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How can I encourage emotional expression and awareness through the use of drama methodologies?

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Ciara Heslin

23/9/21

Abstract

This dissertation seeks to explore how I can encourage emotional awareness and expression through the use of drama methodologies. This study aims to investigate the findings of prioritising the emotional well-being of students through drama lessons. This research took place in a Junior Infants in a gaelscoil, with 19 participants in the research.

The intervention lasted eight weeks was broken into two phases. Phase 1 consisted of drama games which introduced the children to dramatic conventions, while Phase 2 lasted six weeks and consisted of drama lessons which used a wordless picture book as a stimulus. Data was collected through baseline and closing interviews, observations and a teacher reflective journal. Triangulation was achieved by reflecting on the data collected in accompaniment with the use of relevant literature and consultation with a critical friends.

Following the use of thematic analysis to interpret the data, three clear findings emerged from the study (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Firstly, the children became more comfortable and open with sharing their emotions; secondly, the intervention improved the emotional skills of children who were struggling to socialise with their peers; and finally that the children began to contextualise both their and others' emotions.

As a result of these findings, recommendations are provided as to how this study can be implemented and improved upon. The findings indicate that by using drama lessons to support emotional awareness, children become more willing to discuss their emotions, and more expressive about describing how they feel. The findings also indicated that this emphasis on emotional learning developed the social skills of some children in the class. As such, this research concludes that drama methodologies are an appropriate tool to encourage the emotional awareness and expression, and that this will create a classroom culture that promotes the emotional well-being of the children.

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List of Abbreviations

CASEL: Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning

DES: Department of Education and Skills

NCCA: National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

NEPS: National Educational Psychological Service

SEL: Social and Emotional Learning

SPHE: Social Personal and Health Education

1. Introduction

In a time of unprecedented social change caused by the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, the emotional well-being of students became a huge priority for teachers, schools and policy-makers (National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), 2020). As a Junior Infants teacher in a gaelscoil setting, I felt that there were limited resources available to me to promote such emotional well-being (Department of Education and Skills (DES), 2015b). As such, I sought to investigate a method of integrating the promotion of emotional awareness and well-being into the current curriculum guidelines. I proposed to use drama methodologies as a tool to encourage children to explore emotions, which allowed the children to investigate feelings through both a fictitious and personal lens. This thesis explores the methodologies and findings of how I can encourage emotional awareness and expression through the use of drama methodologies, and how this can be utilised to develop a culture of promoting children's well-being in the classroom.

1.1 Values

1.1.1 Living Contradiction

Prior to beginning the research, I reflected on the values that I had as a teacher. I have always believed that care is a core value in my practice, and linked intrinsically with that was prioritising the emotional well-being of the children in order to create a safe and secure learning environment. This coincided with the return to schools amidst the Covid-19 pandemic, at a time where well-being was being emphasised as a vital part of a successful return to the classrooms (NEPS, 2020). When reflecting on whether these values were being enacted, I felt that there was a living contradiction in my practice (Whitehead, 2009) as I was not placing as much emphasis on emotional well-being as I wanted to. This led me to forming my research

question, of "How can I encourage emotional awareness and expression through the use of drama methodologies".

1.1.2 Epistemological and Ontological Values

Epistemological values refer to the how one thinks that knowledge is acquired (Sullivan et al., 2016). My epistemological values have been heavily influenced by my teacher training with the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education, Maynooth University. As a Froebelian teacher, I believe that children learn through a child-centred and active approach, and that play is a valuable teaching methodology (Tovey, 2013; Bruce 2012). Investigating ones epistemological values is an important step in the research process as it allows the researcher to "lead to personal goals and guide self-regulatory cognition and behavior" (Kuhn and Park, 2005: 115). Upon reflection of my epistemological values I wanted to ensure my intervention was centred on active learning. As such, I decided that the use of drama methodologies was an appropriate way to encourage emotional awareness and expression.

Ontological values refer to how one sees themselves in relation to others, and how one sees themselves in the world (McDonagh et al., 2020). In an educational context, this can refer to how I see myself as a teacher in relation to the children in my care. While I would like to think that I do not regard myself as a separate entity to the children in my class, I recognised that by slipping into a didactic approach where I fed information to the class through a 'banking method' of education (Freire, 1970), I was in contradiction to this belief. Reflecting upon the contradiction apparent between my practice and my epistemological and ontological values, this led me to seeking a method that would allow me to live more closely to these values in my daily practice.

1.2 Research Background and Context

This research took place in a Junior Infants classroom, in a Gaelscoil in North Kildare. While emotional well-being was promoted as an important feature of the 2020-2021 school year (NEPS, 2020), supports were lacking in particular for the junior years. Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) lessons and well-being resources were simplistic, and did not allow for the big emotions that these young children were feeling, particularly in a very confusing time for them caused by the Covid-19 pandemic (Orgil et al., 2020; Buheji et al., 2020; Brooks et al., 2020). This was further complicated by teaching in a Gaelscoil, as there is a lack of resources for Irish-medium schools (DES, 2015b). In my research setting, there is no English spoken in the classroom in Junior Infants, so the lack of Irish resources made promoting well-being particularly challenging. Using English-medium resources was not a viable alternative, as Mac Donnacha (2004) notes that using English materials in an Irish-medium context can negatively impact the immersion process. As such, I wanted to ensure that my intervention used wordless resources to keep the integrity of the immersion process, while removing the language barrier of the early stages of Irish language learning.

1.3 Rationale for Research

Following reflection on my values, I wanted to address the 'living contradiction' I had noticed in my practice (Whitehead, 2009). While I value care in my practice (Noddings, 2015), and my epistemological values are rooted in child-centeredness and active learning (Tovey, 2013), I felt that I was doing too much didactic teaching, and I was not living truly to these values. Coinciding with this reflection, I observed that children in my class were struggling with emotional competencies, as they were struggling to regulate, name and express their emotions. Again, this felt in contradiction to my value of care, as I was not addressing the emotional needs of the students sufficiently.

In an effort to address these concerns in my practice and in my environment, I wanted to find a way in which I could support children with their emotional learning, while living in accordance to my ontological and epistemological values. Relevant literature led me to selecting drama lessons as a tool with which to do that. I felt that drama methodologies merged my values of child-centeredness, active learning and my need to resolve the issues the children in my class were facing. The use of drama lessons to teach emotional learning is also supported by a number of theorists and the current Irish curricula (NCCA, 1999a; NCCA, 1999b; Bolton, 1985; Stokes and Forrest, 2009).

1.4 Aims of this Study

The aim of this study was to find an appropriate method with which to encourage emotional awareness and expression with my Junior Infant class. Having identified a need for change in my practice, my intervention sought to investigate the impact of using drama to facilitate Social and Emotional Learning (SEL). I wished to do this as I believed that a strong foundation in SEL would promote the psychological well-being of the children in my class, as well as providing them with skills that would support them both socially and academically (Alzahrani et al., 2019). My broader aims of the study were that I could use these findings to help create an effective well-being policy in my school (DES, 2018), and that I could support my colleagues with using drama to encourage SEL.

1.5 Policy Context

Policy with regard to well-being has become more prevalent in the Irish curricular context in recent years. This became most apparent in the 'Wellbeing for Primary Schools" (2015) and the "Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice" (2018) documents, with the latter being a pilot programme which will be reviewed in 2023. These policies have indicated

a greater need to focus on both emotional and physical well-being for the whole school community, and indicate the benefits of prioritising this. Another key element of these documents is that they have placed an expectation on all schools to create a well-being policy by 2023 (DES, 2018). Policy on well-being has been furthered by the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. Following school closures in the 2019-2020 academic year, National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) and the Department of Education and Skills (DES) have created well-being support guides for schools upon return to the classroom (NEPS, 2020; DES, 2020).

Well-being is one of the four main themes of the Aistear Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (2009) which runs from birth to six years (NCCA, 2009). According to Aistear, well-being "focuses on developing as a person" (2009: 16), and covers both physical and psychological well-being. This study will be focused on the psychological well-being of the child, as the emphasis is on emotional awareness and understanding.

1.6 Potential Contribution of the Study

While the DES have indicated that teachers should be implementing an increased focus on well-being practice in schools, research and personal experience show that there is a lack of resources available to teachers in Gaelscoil settings (Mac Donnacha, 2014; DES, 2015b). As such, my hopes for the contributions of this study is to investigate methods with which I can improve SEL in my practice, while living truly to my values (McDonagh et al., 2020). In a wider context, I hope that my research can contribute to my colleagues and school setting, as I will be able to provide support for SEL in the school and share the methodologies I used when implementing this study.

1.7 Layout of the Action Research Paper

This thesis is divided into five chapters, which charts the development of the study from its inception to its findings and recommendations.

The literature review details the sources I used to support my research throughout this study. In the literature review, I discuss the current policy in the Irish context that relates to emotional well-being (DES, 2015a; DES, 2018b), as well as referencing the current curricula that informed this research (NCCA, 1999a; NCCA, 1999b; NCCA, 2009a). I investigate the need for Social and Emotional Learning in educational settings (Denham and Brown, 2010; Elias, 2006), and how drama is an effective methodology to teach these skills (Bolton, 1985; Heyward, 2010). The work of Froebel and Vygotsky are examined, and I discuss how their theories of child centeredness shaped my research. Finally, I look at some key drama theorists and elaborate on how their research informed my intervention.

The intervention is explored further in the Methodologies chapter. This chapter gives a time line of the intervention and a rationale for each stage of the process. This research used interviews, teacher reflections and observational notes as research tools. A rationale is given for the selection of these tools in this chapter (Cohen et al., 2007). Following this, an in-depth description is provided of the intervention, which illustrates the drama lessons that were undertaken and the adjustments I made throughout with support from my reflective journal. This chapter concludes with a rationale for the selection of data analysis tools, and an explanation on how I would interpret the data upon completion of the intervention (Braun and Clarke, 2006; McLure, 2013).

The data analysis chapter offers a detailed description of the data analysis process and findings that emerged from this research. I explain my methodologies for analysing the data, and detail

the main codes that emerged during that process (Braun and Clarke, 2006). I detail the key findings of the study, and discuss the implications that they have for my own practice as well the wider implications they may have, for example for my colleagues or research community. Recommendations are offered for each finding, should this research be repeated or the interventions implemented in another setting.

The final chapter concludes the research, and offers an overview of the action research process. This chapter discusses the messiness and limitations of the research, along with the implications that this research may have on a wider scale. The findings of the research are reiterated, and I give my final thoughts on the research process.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In the following Literature Review, I outline a background and context for the implementation of this research-that is, how I can encourage emotional expression and awareness through the use of drama methodologies. In the first part of this literature review, I discuss the origins and the growing prominence of emotional well-being and social emotional learning, and how it became prominent in educational fields. This is followed by an exploration of the works of a number of key theorists, such as Froebel, Vygotsky and Bolton, who encourage play and drama as key methodologies, while also investigating the benefits of prioritising emotional education and why it has become of such concern in a modern context, particularly in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic. To conclude the chapter, I will examine how emotional wellbeing fits into an Irish curricular context, and how it has recently become prevalent in policy documents released by the Department of Education. Throughout the research, the words ‘emotions’ and ‘feelings’ will be used to indicate the same meaning, as throughout the literature both words are used interchangeably (Khong, 2011; Denham and Brown, 2010; Usakli, 2018).

2.2 Guiding Concepts

2.2.1 Defining Emotional Learning in an Educational Context

The DES define well-being as being “comprised of many interrelated aspects including being active, responsible, connected, resilient, appreciated, respected and aware.” (2018: 10). An element of this is taking care of one’s emotions, which the DES emphasise is a vital responsibility for schools are teachers (2018). A frequently used term to describe emotional education is ‘Social and Emotional Learning’. Merrell and Gueldner reference the difficulty in defining exactly what SEL is, however they describe the emotional element of SEL as

"fostering self-awareness or self-knowledge, especially involving emotions or feelings, but also by implication, the cognitions or thoughts that are connected to our emotions" (2010: 6). Another description of SEL can be found from Denham and Brown, who state that "the ability to accurately assess personal feelings", and "the ability to handle one's emotions in productive ways, being aware of feelings, monitoring them, and modifying them when necessary so that they aid rather than impede" (2010: 656) are fundamental elements of assessing a child's social and emotional abilities. These definitions provided a grounds to understanding what emotional education is, which in turn assisted me in the designing of the intervention for this research.

2.2.2 Benefits of Emotional Education

Following these definitions, it is worth investigating why it is so necessary that children are given a strong grounding in emotional learning. Denham and Brown are adamant that "young children with SEL competencies participate more in the classroom, are more accepted by classmates and teachers, and are given more instruction and positive feedback by teachers. Without SEL competencies, young children show greater likelihood to dislike school and perform poorly on academic tasks and to later experience grade retention, drop out, and persist in antisocial behaviors" (2010: 653). This emphasises that without adequate social and emotional skills, children are likely not to achieve the academic success that their peers who do obtain these skills might. If this is indeed the case, then it is imperative that teachers are providing a strong grounding in emotional education to students. This is mirrored by Elias (2006), who describes SEL as the "missing piece" between academic success and success in other areas of life, such as family, work and community. As such, he argues that it is only through a combination of academic learning and SEL that true education can be achieved.

This emphasis on academic success being a contributing factor of strong SEL competencies is also reflected in the work of Alzahrani et al. (2019). They claim that a strong teacher-child

relationship is essential for young children in their development of social-emotional competencies, which in turn leads to both healthy social behaviour and academic achievement. This reflects the importance of care and compassion as key values in my practice. By demonstrating care for the children in my class, I am more likely to be able to create this strong teacher-child bond, which will benefit them throughout their childhood and adolescence (Alzahrani et al., 2019). Noddings (2015) argues that it is not enough to simply state that you care, but rather that care must be evident in practice. It is my intention with this study that this care is evident to the children in my class, and that they feel 'cared for'.

