

Jennifer Joyce - THESIS

by JENNIFER MARIE JOYCE

Submission date: 11-Sep-2025 07:19PM (UTC+0100)

Submission ID: 2748144195

File name: 81484_JENNIFER_MARIE_JOYCE_Jennifer_Joyce_-_THESIS_918641_1405513095.docx (5.37M)

Word count: 35962

Character count: 190626



**OLLSCOIL NA HÉIREANN MÁ NUAD
THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND
MAYNOOTH**

**Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood
Education M.Ed. (Research in Practice)**

2024-2025

**Connection before Curriculum: How can I enhance the
relationships in my classroom?**

Jennifer Marie Joyce

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

Date: 12th September 2025

Supervised by: Dr. Deirdre Forde

Ainm / Name: Jennifer Joyce

Bliain / Year group: Master of Education 2024-2025

Uimhir mhic léinn / Student number: 24253831

Ábhar / Subject: Master of Education Research in Practice Thesis

Léachtóir / Teagascóir: Lecturer / Tutor: Dr. Deirdre Forde

Spriocla / Due date: 12th September 2025

Teideal an tionscadail / Assignment title: Connection before Curriculum: How can I enhance the relationships within my classroom?

Líon na bhfocal / Word Count: 19, 685

Líon leathanach / Number of pages: 140

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

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

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

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

Síniú / Signature: Jennifer Joyce

Dáta / Date: 12th September 2025

Turnitin Originality Report

Processed on: 11-Sep-2025 17:44 IST

ID: 2748059157

Word Count: 37408

Submitted: 1

Thesis - Jennifer Joyce By JENNIFER MARIE JOYCE

Similarity Index

16%

Similarity by Source

Internet Sources:12%

Publications:11%

Student Papers:10%



Declaration

I certify that this research, submitted for the degree of Master of Education, Maynooth University, is entirely my own work, has not been taken from the work of others and has not been submitted in any other university. The work of others, to an extent, has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work. I acknowledge that the use of Generative artificial intelligence tools is prohibited on the MEd (Research in Practice) programme and has not been used in this body of work.

Student Name: Jennifer Joyce

Date: 12th September 2025

Abstract

According to a UNICEF (2025) report, childhoods are being transformed. This report evaluated child-wellbeing over a five-year period. Ireland ranks in 1st place in Skills yet is ranked in 24th place in Mental Health. It found that children in wealthy countries are becoming less happy with their lives.

For a long time, the focus on academics and achievement have been dominant in schools. This prioritisation on performance and the impact of neoliberal practices in school systems and policies is hindering our ability to address children's mental health concerns.

Schools provide education yet they provide much more than just academics. They are environments where children learn how to build relationships, how to develop social skills as well as experience a sense of belonging.

The purpose of this self-study action research was to enhance the relationships within my classroom. I introduced interventions within the classroom over a three-month period in a primary school in the south of the country.

The interventions in this research project consisted of *Morning Meeting* as well as a range of empowerment activities and tasks.

Educational action research was the selected methodology, and qualitative data was collected from reflective journals, observations, questionnaires and feedback from critical friends and my validation group.

My findings show that the interventions I introduced enhance both peer relationships as well as teacher-student relationships. As part of these findings, a slow pedagogy and connective instruction were developed. The interventions encourage pupil's awareness of their own mental health and highlight the value of laughter and empathetic listening within the classroom.

Acknowledgements

I wish to convey my sincere thanks and appreciation to the following people who supported me.

My parents, Richard and Gretta, for their unwavering support and for giving me the time and space on this research journey.

My critical friends: Karen, Kelly and Sinead. Thank you for all your words of inspiration and wisdom.

Validation group: Thank you Ita and Jennifer for your time, patience and honest feedback.

My close friends: Grace, Grainne, Martina and Sasha, who listened to me with patience and kindness throughout the year.

My supervisor Dr. Deirdre Forde: Thank you for your advice, expertise and support during this research project. Your assistance acknowledged the importance of this work and encouraged me to keep going.

Thank you to the Board of Management of my school, my supportive principal and staff for all their help throughout the year.

And finally, to the class of 2025, this study would not have happened if not for your engagement, enthusiasm and feedback.

Thank you.

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|------------|
| <i>Title Page</i> | <i>i</i> |
| <i>Assignment Cover Sheet</i> | <i>ii</i> |
| <i>Turn it in Report</i> | <i>iii</i> |
| <i>Declaration</i> | <i>iv</i> |
| <i>Abstract</i> | <i>v</i> |
| <i>Acknowledgements</i> | <i>vi</i> |
| <i>Table of Contents</i> | <i>vii</i> |
| <i>Table of Appendixes</i> | <i>xi</i> |
| <i>Table of Images and Diagrams</i> | <i>xii</i> |
| | |
| Chapter One: Introduction | 1 |
| 1.1 Introduction | 1 |
| 1.2 Focus and Aims of the Study | 1 |
| 1.3 Background to Research | 2 |
| 1.4 Context and Intervention | 3 |
| <i>1.4.1 Research Cycle One</i> | <i>4</i> |
| <i>1.4.2 Research Cycle Two</i> | <i>4</i> |
| 1.5 Potential Contribution of the Study | 5 |
| 1.6 Format of the Study | 5 |
| | |
| Chapter Two: Literature Review | 7 |
| 2.1 Introduction | 7 |
| 2.2 Friedrich Froebel | 7 |
| 2.3 Irish Primary Curriculum | 7 |
| 2.4 Developing positive teacher-student relationships | 8 |
| <i>2.4.1 Belonging</i> | <i>8</i> |
| <i>2.4.2 Impact of positive teacher-student relationships</i> | <i>8</i> |
| 2.5 Barriers in developing positive teacher-student relationships | 9 |

| | |
|--|-----------|
| 2.5.1 <i>Teacher stress and wellbeing</i> | 9 |
| 2.5.2 <i>Feelings of Rejection</i> | 10 |
| 2.5.3 <i>Curriculum before connection</i> | 10 |
| 2.5.4 <i>Neoliberal capitalism</i> | 11 |
| 2.6 How can educators enhance relationships in their classroom? | 12 |
| 2.6.1 <i>Slow Education</i> | 12 |
| 2.6.2 <i>Active Listening and wait time</i> | 13 |
| 2.6.3 <i>Classroom of Care</i> | 14 |
| 2.6.4 <i>Trauma Informed Practice</i> | 15 |
| 2.6.5 <i>Student voice</i> | 15 |
| 2.7 Peer relationships and the role of the teacher | 17 |
| 2.7.1 <i>The invisible hand</i> | 17 |
| 2.7.2 <i>Restorative practice</i> | 17 |
| 2.8 Creating an environment that prioritises relationships | 18 |
| 2.8.1 <i>Dialogue in the classroom</i> | 18 |
| 2.8.2 <i>Pupil Empowerment</i> | 18 |
| 2.8.3 <i>Morning Meeting</i> | 19 |
| 2.10 Conclusion | 20 |
| | |
| Chapter Three: Methodology | 21 |
| 3.1 Introduction | 21 |
| 3.2 Research Rationale | 21 |
| 3.3 Research Site | 22 |
| 3.4 Educational Action Research | 22 |
| 3.5 My Values | 23 |
| 3.6 Critical Self-Reflective Practice | 24 |
| 3.6.1 <i>Lens of Reflection</i> | 25 |
| 3.7 Model of Reflection | 26 |
| 3.8 Living Theory Action Research | 27 |
| 3.9 Ethical Considerations | 28 |
| 3.9.1 <i>Informed consent</i> | 28 |
| 3.9.2 <i>Assent</i> | 28 |
| 3.9.3 <i>Vulnerability</i> | 29 |

| | |
|---|-----------|
| 3.9.4 <i>Power dynamics</i> | 29 |
| 3.9.5 <i>Data Storage</i> | 29 |
| 3.9.6 <i>Sensitivity</i> | 30 |
| 3.10 Action Research Cycle One | 31 |
| 3.10.1 <i>Morning Meeting</i> | 31 |
| 3.11 Action Research Cycle Two | 32 |
| 3.11.1 <i>Empowering Beliefs</i> | 32 |
| 3.11.2 <i>Empowerment within the classroom</i> | 32 |
| 3.11.3 <i>History projects</i> | 32 |
| 3.12 Research Design | 33 |
| 3.13 Data Collection | 33 |
| 3.13.1 <i>Critical Friends and Validation Groups</i> | 34 |
| 3.13.2 <i>Observations</i> | 34 |
| 3.13.3 <i>Reflective Journal</i> | 34 |
| 3.13.4 <i>Pupils Questionnaires</i> | 35 |
| 3.13.5 <i>Pupils' Reflective Journals</i> | 35 |
| 3.13.6 <i>Interview with Dr. Treasa Bowe</i> | 36 |
| 3.13.7 <i>Diamond Nine Activity</i> | 36 |
| 3.14 Action Plan | 37 |
| 3.15 Analysis of Data | 39 |
| 3.15.1 <i>Triangulation and Validity</i> | 40 |
| 3.16 Conclusion | 40 |
| | |
| Chapter Four: Findings | 41 |
| 4.1 Introduction | 41 |
| 4.2 Data Analysis | 41 |
| 4.3 Participatory Action Research | 42 |
| 4.4 Overview of Findings | 43 |
| 4.5 Finding 1: Morning Meeting is an effective strategy for enhancing relationships within the classroom | 43 |
| 4.5.1 <i>Introducing Morning Meeting</i> | 43 |
| 4.5.2 <i>Format of Morning Meeting</i> | 46 |

| | |
|---|-----------|
| 4.5.3 <i>Initial Response to Morning Meeting</i> | 47 |
| 4.5.4 <i>The improvement in the teacher-student relationship</i> | 49 |
| 4.5.5 <i>Development of connective Instruction and care</i> | 51 |
| 4.5.6 <i>Improved Peer relationships</i> | 53 |
| | |
| 4.6 Finding 2: Activities that empower pupils contributes positively to their personal development as well as the classroom environment. | 56 |
| 4.6.1 <i>Introducing empowerment to pupils</i> | 56 |
| 4.6.2 <i>Pupil ' awareness of their mental health</i> | 57 |
| 4.6.3 <i>Increased emotional regulation</i> | 60 |
| 4.6.4 <i>Elevation of Children's voices</i> | 61 |
| 4.6.5 <i>Collective empowerment</i> | 64 |
| | |
| 4.7 Finding 3: Laughter and listening play imperative roles in creating an atmosphere that supports the enhancement of relationships. | 68 |
| 4.7.1 <i>Laughter in the classroom</i> | 68 |
| 4.7.2 <i>Empathic Listening</i> | 71 |
| | |
| 4.8 Conclusion | 72 |
| | |
| Chapter Five: Conclusion | 74 |
| 5.1 Summary of Research | 74 |
| 5.2 Reflection | 76 |
| 5.3 Claim to knowledge | 77 |
| 5.3.1 <i>Personal Impact</i> | 77 |
| 5.3.2 <i>Professional Impact</i> | 78 |
| 5.4 Limitations | 79 |
| 5.5 Implications for Future Practice | 79 |
| | |
| References | 82 |
| | |
| Appendices | 94 |

List of Appendices

| | |
|-------------|--|
| Appendix 1A | School Board of Management Letter |
| Appendix 1B | Parent Information Sheet and Consent Forms |
| Appendix 2 | Pupil consent and assent forms |
| Appendix 3 | Critical friends consent form |
| Appendix 4 | Validation group consent form |
| Appendix 5 | Pupil questionnaires (pre and post intervention) |
| Appendix 6 | Interview transcript with Dr. Treasa Bowe |
| Appendix 7 | Diamond Nine statements template |
| Appendix 8 | Validation Group Questionnaire (pre and post intervention) |
| Appendix 9 | Interviewee Information sheet and consent form |

List of Images and diagrams

Literature Review

Image 1 Themes of Slow Education

Methodologies

Image 2 Action- Reflection Cycle

Image 3 Epistemological and Ontological Values

Image 4 Lenses of reflection

Image 5 ERA Model

Image 6 Morning Meeting components

Image 7 Thematic Analysis

Findings

Image 8 6th class in their Morning Meeting circle

Image 9 Format of Morning Meeting

Image 10 Morning Meeting slide 1

Image 11 Morning Meeting slide 2

Image 12 Personal Reflection Journals

Image 13 Excerpts from pupil's reflective journals

Image 14 Do you think you get along well with your teacher?

- Image 15 Do you think you get along better with your teacher since the introduction of Morning Meeting?
- Image 16 Personal Reflection
- Image 17 Do you think you get along better with your classmates since the introduction of Morning Meeting?
- Image 18 Definition of Empowerment
- Image 19 Empowerment within yourself
- Image 20 Empowerment within school
- Image 21 Examples of Helpful self-talk quotes
- Image 22 Helpful self-talk – example from workbook
- Image 23 Thinking traps – example from workbook
- Image 24 Excerpt from Pupils reflective journal
- Image 25 Pupil reflective journal – Do you feel empowered in school?
- Image 26 Classroom improvement box
- Image 27 Example of some class improvement ideas
- Image 28 Full list of class improvement ideas
- Image 29 Easter Rising projects
- Image 30 Example of feedback after the project
- Image 31 Example of the Diamond nine activity
- Image 32 Results of the Diamond nine activity

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This thesis sets out to examine how I enhanced the relationships within my classroom. I explain the focus and aims of the study, and I identify the research questions that guided me throughout. I provide a background to my research, and I explain the context and intervention for this study.

In Chapter Two, I present the research that informed this study, followed by a discussion of the methodology in Chapter Three. Chapter Four then evaluates the findings in relation to my research questions.

My personal reflective and learning journey is woven throughout this self-study action research. To conclude, I provide the potential impact of the research within my own practice and the wider school community.

1.2 Focus and Aims of the Study

The purpose of this educational action research project is to improve the teacher-student relationship as well as peer relationships. Lang et al. (2020) advocate that early teacher-student relationships are crucial to social and emotional development while McKay and Macomber (2021) believe that relationships are just as important as the content that students are learning.

Relationships and connections provide strong protective factors for all students. They are important enough to be part of the pedagogy of the school day (NSCE, 2025). My goal was to create intentional time within the school day to develop children's socio and emotional skills through *Morning Meeting* by listening, sharing and connecting with one another. I also introduced activities that promote pupils' empowerment within themselves as well as pupil empowerment and agency within a classroom setting.

During this research study, my values were always at the forefront of my mind. I value positive connections with the children in my care. The foundation of a strong relationship, I believe, is built on positive connections with pupils. These positive interactions are formed over time to show care, to show that children are valued and to show that they feel supported and listened to.

Respect and fairness encourage acceptance of oneself and others as well as the promotion of pupil empowerment and dialogue. Therefore, as my study began, my research questions were formed.

1. *How do I enhance my relationship with my class?*
2. *What interventions do I need to include in my teaching?*
3. *How can I encourage, support and maintain positive peer relationships in my classroom?*
4. *How can I live by my values of connection, fairness, respect, empowerment and dialogue while this research is being undertaken?*

1.3 Background to Research

Since I began teaching in the senior end of primary school, I noticed a change in the development of relationships within the classroom. I felt younger children were much more open to a strong connection with their teacher. They desired a mutual relationship, and I found it easier to build those connections with them.

