires. Informal interviews will occur with the different groupings of critical friends.

Who else will be involved?

The study will be carried out by me, Audrey Fagan as part of the Master of Education course in the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education. The class team of three Special Needs Assistants will be part of the process also. The research will be based in the children's classroom and/or online, on a small group set up of seven children with physical disabilities and additional special needs.

To enable all the children, access the activities to the best of their ability, I will engage the class Physiotherapist and visiting Visual artist, when required.

What are you being asked to do?

You are being asked for your consent to permit me to undertake this study with the children in my class.

Adults engaged with the children will partake in informal group discussions as part of the data collection process. All three Special Needs Assistants will form one group. This group will discuss and feedback weekly on research. The validation group, which is comprised of the Preschool 1 teacher will meet on two occasions, once during the research and again when the research is complete. The Physiotherapist will have two informal meetings as described for the critical friends' group. The visual artist, when in attendance, will have an informal meeting after the session. These meetings may occur online or in person.

To be noted, you can withdraw from the study at any time without reason.

What will happen to the data collected?

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.

Throughout the writing of the thesis, I will be supervised by Dr. Triona Stokes, Maynooth University. The thesis will be submitted for assessment to the module leader Dr. Bernadette Wrynn and will be examined by the Department staff at Maynooth University. The external examiners will also access the final thesis.

I would be grateful to have your permission to use any evaluation or feedback that you might give me, as data for my research. If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to ask.

Contact details: Audrey Fagan

E: Audrey.Fagan.2021@mumail.ie

Appendix 10

Consent to Participate in Research

ADULT CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH FORM

I have read the information provided in the attached letter and all my questions have been satisfactorily answered.

I voluntarily agree to help facilitate this research study.

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

I understand that even if I agree to help now, I can withdraw at any time without any consequences of any kind.

I understand that all the data collected in this study is confidential and anonymous.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 11 **Observation Checklist – Research Cycle One**

Observation Checklist

Date:

- 1. Was there children’s decision-making and choice-taking throughout the process?**

Rarely ---1---2---3---4--- Consistently

- 2. Was the correct pacing used throughout?**

Rarely ---1---2---3---4--- Consistently

- 3. Did the children connect with the process?**

Rarely ---1---2---3---4--- Consistently

- 4. Allows for children to compare, contrast, reflect on their learning**

Rarely ---1---2---3---4--- Consistently

- 5. Have the children developed an interest that they’d like to further extend?**

Rarely ---1---2---3---4--- Consistently

Other Comments Welcome:

Appendix 12 Observation Checklist – Research Cycle Two**1. Did I interact positively with the children?****When? How?**

- Greetings
- Snack times
- One-to-one interactions
- Small group activities
- Whole group activities

Comment:

2. Did I extend learning? How?

- Questions
- Modelling
- Demonstrating
- Encourage peer interaction.

Comment:

3. Did I support the child who has difficulty in interacting with others?**How?**

- Negotiation
- Compromise
- Listening
- Naming emotions and acknowledgement
- Co-exploration

Comment

4. Did I support and enable the child who may have had difficulties 'gaining entry' to and sustaining curiosity/interest in learning?**How?**

- Joint attention
- Offering choice
- Visual prompts
- Sensory materials
- Time given
- Song/rhyme/Music

Comment

Appendix 13**Qi gong Exercises****Qi gong sequence for Preschool 2**

Breathing

- Smell the flower and blow out candles X 3
- Bee breath – breathe in, breathe out with a zzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz X 3
- Snake breath - breathe in, breathe out with a sssssssssss X 3
- Belly breath/balloon breath – hands on the belly, breathe in and fill your belly up like a balloon, let the balloon go and breathe a big breath out.