Another perspective on the need for exploring emotions comes from Khong, who encourages the importance of developing a respect for one's emotions. She believes that, "cultivating deep respect for emotions involves learning to pay attention to, embracing and respecting what unfolds, so that we are able to discover hidden qualities and meanings in these emotions, giving rise to greater opportunities for self-reflection and self-knowledge" (2011: 28), and that by doing so we become more in tune with more "refined emotions". Though Khong believes that our "coarse" (reactive, strong) emotions are equally as important as our "refined" (complex, subtle) emotions, I would argue that being in tune with the latter is an incredibly important skill in a classroom context. When the children are equipped with this skill it allows them to take control of their reactions, understand their feelings and socialise successfully with their peers.

2.2.3 Methodologies for Implementation

With the above literature demonstrating a strong indication of the importance of emotional learning, it is also necessary to explore what tools children need to improve their emotional skills. Shotten and Burton state that, "the first step in successfully managing emotions is to become more aware of them, recognising how you might be feeling in any particular moment, or being able to identify how you have felt during the day" (2019: 37). This indicates that being

able to name emotions is a critical element of good emotional learning. The importance placed here on vocabulary lead me to emphasise the learning of emotional vocabulary when designing my intervention. This point is furthered in the SPHE curriculum, which places an emphasis on "the ability to understand emotions, listen to others and empathise" (DES, 2015: 19).

Because I wanted to find a methodology that was in line with my values of an active approach to learning, my research led me selecting drama lessons as an appropriate tool to introduce SEL. Prendiville and Toye emphasise that "drama structures aim to provide meaningful and active contexts for children to explore the relationship between language identity and human behaviour in social circumstances" (2013: vii). This mirrors both the emphasis on emotional vocabulary in the intervention and how drama methodologies work as an effective tool to introduce learning about 'human behaviour'.

2.3 Background and context

2.3.1 The Covid-19 Pandemic

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, children have experienced a massive disruption in their regular routines, with school closures, parents potentially working from home, and the possibility of bereavements as a result of the pandemic. A study by Patrick et al., conducted in America, noted that "parents were worried about how school closure was affecting their children's mental and emotional health" (2020: 4). They noted that the American Psychiatric Association recommend "that schools prepare for a range of mental health conditions among children, provide enhanced training for teachers, engage mental health professionals in COVID-19–related messaging to children, address the mental health needs of staff, and focus additional resources for children with special needs" (2020: 4). While research of the impact of Covid-19 on children is in the early stages as the pandemic is still ongoing, studies are indicating that

children are vulnerable to stress, fears of the pandemic, nervousness and loneliness (Orgil et al., 2020; Buheji et al., 2020; Brooks et al., 2020).

Given that students have experienced a very similar disruption in Ireland, it is worth taking these recommendations into account, as the research demonstrates that these disruptions will have a significant impact on the emotional well-being of students. This concern was echoed by the National Educational Psychological Service, who released a “Wellbeing Toolkit for Primary Schools” in August 2020, upon the return of Irish students to the classroom. This document highlights the importance of providing children with “a chance to express their thoughts and feelings” (2020: 39), and helping “children and young people to understand the different emotions they experience, why they occur and how they can manage them” (2020: 66).

2.4 Historical context and Policy

2.4.1 International History and Context

It is difficult to trace exactly when emotional well-being and learning came to prominence, as they are not entirely new concepts. Through his promotion of play, Froebel himself was an advocate of the emotional well-being of the child, dating these concepts as far back as the 18th century (Tovey, 2013). However, it is evident through the increase in recent relevant literature that the concepts of emotional well-being and learning have become far more prominent in recent years. Merell and Gueldner (2010) believe that the release of Daniel Goleman’s ‘Emotional Intelligence’ in 1995 spurred educators to create an academic framework that would support social and emotional education in schools. Ecclestone goes on to describe how the coming of the 21st century saw reports from the likes of the World Health Organisation which stated that “deteriorating levels of well-being, mental health and motivation for, and

engagement, in formal education" (2014: 2) were being seen in children around the world. Such reports led to governments around the world creating well-being policies for schools, in an effort to tackle the growing mental-health issues children were facing (Ecclestone, 2014).

SEL appears in school curricula internationally, with many countries introducing policies which support teachers in creating a school environment that emphasises the emotional well-being of students. In the United Kingdom, emotional health was initially acknowledged in the National Healthy Schools Programme in 1998, but was further emphasised by an emotional literacy curriculum published in 2005 entitled "Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning" (Shotten and Burton, 2019). Similar policy is evident in Australia, where the government's 'Kids Matter' programme involves guidance for primary schools to encourage SEL (Collie et al., 2017).

These policies differ somewhat from the approach the United States takes to SEL. While the above policies are nationally recognised, the US takes a district based approach to SEL policies, with many schools receiving guidance and curricular support from the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). CASEL provides schools and policy makers with supports on how to incorporate SEL practices into the classroom, and to develop guidelines and policies around SEL (Jones and Doolittle, 2017). While this literature demonstrates that countries are implementing a wide variety of approaches to introducing SEL to the classroom, it is evident that policy makers internationally are ensuring that SEL is included in some form in current curricula (Collie et al., 2017).

2.4.2 Irish Context

In the Irish context, the earliest mention of 'well-being' in policy documents is noted in the Aistear Childhood Curriculum Framework, where it is listed as a key theme. While the term 'well-being' was not explicitly used in the SPHE curriculum (NCCA, 1999a), it does reference

the importance of discussing feelings and recognising the emotions of others. These recent developments can be seen in the policy documents released by the Department of Education- in the "Well-being in Primary Schools: Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion." (2015) and in the "Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice" (2018).

In conjunction with the Department of Health, the DES released a set of guidelines in 2015 entitled "Well-being in Primary Schools". The intention of these guidelines were to promote a whole school approach to addressing well-being and children's mental health in primary schools. As echoed by Denham and Brown above (2010), the DES confirmed that better mental health is "critical to success in school" (2015: 1). The emphasis of these guidelines was to ensure that primary schools should take a whole-school approach and plan to address well-being and mental health, while ensuring that the elements of the curriculum which focus on well-being are being enacted.

This publication was followed by the 'Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice', released in 2018 by Education Minister Joe McHugh. This document aimed to provide a framework for implementing a successful wellbeing policy in primary schools. This policy states that "there is overwhelming evidence that children and young people learn more effectively if they are happy in their work, believe in themselves, and feel supported" (DES, 2018: p1), again emphasising the wide benefits that emotional learning has for children. The initiative is set to run from 2018-2023, with a target being that all schools will have implemented a "School Self Evaluation Wellbeing Promotion Process" by 2023. This document outlines why the Department of Education believe well-being is an important factor in education, how it can be implemented and how schools can evaluate if they are realising the Department's ambitions.

Given that my research is taking place in an Irish primary school, it is empirical that my practice is in line with the guidelines set out by the DES. The emphasis being placed on well-being by the DES is an indication that this is an element of teaching that needs particular attention. Because my research is directed at emotional awareness and expression, this falls in line with the recommendations from the DES by furthering the investigation of how good well-being practice can be implemented into the classroom.

2.5 Curricular Considerations

2.5.1. Aistear

The Aistear Curriculum Framework (2009) is a child-led curriculum which focuses on play as a core methodology. The concept of 'feelings' is regularly discussed throughout the Aistear Curriculum Framework (2009), appearing under all four themes of Wellbeing, Identity and Belonging, Communicating and Exploring and Thinking. The Aistear curriculum states that play is important for children to "manage their feelings" (2009: 11), which links with a key aim under the theme of Wellbeing which states that children should "be aware of and name their own feelings, and understand that others may have different feelings" (2009: 17). The Aistear curriculum is based around play and the value of learning that children can achieve through playing, thus it can be taken from the Aistear curriculum that the use of role-play and playful methodologies are useful strategies in encouraging children to explore emotional well-being.

2.5.2 Social Personal Health Education (SPHE) Curriculum

As referenced in the "Wellbeing in Primary Schools" Guidelines (2015), the SPHE Curriculum (1999a) places a strong emphasis on the exploration of emotions, including how to identify and how to address them. Although feelings are not mentioned discretely in the aims of the

curriculum, it does include the promotion of the well-being of the child, and the exploration of emotions can be seen throughout the objectives. An example of such would be that in Infant classes, the child should be enabled to "name a variety of feelings and talk about situations where these may be experienced" and to "explore the variety of ways in which feelings are expressed and coped with" (1999a: 18). Another key point in the curriculum that is particularly relevant to my research is the idea of empathy, which can be seen in a spiralling manner from infant to senior classes. The idea of empathy appears in relation to resolving conflict with others, cultivating respect and creating harmonious relationships, however it is most prevalent to my research through the objective of enabling the children to "begin to be sensitive to the feelings of others" (1999a: 18). Through this objective, which appears in the Infant section of the curriculum, the importance of recognising feelings outside of our own is noted. In doing so, it creates empathy in the students for others, and enables them to identify and respond to the emotions of others. This provides guidance for a key element in my research, that the children are not solely exploring the emotions that they feel themselves, but are also recognising and identifying the emotions that they see in others.

The first well-being programme designed to be implemented within the Irish SPHE curriculum, "Weaving Well-being" was published in 2018 and suggests a whole school approach to cultivating an atmosphere that encourages staff and student well-being. While this is a useful resource for the Irish educational context, as of the beginning of the 2020/21 school year, they were only offering programmes from 2nd to 6th class, which posed an interesting question as to why such programmes would not be inclusive of junior classes. It is disappointing that a programme which believes that a "2 level approach, comprising of a positive school culture combined with the teaching of a multi-year evidence-based skills programme, is most effective" (Foreman, 2018) for improving student well-being, has neglected to address the needs of younger children. Interestingly, this is echoed by the DES (2018) who mention that

such programmes should be implemented to facilitate a whole school approach to well-being. This is a difficult task when no such programmes exist for junior years in the Irish context. This is a particular issue for teachers working in a Gaelscoil setting as international programmes must be translated, and do not necessarily adapt with children in the early stages of Language 2 (L2) immersion.

2.5.3 Drama curriculum

The Drama curriculum is unique in comparison to the other Irish curricula, in that it only lists one strand throughout the eight years of primary education. This strand, which the Department of Education appears to have deemed the cornerstone of drama education in an Irish context, is "Drama to explore feelings, knowledge and ideas, leading to understanding" (NCCA, 1999b: 13). At the forefront of this statement, is the importance of children exploring their feelings and gaining an understanding of them. Through this, it is evident that the Department of Education places an importance on children's emotional learning, and believes that drama should be an opportunity for children "where ideas, feelings and experiences can be expressed, where conflict can be handled positively, and life situations explored openly and honestly" (1999b: 9). From this quote, it can be derived from this curriculum that the use of drama to explore emotions in primary schools is to be encouraged. This points towards the selection of drama being an appropriate tool to facilitate SEL in this research. The following section further illustrates the ways that drama methodologies are suitable for this study.

2.6 Drama and its Impact on Learning

2.6.1 Drama as a tool for Emotional Learning

To implement emotional learning, I believe that drama and play are key classroom strategies to help me do so. In this context I am not discussing drama to be performed on a stage, but

rather a drama which is very similar to play. Performance drama is not a feature of the Irish drama curriculum. Instead, the Drama curriculum focuses on a process based approach which encourages improvisation and creativity (NCCA, 1999d). Such ‘dramatic play’ is described by Verriour as “a high degree of spontaneity as teacher and students work to create a fictional world in which they assume roles to explore issues that are of concern to them” (1994: 9). A key word in this definition is ‘fictional’-although the dramatic play that the children are engaging in is fictional, it still relates to real life issues that the children are experiencing.

Baldwin (2004) offers a rationale for a wide range of dramatic methodologies that are effective for the early years. The activities that Baldwin suggests, such as hot seating, still image, teacher in role, thought tracking, role on the wall and conscience alley were all used throughout the intervention. The rationale for these activities are backed up by Boulton and Ackroyd (2004), who further emphasise the value in using dramatic activities with children.

Bolton, a key researcher in drama education, offers a definition of using drama in schools as “child-centred rather than subject-centred, process rather than product oriented, active rather than passive and, above all, self-expressive” (1985: 152). He believes that it is the meeting between reality and fiction that “creates drama’s potency” (155), in that neither drama for performance sake, nor the setting up of a ‘real-life’ drama piece, is letting drama education reach its full potential. When reality and fiction meet, those engaged in the drama intensely feel real emotions, yet “because of its level of abstraction, any raw emotion of reality is also tempered by a duality of feeling” (Bolton, 1985: 155). This again illustrates the importance of using fictional scenarios to facilitate drama in the classroom, which will help the students gain a “natural understanding” (Bolton, 1985) of emotions. Bolton’s child-centred values mirror those of my own, and as such his understandings of drama provided an underpinning for the designing of the intervention.

Another benefit of the exploration of emotion through drama, is that it has been proven to enhance learning for the students. Martello describes the numerous ways in which drama can support learning, such as enabling “children to use and reflect upon what they know and through this assists them to make their own knowledge conscious” and how drama “draws upon children's current knowledge, interests, understanding and language” (2001:196). Martello also notes that the involvement of emotion in the drama ensures that learning is more “memorable” (2001). These concepts are backed up by Moore who states that, “recent brain research proves that emotions are linked with learning. When we connect to the concept emotionally, we will have a better understanding of it […] Teaching using drama brings emotion and learning together” (2004: 3). From these researchers’ perspectives, it appears that through invoking emotions in drama, the learning will be enhanced for the students, and the retention of knowledge is more likely to last.