However, when teaching older children, on the cusp of adolescence, I found it much more challenging. Classroom relationships didn't flourish as much as I thought they would. I needed to be more pro-active and mindful when nurturing these relationships.

This observation was the reason for my concern and this research study. Teaching sixth class over the past number of years has made me question my practice and my values.

During this research study, I reflected on that first-year teaching sixth class. It became apparent that I had many assumptions and expectations within myself. This pressure had become part of my practice for many years, maybe even when I first started teaching, fifteen years ago. This poem portrays the views and traditions I carried within me.

A Strong Teacher.

A strong teacher is firm. In control.

A strong teacher commands the room.

A strong teacher observes.

A strong teacher is a step ahead. Always

If I don't become this teacher I fail.

*The class will be out of control.
I will be judged. Proof that I have failed.
Proof that I was never good enough.
(Joyce, Reflective Journal, September 2024)*

The assumptions and expectations that surrounded me as a teacher, were not just an internal belief. At the very early stages of my teaching career, I was encouraged on numerous occasions “not to smile before Christmas”. While this was not a condition of my employment like it was for Ervin (2022), it had become very much part of my practice and beliefs, and I never questioned them.

When I remember my own school days, I fondly remember the friendships I made with my peers. These friendships have stood the test of time and are still strong supportive friendships over twenty years later. This desire to bond and connect with others has always been part of my childhood and adulthood.

I value relationships deeply within my own personal adult life. I have a high regard for friendships that are non-judgemental, respectful, accepting, trusting and supportive. These connections and relationships are strengthened for me through conversations and dialogue. This is the reason I value connection, respect, fairness, empowerment and dialogue within the classroom but also within my own personal life.

1.4 Context and Intervention

This research was conducted in a co-educational suburban primary school where I work as a sixth-class teacher. The participants consisted of twenty-eight sixth class pupils. The research was carried out after ethical approval was received and the Board of management, parents and pupils gave their consent and assent.

Data collection tools were diverse and in keeping with a qualitative study. I gathered evidence of feedback through questionnaires with the pupils and my validation group, alongside observations, photographs, and documentation. I used a reflective journal, and the pupils also had their own reflective journal. When investigating the data, I applied a thematic data analysis and common themes emerged as the findings of my study. Three findings were uncovered and from those findings, nine themes were established.

A Zoom interview with Dr. Treasa Bowe was also included as part of my research. Dr Bowe is a primary school teacher from Cork with over twenty years teaching experience, both in Cork and in Los Angeles, California. It is because of her time in Los Angeles and her training with “The Responsive Classroom Approach” that I felt it was vital to interview her about her experience with *Morning Meeting*. The Responsive Classroom is a learning approach that involves a set of research and evidence-based methods devised to create safe, happy and engaging classroom and school communities. (Responsive Classroom, 2025)

The study took place over two research cycles with each cycle consisting of four weeks. Research cycle one focused on the introduction of *Morning Meeting* while research cycle two focused on pupil empowerment.

1.4.1 Research Cycle One

Cycle one began on 4th February 2025 until 7th March 2025 for four weeks. The focus was on introducing *Morning Meeting* as part of a structured, intentional time for listening, sharing and engaging as a class. This intervention began every day before any formal subjects started. Pupils were encouraged to take note of their feelings, thoughts and ideas in their reflective journals. Observations were recorded by the researcher and feedback was received from the validation group.

This research cycle encouraged both the class and I to “slow down”. The theory of slow pedagogy, (FitzPatrick, Twohig, and Morgan, 2014) is where learning experiences are dynamic and engaging. High value is placed on the quality of exchanges between teacher and student and these exchanges and learning experiences are not rushed or forced.

1.4.2 Research Cycle Two

Research cycle two began on the 10th March 2025 – 11th April 2025. It involved teaching empowerment strategies from the Weaving Well Being Program (Forman and Rock, 2017) that involved learning about helpful self-talk, growth mindset and thinking traps. During this cycle, we focused on fostering empowerment in the classroom and increasing pupils’ active involvement in their own learning.

These opportunities coupled with *Morning Meeting* allow for positive connections and relationships to develop and flourish within the classroom.

1.5 Potential Contribution of the Study

The interventions I introduced during this research study are sustainable, practical and accessible to all teachers and students. It was important for me that the interventions I introduced could be utilised in every classroom in the country every day of the school year.

There is much potential for my own teaching colleagues as well as all educators to engage with *Morning Meeting* and empowering activities in their own classrooms.

Morning Meeting is very slowly finding its way into Irish classrooms through webinars and information from Dr. Treasa Bowe. While there is extensive international research to promote its advantages, I would hope this research study will contribute to the inclusion of *Morning Meeting* in Irish classrooms.

Students that participate in daily social-emotional lessons form healthier relationships with both their teachers and peers. (Responsive Classroom, 2017). One of the main guiding principles in the Responsive Classroom is that “teaching social and emotional skills is as important as teaching academic content”. As Nodding’s (1984: 176) also reminds us, “The student is infinitely more important than the subject matter.”

I define *Connection before Curriculum* as the shift from neoliberal ideals in schools to a more relational pedagogy. Where schools and classrooms prioritise children’s need to belong and be part of a community. This in turn allows pupils to slow down, become emotionally regulated, empowered in their learning and feel valued within the classroom.

This transformation leads to more engagement in the curriculum, more creativity from pupils as well as an enhancement in classroom relationships.

1.6 Format of the Study

The Literature Review (Chapter Two) reviews literature regarding curriculum and policies and classroom relationships. It details the internal and external barriers that can hinder educators from developing positive relationships as well as the pedagogical approaches that foster these relationships.

Methodologies (Chapter Three) explores the methodology used to undertake this research project. It explains the process of Educational Action Research as well as the rationale for

choosing this methodology. It outlines the research design and data collection methods used. Ethical considerations and research validity are also detailed in this chapter.

My Findings (Chapter Four) details the results of this research project as well as how the data was analysed. Three main themes are explained with sub themes also clarified. Critical reflections are included throughout the analysis.

Conclusion (Chapter Five) concludes by summarising the research journey and findings. Personal and Professional knowledge is highlighted as well as limitations for this study. Recommendations are detailed as well as methods for dissemination of the research.

“I define connection as the energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued; when they can give and receive without judgment; and when they derive sustenance and strength from the relationship.” (Brown, 2010)

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Strong, high-quality teacher-student relationships can be attributed to improvements in student engagement, attendance as well as academic and behavioural success (McKay & Macomber, 2023; Quin, 2017)

The aim of this literature review is to explore relationships within the classroom setting and how these relationships can be enhanced. The literature review begins by exploring positive teacher-student relationships and the impact they can have on both teachers and students.

Subsequently, the review will highlight the barriers that can hinder the development of classroom relationships while also highlighting the role teachers play in peer relationships.

In conclusion, pedagogical approaches of how to intentionally foster and nurture positive classroom relationships will be evaluated.

2.2 Friedrich Froebel

The German educator Friedrich Froebel (1782–1852) and the founder of kindergarten, was one of the most important educational advocates of the 19th century. His principles remain highly relevant today, particularly to this dissertation as he placed an emphasis on “unity, connectedness, and community” (Tovey, 2020).

Froebel believed that the relationships educators have with children should be “close, trusting, responsive, interactive and intellectually engaging” (Tovey, 2012: 126). He also highlighted that positive teacher-student relationships come from recognizing each child’s uniqueness and fostering mutual learning (Tovey, 2020).

2.3 Irish Primary Curriculum

The Irish primary education system has transformed in recent decades. The updated *Primary Curriculum Framework* (NCCA, 2023) maintains the importance of relationships in education and identifies relationships as a core principle of learning, teaching, and assessment. It reports that “caring relationships within the school

community can impact positively on children’s engagement, motivation, and learning” (NCCA, 2023: 6).

This emphasis aligns with Froebelian principles, which recognise the determining role of relationships in a child's development. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (1999) emphasise the importance of teacher–child relationships, suggesting that genuine care fosters trust, motivation, and a positive learning environment.

Social and emotional development is seen as foundational to learning and is best supported through a school ethos characterised by caring, interactive teacher–pupil relationships (NCCA, 1999: 16).

2.4 Developing Positive Teacher-Student relationships

2.4.1 Belonging

According to Aistear, the Early Childhood Framework, *belonging* is defined as having a secure relationship with or a connection with a particular group of people (NCCA, 2009).

In 1943, US psychologist Abraham Maslow’s theorized that humans’ psychological needs could be placed into a Hierarchy of Needs. In these 5 levels of needs, *belongingness* is highlighted as a fundamental human need and one often provided through teacher-student relationships, given the amount of time spent in the classroom (Anyon et al., 2018).

Maslow’s view that humans succeed through connection and group belonging is reflected in Irish educational policy. It emphasizes that a child’s sense of self is associated with their self-esteem and their experience of being valued and respected within family and community settings (NCCA, 2009).

In contrast, the absence of belonging in school settings often presents as pupil disengagement which can include detachment, absenteeism, or disruptive behaviours (Battistich & Horn, 1997, cited in Kincade et al., 2020).

2.4.2 Impact of positive teacher-student relationships

The Teaching Council (2016) states that teachers should demonstrate care, fairness and a strong commitment to the well-being of their students, while also fostering positive relationships with them.

Relationships that include trust and connection are key to the engagement and learning of pupils. Interactions that are respectful and sensitive are fundamental to building those positive relationships (Hickey et al., 2020).

Therefore, fostering positive teacher-student interactions in the classroom benefit everyone involved as they can help to resolve conflicts and encourage pupils to take responsibility for their actions. The development of these relationships is supported by adults' knowledge of students' lives, both inside and outside of school (Anyon et al., 2018).

These positive and strong relationships can be a driving force behind student attendance, teacher motivation (Gehris, 2014) and pupils' own motivation to learn. (McKay & Macomber, 2023). These relationships are the foundation of effective teaching: where great teachers are kind, caring, and loving role models (Wong and Wong, 2018).

When trying to build those connections, educators in Anyon et al. (2018: 228) research, described themselves as “warm strict”. This is described as showing care by engaging in students' lives while also holding them responsible for their actions. This mirrors the concept of the “warm demander,” (Pianta, 2006; Fisher & Frey, 2019), where teachers maintain high expectations while promoting mutual respect.

There are many benefits to building strong relationships in the classroom, however, it must be remarked that it is also a challenging aspect of teaching as it requires time, persistence, and patience (Wahl-Alexander et al., 2019, cited in McKay & Macomber, 2021).

2.5 Barriers in developing positive teacher-student relationships.

2.5.1 Teacher stress and wellbeing

It is not surprising that teaching ranks as one of the highest stress-related professions (Harmsen et al., 2018; Titheradge et al, 2019). The teaching profession has for many years been recognised as an at-risk profession for burnout. (Johnson, 2005, cited in Ní Chinseallaigh, 2025).

This is highly relevant in Irish schools as in a recent study (Fitzsimons et al., 2025) found that 86% of teachers in Irish school indicate “moderate to high levels” of burnout. It

indicates that teachers are struggling to manage with the demands of the job which is affecting their overall wellbeing.

Teacher wellbeing can impact students' social and academic outcomes (Split et al., 2011). Teacher-student relationships can be a significant source of stress and joy, as negative emotions and high stress levels in teachers are strongly associated with weaker teacher-student connections (Yoon, 2002, as cited in Split et al., 2011).

It is revealed that teachers often invest in student relationships, which explains why poor relationships can affect teachers' self-image. (Nias, 1996 cited in Split, 2011).

Riley (2010) argues that teachers are often not prepared to manage the powerful emotions that develop in the classroom, and there is a lack of training in how to care for oneself and others in emotionally charged situations.

As Kindermann (2011) reminds us, teachers are human beings with emotions like love, fear, and anger, yet these are rarely addressed in educational literature (Riley, 2010).

2.5.2 Feelings of Rejection

Many teachers not only care deeply for their students but also desire love or respect in return. When this emotional exchange is absent, some, perhaps automatically, respond by punishing students to restore that lost connection (Riley, 2010).

The physical and emotional closeness between teachers and students may accelerate a need for connection. When relationships fail to meet this need, teachers can feel rejected or vulnerable, potentially experiencing both personal and professional failure (Split et al., 2011).

2.5.3 Curriculum before Connection

Marian Dadds (2001) observes that results-driven curricula in countries such as Australia and the UK have placed mounting pressure on educators. In agreement, Ball (2012) describes education systems as being consumed by performance and efficiency.

Dadds (2001) refers to this as "*hurry-along curriculum*." Responsive teaching has been side-lined in favour of rapid content delivery. It often feels as though the content matters more than the learning itself.

This urgency leaves students behind which can weaken their understanding (Pollard, 1992, cited in Dadds, 2001). Hargreaves (1998) also critiques this pressure to perform, observing how it undermines the emotional understanding and care that are essential to teaching. He writes:

“Curriculum frameworks that are so filled up with content, standards, benchmarks and coverage that there is little room for care – all these make cognitive and emotional misunderstanding chronic features of many schools and classrooms.” (Hargreaves, 1998: 839)

Durlak et al. (2011) suggest that content must always be secondary to classroom climate and that developing compassionate, collaborative, and emotionally resilient individuals who can thrive in a constantly evolving world is what is important.

Riley (2010) agrees that building relationships is more crucial than content, specifically the traditional 3Rs (Reading, wRiting and aRithmetic). He proposes a focus on:

- Relationship from the student’s perspective
- Relationship from the teacher’s perspective
- The priority of relationship formation by school leadership

This erosion of care and connection within the classroom manifests in unhappiness, discouragement and self-doubt among teachers (Nias, 1999 cited in Dadds, 2001) which is apparent when Dadds (2001) describes a discussion with Jan, a primary teacher.

When teaching a new prescribed literacy and numeracy programme, Jan asks, *“Am I doing it right?”* An example of self-doubt in a self-confessed experienced teacher. Jan continues, *“It’s the human side of teaching that’s going.”*

Her words echo Hargreaves’ (1988, cited in Dadds, 2001) that *“The human dimensions of education are as important as the knowledge content.”*

2.5.4 Neoliberal capitalism

This erosion of care and the prioritisation of content over connection, shows the beliefs of neoliberal capitalism. Neoliberalism quickens the pace of life and work, driven by intensified competition and the demand to achieve more in less time (Standing, 2011; Rosa, 2013, cited in Lynch, 2022).

Life in the present is often lived for the future: children go to school to secure good jobs and workers view jobs through the lens of holidays and income. This system undermines the time needed to show genuine care and deepens inequalities, especially for those most in need of it. (Lynch, 2022)

To drive economic growth, the Irish Government aims to develop a highly educated, globally competitive workforce (Sloan et al., 2013, as cited in Skerritt, 2019). This has increased the focus on international assessments like PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment).

After unsatisfactory PISA 2009 results, the National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy (DES, 2011) was introduced, reflecting not only a focus on skills but also neoliberal ideals that link education to economic performance (Ó Breacháin & O'Toole, 2013, as cited in Skerritt, 2019).