Movement:

1. **Knocking on the door of life** – let your hands swing around your middle from side to side. Then let one hand come up to knock on your chest as you swing.
Let you hand come up to knock on your shoulder as you swing.
Reverse the sequence back down to the middle and let your hands come slowly back to still at your sides.
2. **Tapping** – Warm up your hands and tap each part of your body from head to toe.
3. **Paintbrush** – Hands by your side, bring hands above your head and then let your hands move down slowly while pretending to paint an imaginary piece of paper with your fingertips – 3 times.
4. **Tiger clears the way** – Hands up to your heads with palms together, let hands swing down on either side of your body (as if clearing through the jungle).
5. **Flower bud opening** – Hands together at your belly, hands go up to the sky around in a circle and back together at the belly X 3
6. **Pushing up sky , bringing down earth** – one hand up and one hand down, alternate (looks like swimming).
7. **Harnessing the moon** – Hands up to the sky as if to catch the moon, hands back down past the body (circular motion) – Flow as long as you want...
8. Shake out and brush off.

Appendix 14

TacPac Information

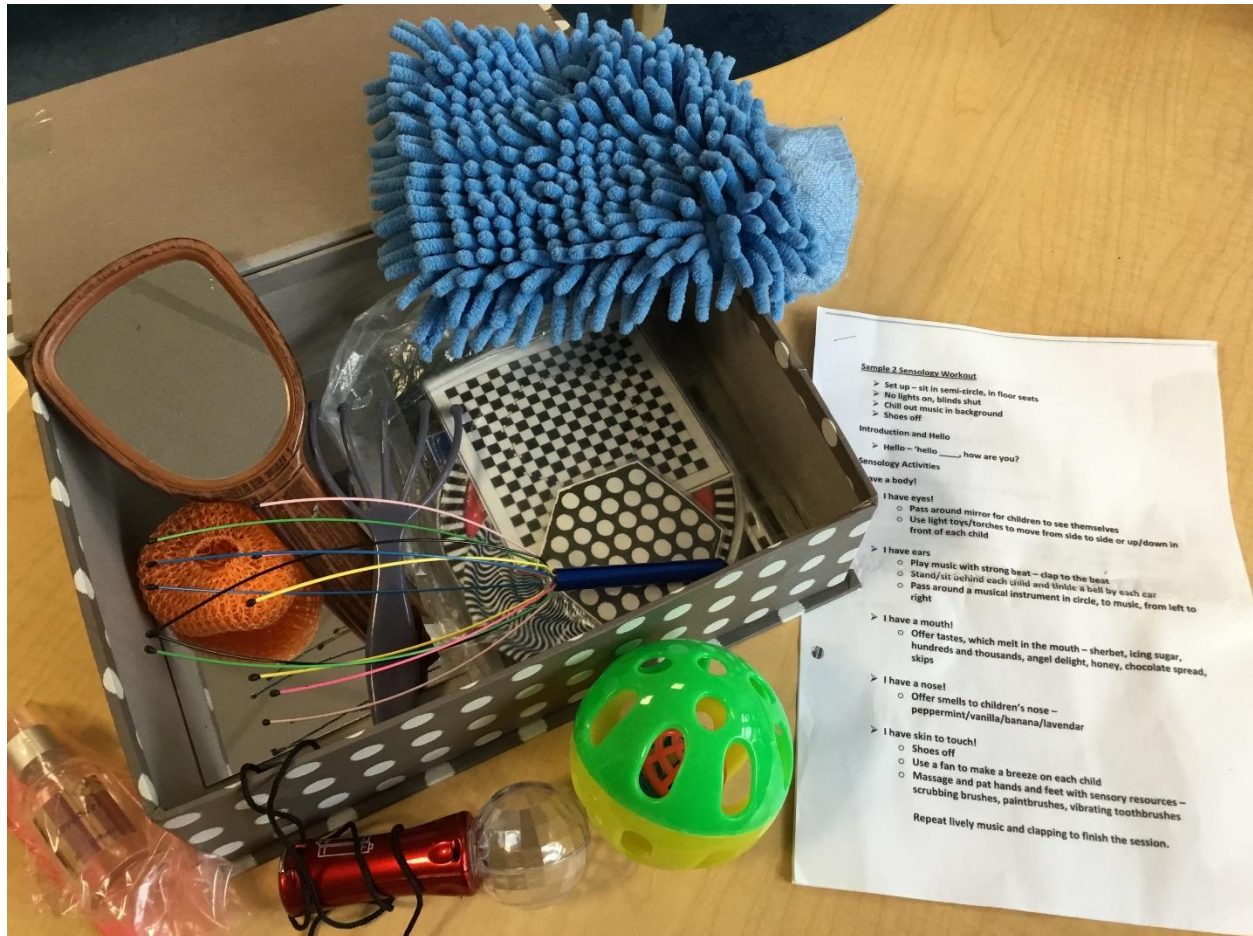


Set One TACPAC. Each child has their own folder of instructions with necessary resources.