2.6.2 Creating the Safe Environment

I believe that the fictional element of drama is what makes it a suitable methodology to teach SEL, as there is a safety in this fictitious exploration of feelings. The Irish Drama Curriculum highlights that a safe environment is a pre-requisite for drama in the classroom, in order to “increase children’s confidence, allay their fears and dissipate their inhibitions” (NCCA, 1999d: 9). Heyward emphasises this by stating that through drama “participants are given the opportunity to adapt to emotionally difficult situations within the safe confines of a fictional world that offers little by way of repercussions in the real world” (2010: 199). This lack of repercussions allows the child to explore a depth and intensity of emotions, while being able to remove themselves from the dramatic space at any time. This is mirrored by Martello, who states that drama “allows exploration and problem solving in safe, supported and motivated situations where children are more likely to take risks and 'have a go' without the threat of real-

life consequences" (2001: 196). Although it is specifically used for children experiencing trauma, similar approaches are used by play therapists, who believe that through structured play children who have experienced trauma can "safely express their thoughts and feelings" (Crenshaw et. al., 2014: 294). This concept can be applied in the classroom context by giving the students opportunities to explore emotions safely through play and drama.

The dramatic methodology of 'distancing' was featured in this intervention in an effort to protect participants from the emotional involvement of the role (Eriksson, 2011; Bolton, 2007). This allowed the children to engage in complex emotions with a safe distance from reality. Again, this is another method in which the 'safe environment' (which is a prerequisite in the Irish Drama Curriculum (1999b)), was implemented. Heathcote mirrors this externalising of emotions, describing drama as a means "of gleaning information in the area of emotional experience without having the actual experience" (1970: 1077). These theorists indicate that drama is a wholly appropriate tool to explore drama, as through the creation of the safe environment children are enabled to experience complex emotions from a safe distance.

This safe environment does not necessarily occur automatically within the class group. Clear guidelines have to be set out by the teacher in order to cultivate a space where the students are willing to immerse themselves fully in drama (NCCA, 1999c). The method I sought to use in this study to encourage the safe environment was the use of a drama contract. Baldwin discusses the importance of creating a shared contract prior to engaging in drama, stating that, "clear expectations enable participants to feel secure about what it is they are entering into and relaxed enough to contribute" (2004: 83). The strength of a class contract is furthered by giving the children ownership of its design, as this ownership makes them more likely to follow its guidelines (Baldwin, 2004). As such, upon the creation of the drama contract for the purpose of this intervention, it was the children that composed the document.

2.6.3 Drama and Language Acquisition

Given that I am working in a Gaelscoil in a Junior Infants classroom, where the children are in the very early stages of learning Irish, it was important to identify a classroom strategy that could incorporate learning about emotions while limiting the language barrier. This is another instance in which drama proves useful, as it is an excellent tool for language acquisition. Sirisrimangkorn notes that drama "integrates verbal and non-verbal aspects of communication" (2018: 15) and that it is "relevant to body language and gestures, facial gestures, stance and posture" (2018: 15). As such, this type of communication is an excellent way to express emotions, while ensuring there is no language barrier between the teacher and the student.

2.7 Play as a Methodology

2.7.1 Froebel

Stokes and Forrest (2009) acknowledge that there is a complementary nature between play and drama as agents of learning. As such, it is worthwhile to examine theorists who support play as an important factor of learning, and how this works hand in hand with drama in the early years.

Using play as an effective methodology for teaching is backed up by a number of highly influential theorists. Froebel was a key influencer of this theory, and by observing children playing and seeing the learning that they achieved, he took the play of children and gave it "educational status" (Bruce, 2012). Froebel also believed that play is the most natural state of being for the child, and as such how they can learn most effectively. He believed that, "play is the highest expression of human development in childhood for it alone is the free expression of what is in a child's soul" (1826: 50-51). This is particularly relevant for my research as the use of play will allow children to express and explore emotions in a freeing and natural way.

Tovey, a key scholar in the study of Froebelian philosophies, further emphasises these beliefs. Tovey references that one of one of Froebel's key principles, creativity through play, also serves to allow children to express emotion, by enabling children to "make connections between their inner world of feelings and ideas and their outer world of things and experiences" (2013: 125). Again we see the importance of the freedom of the child through play, which allows them to move between the concrete reality and the imaginary and abstract world.

Froebel also notes that an important part of play is 'representation' of the experience of post-play, for example through talking or drawing about the play that has occurred (Tovey, 2013). Froebel believed that this was an important part of the play as it leads to a deeper understanding of what the child has experienced, and adds to the learning of the play. Interestingly, this links well with the Aistear curriculum (2009), where a post-play assessment is recommended to follow play centres. These assessments can consist of drawing a picture of the play, explaining the play to a partner, or presenting something created during play to the class. Both of these sources would indicate that it is important to ensure that the children are engaged in some form of representation or assessment post-play. This guided me to include a verbal assessment following each of the interventions throughout my research.

2.7.2 Vygotsky

The concept of play as a teaching methodology is also prevalent in the work of Vygotsky. In his play theory, he states that a dual affect occurs between the child's play context and actual context. Vygotsky describes this by saying that during play the child "weeps as a patient, but revels as a player" (1976: 549). Again, this supports the idea that through drama and play, the children can both intensely feel the emotion that they are portraying, while simultaneously being safe in the world of play and fiction.

Another interesting concept from Vygotsky, in relation to emotion, is his 'cycle of imagination'. This theory explores the interdependence of imagination and reality, and how imaginative creations take from real experiences (Davis et. al., 2016). Again, this relationship between imagination and reality can be transferred to play and drama. Vygotsky also argued that emotion was at the root of all creativity, and that a creative act is made by using the imagination to process reality. As such, emotions are a vital part of imagination. He emphasises that such creativity is vital for children's learning, and it is in the process of creating where the value lies (Davis et. al., 2016). From this we can gather that the creative process of play and drama is not only grounded in emotion, but also fosters the development and expression of emotion simultaneously.

2.8 Conclusion

It is evident from the literature that the exploration of emotional well-being is of paramount importance to children in Primary Education. As I have referenced above, it is well researched that success in both academic and social fields is likely to improve when the student is well equipped in emotional skills. The ability to identify and handle emotions is likely to ensure students are happier in school, home and social settings, and is likely to encourage empathy in students for others. Given that we are in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, it is important that the mental well-being of students is prioritised, and as such students should be equipped with the skills to identify and express their emotions.

The literature advocates that drama methodologies are a particularly useful device to teach children about emotions, particularly in a Gaelscoil setting where there may be a language barrier in younger years. The use of these methodologies should be effective tools in creating lasting learning of emotional education. Using role-play as a methodology is supported by theorists such as Froebel and Vygotsky as the most natural way for a child to learn. The

emphasis on the benefits of drama in education, and the importance of an active-approach to learning directly informs my research, as it is this theory that shaped the design of the drama based intervention.

The combination of these recommended methodologies, and the need and importance of effective emotional education are the cornerstones of my research. The literature indicates an immense value of emotional education from a young age, and as such I think it is vital that such steps are taken as to promote an emotionally safe space in my classroom. The literature above will serve as a guide to me as I progress through my research, and will be referred back to as I implement my research in the classroom.

3. Methodology Chapter

3.1 Introduction

The following chapter will outline the approach I will be taking throughout the research, as I explore how I can encourage emotional awareness and expression through the use of drama methodologies. I will also be discussing my rationale for choosing the methods used in my research. In this chapter I will discuss the 'Critical Theory' research paradigm which I used for this study, and I will examine why this was the most suitable research paradigm for my investigation. This chapter also explores the characteristics of action research, drawing on the theories of Whitehead and McNiff (2010) in particular.

Following the discussion of my research approach, I will explore my intended intervention. I state the research instruments that were used throughout the study, and the theorists that support these tools. Finally, I will discuss the ethical considerations of the research. I will explore the methods which are important to protect the participants of the research, and in particular the unique concerns that come with conducting research with children.

3.2 Research Approach

3.2.1 Nature of Educational Research and Research Paradigms

Educational research can be defined as the pursuit to gain "a better understanding of what constitutes effective teaching and learning" (Atkins and Wallace, 2012: 12). McDonagh et al. (2020) believe that educational research is complex and intricate as it is always guided by the values of the individual practitioner. The epistemological and ontological values of the practitioner are what shapes the research. Epistemological values refer to as how one views

knowledge, and ontological values refer how one sees themselves in relation to others (McDonagh et al., 2020).

McDonagh et al. state that there are three key paradigms in educational research: normative, interpretive and critical (2020). A paradigm can be defined as “a basic system or worldview that guides the investigator, not only in choices of method but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways” (Guba and Lincoln, 1994: 105). Each of these paradigms hold different approaches to educational research, and offer different advantages to the research.

The normative and interpretive paradigms take opposite approaches to research, with the normative using quantitative data to show results in a scientific manner (Hussein et al., 2013), and the interpretive paradigm emphasises finding “meaningful data” (Faraghly, 2018: 6) from qualitative data. While both can be beneficial to researches, they have been criticised for their limitations. Use of the normative paradigm can lead to a generalisation of results (Faraghly, 2018), while the interpretive paradigm fails “to account for historical, societal, political structures existing in the society and the controlling power of these structures over individuals” (Eusafzai, 2014: 182). As such, I selected a third research paradigm for the purpose of my study, the Critical Theory Paradigm.

3.2.2 The Critical Theory Paradigm

The critical theory paradigm arose from a lack of understanding of the cultural context of the research, and “incomplete accounts of social behaviour” (Cohen et al., 2007: 26). A key feature of critical theory is the questioning of broadly held assumptions, and how they benefit different groups of society (Cornbleth, 2017; Tripp, 1992). The aims of critical theory are to question and transform the situation being researched, rather than the positivist or interpretive paradigms which aim to simply understand (Cohen et al., 2007). This research is implemented locally on

a small-scale, and is always self-directed (whether individually or collaboratively), which allows the researcher to implement changes and transform their practice (Eusafzai, 2018; Tripp, 1992).

Critical theory is the most appropriate paradigm for my research, as its focus on the micro-level allowed me to investigate an issue in my practice that I wished to research and transform. Tripp (1992) emphasises that the research participants are the primary audience of critical theory, which highlights how the teacher as researcher can identify a cause of concern in their practice, and seek 'emancipation' from dominant assumptions through their study (Eusafzai, 2018). Using critical theory as a paradigm to guide my reflections into my practice, I identified that I wished to explore the children's emotional expression and awareness, and how I could support the children's emotional well-being. Cohen et al. (2007) illustrate that action research is a key research methodology of the critical theory paradigm, and as such this is the research method I selected for the purpose of this study.

3.2.3 Action Research

McNiff and Whitehead (2010) define action research as investigating the relationship between our actions and what we can learn from them. It is rooted in a desire that the practitioner has to improve what they are doing (Whitehead, 2009). Action research is practice-based and the research is conducted by the practitioner (McNiff and Whitehead, 2010). Whitehead emphasises that a 'living theory' is formed as a result of the action research, which he defines as "individuals producing explanations for their educational influences in learning as they ask, research and answer questions of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing?" (2009: 95).

Action research is rooted in the values of the practitioner, and through the research process it allows the practitioner to live and teach authentically through these values (Sullivan et al., 2016). It encourages the researcher to investigate if there are any living contradictions in their

work and if so how they can address these and improve their practice in the process. A living contradiction is when the practitioner holds a particular set of values or ideas, but recognises that they are not teaching in accordance to these values (Whitehead, 2009). Because action research is conducted by the teacher through their practice, it allows for "change and improvement at the local level" (Cohen et al., 2007: 440). This also makes action research a very accessible form of research, as it "enables practitioners everywhere to investigate and evaluate their work, and to create their own theories of practice" (McNiff et al., 2005: 1).

The nature of action research allows me to explore my own practice, and investigate how I can improve upon it. In this case, I have identified a contradiction in my values; although I feel that I value emotional well-being I am unsure that I am providing the children the opportunity to explore, identify and process their emotions throughout the school day. Through reflection, I have identified this problem, and using action research I am enabled to create an intervention which will address this. By using action research, I hope to be able to create a living theory (Whitehead, 2009) which will improve the practice in my own classroom.

3.2.4 Qualitative Data

The most common data type used in action research is qualitative data. Taylor et al. define qualitative methods as "research that produces descriptive data-people's own written or spoken words and observable behaviour" (2016: 17). Qualitative data allows the researcher to act as 'story-teller', which allows them to research in a context that they are fully immersed in. As such they are more inclined to have a better understanding of the situation that they are researching than an external researcher might have (Kozleski, 2017). Wellington strongly advocates for the use of qualitative research in education, stating that "It remains a mystery to me why those who work in education should attempt to aspire towards science when scientific methods, processes and codes of conduct at best are unclear" (2015: 14). The same argument

is reflected in Atkins and Wallace, who prioritise qualitative research in education as they believe that the actions and thoughts of human beings cannot be reduced to numbers and statistics (2012). Because this research is focused on encouraging emotional awareness and expression, qualitative data is an appropriate method as it involves the actions of human beings (Atkins and Wallace, 2012). Dunn et al. reinforce this belief, in saying that "emotions are complex, ephemeral, highly individual and difficult to research" (2015: 2).

I opted for a qualitative methods approach for my data collection, as I believed it best reflected the complicated nature of classroom research. Due to the nature of the research, qualitative data was able to provide a richer picture of the children's abilities to identify and discuss emotions.