2.6 How can educators enhance relationships in their classroom?

There are many methodologies and interventions that teachers utilise daily to connect with their students. The following practices and pedagogies include the idea of slowing down education which encourages active listening, wait time as well as promoting student voice. A classroom of care can be nurtured when teachers are trauma informed and are knowledgeable about the pupils in their care.

2.6.1 Slow education

According to Fitzpatrick et al. (2014), there is a need to have a greater focus on the teaching of life-skills and social-emotional learning in our schools.

The adjustment from a “*hurry-along curriculum*” to what Dadds (2001) describes as a “*wait-a-while curriculum*” promotes reflection and more profound learning. This concept mirrors the principles of the *slow movement* (Honoré, 2004), which suggests making genuine and significant connections with people, being responsive, sensitive, and reflective.

Pedagogy, as defined by French (2013: 20), is “*the practice...of teaching... the interactive process between educator and child to enable learning.*” Slow pedagogy allows for quality and personal interactions over rapid content delivery, recognising that meaningful

learning emerges through time, presence, and awareness. (Berg and Seeber, 2016, cited in Thomas and Carvajal-Regidor, 2021). There have been many calls over the past few years for a slower, more reflective approach in educational settings and pedagogy. (Docherty, 2013, Glenn, 2023 and Berg and Seeber, 2016, cited in Thomas and Carvajal-Regidor, 2021)

Maurice Holt (2002), a champion of slow education, highlights the importance of the learning process and how the curriculum is *experienced* rather than just *delivered*. Miriam Tanti's (2018) research found four themes associated with slow education.

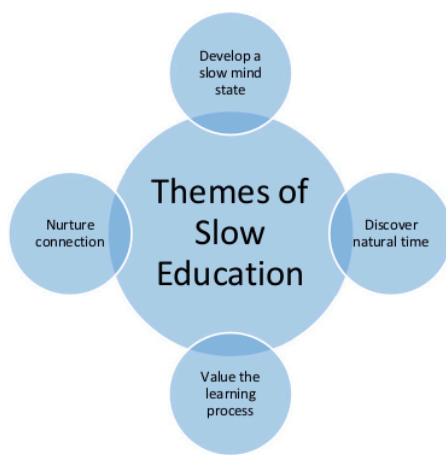


Image 1 –Themes of Slow Education (Tanti, 2018)

However, Carl Honoré (2004) is clear to point out that *slow* does not always suggest *slow*. It is about balance and finding the right speed. When priority is given to speed, results and productivity in education, listening and connection are overlooked. (Tanti, 2018)

2.6.2 Active Listening and Wait Time

To ensure active participation and engagement with young children, respectful listening is vital. (Hayes et al, 2017). Yet Stephen Covey (2020) believes that most people do not listen to understand, they listen with the sole purpose of responding.

Active listening, introduced by Carl Rodgers and Richard Farson in 1957 is vital to engage properly with and understand students. (Newton, 2024). As professionals, we can be hesitant to embrace silence and listen actively according to research from Newton

(2024). She also reminds us that time is a luxury and when time is limited it can hinder our ability to listen well.

Budd Rowe introduced the idea of “wait time” back in 1974 and Dadds (2001) would also encourage that teachers allow for deliberate pauses after asking a question, it can encourage more thoughtful responses, increase participation (especially from quieter children), and can shift classroom dynamics to be more inclusive and collaborative.

2.6.3 Classroom of Care

According to Nel Nodding (2010), the natural human instinct in life is that *we want to be cared for and to care for others*. Teachers who truly listen to students can better understand and respond to their needs. Children will not necessarily remember exactly what taught; however, they will certainly remember how they felt when we cared for them (Noddings, 1984).

Nodding’s (2003) promoted and developed care theory which focuses primarily on the value of relationships. Joan Tronto (1998) describes *care* as both an outlook of concern and the actions that follow. While Kathleen Lynch (2022) claims that *care* involves making time for others which is often at the sacrifice of productivity.

Nodding’s (2013) asserts that the central aim of education should be to preserve and enhance caring both in ourselves and in those we teach. Yet students must be given opportunities to care and becoming prepared to care requires practise (Nodding’s, 2012). Every act of care in the classroom is a form of moral education; every lapse is a missed opportunity. (Nodding’s, 2013)

Yet care practices could also be seen as a barrier when building relationships in the classroom as according to Ireland’s Central Statistics Office (CSO, 2023), over 84% of primary school teachers are female. Lynch (2009, cited in Lynch 2010: 58) draws attention to this gendered nature of care, describing women as “care’s foot soldiers” and men as “care commanders.”

This responsibility of care can come at a price. Nodding’s (2012) warns of “empathic fatigue” when teachers are denied emotional support from students. Similarly,

compassion fatigue and burnout can undermine teacher success and their ability to build supportive student relationships (Craig, 2017, cited in Hickey et al., 2020).

Yet it is worth remembering that care is not a one-dimensional performance demonstrated by an individual but a vibrant process that emerges from the interactions and discussions within a community (Sidorkin, 2025). Care is relational because in a classroom community, pupils and their teacher are all participants in creating and sustaining a classroom of care.

2.6.4 Trauma Informed Practice

Attachment Theory, introduced by John Bowlby in the 1960's was the theory that children form core connections with caregivers, which can shape their sense of self. Unfortunately, some of these early experiences may involve neglect or fear or abuse. These Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) are understood to impact learners' ability to engage and prosper within mainstream education (Hickey et al., 2020). Trauma is defined as an event(s) that are perceived to be physically or emotionally harmful with lasting effects on a person's wellbeing. (SAMHSA, 2014).

"Piece of my Mind", a survey on Irish children's mental health, (OCO, 2023) found that 78% of children surveyed rated their Mental Health as "sometimes low, stressed or anxious, not good". It found that almost 12,000 children are on waiting lists for primary care psychology services. Due to the distressing consequences of childhood trauma, there has been a surge in initiatives to help schools become trauma informed. (O'Toole, 2022).

In Ireland, the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), under the supervision of the Department of Education (DES, 2025) have launched a new eLearning course based on introducing a Trauma Informed Approach in schools. The focus of this course is on creating environments to reduce stress as well as exploring the use of compassionate and trauma-informed approaches to build safe and connected schools (Foley, 2023).

2.6.5 Student Voice

During a recent class discussion, a child shared her opinion: "*Why do we have to do Maths and reading all the time? We should be doing more Drama and Dance*" (Joyce, Reflective Journal: 24th January 2025).

This comment conveys the rift between a child's interests and a curriculum that is led by core subjects. National curriculums that are heavily prescribed limit both time and freedom to explore what genuinely interests pupils. (Pollard et al., 1992, cited in Dadds, 2001)

According to Article 12 of The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), children have a right to express views on matters affecting them, but research by Lundy (2007) shows these rights are often overlooked. Children are rarely listened to significantly and are often given perfunctory roles in decision-making, due to adults' belief that children cannot contribute appropriately (Lundy, 2007).

School Self-Evaluation (SSE), a cooperative and reflective process of internal school review, has been compulsory in Ireland since 2012 and recognises students as key participants. However, as Brown et al. (2020, cited in Skerritt, 2023) indicate, student voice still focuses on non-academic matters which seems to have little influence on teaching and learning.

Some teachers may find that student voice can create discomfort, but other teachers may find it generates creativity and enjoyment. (Flutter, 2007, cited in Skerritt, 2023)

As Trigg and Pollard (1998, cited in Lundy, 2007) claim, placing students as passive recipients of a rigid curriculum denies them the ownership that they need for lifelong learning. In contrast, autonomy-supportive teachers are those who listen, respond, and offer choice which in turn encourage pupil's motivation, curiosity, and challenge (Flink et al., 1990, cited in Lundy, 2007). There is huge potential to improve current and future educational practices by embracing autonomy-supportive teaching. (Reeve and Cheon, 2021).

Nearly four decades ago, Schön (1971, cited in Lundy, 2007) warned that rigid education systems suppress the creativity essential to children's development. Lundy (2007) stresses that student voice must be treated as a human right, not just an educational trend.

2.7 Peer relationships and the role of the teacher

Ertesvåg (2024) describes the connections between the quality of teachers' educational support and the quality of peer relationships within the classroom. Students learn from, compare, support and co-operate with their peers. These peer interactions are shaped, directly and indirectly, by the teacher's role in the classroom.

Teachers can influence students' peer relationships by promoting social skills, enhancing confidence in social interactions, or shaping peer perceptions through their own behaviour toward the student. (Endedijkl et al., 2022).

2.7.1 The invisible hand

Teachers are uniquely positioned to manage peer interactions in the classroom as well as being the one professional in a child's life to view the whole child: academically, behaviourally, physically and socially. (Farmer, 2011).

Dr. Robert Cairns and Urie Bronfenbrenner presented the concept of the "invisible hand" to explain the often-overlooked influence teachers have on their students' peer relationships. Teachers can inadvertently affect a student's peer relationships through their own relationship and interactions with that student. (Farmer, 2011). These subtle yet powerful interactions can strengthen inclusivity, status, and behavioural expectations.

Research by Kincade et al. (2020) acknowledges these powerful interactions. The research involved teacher-student relationship interventions and the impact they had on peer relationships. Teachers used practices which included praise, demonstrating respect, one on one time with students to build relationships, teaching student emotions and getting to know students personally. The findings show that teachers have a significant role in the quality of the students' peer relationships via their own interactions and relationships with the students.

2.7.2 Restorative practice

In an evaluation report by the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST, 2019), Restorative Practice (RP) is described as a way of "building bridges and fostering positive relationships within schools" (PDST, 2019: 5). The report itself came as a response for support from schools when dealing with bullying and conflict in schools.

RP emphasizes the importance of healthy, positive and sustainable relationships in schools. (PDST, 2019). It is centred on the idea that *uplifting others also uplifts ourselves* (Brummer, 2020, cited in Moran et al, 2025).

The PDST (2019) report found that schools that had embedded RP had extremely positive outcomes. The findings demonstrated the importance that lies in human relationships and the power of connection within the school community. As schools implement restorative practices, mutual respect grows and students learn to resolve disagreements independently, reducing the need for teacher involvement. (Moran et al, 2025).

2.8 Creating an environment that prioritises relationships

2.8.1 Dialogue in the Classroom

One of the key competencies in the Primary Curriculum Framework (NCCA, 2023) is that of children being a communicator and using language. It explains that this is how children “learn how to share their experiences, thoughts, ideas, and feelings in a variety of ways, and learn how to observe, listen to, interpret, and show respect for the perspectives of others” (NCCA, 2023: 10).

Nodding’s (2003) believes that to engage in dialogue (listening to, talking to and accepting each other), there must be a good relationship built up between the educator and learner.

Dolton et al. (2020) describe the importance of giving children a voice, arguing that without it, attempts to meet their needs are undermined. Tovey (2012) reflects on the Froebelian approach and emphasises that educators must empower children to view themselves as capable problem solvers.

2.8.2 Pupil Empowerment

Teachers must recognize the power they assume in the classroom and how they might inadvertently oppress students, hindering creativity and autonomy (Flaherty, 2018). An empowered person believes in their ability and their capacity to act in a sufficient, appropriate and effective manner (Ashcroft, 1987).

To foster student empowerment, feeling *cared for* is essential. When teachers show genuine care, students often respond well which strengthens the teacher-student bond.

With this, teachers can begin to understand and embody true empowerment. (Flaherty, 2018).

However, Flaherty (2018) also believes that aspects of power and empowerment can be difficult for teachers and that the relaxation of power to promote empowerment demands critical thought, attention and time.

2.8.3 Morning Meeting

Morning Meeting encourages relationship-building, emotional well-being, and social skills. (Kriete & Davis, 2014). It is an engaging way to start the day where teachers and students gather in a circle for twenty to thirty minutes to interact with each other in the following way: greeting, sharing, group activities, and morning message. (Responsive Classroom, 2023). The format is adaptable, allowing teachers to meet students' unique needs (Bondy & Ketts, 2001).

Morning Meeting is a component of The Responsive Classroom Approach, which was devised by American educators in 1981. (Responsive Classroom Approach, 2017). This approach was built out of the best research on how children learn.

Rimm-Kaufman et al. (2007) believe that *Morning Meeting* encourages positive behaviour as well as supporting students' emotional and social development. While educational literature on *Morning Meeting* is absent from Irish schools, it is highly represented in American schools.

Kriete and Davis (2014) emphasise the teacher's role in creating an engaging, caring environment, where students are seen and heard. Nodding's (2013) highlights the value of classroom interactions, where teachers engage with students as whole individuals, encouraging deeper understanding and dialogue.

When the priority is on building relationships, student attitude and motivation and positively influenced (Li, 2015; Fisher & Frey, 2019). *Morning Meeting* aligns with my values of Connection, Respect, Fairness, Empowerment and Dialogue and by creating an intentional space for developing these values daily.

2.10 Conclusion

“The heart of education is the education of the heart,” (Wong and Wong, 2018)

As mentioned in a prior chapter, early in my teaching career, I was told by many seasoned educators not to smile before Christmas, similar to the advice that Anderson and Anderson (1987) and Ervin (2022) discuss in their work. This journey of action research has been the unravelling of this assumption.

In this literature review, I have explained the impact that positive class relationships have on both teachers and students but also explored how both internal and external factors can be at play to make them difficult to achieve. Time is a limited resource for educators, yet it is vital to allow relationships to flourish.

The purpose of education is to help us care for ourselves and others and to show understanding, compassion, and courage in both our public and private lives (Pinar et al., 2008; 848, cited in Fitzpatrick et al., 2014).

The way a teacher manages the class, and the teacher’s personal qualities and relations with the pupils, are the most important factors in the work on learning in school. (Postholm, 2013).

Tronto (1998:16) writes, “We care so that we can live in the world as well as possible.” This climate of care is not an “add-on”, it is foundational. When care is prioritised, “everything else goes better.” This climate begins with listening, respecting, and making space for children's voices in every aspect of school life. (Noddings, 2012:777

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The updated *Primary Curriculum Framework* (NCCA, 2023) emphasises the importance of relationships in children's lives and that *to be with others* is an important need that makes us human (McNiff, 2013).

In this methodology chapter, I describe and outline my research questions and the methodology I used to enhance relationships in my classroom.

Using my research questions, my values of connection, fairness, respect, empowerment and dialogue as well as an Educational Action Research methodology, this chapter focuses on how my concerns informed my interventions.

My interventions included a new daily, structured routine of *Morning Meeting* as well as the introduction of activities and opportunities for pupils to feel empowered – both within themselves and within the classroom.

I explain my data collection tools and how the data collected was analysed in a thematic way. Ethical concerns for research on children are also discussed.

3.2 Research Rationale

Before embarking on this research journey, I had concerns in relation to my practice. I was aware of the need to become more intentional in fostering positive relationships with my sixth-class pupils. This enquiry into my practice, according to Mary Roche (McDonagh et al., 2020) came from a discontent with aspects of my practice.

I was concerned about the absence of positive teacher- student relationships as well as the absence of strong peer relationships. The questions I formulated from these concerns were:

- *How do I enhance my relationship with my class?*
- *What interventions do I need to include in my teaching?*
- *How can I encourage, support and maintain positive peer relationships in my classroom?*
- *How can I live by my values of connection, fairness, respect, empowerment and dialogue while this research is being undertaken?*

I was unaware that in August 2024, my intellectual curiosity was emerging, “which is at the root of a research process to enhance practice”. (McDonagh et al., 2020: 12). The motive behind my research was to enable the enhancement of positive class relationships that included and validated every child.