Music to accompany each movement is provided.

Appendix 15

Sensology Resources (Flo Longhorn)



Sensology resources include instructions and items that awaken the senses – sound, visual, taste, smell, touch and movement.

Appendix 16 Modes of Communication



A Communications Board. Children and adults can point to common vocabulary to create 1/2/3/ or more word sentences, depending on level of child's ability. They are used wherever a child or children gather.



A Big Mac. This is a recordable device that allows a recording of a voice/sound to be played back when the big button is pressed. It encourages cause and effect and allows a child communicate with others. News of the day can be recorded to send home and the child, when ready can press to hear it. They can be used to initiate a game, repeat a common occurring line from a story.



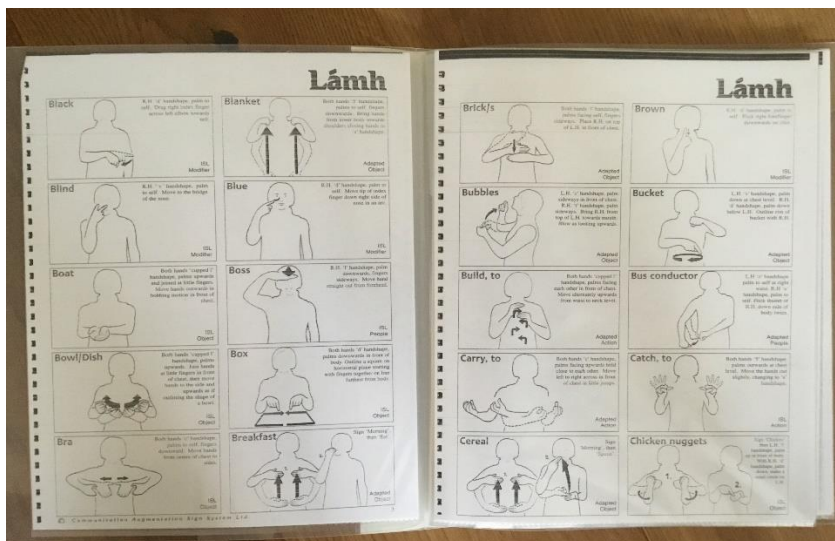
A visual timetable. The board on the left holds the selection of activities. The board on the right is where the activities are placed to inform the child what will happen first, next and then.



Objects of reference timetable. Small objects are used to create a visual and a tactile reference to an activity. Objects augment the vocabulary and understanding of an activity.



Buttons with two words 'more' and 'stop'. These are used prior to introducing a more complex form of assistive technology. They allow the child express themselves as they play and learn.



A selection of Lámh signs which are used to aid receptive and expressive language. Lámh signing is different to sign language as the word is spoken at the same time as the sign is given.

Appendix 17 Learning Story for Child01

Dear Child01,

I just had to write down how wonderful I felt after our time spent exploring our frames of colours today. You had joined the rest of your friends over at the mat and the coloured plastic took your interest. You were listening and watching how others were exploring. A sense of calm was all around when you approached with your frame of colours, slowly, inquisitively towards me. You had been looking at the frame for some time; turning it around in your hands, bringing it up to your face, your eyes, vocalising as you did this.

You stood to your feet and took small steps around the mat, still looking and turning the frame in your hand. You made your way towards me as I was saying your name. In a moment, we both crossed over the bridge of communication, from either side and at the same time! Meeting in the middle, both our eyes looked through the coloured frame and you chuckled. What a connection! We shared a few moments together, looking and listening to one another.