3.3 Methodology

3.3.1 Research Site

The research was conducted in a mainstream, Irish, Junior Infants classroom. There were nineteen children in the class, ranging between four to six years of age. The class consisted of twelve girls and seven boys. The research was conducted in a gaelscoil, located in an urban setting in North Kildare. The research was conducted in Irish, in which the participants were in the early stages of learning. As the teacher, I only spoke in Irish to the children due to the immersive nature of a gaelscoil setting. However, as the majority of children were relatively new to immersive learning, interview transcripts from the children contained an amalgamation of Irish and English. This is referred to as code-switching, where "words from two languages are used within a single discourse" (Yow et al., 2017: 1075).

3.3.2 Intervention

3.3.2.1 Phase One

The intervention consisted of two phases. The first phase lasted three weeks, in which the children were introduced to a number of drama games. As the children had not previously engaged in discrete drama lessons, this phase allowed the children to become comfortable in expressing themselves through drama and become used to dramatic conventions. These games consisted of activities such as mime, freeze-frames, pass the emotion, drama walks and drama quadrants (Baldwin, 2004; Boulton and Ackroyd, 2004). The emotions 'áthas' (happy), 'brón' (sad), 'fearg' (angry) and 'eagla' (scared) were introduced to the children over the course of these lessons. They were introduced using the structure "Tá ___ orm" (I am ___).

To support children with retaining the new vocabulary used, I accompanied each word learnt with an 'emoji'. An emoji can be defined as "an ideogram which can be used to represent a facial expression" (Mackenzie et al., 2018). I used this image as a way to convey the meaning of the emotion without reliance on language. Philominraj et al. (2017) emphasise that language learning must be integrated with the world of the child, and that a visual aid is an essential component of language learning.

These emojis also served as a prompt to assist the children in remembering the names of the emotions, as visual images are memorable for the language learning, and makes words easier to learn (Philominraj, 2017). The following image displays the emojis used over the course of the research.

Figure 3. 1: 'Emojis' used to represent emotions

Use of imagery in language learning has proven to be of benefit to students, with one study noting the inclusion of cartoon characters to text only language lessons positively affected both cognition and learner satisfaction (Choi and Ko, 2018). Visual aids, such as the emojis represented above, "focuses attention on meaning, and helps to make the language used in the class more real and alive" (Doff, 1988: 82). I noted in my observations that the children would occasionally draw an emoji, in instances when they forgot the new word.

Following observations and consultation with my teacher reflective journal, the children indicated that they were ready to progress to more challenging material and more complex emotions. This was illustrated by reflective journal which noted the children becoming very competent with the exercises, as well as some children indicating tiredness with the topic (Heslin, 2021). As such, I decided to progress to the next phase on the research.

The next phase of the research involved the introduction of integrated SPHE/Drama lessons, using the stimulus of a wordless picture book, 'The Umbrella' (Schubert and Schubert, 2015). While I was satisfied that the first phase of the research gave the children a strong introduction to drama, I felt I needed a stimulus to give the students more depth to explore. As such, I

introduced a wordless picture book as a stimulus to guide the children through the drama. This allowed the children to focus on the emotions of the characters and the story without the language barrier posing as an obstacle. This phase lasted six weeks, and introduced six new emotions to the children. These were ‘imní’ (worried), sceitimíní (excited), ionadh (surprised), díomá (disappointed), náire (embarrassed) and bród (proud). Again, these phrases were introduced using the structure “Tá ___ orm” (I am ___). While I had initially intended to add two more emotions, I noted in my reflective journal that the children were indicating saturation towards the latter half of this phase (Heslin, 2021). As such, I elected to continue revising the emotions they had learnt.

Each drama lesson in phase two was laid out in the following manner:

1. Introduction of new emotions/Revision of emotions learnt in previous lessons
2. Drama game (such as mime and freeze frames)
3. An activity based around the picture book
4. Assessment of Learning

As I was using a picture book as a stimulus, the children were able to externalise emotions to a fictitious setting. This caused debates amongst the children about what the characters in the story were feeling at different moments, and allowed added depth to be included in the drama lessons. The children engaged in activities such as hot seating, teacher in role and conscience alley during these lessons.

3.3.3 Timeline of the Research

The following table indicates the timeline of my action research cycle, and the data collection tools that were used at each stage.

Figure 3. 2: Timeline of Research

3.3.4 Research instruments and rationale for choosing them

Opening and Closing Student Interviews	At the beginning of the research, the children were shown a set of pictures of faces (Appendix E and F), which depict a variety of emotions. The children were individually asked how the person in the image was feeling, with the question 'Conas atá siad ag mothú?' (How are they feeling?). This was then repeated at the end of the cycle, which allowed me to make a comparison between the children's responses to the range of emotions shown to them. This is a standard interview, in that questions are decided in advance of the interview. A range of answers were accepted for each emotion that the child was shown, for example a sad face may be described as worried, stressed, concerned etc. When comparing the first and second set of answers, I looked for accuracy, descriptiveness and vocabulary used in describing the pictures. These interviews were conducted individually, which Cohen et al. (2007) note can be beneficial for the children in having one on one conversation.

Group Interviews with the Children	Cohen et al. (2007) state that conducting group interviews with children can be an effective research methodology for a number of reasons. By conducting the interviews in groups, the children may be less inclined to feel nervous about answering questions. It can also lead to a discussion amongst the children, in which they can share and develop their thoughts while bouncing ideas off each other. Bruner believes that "Understanding is fostered through discussion and collaboration" (1996: 56), which further reinforces the efficacy of interviewing children in groups. As a stimulus for this group interview, the children were shown an image which depicts a social scenario, and the children were asked to describe the image. Cohen et al. (2007) suggest that this invokes a 'projection technique', which allows children to describe what they see in a picture without the researcher implying any bias. This was then followed by the question "Conas atá siad ag mothú?" (How are they feeling). I recorded the answers of the children on a voice recorder and transcribed it afterwards.

Teacher Reflective Journal	My reflective journal is where I reflected on each intervention, and where I ensured that I was engaging in reflexivity. I will explore reflexivity in further detail later on in the chapter. Sullivan et al. emphasise the importance of a reflective journal, explaining that it allows the researcher to develop "a new awareness of what is happening in your everyday work" (2016: 41). They also note that it is not sufficient to rely on memory for events that occur during the research, and that a reflective journal will help in recalling and reflecting on such moments. Tripp emphasises the necessity of a teacher journal in action research, stating that they are "a means both of ensuring that the participants are the principal audience for their research, and as a means of enabling them to set the research agenda" (1992: 14). The reflective journal allowed me to make adaptations to my interventions to suit the needs of the children as they arose.
Observational Notes	Throughout the research, I also kept a note of observations I made of the children outside of the interventions. Cohen et al. (2007) note that this is particularly useful data collection tool as it allows the researcher to collect "live data from naturally occurring social situations" (2007: 396). Miskovic et al. mirror this sentiment, noting that "observation is particularly useful in attempts to place specific interactions, events, and people into a meaningful context" (2012: 3). This was very relevant to my research, as it enabled me to explore the changes in the interactions the children had with both myself and with each other. A key advantage of these observations is that they ensured that natural interactions between the participants, or 'critical incidents' were included in the data (Cohen et al., 2007). This provided a broader picture for any change that occurred during and following the interventions.

Table 3. 1: Research Instruments

3.3.5 Curricular Area

This research was implemented in conjunction with the SPHE and Drama curricula. My intervention took place during integrated Drama/SPHE lessons, and was timetabled during allocated drama and SPHE time slots. From the Drama curriculum, the strand "Drama to explore feelings, knowledge and ideas, leading to understanding" was covered (NCCA, 1999a: 13). From the SPHE curriculum, these interventions covered the strand "Myself" and strand unit "Growing and Changing" (NCCA, 1999b: 18).

Although there was not a direct intervention during the implementation of Aistear (2009) play centres, I was able to take observations during these sessions while the children were engaging in the socio-dramatic play area. These were important to document as part of the research as there were instances of the children engaged in topics covered in the interventions. This will be further discussed in Chapter 4.

3.3.6 Data Analysis

When analysing qualitative data, there are different approaches that can be used to interpret the results. One such method is coding, which McLure describes as "looking for pattern or order in a body of data" (2013: 164). Coding allows the researcher to find common themes that appear throughout the data, which makes the findings of the data clear. This ensures that the researcher can "move from raw text to research concerns in small steps, each step building on the previous one" (Auerbach and Silverstein, 2003: 35).

This method of searching for themes is also apparent in Braun and Clarke's (2006) model for thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke propose a six step process for researchers to follow in order to interpret and organise key themes that arise from the data, which I followed throughout the course of my data analysis. The advantage of thematic analysis include its flexibility, its

ability to generate unexpected insights and it can summarise large quantities of data effectively (Braun and Clarke, 2006). I used a combination of coding and Braun and Clarke's model for the purpose of this data analysis, which is explained in full in the data analysis chapter.

While proving a useful tool for the purposes of qualitative data analysis, thematic analysis can also have its disadvantages. Because thematic analysis can offer such a wide range of interpretations and findings, this flexibility can be paralysing for the researcher trying to work through broad data sources (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This can be a cause of 'messiness' in the research, and while mess is an inevitable part of action research it can be a cause of discomfort and uncertainty for the researcher (Cook, 2009). As well as this, thematic analysis is not always highly regarded, given that it can be completed by "someone without the knowledge or skills to perform a supposedly more sophisticated / certainly more kudos-bearing / 'branded' form of analysis like grounded theory" (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 97). However when implemented with care and rigour, thematic analysis is a useful tool that is effective at analysing a broad scope of qualitative data. Thematic analysis was the principle method used when analysing this data.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

3.4.1 Principles of informed consent and dissent

Bourke and Loveridge define informed consent as "the simple process of agreement to participate and often a pleasant experience for the child", and dissent as being "essentially saying 'no' to the adult, either the teacher or the researcher [which] is less clear but arguably more difficult to articulate" (2013: 153). They insist that explaining dissent to the participants is equally if not more important than consent, as it is often difficult and uncomfortable for a child to say no to an adult (2013). This consent was clearly explained to the children and to their parents and guardians both verbally and in a written, plain English document.

To give informed consent, participants and their parents/guardians must be fully aware of the research that they are participating in. Again, this was fully explained in written and verbal form to both parents and children. I provided an email for parents/guardians to contact me if they had any further questions, and children were informed that they were welcome to ask any questions throughout the research process. All of the parents/guardians and children in the class provided consent to participate in this research.

3.4.2 Anonymity and confidentiality

From the onset of the research, children and their parents/guardians were ensured that data collected would be confidential, and names of the participants were anonymised in the research. Each child in the study was allocated a number, which was used to represent the findings and data from the children anonymously. Sullivan et al. (2016) state that anonymity and confidentiality are particularly important when children are participants in research, and that a duty of care must be upheld when collecting data. They note that while there is no one body which concerns itself with ethical guidelines, it is the researcher's responsibility to draw on documents such as the Irish Teaching Council's "Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers' (2016), The Children First Act (2015) and university ethical guidelines to ensure children are protected during the research. While they state that anonymity and confidentiality should be guaranteed to the participants and their guardians at the beginning of the research process, they also note the caveat that this anonymity cannot be upheld if child protection issues arise.

The Data Protection Act (2018) was also followed throughout the research process. All research was kept on a password protected laptop, and consent forms were kept in a locked drawer in my classroom. The names of the participants do not appear in the research, and a number was allocated to each child when transcribing their interviews. This number system appears in the data analysis chapter.

Finally, this research was conducted in accordance to the ‘Maynooth University Research Ethics Policy’ (2015). These guidelines emphasise the dignity of the participant as an essential component of the research, and require all participants to give informed consent prior to participating. Maynooth University advocates that the “best interest of the child must be central to any research conducted” (2015: 11), and that permission must be received from both children and parents/guardians. This policy was adhered to fully in the process of this research.

It is important to note that there is an unavoidable power imbalance between the teacher and child. To alleviate this it is essential that children are informed that there is no obligation to participate in the research. Bucknall notes that “children sometimes find it difficult to refuse to take part as they perceive the research to be a ‘school’ activity” (2012: 46), so it must be emphasised to the children, and their parents, that they can withdraw their consent at any time during the process. During this research, I assured the children that it was optional to partake in the research, and that they could opt out at any time. Children were also informed that there was no reward for participating in the research, nor retribution for opting not to participate, which ensured that there was no coercion at play.

3.4.3 Validity of Research

To ensure that there was validity in my research, I used triangulation to consolidate my findings. Sullivan et al. note that the researcher can triangulate their data by cross-checking work through a variety of lenses, and “can explain more fully the richness and complexity of the changes you have made” (2016: 82). They also suggest that getting the opinion of others, such as other teachers in the school, critical friends or peers who are also engaging in research can add triangulation to the data by adding a variety of perspectives. This can ensure the accuracy of the data, while backing up the claims made in the research. Following Sullivan’s approach, I triangulated my data through thematic analysis, consultation with a broad source

of literature and by seeking assistance from critical friends. These critical friends provided feedback on my research throughout the process, by sharing their experience of SEL and their opinions and ideas on how I could further my research.

To ensure validity and accuracy in the research, “victory narratives” must be avoided. Sullivan et al. (2016) describe this as where the researcher is dishonest about the data to create an image of a research process that went entirely positively, and neglects to mention any unsuccessful elements of the research. This is important as unexpected results do not necessarily mean unsuccessful research, as insights on the practice of the researcher may still be gained throughout the process despite not being the expected outcome of the research (Sullivan et al., 2016). These victory narratives were avoided by ensuring that I was honest throughout the reflective process.