Bruce et al. (2020) recognises the importance of forming strong bonds with children and how these relationships can promote positive peer relationships within an educational setting.

3.3 Research Site

The research was conducted in an urban school based in the South of the country. The participants consisted of twenty-eight sixth class pupils. Participants were selected because of the class I was assigned to teach. The research group comprises of nine boys and nineteen girls. The school has a religious ethos and is a co-educational school of over 200 pupils.

3.4 Educational Action Research

My methodology for this investigation is based on Educational Action Research. Caitriona McDonagh et al. (2020) maintain that Action Research is established around a person’s values.

Jean McNiff (2013: 24) believes that Action research is “an enquiry by the self into the self, with others acting as co-researchers and critical learning partners”. Action research follows a repeated process of observe, reflect, act, evaluate, modify, and then to move in new directions. (McNiff, 2017: 12)

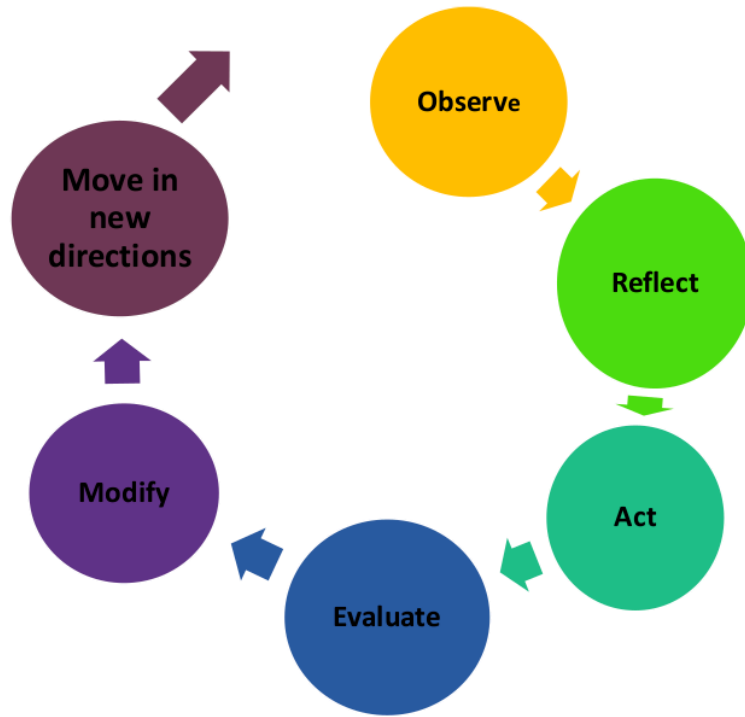


Image 2 - Action-Reflection Cycle (McNiff, 2017)

During this process, I had to develop a critical self-reflective practice. (McNiff 2013, 2014; Sullivan et. al., 2016). As part of that, I needed to ask myself three questions.

1. **What am I doing?**
2. **Why am I doing it?**
3. **How can I improve it?** (McNiff, 2013; McNiff & Whitehead, 2005).

Mary Roche (McDonagh et al., 2020) believes that self-study action research is a form of authentic professional development that can benefit others. There is also the suggestion that by investigating one's practice and putting it up for public examination, it can add to the "flourishing of humanity" (Whitehead 2018: 141).

3.5 My Values

Educational Action Research is profoundly values-based and yet, in late August 2024 when asked by Mairín Glenn and Caitriona McDonagh what my values were, I was uncertain.

In the 14 years I have been teaching, I have never reflected on this before. Just as Glenn (2023) explains, by beginning this Educational Action Research, the process was uncovering who I am and the beliefs and values that I hold.

Ontological values depict “being” and are an explanation of one’s personal reality and how one views themselves within the world. Epistemological values are to do with how we view knowledge and how we believe that knowledge is created. (Schraw, 2013).

According to Jean McNiff and Jack Whitehead (2005), my values (connection, respect, fairness, empowerment and dialogue) are not abstract concepts. I need to remember that my values need to be understood as real-life practices.

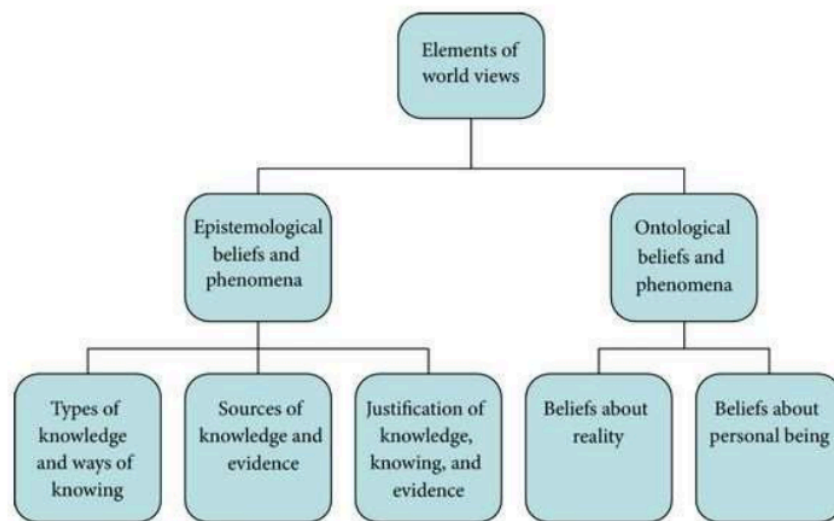


Image 3 – Epistemological and Ontological Values (Schraw, 2013:11)

McDonagh et al. (2019) state that our values inform who and how we are as educational researchers, and how we attempt to work with others. Similarly, Schraw (2013) establishes that a teacher’s beliefs and classroom practices affect student’s beliefs and learning. McDonagh et al. (2020) reminds us that during the process of Action Research our values can evolve and develop along with our understanding.

While all my values are of equal importance, it is my ontological values of Connection and Empowerment as well as my epistemological value of Dialogue are what have motivated me to begin this project.

3.6 Critical Self-Reflective Practice

As previously mentioned, I had to develop a critical self -reflective practice during this Action Research project.

Reflective thinking involves taking aspects of your practice and thinking intentionally about them, to see if you can gain insights and improvement. It usually involves thinking about events in the past, yet its purpose is related to the future. (Sullivan et al, 2016).

Donald Schon (2017: 65) explains two different types of reflective practice. “Reflection **in** action” – is in the moment where we “think about doing something while doing it”.

“Reflection **on** action”- occurs after the action took place and is known as the review of the action. (Sullivan et al., 2016).

3.6.1 Lens of Reflection

Stephen Brookfield (2017) further explains how we can create a full and accurate picture of our practice when we are reflecting critically on our practice.

He describes that when we try on a new jacket in a clothes shop, we only see the front view of ourselves in the mirror. However, when we try on the jacket in the changing room, with multiple mirrors, we see the bigger picture. We can see multiple perspectives.

Brookfield (2017) describes how one should view their actions through four complementary lenses. These lenses of reflection comprise of the lens of *students' eyes*, *the lens of colleague's experiences*, *the lens of literature or theory* and *the lens of personal experience*.

He recommends using ‘Four Lenses’ to obtain a consistent picture of our teaching. Each lens offers a different perspective like the mirrors in a changing room.

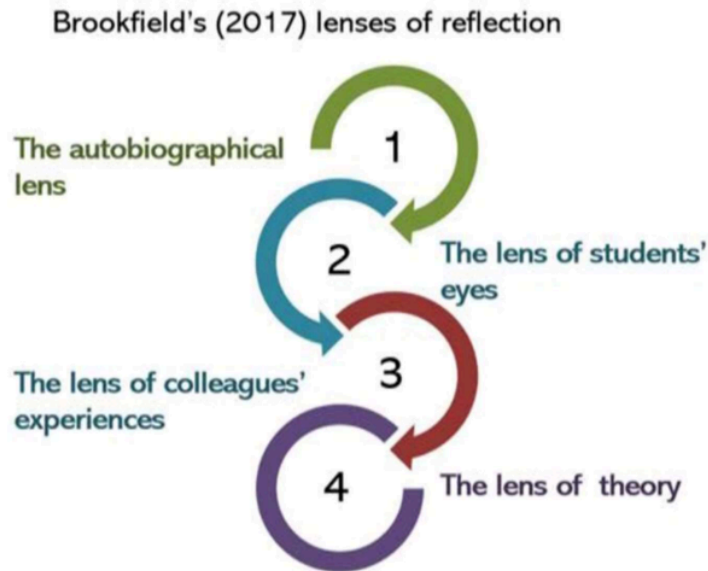


Image 4 - Lenses of reflection. (Brookfield, 2017)

Personal experiences of learning are intertwined with teaching practice. Accounts of personal experience typically move us more than summaries of findings in a research study. The inclusion of a *critical friend or colleague* is at the centre of the critically reflective process. A critical friend is someone who strives to help you discover and check your assumptions and opens you up to new perspectives about familiar problems. (Brookfield, 2017).

Brookfield (2017) also asserts that *reading theory* feels like coming home. It has been surprising to respond emotionally to certain articles that convey how I feel. He is of the opinion that the *lens of student's eyes* has been the most important in his career and when you understand the different ways students view your practice it can reveal some unsettling truths for you. (Brookfield, 2017)

3.7 Model of Reflection

Within the Action Research cycle of McNiff (2017) as previously discussed, I needed further support to guide my reflection.

I was drawn to the ERA cycle developed by Melanie Jasper (2013). The ERA (Experience, Reflect, Action) reflective model is a simple framework that appealed to me as it seemed like a more individual process of reflection.

It also allowed me to reflect more deeply on an experience before I moved to the next stage which is where I could *reflect on the action* that was happening within my practice (Sullivan et al., 2016).

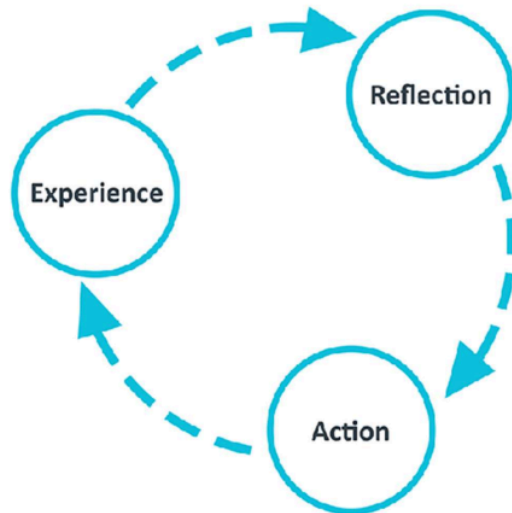


Image 5 - ERA Model (Jasper, 2013)

3.8 Living Theory Action Research

The concept of Living Theory Action Research by Jack Whitehead (2019, 2006) is where educators create their own *living educational theory* as an explanation of their educational experiences in their own learning and then by sharing this explanation with others.

The educational theory we generate from our research is known as a “living” form of theory. (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006). They are “living” theories as they are created from our own living practices.

Part of generating a living theory is the tension between a person’s values and beliefs and actions. This is known as being a “living contradiction” (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006). This tension is the connection that links past actions and future actions.

Whitehead (2018) asserts that it is important that one uses this conflict as a motivation for progression and development in their own learning.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

The British Education Research Association (BERA, 2024) endorses the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC); *the best interests of the child are the primary consideration, and children who are capable of forming their own views should be granted the right to express those views freely, and have them taken into consideration, in all matters affecting them, commensurate with their age and maturity.* (BERA, 2024; 18)

Ethical approval for this research project was granted by the ethics committee in Maynooth University Froebel Department Teacher Education.

3.9.1 Informed consent

A discussion was had with the school principal and approval was sought and received from the Board of Management (Appendix 1A). Consent forms and information sheets were given to parents regarding the research. Informed consent was central to the involvement of the participants. Separate consent forms were issued to their parents and /or guardians. (Appendix 1B). Parents were made aware that non-participants for this research would still participate in the activities/tasks, but data would not be collected on them.

Information sheets and consent forms were provided to all adult participants in this research, including members of the validation group, critical friends and Dr. Treasa Bowe. These roles are explained further in the Methodology Chapter.

3.9.2 Assent

An information session with my class explained my research and allowed children to ask questions. It was important that children understand that they could withdraw participation at any time. I showed the children the assent forms and answered any questions they had.

Children were informed that those who do not give assent for this research would still participate in the activities, but data would not be collected on them. All pupils gave consent to participate in this research (Appendix 2).

3.9.3 Vulnerability

Before carrying out any research with children, ethical guidelines considerations are paramount. Primary school children need to be safeguarded, and every effort was made to ensure they were.

My values of respect and fairness align with the Teaching Council's Standards of Teaching which are listed as: Respect, Integrity, Care, and Trust. (Teaching Council, 2016).

As a teacher and teacher researcher, I adhered to the Children First (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2017) and the Child Protection Procedures for Primary schools (Department of Education, 2023).

3.9.4 Power dynamics

Teachers hold full authority over how they exercise power in their classrooms. (Flaherty, 2018). I am mindful that I, as a teacher, hold this position of power. I shared this position of power with the pupils and gave them more responsibility in their learning during this research project. Each child was treated respectfully, acknowledging their own individual ways of participation and engagement in the research. Children had the option to opt out should they so choose, without consequences, at any stage.

Pupils were asked to participate in the project without incentives to do so. They were informed that they could withdraw at any time without giving reasons to do so.

At all stages of the research process, I was aware of the need to ensure that the research should never harm anyone, intentionally or otherwise, and maintained an open and transparent line of communication with both pupils, parents and the schools Board of Management.

3.9.5 Data storage

Data collected was confidential (within the limitations of the law), anonymous and was stored safely. When collecting data, I used the minimum amount of personal information.

When writing about my participants, each participant's data was pseudonymised by assigning them letters of the alphabet. All data collected was accessible only to me.

All information gathered will be stored for a period of time in line with the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education at Maynooth University and GDPR guidelines. Data collected was stored in a secure location with password protection on electronic devices. Information will be destroyed in a stated timeframe in accordance with the University guidelines. The correct guidelines will be complied with when carrying out this research.

If this thesis is disseminated or published to a wider audience in the future, all ethical considerations will continue to be adhered to. My interview with Dr. Treasa Bowe was audio recorded with her informed consent. The recording was used solely for research purposes and securely stored to ensure confidentiality.

3.9.6 Sensitivity

My research is based around pupil/teacher relationships and the impact they can have. There are some children in my class that have difficult relationships with people in their home lives. In those cases, I was very conscious of their engagement levels as well as their emotional and physical responses and was aware of that when gathering and analysing data.

Some participants had English as an additional language, (EAL) therefore when asking for permission and having informal conversations with them, I ensured I was clear, and I had been understood.

A strategy to aid understanding for all children as well as EAL learners was the use of Flipchart/PowerPoints which included concise language as well as images and diagrams to explain the research process (before, during and after).

There was flexibility regarding all children but especially children with disabilities in relation to alternative means of expressing their thoughts/opinions. Children had the choice to draw, paint or sketch in their personal journals. I encouraged the use of extra Time to process and create their responses.