Saying 'I see you; Child 01 sees lots of colours' and 'Hello Child 01'. You continued to look at me, at my eyes, and listening with your infectious giggle. As an educator I would write about 'sustained shared thinking', making a deep connection. As your preschool teacher I would write about how my heart was jumping with joy and that the 18-month wait for this moment was so worth it.

Audrey



Appendix 18 Learning Story Child02

Dear Child02,

I'm writing to you to say how incredible it was to see your resilience and motivation reward you today.

We had spent almost an hour creating our blue collage with mixed media materials. The last material I introduced were paint pots – small circles of solid paint. We had explored rolling them, stamping them and pushing them along the paper. The really fun part was yet to come with the introduction of water sprayers!

Yes, the water spray made you giggle; it was fun pretending it was raining inside! You leapt and giggled into the spray and away again. Child02, your curiosity began to reveal itself then.

'I want a turn!'; 'Can I spray?' You squealed with delight! No matter how hard you tried, your small hands stretched, twisted and just couldn't pull the trigger! You persisted and persisted and suddenly I heard 'I did it!'

You had figured out to use both your hands, the right hand leaning the bottle over and giving stability on the mat, the left hand pushing in the trigger. The smallest amount of spray at first and then swoosh! Bigger sprays to wet the paint block!

Your sense of an achievement was so clear in your voice, your smile and your actions! In fact, I think this is going to be a daily request from you!

Audrey



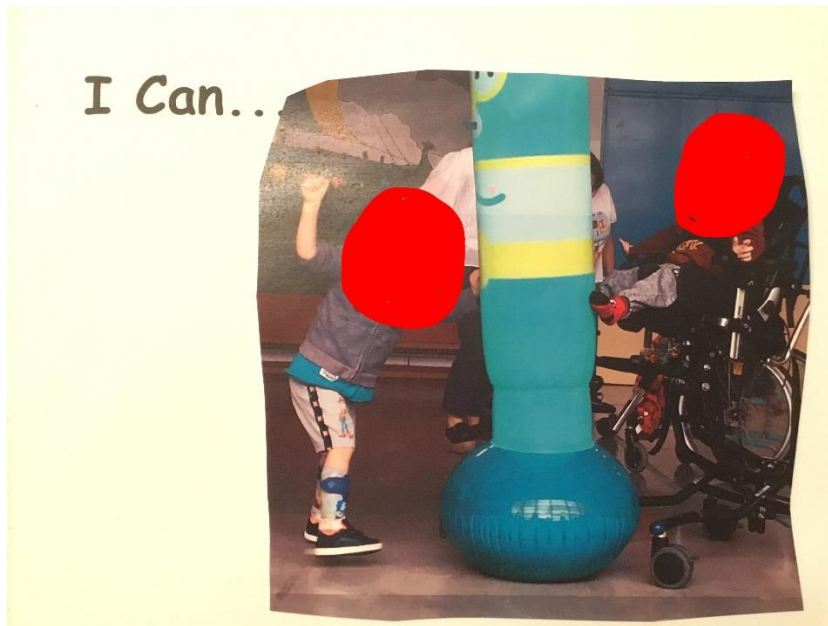
Appendix 19 Extract of email from a Member of Validation Group

I think you are a very good communicator with the children & staff; you give very clear instructions, feedback, support to them & give them time to interact with you. You are very adept at reading the children & getting to know their routine behaviours & what they mean thereby responding to this & acting accordingly to avoid any crisis developing. You have a delightful calm manner & you laugh a lot. The children get lots of different learning experiences in your class from painting, nature walks, water play, dressing up, art & crafts it's quite a show & I'd say for the children one of the main reasons they enjoy their time there so much. You were the first teacher I had worked so closely with doing the bag books with yourself & Alison in SLT – I loved that time & the kids took to it hugely. Again with the Yoga for the Special Child, that was another first & once you engaged with it lots of the other teachers wanted to as well, which pissed my manager off no end 😊😊 so you're an innovator & very creative. Your job is taken up with engaging parents & professionals too which is no easy task. I find you are very willing to engage with therapists & use their skills to enhance the engagement of the children in the curriculum. Not all teachers do that, they view therapists as pests in the main who just want to disrupt their class. Managing parental expectations is a real challenge but you seem to be able to manage that with real skill & ease.