3.4.4 Reflexivity in the research

The unique nature of action research in which the teacher acts as practitioner and researcher means that it is important for the teacher to engage in reflexivity (Cohen et al., 2007). McDonagh et al. describe reflexivity as a “reflection on your actions” (2020: 147), and allows the researcher to make further discoveries through this reflexivity. This requires the teacher to “apply to themselves the same critical scrutiny that they are applying to others and to the research” (Cohen et al., 2007: 310). This is mirrored by Canosa et al., who note that reflexivity is “the researcher’s ‘ability to think’ and ponder the positionality of researcher and participant, the relationships that form between the two and how these may impact on the knowledge produced” (2018: 402). I ensured reflexivity in my research by using a teacher reflective journal to document important moments that arose throughout the intervention.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter focused on the methodology of the action research "How can I encourage emotional awareness and expression through drama methodologies". This chapter initially examined the critical theory paradigm, how this connects to action research and why it was selected as a research methodology (Cornbleth, 2017; Eusafzai, 2018; McNiff and Whitehead, 2010). This was followed by an explanation of the research process and what this consisted of. This explained the phases of my research, and an explanation of the data collection tools used throughout the research (Cohen et al. 2017; Bruner, 1996; Tripp, 1992; Miskovic et al., 2012). An overview of the data analysis process was given, which illustrates my methods for interpreting the data and their benefits and potential disadvantages for the action research (Auerbach and Silverstein, 2003; McLure, 2013; Braun and Clarke, 2006). In the final section of the chapter, I detailed the ethical considerations of this research, and the care that was taken to protect the anonymity of the participants and to ensure that informed consent was received (Sullivan et al., 2016; Data Protection Act, 2018; Bucknall, 2012). The following chapter investigates the data analysis process undertaken in the research, and the findings that arose from this.

4. Data Analysis and Findings

4.1 Introduction

In the following chapter, I will outline the main findings of my research question "How can I encourage emotional awareness and expression through the use of drama methodologies". Using coding and thematic analysis, I analysed the data and the findings that became most apparent to me over the course of my research were that the children became more comfortable and open with sharing their emotions (finding 1), the intervention improved the emotional skills of children who were struggling to socialise with their peers (finding 2), and that the children began to contextualise both their and other's emotions (finding 3). I will begin the chapter by revisiting Braun and Clarke's (2006) model of thematic analysis, and explain how I utilised it when analysing the data. Through this chapter, I will illustrate the manner in which the data was collected, how it shaped my research as it progressed and how the findings came to light. For the purposes of anonymity and confidentiality, the children were each allocated a number and will be referred to as such throughout this chapter.

4.2 Emergent Codes

Following the collection of data, I began using Braun and Clarke's (2006) model to structure my analysis. Braun and Clarke argue that "a rigorous thematic approach can produce an insightful analysis that answers particular research questions" (2006: 97), and that its flexibilities make it a suitable methodology for a wide range of qualitative data. This thematic analysis involved a six step process, which allowed me to clearly see the themes emerging from my research. The following figure illustrates the steps I took in analysing the data;

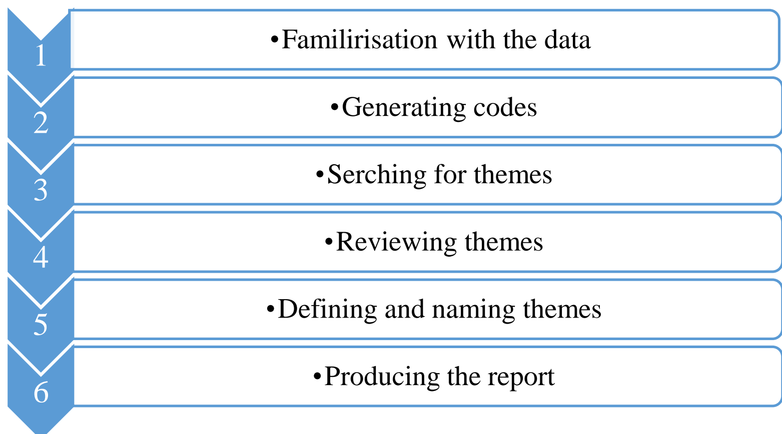


Figure 4. 1: Braun and Clarke's Model of Thematic Analysis (2006)

The familiarisation process was a critical stage in my analysis, as throughout this process I began to form initial ideas and recognise patterns that were beginning to emerge from the research. This familiarisation was also aided by the transcription process, which Bird describes as "a key phase of data analysis within interpretative qualitative methodology" (2005: 227).

Following this stage, I began the coding process through identifying patterns that emerged in the data. These patterns emerged through a process of searching through common phrases that appeared in transcripts from the children. These were highlighted, and grouped together. The following excerpt from the group interview stage displays this part of the coding process;

M: Cad faoin gceann seo?

Child 7: Brónach.

Child 12: Them are brónach because that boy is so sad because somebody might throw the ball and punch his face.

Child 7: Or maybe that girl is trying to cheer him up.

Figure 4. 2: Interview excerpt demonstrating coding process

The colours indicate the commonalities that emerged from what the children were saying. Yellow indicated use of emotional vocabulary, purple indicated that the child could provide a reason for the emotion named, and green indicated that the children were engaged in discussion with each other while discussing the emotions named. Once these commonalities were identified throughout the data types, they became solidified as codes.

After repeating this coding process a number of times, and grouping similar ideas under one name, the key codes emerged from the research. Beginning with the group interviews at both the beginning and the end of the process, 'Dialogue', 'Contextualising', 'Vocabulary' and 'Lack of understanding' arose as key codes. Similar codes appeared in my reflections and observations, with the addition of 'Personal Experience' recurring regularly in these two data sources. The following is an explanation of the key codes that emerged from the research;

- Dialogue: Dialogue involved instances where the children discussed amongst their peers about the content of the picture, and debated about whether they thought the same thing. This demonstrated the richness of using group interviews, as it allowed the children to bounce ideas off each other and expand on their opinions (Cohen et al., 2007). Alzahrani et al. regard communication between peers a critical part of the learning process, and that "learning-based collaboration and communication can help children to develop social and emotional skills" (2019:143). As such, the dialogue between the children indicated a developing understanding of the content from the interventions.
- Contextualising: Contextualising was highlighted when children gave an explanation as to why they had chosen a certain emotion. When the children were able to contextualise emotions, that is providing a reason why someone was feeling a certain way, they were demonstrating strong emotional understanding. Nirit (2005) defines this

understanding as acts such as being to recognise emotions within a variety of social settings and "using emotional language to describe one's own and others' emotional experiences" (2005: 46).

- Vocabulary: Vocabulary showed the times where children used emotional terminology. Denham (1998) indicates that the use of emotional vocabulary in the correct context indicates strong emotional competency and understanding. This is reflected by Baldwin, who notes that "Whilst imitating, mimicking and improvising, they are using real language purposefully, within a range of familiar or newly imagined contexts" (2019: 323). As such, use of the vocabulary introduced during the intervention demonstrated a positive change in the children's SEL.
- Lack of understanding: Lack of understanding was used when the children were asked 'how are they feeling' and they could not give an answer, or alternatively they simply described the actions of the people in the picture rather than what they were feeling.
- Personal Experience: Personal experience indicated instances where the students used emotional vocabulary about a real situation in their lives, or when they related the emotion of a character to a situation in their lives. Piaget and Inhelder (1956) emphasise that children as old as 7 hold an egocentric viewpoint, and as such this personal experience is an important feature for them to understand the concepts taught to them during the intervention. Referencing their personal experience indicates that the children are using first-hand experience to make learning meaningful to them (NCCA, 2009).

The following table demonstrates the codes that were found in each source of data;

Group Interviews	-Lack of understanding -Dialogue -Contextualising -Vocabulary
Reflections	-Vocabulary -Contextualising -Personal Experience -Dialogue -Lack of Understanding
Observations	-Vocabulary -Contextualising -Personal Experience -Dialogue -Lack of Understanding

Table 4. 1: Codes Arising from Data Sources

The table below shows extracts from the group interviews. A sample quote is provided for each code that arose, in both the first and second round of interviews. The numbers represent the name of a child, and 'I' represents the interviewer (myself).

	Interview Round 1	Interview Round 2
Dialogue	18: A girl is helping a boy when he's sad 16: because he fell I think	12: them are brónach because that boy is so sad because somebody might throw the ball and punch his face 7: Or maybe that girl is trying to cheer him up
Contextualising	8: He's sad because his vase broke	9: Brón because them wasn't letting her play and they said níl
Vocabulary	Áthas Happy Sad	Bród Díomá Íonadh
Lack of Understanding	I: Conas atá siad ag mothú? 3: Being nice, cáca 12: I don't know	M: Agus conas atá siad ag mothú? 12: That guy wants to build something with the paper

Table 4. 2: Code Samples from Group Interviews

Once these main codes emerged from the data I progressed to compiling the 'themes' of the research. Connecting the main codes that appeared, along with the appearance of the sub-codes that arose across these three data sources, showed the most significant themes of the research. The codes of contextualising and personal experience became the most important and recurring codes of the research, and these developed into the main findings.

The following is the titles of the main findings that emerged from the research:

1) The children became more comfortable and open with sharing their emotions
2) The intervention improved the emotional skills of children who were struggling to socialise with their peers
3) The children began to contextualise both their own and other's emotions

In the following section, I will discuss each finding in more depth, and make recommendations for further implementation of the intervention and changes to practice.

4.3 Finding 1: The children became more comfortable and open with sharing their emotions following their exposure to drama

My research was guided by the question 'How can I encourage emotional awareness and expression through the use of the drama methodologies". This question was rooted in observations I had made at the beginning of the year, where children were having difficulties with emotional competencies. I had noted in my reflective journal that the children in the class had been struggling with naming and recognising their own and other's emotions, and it was evident at the beginning of the intervention that the children were not comfortable depicting or discussing emotions. As the drama lessons began, the children's lack of ability to depict emotions was highlighted by an extract from my reflective journal in the early stages of the intervention, which notes that:

"Children were clear in their mind about what emotion they were depicting, however this did not translate well in their acting. Despite saying they were making a 'sad face', this did not translate in their depictions" (Heslin, 2021).

In Phase 1 of the research, it took some time for the children to become comfortable engaging with the drama. Following the first phase of drama games, I wrote in my reflections that the

children appeared more comfortable after participating in these games as it allowed them to explore drama conventions before delving in to more complex dramatic activities in Phase 2 (Heslin, 2021). As the children became more comfortable engaging with the drama, I noted that they began to share their own personal experiences of the new vocabulary that they were learning.

4.3.1 Safe Environment

My rationale for the use of images, games and books was so that the children would find it more comfortable to discuss the emotions of others through these media. The SPHE Teacher Guidelines emphasises that using drama as a methodology to teach SPHE allows children to take risks and make sense of the world around them while in a "safe, non-threatening situation" (1999c: 58). In an effort to create a safe environment for the children (NCCA, 1999), I felt that a fictitious scenario would help children become more comfortable with using emotional vocabulary. Through the introduction of the picture book 'The Umbrella' (Schubert and Schubert, 2015) in Phase 2 of the research I felt that this safe environment was created, and that allowed the children to begin relating emotions to their own experience. I created this safe environment by assisting the children in writing a drama contract, in which they decided on rules they would follow during the interventions (Primary Curriculum Support Programme (PCSP), 2007; Baldwin, 2004). The following quote from my reflective journal illustrates the efficacy of the safe environment created;

"The children have begun to offer suggestions for each emotion that related to their own experiences. They did not do this in previous interventions-I wonder does this mean they feel safer in their learning environment? Does this indicate a deeper level of understanding because they understood the emotion on a personal level?" (Heslin, 2021).

This quote indicates that the safe environment created by the drama seems to have encouraged the children to share their own emotions with myself and their peers. Without prompts, the children began to associate each new emotion that they learnt with an experience that they had. Stokes and Forrest offer an interesting perspective as to why drama may have aided this. They state that, "as children "try out" different roles in varied scenarios using the appropriate social and linguistic behaviours, they equip themselves with a skill set from which they can draw when in a similar scenario" (2009: 90). In this situation, the children began using the vocabulary in relation to the picture book, and progressed to using it when talking about themselves.

4.3.2 Discussing Personal Emotions

The children's comfort in expressing their emotions became clear on a day when they received their immunisations in school. This was the first time I heard the children discussing their emotions with each other, rather than solely with me. The following extract from my observations discusses these conversations.

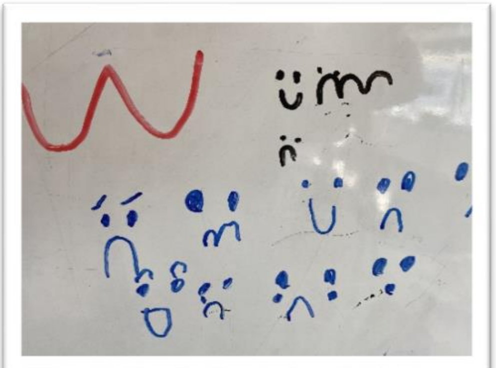
> "A number of the children stated that they were 'imní' and 'eagla' for getting the vaccine, while one also said that they were 'sceitimíní'. I noted that when the children were talking amongst themselves, they shared how they were feeling with each other, and shared whether they felt the same way. After all of the children had completed their immunisations, they began to share that they were feeling 'bród' of themselves for having been brave during the vaccine." (Heslin, 2021).