I adhered to the United Nations (1989) Convention on the Rights of the child and considered the child's view on all matters relating to the research (Article 12). Regarding

compliance and authority, I recognised that children might feel obliged to give answers that they deem pleasing to the teacher (Cohen et al., 2018: 341). I clearly stated to the children that the research is to do with my learning of me as a teacher.

3.10 Action Research Cycle One

3.10.1 Morning Meeting

Morning Meeting was designed to create a space in the day that addresses student's emotional and social development. The *Morning Meeting* format was created by Northwest Foundation for Children in the United States as part of the Responsive classroom practices. (Kriete & Davis, 2014).

The meeting sets a respectful tone of trust and engaged learning. It also meets everyone's need to belong and have fun together. The four components of the *Morning Meeting* are:

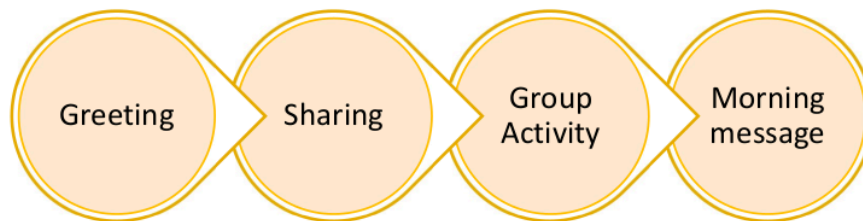


Image 6 – Morning Meeting components (Kriete & Davis, 2014)

During *Morning Meeting*, students develop improved ways to be heard and to listen to their peers. Children are given a voice. These meetings provide students daily opportunities to interact with their peers and teachers to further develop their social and emotional skills (Trottier, 2016). The meetings also focus on community building and skills such as listening, asking questions, and making meaningful comments. (Bondy and Ketts, 2001).

My first research cycle will involve all pupils in *Morning Meeting*. Pupil questionnaires will be used before we begin *Morning Meeting* as well as after. This will allow me to examine the pupil's thoughts and feelings towards *Morning Meeting*.

3.11 Action Research Cycle Two

3.11.1 Empowering Beliefs

Weaving Well-Being is an Irish designed positive mental health programme which aims to enhance well-being in children aged from eight to twelve years. It focuses on the concept that a *state of well-being* is not simply the absence of the negative, but the presence of the positive. (Forman and Rock, 2017).

The theme of the sixth-class programme is *Empowering Beliefs*. This intervention aligns well with my values of empowerment and dialogue. The topics I cover during my intervention will be:

- *Belief 1: I can choose helpful Self Talk*
- *Belief 2: My effort is as important as my ability*
- *Belief 3: I can recognize thinking traps*
- *Belief 4: I can act "as if"*

3.11.2 Empowerment within the classroom

My values of Empowerment, fairness and respect are central to my belief that children's voices should be valued and listened to within the classroom.

3.11.3 History Projects

In a class discussion with pupils regarding Easter Rising projects, pupils were given the opportunity to showcase their learning in a way that suited their interests and strengths. This was to showcase their creativity and enhance engagement as well as foster children's autonomy.

This opportunity for dialogue and decision-making mirrors the belief of Freire (1972, cited in Garavan, 2016) that dialogue is the critical method for involving engagement between teachers and their students and vice versa.

3.12 Research Design

This project is mainly based on qualitative research which, according to Weng Marc Lim (2025) is prominent for its ability to describe the depth of shared experiences involving human perspectives.

Qualitative research is connected to real-world concerns, as it seeks to explore events within their natural settings. Qualitative research values the experiences and perspectives of participants. Therefore, qualitative research allows me to gain insight into what the pupils are thinking. To foster positive relationships within the classroom, it will be essential to observe participants in their natural setting, which permits me to recognise any concerns or areas that needed attention.

Quantitative research, by contrast, depends on numerical data, which I incorporate in the analysis of results from questionnaires. The process of reflection was also relied upon during this project. As previously stated, reflection is a key element to action research, and this facilitates a qualitative approach.

By creating data from observations, notes, interviews and reflections, it emulates the objectives of this project, which show that an action research study with a qualitative model is the most effective and beneficial methodology for teacher and student. These interventions will hopefully have a positive, lasting effect on the children. I planned inclusive and personal activities for the children during these Research Cycles whereby I focus on the intentional space for sharing and listening with each other. I hope to see my values of connection, respect, fairness, empowerment and dialogue more evident during these interventions.

3.13 Data Collection

There will be two research cycles in this study and data was collected from the research participants throughout both research cycles. There were several different methods used to collect data including feedback from my validation group and my critical friends, reflective observation notes, my personal reflective journal, pupil's reflective journals,

pupil questionnaires as well as an interview with Dr. Treasa Bowe, who has many years' experiences of using *Morning Meeting* in her classroom.

3.13.1 Critical Friends and Validation Groups

A member of my validation group is a Special Needs Assistant (SNA) assigned to my room. I have worked with her for several years and I value and respect her opinion, knowledge, expertise as well as her relationship with the children in my classroom.

Another member of my validation group is a teaching colleague. This teacher taught the class involved in this research previously and therefore is familiar with them. Both members gave their consent to be involved in this study and gave feedback throughout the research cycles.

My three critical friends include educators taking part in this research course. Bernie Sullivan (McDonagh et al., 2020) writes that of particular benefit are the critical comments of colleagues, as these observations can be used in the process of *triangulation*. All participants consented to allow their feedback to be included in my research. (Appendix 3 and 4).

3.13.2 Observations

Observations are an effective approach in smaller research projects that have a short time frame (Cohen et al., 2018). I observed the children's interactions with one another, in small groups and as a whole group. I was mindful of my role as researcher and as teacher to maintain a natural and participatory approach. Observations can be used to record interactions, conversations and behaviours in a more naturalistic approach (McAteer, 2013).

I used these observations to make note of children's comments/actions during my interventions. I documented these quotes from conversations on "post-it" notes and later transcribed them into my reflective journal.

3.13.3 Reflective Journal

McNiff and Whitehead (2002) discuss how the reflective diaries, at the end of the research study provide essential data that details the learning that has occurred. It gives a true

account of how one feels exactly at a moment of writing as well being a map of my learning journey. It helped to clarify my ideas. (Brockbank and McGill, 2006).

My journal recorded data from my observations, my reflections as well as my feelings and questions. A reflective journal provides both data related to the researchers practice but will also generate data on their given topic (Sullivan et al., 2016). By using Brookfield's framework (2017) of the complementary four lenses as well as Jaspers' (2013) ERA reflective model, I hoped to obtain a comprehensive view of myself.

Bernie Sullivan (McDonagh et al., 2020) asserts that a reflective journal of experiences needs to be described in a way that will improve a reader's understanding of teacher education. To add to the validity of this research project, my data was concise and truthful as well as dated and labelled.

3.13.4 Pupils Questionnaires

I used two questionnaires during my research cycle- before and after my interventions (Appendix 5). On the questionnaires, I used a slight adaptation of the Likert-Type Scale. The Likert scale was developed by Rensis Likert in 1932 and is used to measure the amount to which a respondent agrees or disagrees with a statement. He created this method to measure people's attitudes quantitatively. It allowed me to assess the degree of agreement or disagreement rather than just a simple yes or no response.

In Alan and Atalay Kabasakal's study (2020), they found that if there is an increase in the number of response options, the scale advises us about detailed individual differences and that variability and reliability increase.

Brookfield (2017) is very clear when he discusses how to gather accurate information from students. He believes that students will respond more truthfully if it is through anonymity. He claims that I, the educator, must demonstrate that I have no idea who wrote what which was my aim by pseudonymising all data. I encouraged all pupils to share their criticisms as well as their praise.

3.13.5 Pupils' Reflective Journals

The objective of this data was to 'become aware of the complex and sometimes contradictory perceptions students have of the same event' (Brookfield, 2017:97).

Melanie Ní Dhuinn's (2023) action research found that by allowing children the option to draw and/or paint their feedback offered children an inclusive and level playing field from which to participate. It allowed them to articulate their viewpoints and develop their own agency and belief system.

I encouraged pupils to respond to appropriate questions based on my interventions, in an inclusive and creative way. Pupils could draw, paint, write, and sketch their responses into their journals throughout the research cycle.

Pupils were fully anonymous when they wrote in their journals as well as having the option to type their responses if they wish.

3.13.6 Interview with Dr. Treasa Bowe

A Zoom interview with Dr. Treasa Bowe during the year gave further insight into the long-term benefits of *Morning Meeting*. I refer to Brookfield (2017) again and his lens of reflection and how *the lens of colleague's experiences* are another way to reflect and see a different perspective.

An interview is “not simply concerned with collecting data about life; it is part of life itself, its human embeddedness is inescapable” (Cohen et al, 2018:349). This interview was conducted in May 2025 which allowed me to reflect on my Action research to date and to share my concerns and queries with Dr. Bowe during our interview.

As my Research Cycle was 4 weeks, the interview allowed for further information to be elicited on *Morning Meeting* and how to manage this intervention throughout the year. (See Appendix 6 for full transcript).

3.13.7 Diamond Nine Activity

The Diamond Nine is a strategy that allows pupils to work collaboratively to prioritize nine statements or ideas from what they believe is the most important and the least important. (Appendix 7)

It encourages dialogue, group work and discussions (Rockett and Percival, 2002 cited in Clark, 2012). The important feature of diamond ranking is not the actual position of the statements as there are no right or wrong answer but the process of discussion, reflection, negotiation, accommodation to other perspectives and consensus seeking that takes place in agreeing the ranking. (Clark, 2012).

3.14 Action Plan

| | Cycle 1 |
|------------------------------|---|
| 13 th January | <i>Meet with Principal and send letter to Board of Management.</i> |
| 20 th January | <i>Discuss and explain research project with class. Distribute and collect consent and assent letters Meeting with Critical Friends and Validation group and collect consent forms</i> |
| 27 th January | <i>Baseline pupil questionnaires before Morning Meeting Validation members questionnaire and observation of morning routine (before intervention) Introduction and explanation of Pupils Reflective Journal Demonstration and explanation of Morning Meeting before formal start (routines and procedures – seating, speaking, listening, visual aids, transitions)</i> |
| 4 th February | <i>Formal start of Morning Meeting (Greeting) Observations of pupils/Teacher's reflective journal Responses in pupils reflective journal (free write/picture and/or structured questions)</i> |
| 10 th February | <i>Morning Meeting (Greeting and Sharing) Observation of pupils/Teacher's reflective journal Responses in pupils reflective journal (free write/picture and/or structured questions) Validation members observation and feedback</i> |
| 17 th February | <i>Mid Term Break</i> |
| 24 th February | <i>Morning Meeting (Greeting, Sharing and Activity) Observations of pupils/Teacher's reflective journal Responses in pupils reflective journal (free write/picture and/or structured questions) Discussions and feedback with Critical Friends and Validation Groups</i> |

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| 3 rd March | <p><i>Morning Meeting (Greeting, Sharing, Activity and Message)</i></p> <p><i>Observations of pupils/Teacher's reflective journal</i></p> <p><i>Responses in pupils reflective journal (free write/picture and/or structured questions)</i></p> <p><i>Discussions and feedback with Critical Friends and Validation Groups –</i></p> <p><i>Final Meeting from Cycle 1</i></p> |
| | CYCLE 2 |
| 10 th March | <p><i>Weaving Wellbeing topic -Belief 1: I can choose helpful Self Talk</i></p> <p><i>Observation of pupils/Teacher's Reflective Journal</i></p> <p><i>Responses in pupils reflective journal (free write/picture and/or structured questions)</i></p> <p><i>Baseline questionnaire on empowerment within themselves and within the classroom</i></p> |
| 18 th March | <p><i>Weaving Wellbeing topic -Belief 2: My effort is as important as my ability</i></p> <p><i>Observation of pupils/Teacher's reflective journal</i></p> <p><i>Responses in pupils' reflective journal</i></p> <p><i>Discussions with Critical Friends</i></p> |
| 24 th March | <p><i>Weaving Wellbeing topic -Belief 3: I can recognize thinking traps</i></p> <p><i>Observation of pupils/Teacher's Reflective Journal</i></p> <p><i>Responses in pupil's reflective journal</i></p> <p><i>Introduction of Easter Rising Projects</i></p> <p><i>Discussions with Validation Group</i></p> |
| 31 st March | <p><i>Weaving Wellbeing topic -Belief 4: I can act "as if"</i></p> <p><i>Observation of pupils/Teacher's Reflective Journal</i></p> <p><i>Responses in pupil's reflective journal</i></p> <p><i>Discussions and feedback with Critical Friends</i></p> <p><i>Class/group discussions on Easter Rising Projects</i></p> |
| 7 th April | <p><i>Presentation of Easter Rising Projects to audience</i></p> <p><i>Observation of pupils/Teacher's Reflective Journal</i></p> <p><i>Responses in pupil's reflective journal</i></p> <p><i>Final Discussion with Critical Friends/Validation Group</i></p> |

3.15 Analysis of Data

Braun and Clark's (2013) thematic analysis is the process of identifying patterns or themes within qualitative research. The aim is to identify those themes and use these themes to address the research. They discuss the reflexive approach to this by highlighting the researcher's active role in knowledge production. Reflexive thematic analysis is considered a reflection of the researcher's analysis of the data.

Due to this individual analysis, there should be no assumption that codes or themes understood by one researcher may be replicated by another (Byrne, 2022).

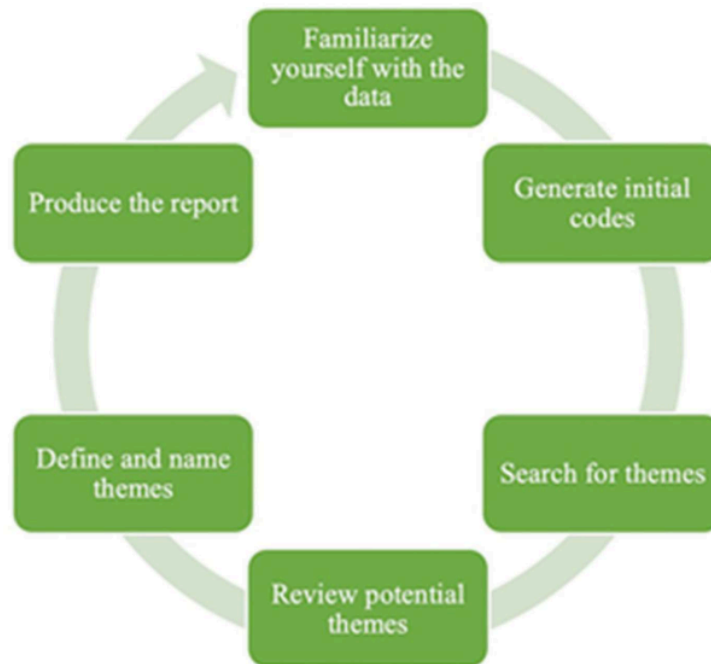


Image 7: Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clark, 2013)

In line with the six-step process, I began to become familiar with the data collected by reading and becoming familiar with all the data that had been gathered. I transcribed the questionnaires, the interview as well as the children's reflective journals, which were collected at various times during the research cycles.