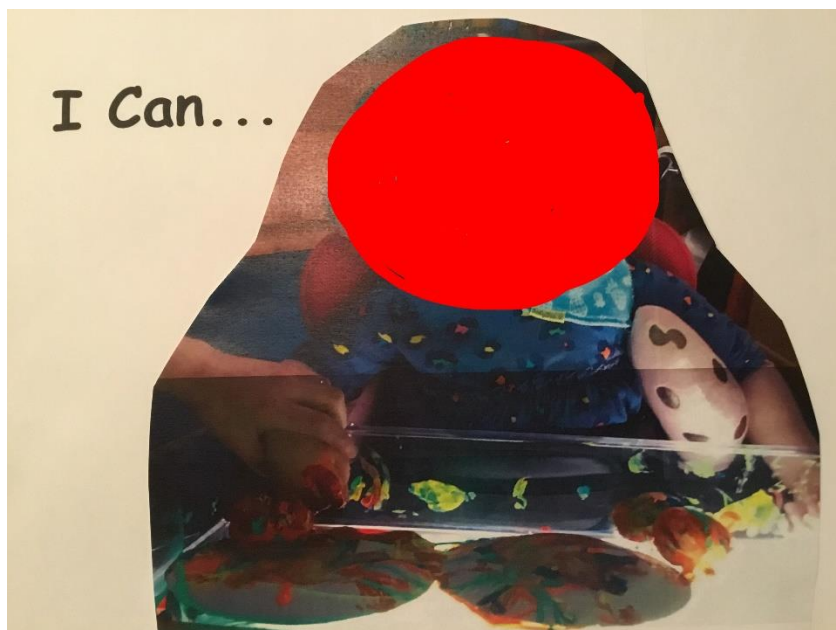
You don't come across as the 'Boss' in the class & have an egalitarian approach allowing banter to flow freely & taking the minor criticisms from your staff with aplomb. You seem to actively foster that approach which may be frowned upon in certain quarters but it works as the staff really respond to it & demonstrate a great deal of respect & support for you as their 'manager'. I notice that other teachers also have a lot of respect for you & you seem to get on with the majority of them, from what I see.

Appendix 20

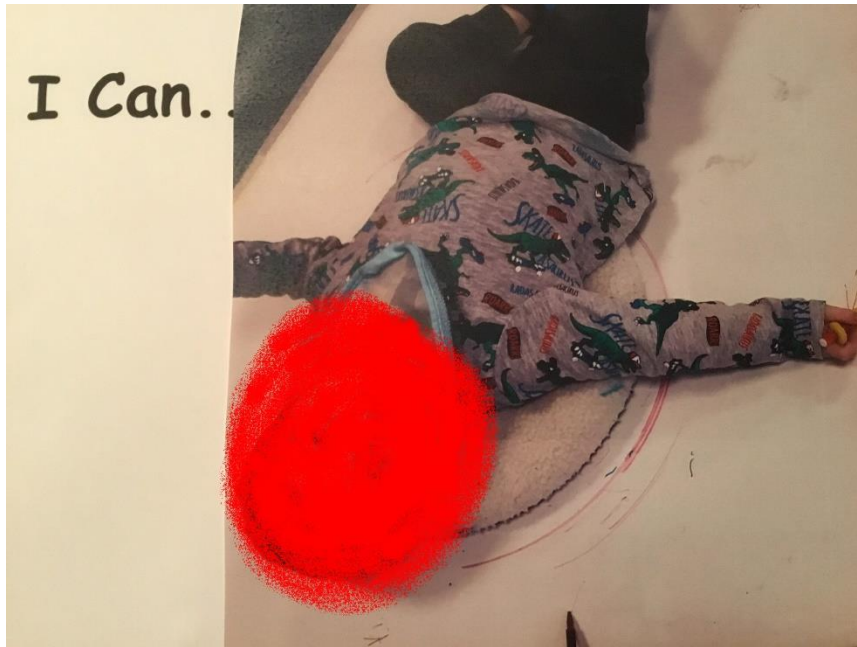
Some I Can Photos that Children Loved



...punch and kick with my friend.