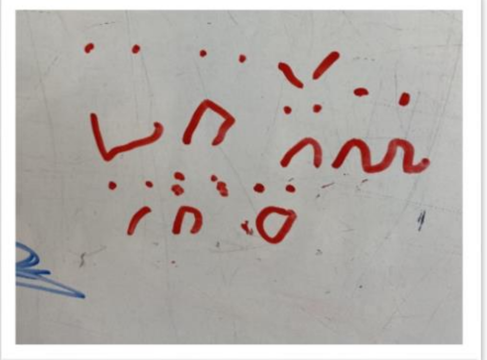
This indicated a number of important factors. Initially, it shows a strong development in the children's vocabulary. They were not only using language that they had previously been unfamiliar with, but they were also able to apply the new vocabulary in the correct context. This also demonstrates that the children were able to identify how they were feeling, name it,

and explain why they were feeling that way. Finally, it demonstrated the comfort that the children felt in sharing their emotions, as they discussed and compared how they were feeling with each other.

4.3.3 Use of Vocabulary

Another indication of the children becoming comfortable with emotional vocabulary was observed during a free writing session in Aistear play centres. When introducing new vocabulary to the children, I used drawings to encourage them to remember the emotion. During a free writing session, I noticed the children began drawing the emotions that they had learnt throughout the intervention. The following images demonstrate some of the children's pictures;





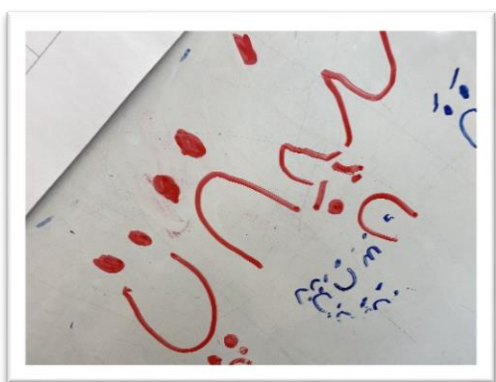


Figure 4. 3: Children's Depiction of Emotions through Imagery

A quote from my observations discusses my thoughts on these drawings;

> "During Aistear play centres, I noticed the children drawing the emotions they had learnt on the board. While observing from a distance, I heard the children naming each of the emotions they had drawn, and discussing how they felt on that day. They were animated in their conversations, and appeared to be enjoying comparing their pictures" (Heslin, 2021).

The children's drawings demonstrated both a familiarisation with the new vocabulary learnt, and an engagement with the learning as they were able to recall the pictures used in the lessons. Not only were they discussing between themselves the emotions that they were drawing, they were comfortable sharing with their peers how they were feeling on that day. Spinrad and Gal (2018) discuss that when parents allow children to express themselves emotionally children gain greater self-regulation skills and ability to display sympathy. As such, the children expressing their emotions is a good indicator of the development of social and emotional skills.

4.3.4 Recommendations

Throughout the research process, it was evident through the data that the children became more comfortable sharing their own emotions. While the children took time to immerse themselves in the drama, once they became familiar with the concepts through dramatic conventions they were able to translate the skills in to real life. The children began sharing their emotions without prompts, often revealing fears and worries that they were experiencing. The following quote is an example of this:

> "Tá imní orm because I have a hospital appointment later and the last time I went I had to stay for a few days"-Child 16

This took me by surprise, as Child 16 had never shared how they were feeling with me before, and this had not been prompted by me asking how she felt. Usakli supports how drama aids

this, noting "drama gives children opportunities to explore, discuss and deal with difficult issues and to express their emotions in a supportive environment" (2018: 13). The data indicated that through the exploration of emotion through drama, the children became more comfortable discussing how they were feeling.

4.4 Finding 2: The intervention improved the emotional skills of children who were struggling to socialise with their peers

This finding emerged initially from analysing the individual interviews prior to the intervention. I noted that the children who struggled most with socialising with their peers and making friends, were children who struggled with identifying the emotions in the images. I noticed three children, Child 1, 9 and 12, were having particular difficulties making friends. I recorded in my observations that these children struggled with sharing, emotional regulation and engaging in back and forth dialogue with their peers. In the individual interview I recorded the number of times they said that they 'didn't know' or could not provide an answer, when asked what emotion the image was depicting. The below graph maps this data. Throughout the research, I made observations on these children and tracked their progress throughout the interventions.

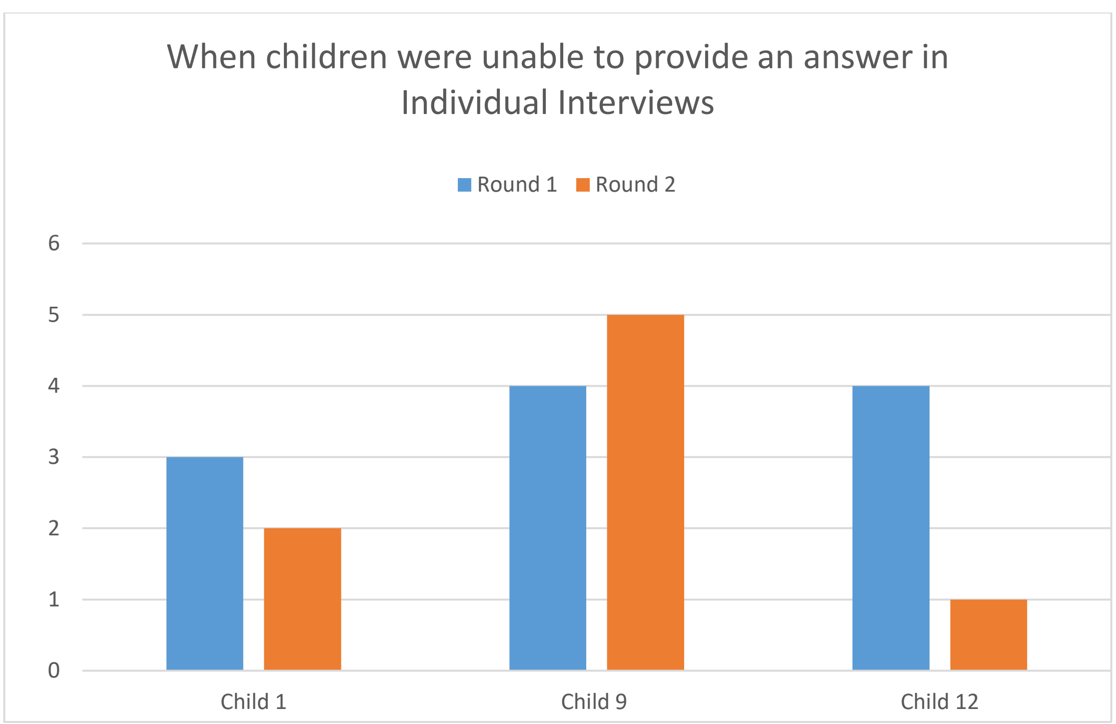


Figure 4. 4: When children were unable to provide an answer in individual interviews

4.4.1 Child 1

The biggest initial development came with Child 1's willingness to share how they were feeling, and why. This was not something the child did prior to the interventions, so this development indicated a growing ability to identify and discuss emotions. In the early stages of the intervention, I recorded that Child 1 was nervous participating in the drama, and was reluctant to engage in the way her peers were. As the intervention progressed, Child 1 became more comfortable participating, and she began to use new vocabulary relating to her personal experience. The following extracts from my observations illustrate times where Child 1 shared how they were feeling.

"Child 1 expressed that she was 'eagla', as she was going on the bus for the first time" (Heslin, 2021)

"Child 1 told me that she was 'sceitimíní' because her brother and sister were visiting her at the weekend" (Heslin, 2021)

These quotes were noted during the fourth and fifth week of the second cycle of research. The use of vocabulary here by Child 1 shows a significant progression from alternating between 'áthas' and 'brónach', which were the only two adjectives they used in Round 1 of the individual interviews. Child 1 became more comfortable using this vocabulary throughout the intervention, and also became more comfortable engaging with her peers in the drama.

4.4.2 Child 9

As evident from the graph above (Figure 5), Child 1 and 12 were able to identify more emotions in Round 2 than they were from Round 1. Surprisingly, Child 9 showed more 'did not know' answers in Round 2, yet this did not seem to correlate with the progress that they made during the intervention. Taken from the qualitative data of the group interviews, Child 9 managed to produce more robust answers in Round 2 compared to Round 1, and demonstrated a good improvement in vocabulary in the individual interviews. This improved understanding of the vocabulary reinforces Martello's beliefs that drama assists the children "to make their own knowledge conscious" (2001: 196). The table below shows the vocabulary used by Child 9 prior to and after the intervention.

Pre-intervention	Post-intervention
• Áthas • Brónach • Brón orm • Scared	• Áthas • Brónach • Eagla • Crosta • Sceitimíní

Table 4. 3: Child 9's pre and post intervention vocabulary

Taken from the group interviews, Child 9's answers became more comprehensive in Round 2. The following quotes are an example of Child's 9 response to the below images in the group interview.

Figure 4. 5: Image used in Group Interviews

"She's putting her hand on his shoulders"-Child 9, Round 1 (As a direct response to the question 'Conas atá siad ag mothú?')

"That one is ag caoineadh cause I think he fell. And that girl is áthas and is helping him up"-Child 9, Round 2

This indicated that despite Child 9's Round 2 individual interview being less successful than I had anticipated, in other areas Child 9 demonstrated a deeper understanding of emotional situations. By the end of the intervention, Child 9 was more able to identify and name emotions being depicted through imagery and by his peers.

4.4.3 Child 12

Child 12 showed the most significant development over the course of the intervention, and this became particularly apparent through group interviews and my own observations. Child 12 had been flagged early in the academic year by myself and support teachers for potentially exhibiting some mild learning difficulties, both academically and socially. It had been recorded by myself and colleagues that Child 12 had trouble listening to others and had difficulty explaining himself when asked questions. Nirit (2005) suggests that children with learning difficulties have far greater difficulty in recognising complex emotions, such as pride or embarrassment, as understanding these emotions tends to come from social interactions with peers. This was reflected in Child 12's initial interviews. He could not provide an answer for four images, and could only provide 'simple' emotions (Nirit, 2005). In his second set of interviews, an improvement was demonstrated as there was only one image that Child 12 could not provide an answer for, and he used the complex emotion 'sceitimíní'. Not only was Child 12 better able to identify emotions in Round 2, but he were comfortable using more emotional vocabulary. The below table shows the difference between Child 12's use of vocabulary in the group interviews:

Pre-intervention	Post-intervention
• Sad • Happy • Mad	• Happy • Sceitimíní • Sad • Áthas • Brónach • Mad • Fearg

Table 4. 4: Child 12's pre and post intervention vocabulary

This progression indicates a stronger competence in the ability to recognise and name emotions, while also demonstrating an expansion of vocabulary. This progression was also evident in Child 12's interaction with their peers. A quote from my reflective journal indicates this below;

"Child 12's listening skills are improving, particularly with his peers. Prior to the intervention, Child 12 struggled to hold a continuous conversation with his peers, whereas now he is clearly able to communicate with his friends" (Heslin, 2021).

While it is difficult to say that this improvement is a direct result of the intervention, the timeline of Child 12's development correlates with the progress made throughout the drama lessons. As the intervention progressed and Child 12's vocabulary expanded, he became more comfortable expressing himself and was better able to recognise and contextualise the emotions of others. This reinforces Spinrad and Gal's (2018) belief that children who are given the space to express their emotions are more likely to develop stronger social skills, and this is mirrored by Child 12's development over the course of the action research.

4.4.4 Recommendations

The three children that I focused on in this section of the research demonstrated a difficulty with emotional skills, and struggled to socialise with their peers. The findings indicate that through drama, the children's emotional skills improved in that they began to name more emotions, could contextualise emotions and began to share how they felt personally. It is evident from this data that this was of particular benefit to these students, as it allowed them to develop stronger relationships with their classmates.

This demonstrates the importance of emotional education, and the difference it can make for certain children. McClelland et al. (2017) emphasise that without adequate social and emotional skills, children starting school will struggle to make friends and will find learning challenging. The combination of drama games and lessons demonstrated a significant improvement in these particular children's social and emotional skills, which in turn should support their development in other areas in school.

If I were to continue further cycles of this research, I would keep in mind the 'messiness' that was associated with this cycle of research that may skew the data (McDonagh et al., 2020). This was evident with Child 9's individual interviews, which upon initial reading appeared to show that Child 9's skills had regressed throughout the process. However, after drawing upon the different data sources a different picture emerged. It indicated that although the individual interview was a good source of data in relation to the vocabulary the children were using, it was not always a complete indicator of the progress the children had made throughout the intervention.

4.5 Finding 3: The children began to contextualise both their and other's emotions

The final finding was when discussing emotions, the children began to provide a reason as to why someone may be feeling that way. This occurred when the children were discussing their own personal experience, experience of their peers and fictitious scenarios,

4.5.1 Contextualising Imagery

When analysing the group interviews, what stood out the most was the difference in the regularity that certain codes appeared. Pre-intervention is referred to as Round 1, while post-intervention is referred to as Round 2. 'Lack of understanding' appeared more often in the first round of interviews, while 'Contextualising' was far more common in the second round. The following graph (figure 9) shows the comparison between these codes arising. As evident in the graph, the code with the negative connotation (Lack of understanding) was more frequent in Round 1, demonstrating a development in the children's ability to provide an answer to 'How are they feeling?' Similarly, the code with a positive emphasis (Contextualising) appeared 105 times in Round 2, compared to 34 times in Round 1. This clearly demonstrates that the children became more aware of why someone may be feeling a certain way, and they were confident in providing a reason for that.