Once I had gained a greater understanding of the data collected, I then began to highlight initial codes using different colours. Codes are the words the participants say or write. These codes are of significant interest to a researcher (Braun and Clarke, 2013). Coding was initially wide ranging and there were several different codes created. (Appendix 8)

Once I had the codes created, I reviewed the codes and decided which codes could be merged and which codes could be regarded as less important.

Once I identified all the codes, I then organised them into themes. From these main themes, I assigned sub-themes. I reread all the codes I had given to each theme, assessing the value of each theme. Further discussion of these themes will be discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

3.15.1 Triangulation and Validity

From the outset of my research, it was important to me to use multiple data sources and perspectives to verify my findings. It provides the researcher with the opportunity of having the outcomes of the research verified by others not directly involved in the research and can add to the authenticity of the research and the dependability of the outcomes. (McDonagh et al., 2020).

This is known as triangulation. Triangulation is the process of inspecting data from at least three different sources and comparing the analysis. (McNiff, 2013). Robson and McCartan (2016) regard triangulation as a vital tool in research and claim that it improves the quality of the data and the accuracy of the findings. Cohen et al. (2018) describe triangulation as a powerful way of demonstrating validity.

3.16 Conclusion

In this methodology chapter, I explained comprehensively how I planned to enhance the relationships in my classroom.

I participated in Educational Action Research whereby I became critically reflective about my practice. This was in line with my values and as a result qualitative data was created from my interventions and research cycles.

In the process of this project, I began to understand that “being professional and developing professionally involve constantly monitoring one’s practice and questioning oneself”. (McDonagh et al., 2020:13)

Chapter Four: Findings

4.1 Introduction

The objective of this research journey was to enhance teacher-student and peer relationships.

It was my hope that due to the interventions that I put in place, the pupils would feel more connected to their peers as well as developing a positive, strong relationship with me, as their teacher.

My interventions consisted of a structured *Morning Meeting* as well as activities that would promote pupil empowerment both individually and as a class.

I hoped they would feel valued, heard, and respected. I was optimistic that these strategies would strengthen relationships and create opportunities for sharing and inclusion. Fostering meaningful connections lies at the heart of my core values.

This research proved three key findings.

- *Morning Meeting* is an effective strategy for enhancing relationships within the classroom.
- Activities that empower pupils contribute positively to their personal development as well as the classroom environment.
- Laughter and listening play imperative roles in creating an atmosphere that supports the enhancement of relationships.

4.2 Data Analysis

Twenty-eight sixth class pupils were involved in my action research. All pupils participated in a daily *Morning Meeting* as well as selection of classroom activities designed to promote pupil empowerment.

I collected data for this study from a range of sources. These ranged from pupil questionnaires, pupil reflective journals and class observations. Additional insights and data were gathered from conversations with my critical friends, feedback from my validation group, and my own personal reflections and observational notes.

I also interviewed Dr. Treasa Bowe, who has many years' experiences in facilitating *Morning Meeting* in her own classroom. This provides evidence of triangulation and enhanced the integrity of my findings as I collated data from multiple sources.

This research was guided by my values of connection, respect, fairness, empowerment, and dialogue, alongside the central research question: *How can I enhance the relationships in my classroom?"*

The data collected was analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013), a method which identifies and interprets patterns within qualitative data such as observation notes and questionnaire responses.

In addition to recognising the main themes within the data, I also paid attention to 'dissonant voices' (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) which showed disagreement in relation to the main patterns.

4.3 Participatory Action Research

In Chapter Three, I discussed Educational Action Research as a methodology to enhance my criticality and reflection. I discovered, that to stay true to my values, I needed to ensure that the voices of the pupils were appreciated.

I agree with Stephen Kemmis (2006) where he states that pupils need to be involved in action research and need to be seen as co-researchers rather than passive subjects.

The aim of participatory action research is to work *with*, not *on*, participants. This type of action research values the contributions of all individuals as equal partners in the research process. (Ledwith, 2007 cited in Niemi et al., 2015).

I believe I have captured the reality of how the pupils in my class felt at various points during this research, as all data was gathered anonymously, supporting Brookfield's (2017) view that students respond more truthfully in such conditions.

4.4 Overview of Findings

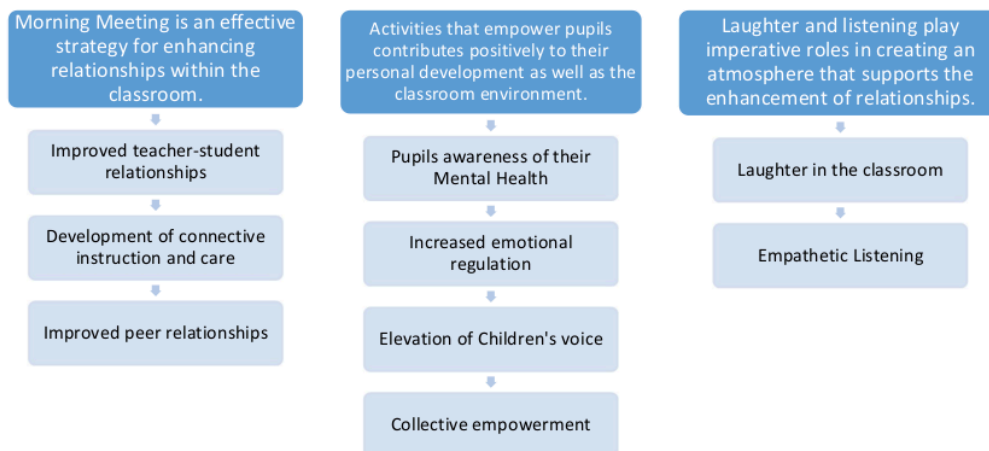


Image 8 – Overview of Findings

4.5 Finding 1: *Morning Meeting* is an effective strategy for enhancing relationships within the classroom.

4.5.1 Introducing Morning Meeting

Pupils arranged themselves in a circle for the commencement of *Morning Meeting*. This arrangement allowed each pupil to see and engage with the speaker. As Brookfield (2017) observes, the circular format naturally captures students' attention and creates an inclusive space where all voices can be seen and heard and that by forming a circle, it demonstrates that the class functions as a unified community Edward and Mullis (2003).



Image 9 – 6th class in their Morning Meeting circle (Joyce, 2025)

Conversely, Brookfield (2017) acknowledges that the circular arrangement can create a sense of uneasiness in some students when asked to share. This was reflected in my data, as a few pupils expressed discomfort with this aspect of *Morning Meeting*, indicating the need for understanding of individual differences. I observed some children being visibly uncomfortable and other children seemingly quite content within the setting.

“I like the fact the whole class get to say [something]. But I don’t like starting first as I feel like all the pressure is on me.” (Child BB, Personal Reflection, February 2025)

“I hated it. I felt embarrassed again. Judged. I don’t like morning meeting. I guess it’s better than Maths, but I feel a lot of pressure during the greetings. (Child M, Personal Reflection, February 2025)

“I think some people feel under pressure when you ask the questions. I think they also feel embarrassed” (Child U, February 2025).

When I read through the pupils’ reflections, it did surprise me. I assumed that because they enjoyed class discussions, that *Morning Meeting* would be something they would appreciate from the outset.

However, in *Morning Meeting* it is a requirement that everyone had to share their opinion whereas a class discussion doesn't require every pupil to contribute. To support all pupils, I introduced *Morning Meeting* gradually, scaffolding the pupils to help them become increasingly comfortable within the group.

"We had a question last week: "Name one good thing that happened to you" and about half the class only responded so I think that could be to do with the questioning. They are not ready for that extra, more imaginative questioning. I don't know if it is a "thinking time" [issue]. (Joyce, Personal Reflection, 3rd March 2025)

From this, I adapted some of the sharing questions, so pupils didn't feel like they didn't have to expand on the answers too much.

What is your favourite colour and why?

Would you prefer cold soup or hot ice-cream?

What is your favourite animal?

As the weeks passed and when children's reflections seemed more positive, we moved on to more comprehensive questions.

What are you looking forward to in secondary school?

What are the top three qualities you look for in a friend?

If you could develop an app, what would it be?

I also emphasised the importance of tracking the speaker and using nonverbal cues to express agreement or disagreement, thereby promoting attentive and respectful communication.

In my interview with Dr. Treasa Bowe, we discussed the pupils' discomfort when sharing in front of their peers.

"Okay, knowing that they don't feel comfortable with sharing as much. It's not that you shy away from it. But you go back to "Can I make it more structured and then move it back.". So, one of the things that's really important is to give children time to think. I think it's really good to get them to reflect on things. But there's also a difference between feeling discomfort, and you know it not being good for you. (Interview, Dr. Treasa Bowe, May 2025)

4.5.2 Format of Morning Meeting

The image below details the structure of Morning Meeting.

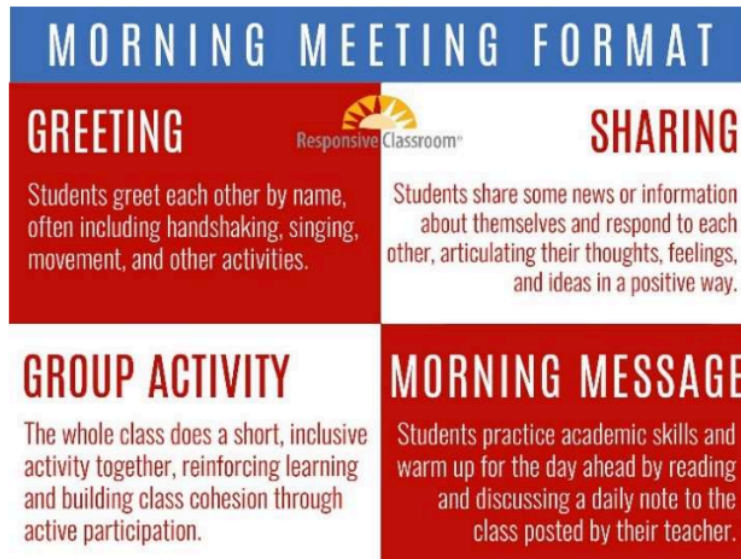


Image 10 - Format of Morning Meeting (Responsive Classroom, 2019)

Dr. Treasa Bowe was clear in her explanation of the structure of *Morning Meeting*.

“When I moved to work in America... [Responsive classroom] gave us training. [Morning meeting] is a very structured thing. There's a trademark, if you want to call it for morning meetings... When you're saying you are doing morning meetings, you do have to say that there are 4 elements. You are talking about the greeting element. You're talking about the sharing elements. And you're talking about the game element, and ... the message. I find what I do with that is that's our kind of goal setting or focus of the day”.

The examples below show what the pupils saw when entering the classroom. The *Morning Meeting* prompts were displayed daily on the interactive board. It gave students an opportunity to plan and prepare their answers in advance, supporting Mary Budd Rowe's (1986) concept of 'wait time' to support deeper thinking and engagement and Dr Bowe's previous mention of giving pupils time to think.

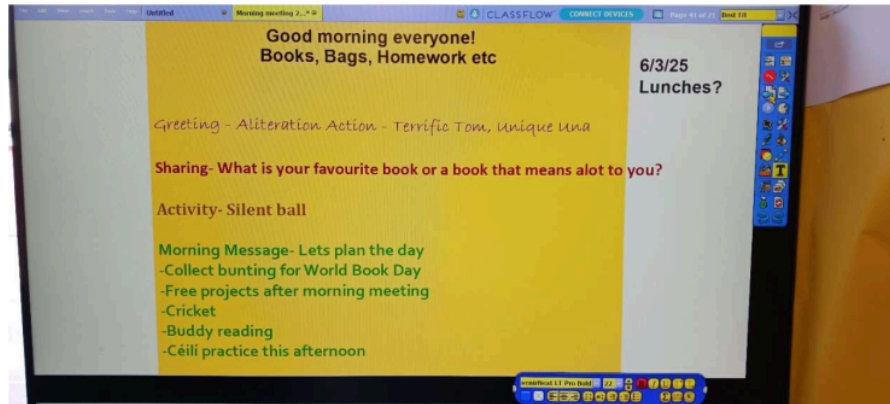


Image 11 – Morning Meeting Slide 1 (Joyce, 2025)

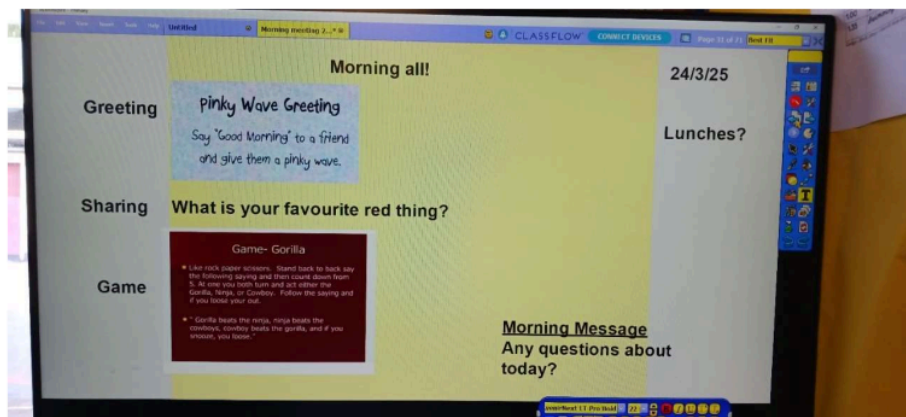


Image 12 – Morning Meeting Slide 2 (Joyce, 2025)

4.5.3 Initial response to Morning Meeting

The pupils' reflective journals were an essential part of my data collection tools. Each child in the class chose their own reflective journal and noted their feedback in their journals throughout the research cycles. I analysed each journal during different stages of the intervention and transcribed them for my data analysis.

The children took pride in decorating their personal reflection journals and expressed enthusiasm when sharing their thoughts and opinions.



Image 13 – Personal Reflection Journals (Joyce, 2025)

Many of the entries from the pupils’ journals showed a general sense of contentment and excitement about *Morning Meeting*. However, as previously mentioned, some pupils also expressed feelings of embarrassment and judgement which show the different range of responses within the class. Children had the option to write as much or as little as they wanted. Some children drew pictures with one or two words while others wrote more.

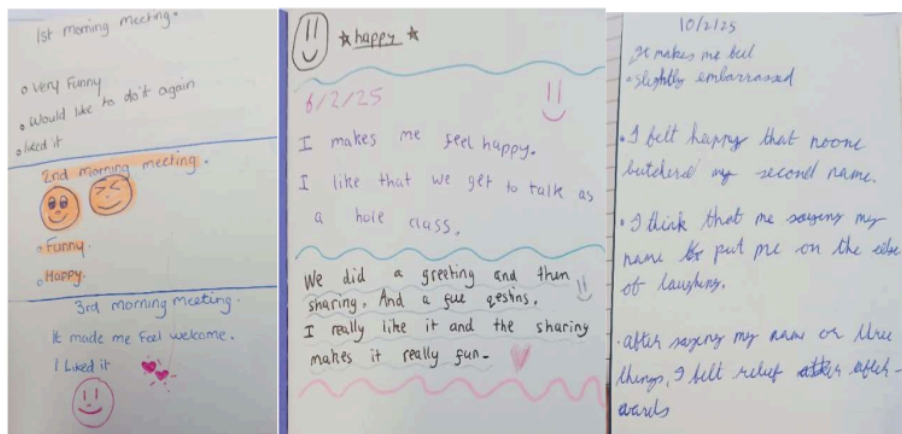


Image 14 – Excerpts from pupils’ reflective journals (Joyce, 2025)

Members from my validation group gave feedback after observing *Morning Meeting* on different occasions. They both expressed that *Morning Meeting* was a great positive start to the day where all pupils were “woken up” and everyone had time to be heard.