...explore paint on the light table.



...spin around and draw circles.



...sing a song and share a leaf with my friend.

Appendix 21 Extract of Reflection from Observations

May 19th 2021

Really enjoying the morning greeting and extending now into calendar work and weather. I find I'm getting more in-depth conversation and engagement from the children, or is this my imagination?? Well only time will tell! We had a wonderful hour of Music and movement using instruments and actions! The guiro was introduced and it caused such laughing from Aa! And what a wonderful laugh he has! We count 1,2, 3 before singing or saying our rhymes. Using visuals, the children can choose their own rhyme. I've introduced asking if they'd like to sing the rhyme a second time and they are mostly asking to sing it again! I would have done that from time to time in the past but now I do it with each child.

While the IT teacher came in to take some of the children for IT skills, I worked with the other children on throwing and catching skills. We also did a hide and seek game with the farm animals from the story 'Mrs Wishy Washy'. This was an unexpected success! Again, again! Hiding the animals over and over in various locations around the classroom and then going to look for the 'escaped' animals was super fun, for adults too! One of the SNAs introduced clues as she was having so much enjoyment from the excitement that the game was generating! There was a plan for playdough and building but the hide and seek had all the children engaged and isn't that what slow pedagogy is all about? I think so!

It rained so heavily in the afternoon when we were about to read the story. Up I jumped and had the children come over to the window to observe the rain. What did they think? Hear? See? How about going outside? Noooo, many of them said, but O was giggling and with that twinkle in her eye, I opened the door to the outside.... they took turns sticking their hands out in the rain! Oh no! They laughed at the fun of it and getting 'wet'.

May 20th 2021

Using the visual schedule with L has been a huge help in directing him, first thing in the morning. Coat, bag and hand washing are being done with a little verbal prompting. Ad has benefitted from one to one at the beginning of each morning. It has been easier this week as there has been just 5 children in. How will it work out next week? I'll have to look at grouping 2/3 children together and changing the timetable a little to accommodate Ad. I have made a very conscious decision to spend time with each child, at a one-to-one level. It is difficult but if I can spend just a few minutes connecting with each child on their work or play, acknowledging their learning, through a comment, a touch, a thumbs up, eye to eye engagement etc can build on the relationships I have with each child.

L was really fascinated with the finger light today. I loved watching how absorbed he got with moving the lights in and out from the cardboard background and then they got his eye as he was moving about and he saw the light on the ground. he started to move his feet as if he was trying to avoid stepping on the lights as he moved his hands around! Ad tracked the lights as I moved them from behind the plastic curtain. Taking my time to stop and start the movement allowed him not to lose interest. Im was asleep when we explored the lights. I had hung strips of fluorescent plastic from the line in the classroom and we spent a lot of time passing through them. She loved the slow movement through the strips, as I pulled her through, I would say, 'Where's Im?' 'peek-a-boo!' 'There she is!' It was one of the best days we've had with her. She was so responsive today and really good eye contact.

During rhymes today, L chose '_Ring a ring a Rosie'. He immediately asked for the hulla hoop. He was delighted to hang on to it and help his friend Aa grasp the hoop so we could all sing the rhyme and fall down! There have been a number of occasions now where I have noted L being

more considerate of including the other children in play/music. He gave a soft toy to Aa one day when he saw him upset. He held Ad's hand during a dance party we had, cautiously, as they have had some misunderstandings in the past, but he wanted to hold his hand and he held good eye contact with him. We sang Ring a ring Rosie 5 times, and I could see the real enjoyment as we shared the words and actions and laughing all together.

May 21st 2021

The children are beginning to use the picture books after snack to chat about what they see. The picture books show the activities that they have engaged in over the week each day. L was always interested in himself alone but lately has begun commenting on what he sees his friends doing. I hadn't realised how incredible this resource could be. The children are reflecting on their activities, I can gain an insight into what they really enjoyed and what they would like to do again or not revisit! L has been more willing to use his communications device which is super. Tell L, who do you see in the picture? What are they doing? Do you think they look happy, sad, curious? What day did we play with the sand outside? etc. He is keener to use his device than ever before. Aa is transitioning from objects to symbols and allowing more time with this will hopefully help his learning. It is certainly allowing us to tune into his choice making, the child's agency, is emerging and together we are enabling this to happen.