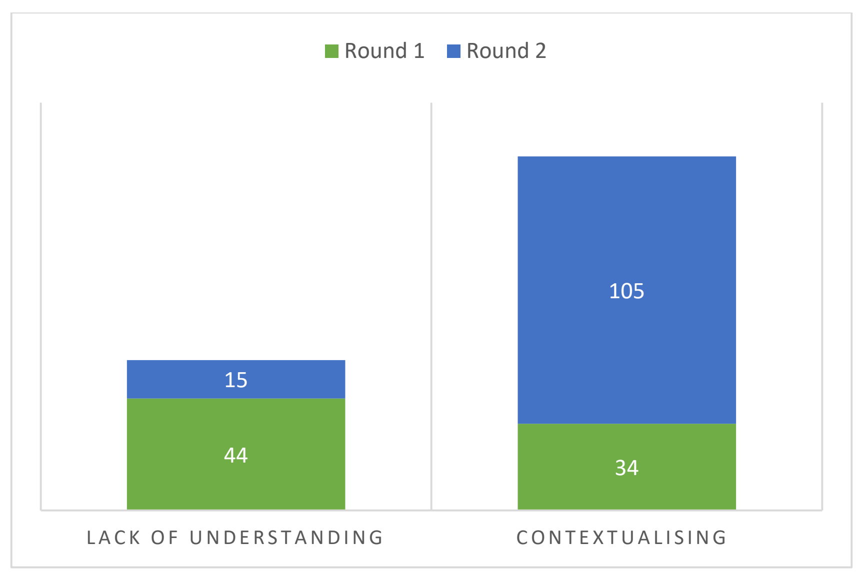


Figure 4. 6: Code comparisons between Round 1 and Round 2

4.5.2 Providing Descriptions

Not only were the children more able to provide a reason why someone felt a certain way in the image in Round 2, the majority of the descriptions that they gave were also more elaborated and contained more detail. The following quotes are the response of a child to the image below, both in Round 1 and 2.

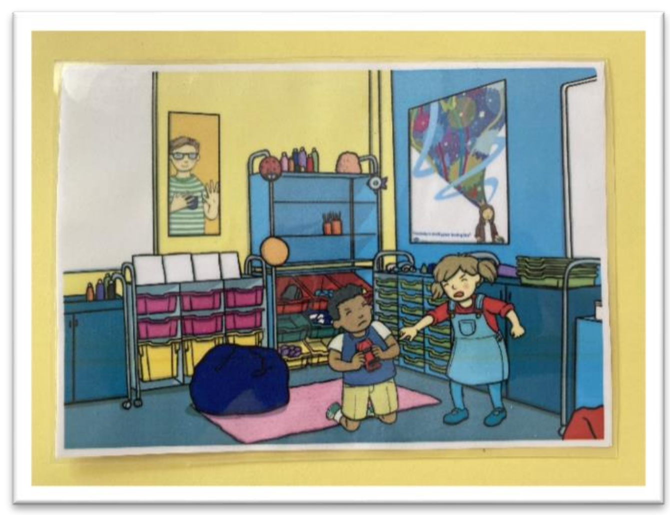


Figure 4. 7: Image used in Group Interviews

Round 1: “Them two are mad cause the girl wants the car”- Child 12

Round 2: "That boy is so mad because he doesn't want to give the girl his car because that boy got it first and they need to share and they're not sharing"-Child 12

In this quote we can see that although the child has used the same emotion in each description, they have become comfortable sharing longer and more descriptive reasoning for why they believe the children in the picture feel a certain way. While this example provides a direct comparison between the child's reasoning for selecting an emotion at the beginning and end of the intervention, many of the reasons given in Round 2 progressed from having not been able to provide any reasoning at all in Round 1. For example, the below quote highlights a child's progression from one word answers to descriptive sentences.

Figure 4. 8: Image used in Group Interviews

Round 1: "It's someone's birthday"-Child 17

Round 2: "They're sceitimíní cause their mam and dad got them a cake that they really like"- Child 17

Again, a clear development is evident here. In Round 1, this child was unable to name any emotion in the picture, however in Round 2 the child was able to name an emotion and describe why those in the image were feeling this way.

4.5.3 Contextualising

For the purpose of this study, contextualising refers to the children explaining why someone is feeling a certain way. This occurred when the children were speaking about themselves and others. Towards the latter stages of the intervention, this contextualisation began to appear in the drama lessons. I wrote in my reflective journal;

> "I am beginning to see the children note 'I feel ___ *because*' when they are describing their own feelings and giving examples of the vocabulary learnt" (Heslin, 2021)

This appeared with the children discussing the picture book, as well as describing their own emotions. When introducing the children to new emotions, they occasionally provided examples from their own personal life, and they began giving a reason to why they felt this way.

> "Tá sceitimíní orm because I am getting a madra today"-Child 6

As the children began to explain *why* an emotion was felt, it demonstrated that they had a strong understanding of the emotion named. This transfer of knowledge was apparent when they discussed their own personal experience, such as mentioned above, and fictitious examples. While naming emotions was a key feature in the early part of the interventions, the development of recognising 'why' showed the progression of emotional skills that the children developed over the course of the research.

4.5.4 Recommendations

The development of the children's ability to provide context for emotional situations shows the importance of exploring meaning within the drama lessons. This began properly when the

children began to investigate why the character in the picture book was feeling a certain way, demonstrating the efficacy of exploring the emotions of others through drama.

The use of picture books in the research allowed the children to search for meaning behind an emotion, which encouraged them to develop their awareness of other's emotions. Serrurier-Zucker and Gobbé-Mévellec emphasise that imagery from picture books "are at once attractive, appealing to the imagination and calling for identification and empathy from the reader" (2014: 16). This search for empathy through the lens of the character in the story encouraged the children to begin contextualising emotions that they saw in imagery as well as in real-life. The data indicates that through drama, the children gained a deeper understanding of emotions and began questioning why people and characters were feeling a certain way.

4.6 Conclusion

Using Braun and Clarke's (2006) model as a scaffold to analyse the data collected during the research, three key findings arose from the research. In this chapter, I have explored how analysing codes in my findings led to these themes emerging. The research indicates that the use of picture books and fictitious situations allowed the children to become comfortable exploring emotions removed from themselves. As the children became more comfortable using the vocabulary they had learnt during drama, they began to translate this in to personal experience.

The data demonstrates that these interventions were particularly important for children who were struggling with socialising with their peers. Through observations, it appears that these children have been enabled to better recognise the emotions of their peers, and in turn led to forming better relationships with their classmates. This improvement of SEL competencies will

then hopefully lead to a more successful experience in school (McClelland et al., 2017; Denham and Browne, 2010).

Following this research process, the children appear to have a deeper understanding of emotions, and have become comfortable sharing their feelings with myself and their peers. It has demonstrated to me the value of prioritising emotional education for my students, and the ways in which drama aided this process. The drama lessons allowed children to explore their emotions in a safe space, while connecting the vocabulary they were learning to their own experiences (Stokes and Forrest, 2009; Heathcote, 1970). I believe that by using drama as a methodology to encourage SEL competencies, students are being equipped with skills that they will be able to use throughout their education and beyond.

5. Conclusion

The aims of this action research paper was to investigate the question "How can I encourage emotional awareness and expression through the use of drama methodologies". Throughout this paper I have detailed the literature that supported this study, the methodologies used in the data collection process, my analysis of the data and finally the findings which emerged. In this final chapter I will reiterate my findings and the implications for future practice, for both myself and other readers, with particular reference to my values and living contradictions in my practice (Whitehead, 2009). This will be supported by an explanation of alterations I would make should this action research cycle be repeated. My values will be discussed with mention of the influence of Froebelian theory throughout the process of this research. I will also investigate the limitations of this study, and readdress the 'messiness' that occurs as part of action research (McDonagh et al., 2020). Finally, I will conclude this paper with the wider implication of this study, and the lasting impact it will have on my practice.

5.1 Findings and Implications

The three main findings of this research are the following;

1. The children became more comfortable and open with sharing their emotions.
2. The intervention improved the emotional skills of children who were struggling to socialise with their peers.
3. The children began to contextualise both their and other's emotions.

These findings indicated that through the use of drama methodologies, the children became more emotionally aware (seen in finding 3), and that they became more emotionally expressive (seen in finding 1).

An unexpected outcome of the research was finding 2, which showed that children struggling with communication benefitted significantly from this intervention. Nirit (2005) highlights that many children learn complex emotions from social interaction with their peers, however when children are struggling to communicate with their peers it is difficult for them to learn in these social situations. The intervention provided the learning opportunity to all the children through drama, and in turn helped children gain an understanding of complex emotions. This understanding of emotions leads to improvement in pro-social behaviour and empathy (Spinard and Gal, 2018), which was evident in my observations of these particular children's development over the course of the intervention.

5.2 Froebelian Theory

As a graduate of the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education, Maynooth University, many of my values and methodologies in education stem from a Froebelian viewpoint. As such, this approach to my teaching is evident throughout this action research study. Froebel advocated for a child-centred approach to education, with a belief that play is the child's work. This is a core value in my practice, and it is a value that I was unsure I was living to in all of my practice (Whitehead, 2009). With this in mind, I endeavoured to ensure that this action research was approached in a Froebelian manner, putting the needs of the child to the centre of the study. Froebel advocated for active and meaningful learning, which included "songs, dance and drama" (Tovey, 2013: 10). This nod towards the importance of drama emphasised my belief that the active and engaging nature of this research would be an effective manner to support SEL. Froebel also advocated for the importance of allowing children to express and explore their emotions, citing play as an opportunity for them to explore these complex themes (Tovey, 2013). This again inspired the inclusion of drama as a

methodology in my research, as the playful and creative nature of role-playing allowed the children to begin to make sense of complex emotions.

Another element of Froebel's theories which proved prominent in the research was the concept of first-hand experience contributing to the child's knowledge. The reoccurring code of 'personal experience' in the data reflects this, as the children were able to use the dramatic activities to reflect and understand their personal experiences with emotions (Tovey, 2013).

Froebel's dictum, "I always start with the child" (Liebschner, 1992) was a guiding principle of this research, as I endeavoured to place children at the centre of the study. This was reflected in the rationale for choosing my research question. I began by identifying something that the children were struggling with (emotional learning), and sought to support them with this issue in my practice. This child-centred approach was also evident in my intervention, as I used an active approach to encourage SEL through the use of drama methodologies.

5.3 Limitations

Action research is an effective methodology as it allows research to be conducted on the small scale, thus making it a useful tool for the researcher in their practice (McDonagh et al., 2020; Whitehead, 2009). With that being said, this could also be regarded as a limitation as the findings of the research are acutely representative of my unique research setting. As such, results could vary greatly depending on where this intervention was implemented (Baldwin, 2018).

Another limitation of this study was the impact of school closures due to Covid-19. During the academic year, the children worked from home. The children were out of the classroom for two months of the year, and I elected to wait until we returned to school to begin the intervention as I believed it was more appropriate to do in person. Because of this, time was

limited upon the return to school, and I was unable to complete any more cycles of the research. If I were to repeat this research, I would endeavour to include more cycles by allowing myself more time to conduct the study.

5.4 Messiness in the Research

Given that action research is a study of social settings and the actions of people, it is inevitable that the findings will not emerge in a linear manner (McDonagh, et al., 2020). The first instance of messiness that arose in my research was the comprehension obstacle that came with teaching Junior Infants in a gaelscoil. When developing my research, I had decided that I wanted to implement drama lessons to encourage emotional awareness, however I found it difficult to find suitable resources for my class (DES, 2015b). This meant that an element of language learning had to be accommodated in each drama lesson. It was from this perspective that I added the emojis to assist the children in comprehension, as through the use of these visual aids the new vocabulary became both memorable and 'real' (Philominraj et al., 2017).

Messiness was also evident when analysing the data. There were unexpected outcomes in the data, such as students being unable to answer more emotions in the second rather than the first individual interview. While this proved to be an obstacle when interpreting the data, Cook (2009) encourages this 'messy area' as a reflection of the depth and rigour. Interpreting this messiness was an uncomfortable stage of the research process as surprising results began to emerge, however regular reading of the data was an important part of the process as it provided me with a deeper understanding of the study. This also indicated the importance of analysing across of the data sources, as despite the occasionally unsuccessful answers in the individual interviews, the group interviews indicated that the children had made developments in language acquisition and understandings.

5.5 Implications

In a time where a strong emphasis is places on standardised testing and literacy and numeracy are prioritised by such tests, drama is at risk of becoming overlooked for its educational benefits (Eriksson, 2011). Coinciding with the Covid-19 pandemic, there was an urgent need to prioritise the emotional well-being of students, and place a strong emphasis on SEL throughout the academic year (NEPS, 2020; DES, 2020). Combining the urgent need for SEL with drama methodologies, my findings indicated that children became better able to recognise emotions, as well as recognise why others may be feeling a certain way.

This action research had a number of implications for my own practice. Initially, it encouraged me to continuously reflect on my practice and identify contradictions between my practice and values (Whitehead, 2009). This in turn has allowed me to live more closely to my values of care and a child-centred approach (Tovey, 2013). This was a direct result of the identification of the issues in my practice combined with the intervention demonstrating what was effective. The action research process has also demonstrated to me the importance of SEL, particularly to those children who are struggling with emotional expression and communication with their peers (Nirit, 2005).

A study by Malti et al. (2016) demonstrated that emotional education intervention is most successful when implemented in the early years, and can lead children to exhibiting pro-social and empathetic behaviours. This contradicts the lack of available resources, particularly through Irish, available to Junior Infants which focus on emotional education. My hopes for wider implications of this research is to emphasise the importance of bringing SEL to the junior classrooms, and a demonstration that this can be achieved despite a lack of resources.