“Children are very excited to grab chairs and get started. They are willing to listen to each other. Listening was exceptional for a class who find this hard. Everyone was

following the person speaking. Some children were smiling at each other's responses in agreement." (Validation group, March 2025)

It became clear as we became more comfortable with the structure, that the children enjoyed participating in *Morning Meeting*, with the whole class voting overwhelmingly to continue the practice until the end of the school year.

"They seem very happy, smiles, laughs and all engaging while interacting together. When asked who wants to keep this routine going – all hands went up!" (Validation group, April 2025).

4.5.4 The improvement in the Teacher – Student relationship

My concern throughout this action research was the absence of positive relationships with my pupils. The graph below shows the results of a questionnaire which was given **before** my intervention of *Morning Meeting* began.

The data suggests that while some children felt they had a good relationship with me, others experienced a degree of strain, especially during moments of classroom tension.

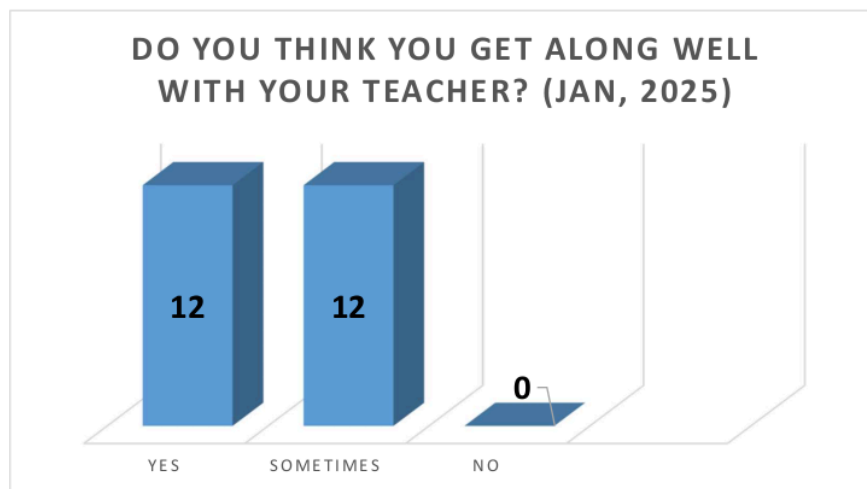


Image 15 – Results from “Do you think you get along well with your teacher?”

“She’s very kind but can get very angry when we talk or something and then it’s annoying or scary”

“I feel like Ms. Joyce is a nice teacher, but I think she get angry quite fast”

“Yes, because she is funny and supportive and listens to you”

“She can be a little scary when she’s angry though. But she is kind.”

“Sometimes we all don’t give enough respect to each other, and we should all work on that but yes” (Pupil Questionnaire, January 2025)

The pupils’ responses were both honest and significant, acknowledging my own concerns about the quality of my relationship with the class. Using Jaspers (2013) ERA model and recognising the lens of the students’ eyes (Brookfield, 2017), the data served as a valuable tool for my own critical self-reflection as well as uncovering how my assumptions need further analysis.

The results from this questionnaire proved to be quite confronting I reflected on my interactions and reactions to events within the class. This critical reflection reminded me of a past event where a past pupil suggested that I had a dual personality. I could be very kind yet also quite strict. This aspect of my practice is displayed again in the data during this research cycle and has forced me to look inwards and analyse my reactions.

I feel this may be partly due to the fact of feeling judged in my early years of teaching. Newly appointed teachers are judged for maintaining order in their classroom and not in promoting effective learning. (Ormond, 1944). This is an aspect of my practise that has forced me to question my practice, my mindset and my beliefs as a teacher.

After a few weeks of mostly positive participation with *Morning Meeting*, I gave a follow-up questionnaire as well as the chance for pupils to provide individual comments.

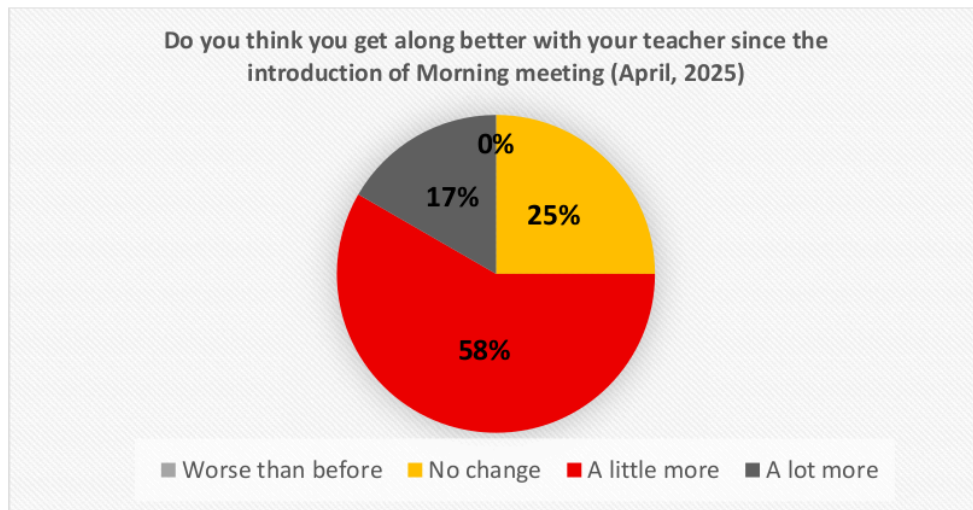


Image 16 - Result – Do you think you get along better with your teacher since the introduction of Morning Meeting?

Their personal reflections provided further clarification of their thoughts.

“There was no difference”

“I just get along the same as always”

“Kinda because I know more things about her”

“I think yes because I feel listened to more”

“Because we can talk to her more and she answers questions as well”

“Because she has learned more about me and I have learned more about her”

(Pupils questionnaire, April 2025)

This was startling to me but also heartwarming. The pupils valued my contributions. To promote positive relationships, it was crucial for the children to get to know me. They enjoyed hearing me participate during *Morning Meeting*, highlighting the importance of modelling vulnerability, care, and openness in my future practice. They wanted me to be authentic and enjoyed listening to me just as much as each other.

“I feel I’m questioning everything. I’m questioning how I speak to the children especially when there are [tricky] conversations that need to be had. It’s just difficult trying to find the words and I just feel like I’m questioning everything to make sure that I’m showing care and showing my values. (Joyce, Personal Reflection 26th February 2025)

4.5.5 Development of connective instruction and care

Morning Meeting became an important element of my practice as it naturally began to foster a calmer, more positive tone in my interactions with the pupils as well as creating a positive environment. Pupils began to engage more and there seemed to be less discomfort.

“As much as I have grown to love morning meeting, I think it is helping build the relationship between me and you (teacher)” (Child M, Personal Reflective Journal, April 2025)

By creating this time for sharing and connection, the pupils seemed ready for the day and the learning ahead. They seem much more engaged in subjects. These results support Martin and Dowson's (2009) notion of connection instruction as a strategy for increasing engagement.

This type of instruction involves connecting with students, seeking to understand them, designing interactive lessons, displaying care and promoting student expression. Cooper (2014) is of the belief that it is not surprising that the personal, relational aspects of connective instruction are so strongly linked to engagement.

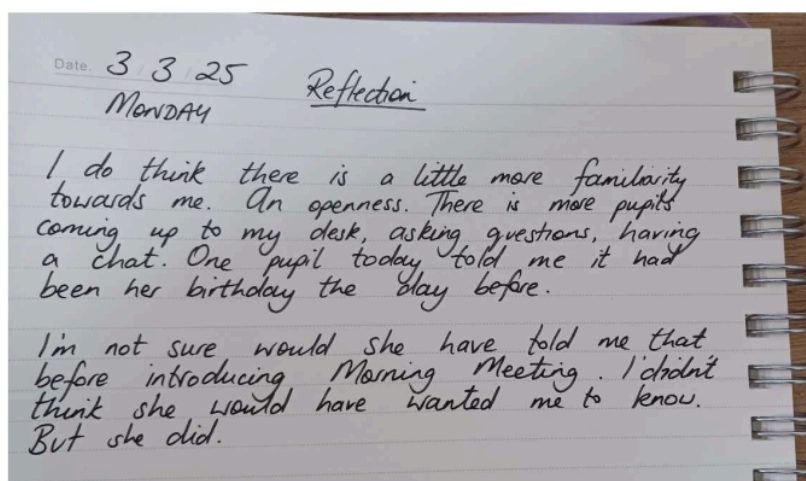


Image 17 – Personal reflection

I think it is build[ing] a better relationship with my teacher because she listens to what we say. (Child J, Personal Reflection, March 2025)

I feel like it does build relationships with classmates and teacher through the shared memories and ideas. (Child L, Personal Reflection, March 2025)

Yes, I do because you find out more about your teacher. Also, yes because I find it fun to learn more about them, stuff that doesn't come up in normal conversations. (Child V, Personal Reflection, 2025)

By valuing time for conversation and a dedicated time and space to share, my value of connection – connection to self as well as connection to others was embodied in my practice.

Morning Meeting also allowed for my values of dialogue, fairness, respect and empowerment to be showcased every day. It allows for discussions within the classroom where we learn of each other's interests and points of view.

It is evident, *Morning Meeting* improved the teacher-student and student – teacher relationship.

4.5.6 Improved Peer - relationships

Positive peer interactions offer valuable opportunities for social development and support (Yao et al., 2021). While most children in this study recognised an improvement in peer relationships, a few did not share this view.

"There is more togetherness." (Child E, Personal Reflection, February 2025)

"Morning Meeting helped me get to know each other." (Child H, Personal Reflection, February 2025)

"I think we have become a lot closer since we started." (Child R, Personal Reflection, February 2025)

"Morning Meeting has not helped me. I feel the same." (Child U, Personal Reflection, February 2025)

"I don't think MM helped me in any way. The only thing that changed is I don't think or actually use my brain." (Child X, Personal Reflection, February 2025)

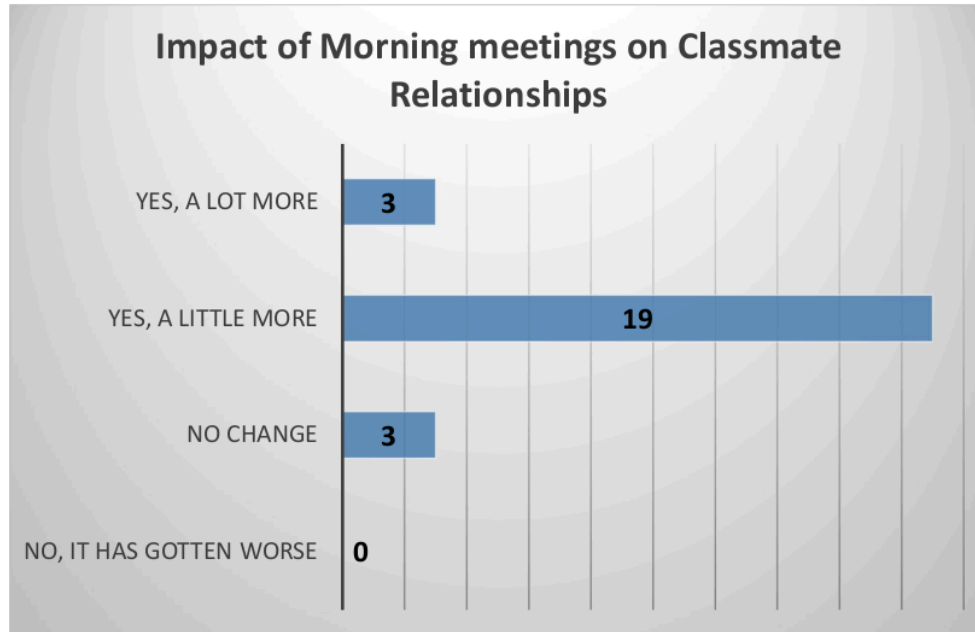


Image 18 - Do you think you get along better with your classmates since the introduction of Morning Meeting?

The graph above shows a positive result in peer relationships within the class since the introduction of *Morning Meeting*. This reflected in research which states that class meetings provide students with opportunities to build peer relationships in the classroom (Edwards and Mullis, 2013).

Dr. Treasa Bowe discusses how *Morning Meeting* can support pupils in building connections across peer groups.

“It's so powerful to build that community part where it's not about greeting your friends. It's about greeting other people in the class... They are so about their friends that they don't realise that they are turning their back on somebody else..... It's really important in terms of expanding and breaking the cliques that might be in the class”.

This was something I never thought of during *Morning Meeting*. I could see children greeting the same pupils every morning or only choosing their friends to share the question. It proved to me the vast number of opportunities for learning and for social and emotional development there can be within *Morning Meeting*.

4.6 Finding 2: Activities that empower pupils contributes positively to their personal development as well as the classroom environment.

4.6.1 Introducing Empowerment to pupils

To introduce the concept of empowerment to the pupils, I used the following slides to explain the definition of empowerment. My aim was to show that pupil empowerment originates from within themselves and can be nurtured and developed in a supportive school environment.