We painted farm animals today, each child had a cow, pig and duck template. They chose their colours, reds and pinks and yellows for the animals! I was delighted that their creativity and agency was allowed to flourish, I could have said red for a cow?? But instead, I stayed in the moment and allowed their choice to stand. **In fact, what I learned was quite revealing! Choosing red for a cow enabled a conversation between myself and Ol to develop. Had she seen red cows before, 'yes' was her answer! How many? 5! As she holds up 1 finger! So now I see her imagination developing.... the joys of young children and their learning.**

Appendix 22 Post-research Questionnaire

ACTION RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE – PARENTS

Engaging Children in Movement Activities Guided by a Slow Pedagogy Framework

When thinking about your child’s holistic development please answer the following:

1, Do you think your child’s engagement with sensory activities has improved?

YES

NO

Yes

Please explain: Without a doubt there has been a significant improvement in engagement with sensory activities. She went from be completely adverse to certain noises and textures to being excited to try new things.

2. I have seen photographs of my child engaged in sensory activities that look fun. I would be willing to try these at home.

YES

NO

Yes

Please explain: We have successfully tried some sensory activities at home having been inspired by photographs from class as well as direction from Audrey. The photographs helped as we could see how much she enjoyed activities we never would have thought of or wouldn’t have been confident to try before.

.....

.....

3. Did you engage with relaxation movement activities, Qi gong/TAC PAC at home?

YES

NO

Yes

Please explain: Especially after experiencing Qi gong on the class zoom calls we tried it at home and found it great for the family. TAC PAC activities too. Its great to get the ideas and direction and the confidence that comes from the child having already experienced this in class and therefore being more open to recreating at home.

4. Further sensory activities to initiate movement would be most welcome to try at home.

YES

NO

Yes

Please explain: New ideas always welcome. The activities we have recreated at home were so successful we would love more to try. Even just the idea of sticking pages to a vertical surface for colouring has been a big hit and helped with shoulder movement and balance exercise

Any other comments:

I wouldn't have realized the importance of movement in the learning experience without Audrey helping and introducing these exercises to us. I loved getting the information on

what was being done in class and having the opportunity to try these activities at home. As a parent I can struggle to think of fun activities that add benefit and having the ideas and encouragement coming from pre-school was really helpful and welcome

Appendix 23

Reflective Journal Pages - Samples

Challenges

- Outdoor space
- Time to replace videos even take them in the first place
- Parents engagement with screen play
- Adult-child ratio
- Hourly interruptions or regular

July 5th 21

Findings

- More freedom
- Stretch with a flexible structure
- Further, more in depth commitment to developing warm, close relationships with them.
- Video of clin. engaging in play projects better than 100 photos!
- 1 core wrap to keep on learning, improving, exploring, old & new wrap of how John learn.
- Facilitator? Educator? Activator?
- Knowledge, power, authority

21/5/21

Why Slow Pedagogy?

Gives me language to frame my strategies / methods / wrap of working with John.

It gives me a skeleton upon which I can hang the meaty parts - that content + strategy, skills + knowledge, reflections / documentation

The clin are the food that fuels the whole being.

These relationships / dialogue, observations, clin's lead interests

* The art of "staring" with your eyes, nose, touch ears, mouth in moments.

deeper thought and time to these fundamental quests -

Most of my teaching coming from the learner to begin with

They inform me - content, interests, skills that need to be taught + strengthened.

It's all about timing and being deliberate

16/04/21 John & the Inside Educ. point

Reflection - how do you reflect on what you've done when you can prob. only remember 20% of what went on? What about the other 80%? I've nursed it on - Love this!

Is valuation a better thing to do? More specific?

21/ April 21

Abici Cuidado with disabilities

What we do - bucket loads of empathy, patience, worldly experience of hospitals, specialists, equipment, mess, doctors, care, gentle voice & movements, appointments, operations, diagnosis

- What impact does all of this have on their emotional/social development, intelligence?