5.6 Conclusion

This action research was a valuable professional learning experience for me as a practitioner, as it provided me with an opportunity to reflect on my practice and on ways that I could teach more closely to my values. This research indicated to me that through the use of drama methodologies, I was able to encourage the children in my class to become more emotionally aware and expressive. By undertaking this action research, it has demonstrated to me the power that teachers have to become change makers in their own setting, and that I will endeavour to continue this course of life-long learning throughout my career. I hope that through this research I can demonstrate the importance of SEL, and the benefits that it has on children, particularly in a time of social unrest caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. I believe that by creating a more emotionally aware classroom, I have equipped the children with skills that will last well into their future, and I will endeavour to continue this practice in my teaching.

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7. Appendices

Appendix A: Children's Consent Form

Child's name ……………………….

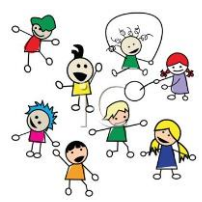
I am doing some research on emotions, and how we can learn about them in school. I would like to find out more about this. I would like to watch you and listen to you when you are in school and to write down some notes about you, and record some voice notes.

Would you be ok with that? Pick a box

I have asked your Mam or Dad or Guardian to talk to you about this. If you have any questions I would be happy to answer them. If you are happy with that could you sign the form that I have sent home? If you change your mind after we start, that's ok too.

Míle buíochas,

Múinteoir Ciara



Ainm an pháiste …………………….Táim ag déanamh taighde ar mothúcháin, agus conas is féidir linn foghlaim fúthu ar scoil. Ba mhaith liom níos mó eolas a fháil faoi seo. Ba mhaith liom breathnú a dhéanamh oraibh, agus éisteacht libh agus nótaí a scríobh fút, agus roinnt taifead a dhéanamh (de do ghuth amháin).

An mbeidh sin ceart go leor?

Ní Bheidh

Tá ceist curtha agam ar do thuismitheoirí/caomhnóir chun labhairt libh faoi seo. Má ta ceist agat, freagróidh mé é. Má tá tú sásta le seo, an féidir libh an fhoirm seo a shíniú? Má athraíonn tú d'intinn, sin ceart go leor freisin.

Míle buíochas,
Múinteoir Ciara

Appendix B: Parental Consent and Information

Maynooth University Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education

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

PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

Léigh mé an t-eolas sa litir ceangailte, agus tá freagra faighte agam d'aon ceist.
Tugaim cead do mo pháiste páirt a ghlacadh sa taighde.
Tuigim go gheobhaidh mé cóip den fhoirm seo mar eolas dom.

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

Síniú an Tuismitheora/Caomhnóra *Parent/Guardian Signature*_______________________

Síniú an Tuismitheora/Caomhnóra *Parent/Guardian Signature* _______________________

Dáta/*Date*: ______________________

Ainm an Pháiste/*Name of Child* ________________________________

Síniú an Pháiste/*Child's signature*: ______________________________________

Date/*Dáta*: ______________________

Maynooth University Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education

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

Information Sheet

Parents and Guardians

Who is this information sheet for?

This information sheet is for parents and guardians.

What is this Action Research Project about?

Teachers Master of Education in the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood, Maynooth University are required to conduct an action research project, examining an area of their own practice as a student teacher. This project will involve an analysis of the teacher's own practice. Data will be generated using observation, reflective notes, interviews with the children and voice recordings. The teacher is then required to produce a thesis documenting this action research project.

What are the research questions?

- How can I use play-based learning to enable children to explore emotions and feelings?

What sorts of methods will be used?

- Observation, Reflective Journal and Student Response (which will be voice recorded).

Who else will be involved?

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

What are you being asked to do?

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

Contact details: Ciara ní hÉislín E:

Appendix C: Child's Assent Form

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

Léigh mo thuismitheoir/chaomhnóir an t-eolas thuas luaite liom, agus táim ag iarradh páirt a ghlacadh sa taighde.

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

Ainm an pháiste/Name of child (in block capitals):

____

Síniú/Signature: ______________________

Dáta/Date: ______________________

Appendix D: Declaration

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: *Ciara Heslin*

Date: 21/11/20

Appendix E: Round 1 Individual Interviews

1	Áthas	Brónach	I don't know	I don't know	Brónach	Áthas	Brónach	Brónach	I don't know	Áthas	Brónach	Brónach
2	Happy	Sad	Sad	Angry	Sad	Happy	Sad	Sad	Confused	Strong	Scared	I don't know
3	Sásta	Brónach	Caoineadh	Crosta	Sad	Sásta	Worried	Scared	Didn't know	Sásta	Worried	Plain
4	Áthas	Brónach	Scared	Mean	Sad	Happy	Worried	Scared	Thinking	Happy	Scared	Bored
5	Sásta	Brónach	Scanraithe	Cranky	Brónach	Sásta	Nervous	Didn't know	Confused	Sásta	Scanraithe	Brónach
6	Áthas	Brónach	Shocked	Angry	Brónach	Áthas	Scared	Shocked	Thinking	Áthas	Scared	Shy
7	Áthas	Brónach	Frightened	Angry	Sad	Happy	Sad	Scared	Confused	Excited	Scared	Confused
8	Áthas	Brónach	Frightened	Scary	Brónach	Áthas	Worried	Scared	Thinking	I don't know what that means	Scared	Worried
9	Áthas	Brónach	Didn't know	Didn't know	Brón orm	Áthas	Didn't know	Didn't know	Thinking	Áthas	Scared	Brón
10	Áthas	Brónach	Confused	Crosta	Brónach	Áthas	Brónach	Brónach	Confused	Áthas	Brónach	Brónach
11	Áthas	Brónach	I don't know	I don't know	I don't know	No	Brónach	Didn't know	No	No, I don't know all	Didn't know	Didn't know
12	I don't know	I don't know	I don't know	Mad	Sad	Happy	Sad, Hurt	Sad	I don't know	Happy	Scary	Sad
13	Áthas	Sad	Oh no	Shout	Brónach	Áthas	Sad	Oh no	Thinking	Áthas	Oh no	Scared
14	Áthas	Brón	I don't know	Angry	Brón	Happy	Brónach	Brónach	Brónach	Brónach	Brónach	Brónach
15	Áthas	Brónach	Frightened	Angry	Sad	Happy	Frightened	Scared	Think	Happy	Frightened	Frightened
16	Happy	Sad	Surprised	Angry	Sad	Happy	Sad	Sad	He is saying I don't know	Happy	Sad	Afraid
17	Áthas	Brónach	Didn't know	Didn't know	Sad	Áthas	Didn't know	Does she not want to do it	He doesn't know	Yay	She doesn't want to	She isn't sure

18	Áthas	Brónach	Scared	Crosta	Brónach	Áthas	Confused	Scared	Thinking	Excited	Scared	Confused
19	Áthas	Brónach	Eagla	Scary	Brónach	Áthas	Tá eagla ort	Eagla ort	Thinking	Excited	Eagla	Brónach

Appendix F: Round 2 Individual Interviews

1	Áthas	Brónach	Eagla	Níl fhios agam	Brónach	Áthas	Brónach	Eagla	Níl fhios agam	Sceitimíní	Eagla	Brónach
2	Áthas	Brón	Eagla	Crosta	Brónach	Áthas	Brón	Brón	Confused	Áthas	Scared	Eagla
3	Sásta	Brónach	Eagla	Crosta	Brónach	Sásta	Caoineadh	Eagla	Crosta	Sásta	Eagla	Eagla
4	Sásta	Brón	Eagla	Angry	Scared	Sásta	Brón	Eagla	I forgot	Sasta	brón	Little bit sásta
5	Áthas	Brónach	Eagla	Fearg	Díomá	Áthas	Brónach	Eagla	Brón I think	Áthas	Eagla	Shy
6	Áthas	Brónach	Eagla	Fearg	Brón	Áthas	Eagla	Eagla	Thinking	Sceitimíní	Eagla	Eagla
7	Áthas	Brónach	Eagla	Fearg	Don't know	Sceitimíní	Brónach	Eagla	Confused	Sceitimíní	Eagla	Imní
8	Áthas	Brón	Eagla	Fearg	Brón	Ionadh	Díomá	Gáire	Didn't know	Sceitmíneach	Didn't know	Díomá
9	Áthas	Brónach	Eagla	Crosta	n/a	Áthas	n/a	n/a	n/a	Sceitimíní	Eagla	n/a
10	Áthas	Brónach	Eagla	Fearg	Brónach	Áthas	Brónach	Brónach	Smaoineamh	Íonadh	Imní	Brónach
11	Áthas	Brón	Can't remember	Can't remember	Díomá	Can't remember	Can't remember	Can't remember	Can't remember	No	No	No
12	Áthas	Tá Brón orm	Sad	Tá fearg orm	Sad	Áthas	Sad	Sad	I don't know	Áthas	Sad	Sad
13	Áthas	Brón	Eagla	Crosta	Brón	Áthas	Worried	Eagla	Thinking	Íonadh	Eagla	Shy
14	Áthas	Brónach	Eagla	Angry	Brónach	Happy	Cross	Eagla	Thinking	Excited	Brónach	eagla
15	Áthas	Brón	Eagla	Fearg	Brón	Áthas	Brón	Shy	Don't know	Sceitimíní	Eagla	Brón
16	Sásta	Brónach	Eagla	Fearg	Imní	Áthas	Brónach	Brónach	He's saying I don't know	Sceitimíní	Eagla	Imní
17	Áthas	Brón	Eagla	Fearg	I don't know	Áthas	Díomá	Eagla	Don't know	Sceitimíní	Eagla	Imní
18	Áthas	Brón	Eagla	Fearg	I don't know	Ionadh	Imní	Eagla	I don't know	Sceitimíní	Eagla	Can't remember
19	Áthas	Díomá	Eagla	Crosta	Náire	Sceitimíní	Brón	Eagla	Díomá	Sceitimíní	Eagla	Díomá

Appendix G: Drama Scheme

Draft Scheme for 6 week Drama Intervention

Objectives

- The objective of this scheme is encourage children to recognise and explore emotions through drama.
- The overarching strand of drama "Drama to explore feelings, knowledge and ideas, leading to understanding" will guide the lessons, and objectives will be taken from the three strand units: "Exploring and making drama"; "Reflecting on Drama" and "Co-operating and communicating in making drama".
- These lessons will also be informed by the SPHE strand "Myself", and the strand unit "Growing and Changing". Each lesson will contain an objective related to 'feelings and emotions'.

Safe Environment

- The Drama curriculum states that a safe-environment is a pre-requisite to drama in the classroom.
- A drama contract will be written with the class in the first lesson to ensure this.
- The safe environment will also be created through the use of a picture book. This fictitious lens will allow the children to explore emotion in a safe way that is removed from their own experiences. (NCCA, 1999)

Lesson Structure

- The children will move from basic to complex vocabulary in relation to emotion, using the base phrase as Gaeilge: "Tá ____ orm".
- Each lesson will begin with a drama game to warm up. New vocabulary will be introduced to the children through this game, and prior vocabulary will be revised.
- The development of each lesson will build on the picture book 'The Umbrella'. Each activity will progress in challenge and complexity.
- The conclusion will revise the emotions discussed in the lesson.

Research Methodologies

- I will be taking observation notes during the lesson to note how the children are participating in the drama. Measures I will be recording are participation in drama, use of vocabulary, recognising and naming of emotions and expression of emotions.

- I will be using a reflective journal following each lesson to reflect on how the interventions are progressing, methods I can improve the lesson and how the children are participating.

Week 1	Week 2	Week 3
Learning Activities • Creating a drama contract • Introduction to the story 'The Umbrella' • Emotional expression game • Freeze frames • Thought tracking Learning Objectives • develop the ability to play in role as an integral part of the action (Drama) • develop, in role, the ability to co-operate and communicate with others in helping to shape the drama (Drama) • name a variety of feelings and talk about situations where these may be experienced (SPHE) Vocabulary • áthas • eagla • brón • fearg	Learning Activities • Drama quadrant • Emotion walk Learning Objectives • develop the ability, in role, to co-operate and communicate with others in helping to shape the drama (Drama) • develop the ability to play in role as an integral part of the action (Drama) • name a variety of feelings and talk about situations where these may be experienced (SPHE) Vocabulary • íonadh • díomá	Learning Activities • Role on the Wall • Hot Seating Learning Objectives • develop awareness of how he/she, as part of a group, helps to maintain focus in the dramatic action (Drama) • develop the ability to reflect on the action as it progresses (Drama) • explore the variety of ways in which feelings are expressed and coped with (SPHE) Vocabulary • imní • sceitimíní
Week 4	Week 5	Week 6
Learning Activities • Pass the emotion • Captioning Learning Objectives • experience the relationship between story, theme and life experience (Drama) • develop the ability, out of role, to co-operate and communicate with others in helping to shape the drama (Drama) • explore the variety of ways in which feelings are expressed and coped with (SPHE) Vocabulary • náire • bród	Learning Activities • Mime • Suitcase Game Learning Objectives • develop the ability to reflect on the action as it progresses (Drama) • share insights gained while experiencing the drama (Drama) • begin to be sensitive to the feelings of others and to realise that the actions of one individual can affect the feelings of another (SPHE) Vocabulary • Siúl siar	Learning Activities • 'Tá ___ orm mar' Game • Conscious Alley Learning Objectives • develop the ability to reflect on the action as it progresses (Drama) • experience the relationship between story, theme and life experience (Drama) • begin to be sensitive to the feelings of others and to realise that the actions of one individual can affect the feelings of another (SPHE) Vocabulary • Siúl siar