- How can I begin to explore these experiences lived through 4-5 years through

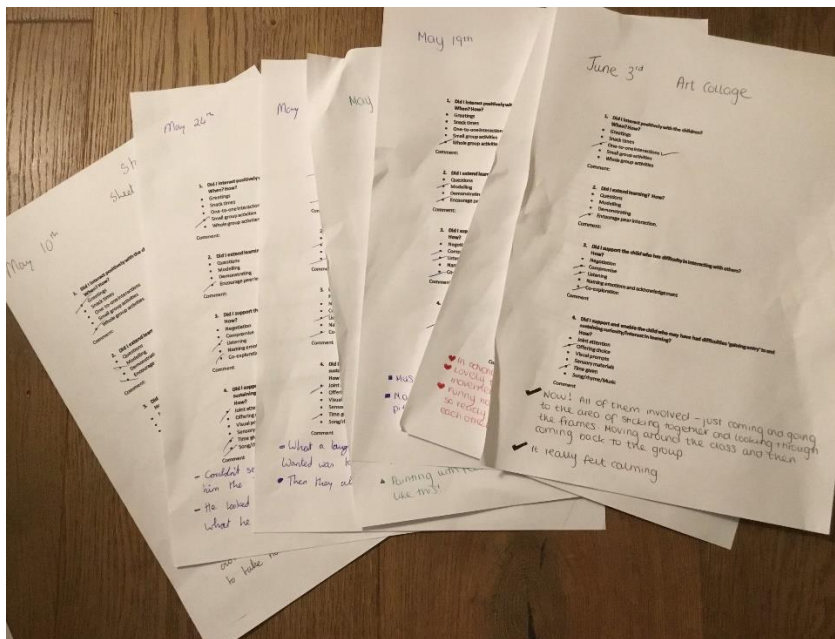
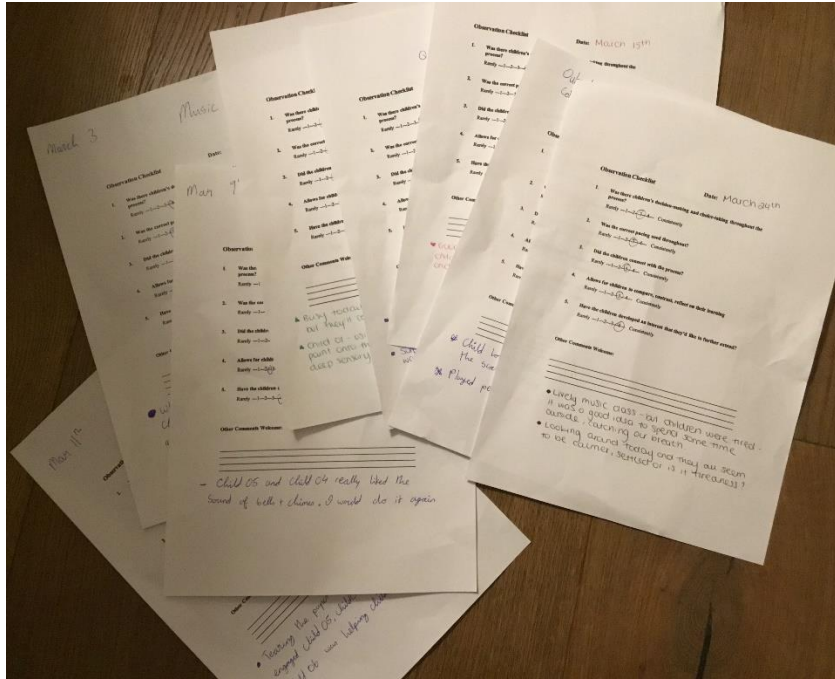
When I think about & reflect on the many clin. that have been in my classroom, over almost 30 years, the gifts I've received from them is substantial.

Not worldly gifts but gifts of kindness, joy, patience, gratitude, the here & now, risk-taking, fun celebrating the small stuff - long before COVID hit!

To see their joy + even their disgust at exploring

Appendix 24

Observation Forms - Samples



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