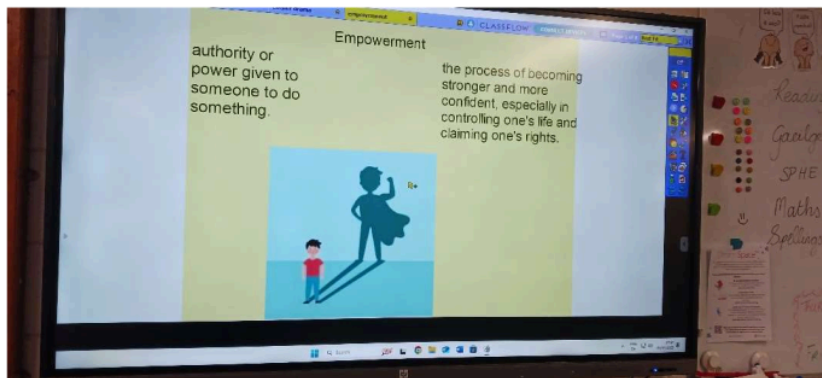


Image 19 – Definition of Empowerment

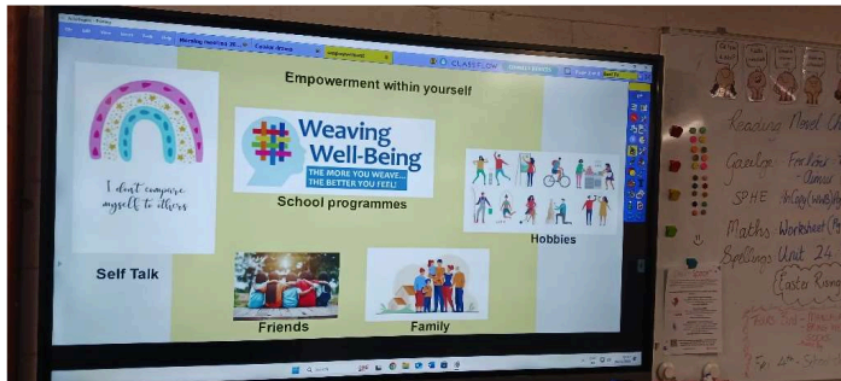


Image 20 – Empowerment within yourself

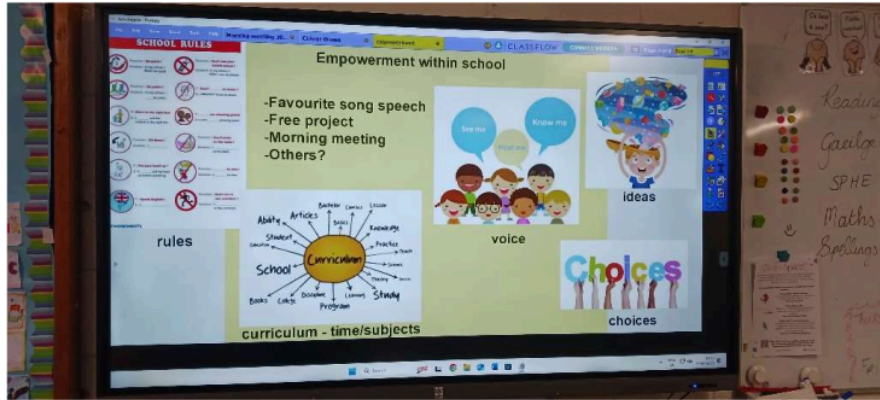


Image 21 – Empowerment within school

4.6.2 Pupils' awareness of their Mental Health

The Weaving Well-Being: Empowering Beliefs programme (Forman & Rock, 2017) is designed for sixth class pupils. It aims to foster positive mental health through the development of self-belief. Lessons introduce key concepts such as helpful self-talk and thinking traps. Pupils explored the use of positive affirmations to help change unhelpful self-talk into helpful self-talk.

One child reflected, *“I put sticky notes on my mirror that I read again and again to help me stay positive because our brains only remember the negative”* (Class discussion, 31st March 2025).

The class created their own helpful self-talk quotes which they shared with their partners and then placed on the class notice board for everyone to read and respond to.

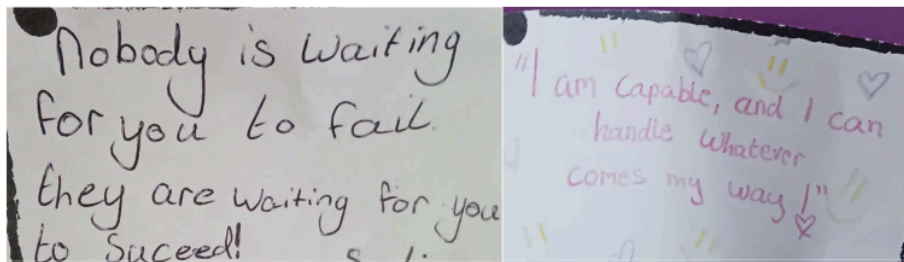


Image 22 – Examples of Helpful self-talk quotes

Additionally, the concept of a growth mindset was introduced, encouraging students to shift from “I can’t do this” to “I can’t do this yet,” recognising effort and resilience in learning.

One pupil shared, “I wanted to give up hurling... I put in a bit more effort and now I love it more than football” (Class discussion, 2nd April 2025).

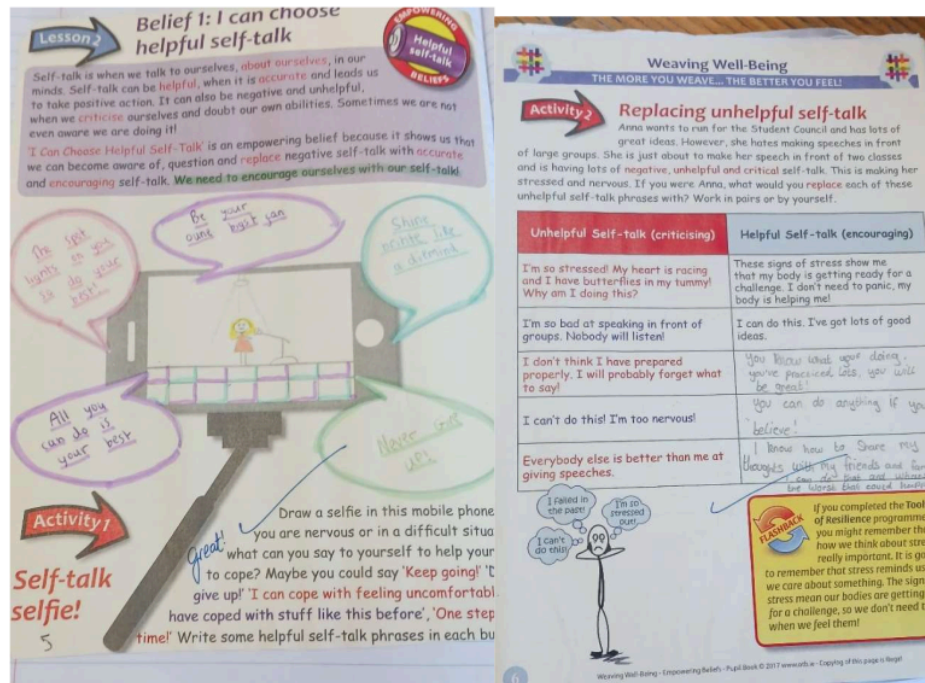


Image 23 – Helpful self-talk – example from workbook

Finally, the lesson on thinking traps focused on two types: mind reading and catastrophising. Pupils wrote about times they fell into a thinking trap in their workbook as well as sharing their examples to their peers.

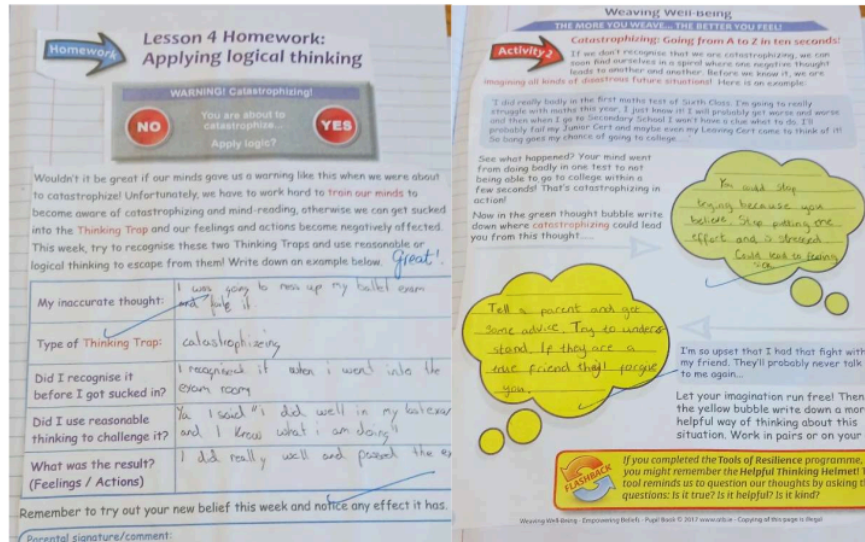


Image 24 – Thinking traps – example from workbook

As one pupil commented, “I liked listening to all the thinking traps people used; it reminded me of some of my own and how we all get stuck thinking about the same things” (Class discussion, 4th April 2025).

These lessons were especially meaningful considering “Wellbeing” is a significant feature in *Primary Curriculum Framework* (NCCA, 2023) in Irish primary schools. The activities appeared to foster a metacognitive awareness of mental health among pupils. As Unver et al. (2022) suggest, higher levels of metacognitive awareness are associated with increased emotional resilience, which supports cognitive regulation, effective problem-solving and the development of coping strategies.

The feedback from the pupils related to my research question: *How can I enhance the relationships in my classroom?* Their feedback showed that when pupils have an awareness of their mental health, it nurtured the relationships in the classroom as they developed their emotional skills, problem-solving skills as well as their ability to regulate themselves.

4.6.3 Increased Emotional Regulation

The continued *Morning Meeting* routine and activities to learn about empowerment, brought about a change in the classroom. I noticed a change within myself. *Morning Meeting* gave me time to regulate every morning. It allowed me to slow down and set the tone for the day. It became something to look forward to.

“Did I ever think also that this [Morning Meeting] might be regulating me in the mornings? It’s so strange, isn’t it? To start off the morning with laughter.. It’s so simple. Laughter or a smile. It’s interesting” (Joyce, Personal Reflection, 26th February 2025)

“It’s putting me in a better mood. I do think it’s a lovely start to the morning. It’s a lovely transition from home to school. It’s a check-in. I want to listen to you; I value what you’re saying. Let’s all just do a quick check in to see how everyone is getting on” (Joyce, Personal Reflection, 3rd March 2025)

Morning Meeting in essence embraces a slow approach to one’s practice. I was aware at the outset of my research that my practice would benefit greatly from slowing down. The structure of *Morning Meeting* catered for this.

The pupils knew *Morning Meeting* had now become part of our day, and it required us to come together as a class to listen, share, work and laugh with each other. Pupils knew that we would transition into more formal learning after *Morning Meeting* but at that stage, they were ready. I was ready. We eased into our day with *Morning Meeting*, and the benefits could be seen throughout the whole day.

Dr. Treasa Bowe also mentions that *Morning Meeting* and regulation go hand in hand and that by allowing time for Morning Meeting shows what you value as a teacher in your classroom.

“It was very important to regulate everybody...teacher included.... taking that moment.... setting the tone. When you show the children [what] matters, when you have to make choices, [it] shows your values.” (Bowe, 2025)

I felt at this stage that the class were showing increased levels of engagement within our school day. I noticed an increased ability in some pupils to regulate during class discussions.

“I feel like it makes everyone in a better mood and it’s a nice start to the day” (Child G, Personal Reflection, April 2025)

“It’s helped me to make my mood better.” (Child N, April 2025)

“It gets us in a good mood for the day. When we had mental maths, I felt stressed and rushed.” (Child S, Personal Reflection, April 2025).

“I usually feel a bit down in the mornings. I usually wake up in the morning grumpy, with this I feel confident. (Child BB, Personal Reflection, April 2025)

“Morning meeting has helped a lot because it starts the day off relaxing and slow (Child C, Personal Reflection, April 2025)

Using *Morning Meeting* and these lessons on empowerment seemed to work well together. Pupils seemed to want to share more within general class discussions but also, I felt I had less disruptions during the day and the pupils transitioned well from one subject to another.

When I relate this back to my research aims, it shows that *Morning Meeting* provides space for children to share with each other. This allowed for connections to grow and peer and teacher relationships to improve.

4.6.4 Elevation of Children’s Voices

Promoting empowerment in a class group of twenty-eight required additional organisation and reflection than I had anticipated. I was conscious of this intervention becoming performative and artificial. I was concerned that once the research cycle was complete, we would revert to how things were before.

This became a challenge following the research cycle, as the hectic end of the school year approached. The promotion of pupil voice and agency was part of my core values and therefore it was important to begin with the most important people in this study: the pupils.

I recognised that true empowerment must come from the pupils, who need to lead their own learning and share in classroom decisions. This exhibits the participatory action research that allows pupils to be involved in their own learning. This reflects my values

of fairness, empowerment, and dialogue within my practice. I asked pupils to reflect on times they felt empowered in school.

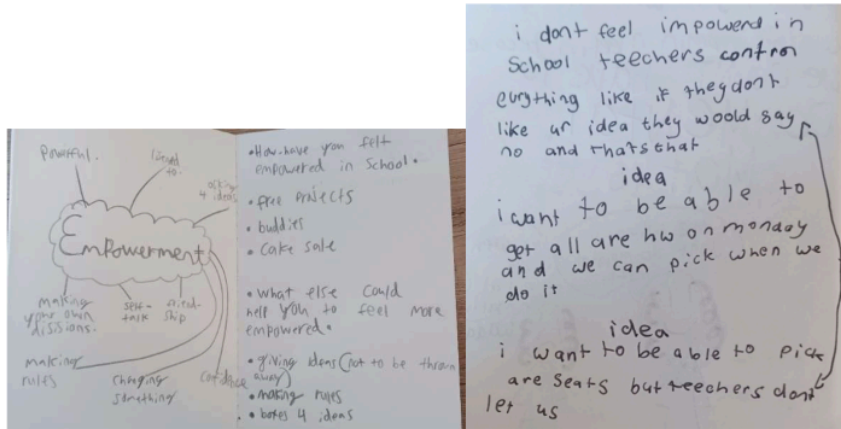


Image 25 – Excerpt from pupil's reflective journal

Kristan A. Morrison (2008) explains that a democratic education promises much more meaningful learning. Pupils become more engaged in their learning if they have more choice and freedom to study what interests them. Listening to children reveals valuable insights often overlooked and supports a democratic school ethos (Flutter & Ruddock, 2004, cited in Lundy, 2007).

During a discussion on improving *Morning Meeting*, some pupils suggested having a “suggestion box” where pupils could anonymously share their ideas or comments.

Days later the children suggest a “classroom improvement box” to share further ideas on for wider classroom improvements. Pupils were highly engaged in this and had sufficient suggestions for improvements.

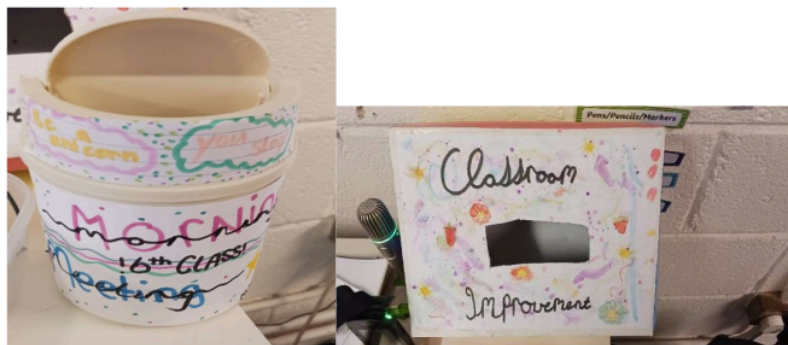


Image 27 – Suggestion Boxes

Every afternoon I gathered pupils' suggestions and created a full list of their ideas. Though some ideas were beyond my control, most were reasonable. It surprised me. I mistakenly assumed that some of the suggestions would be bizarre, which aligns with Lundy's (2007) observation that adults often underestimate children's ability to make decisions.

"When reading through the list of ideas the class had for change, I was pleasantly surprised at the variety of ideas. I think I assumed their ideas would be impossible to partake in, but most are very possible. Ideas like "Homework laid out for the week, changing seating more regularly, and feedback on their projects" are all extremely fair and balanced. I had assumed most of their ideas wouldn't be feasible. (Joyce, Personal Reflective, 1st April 2025)

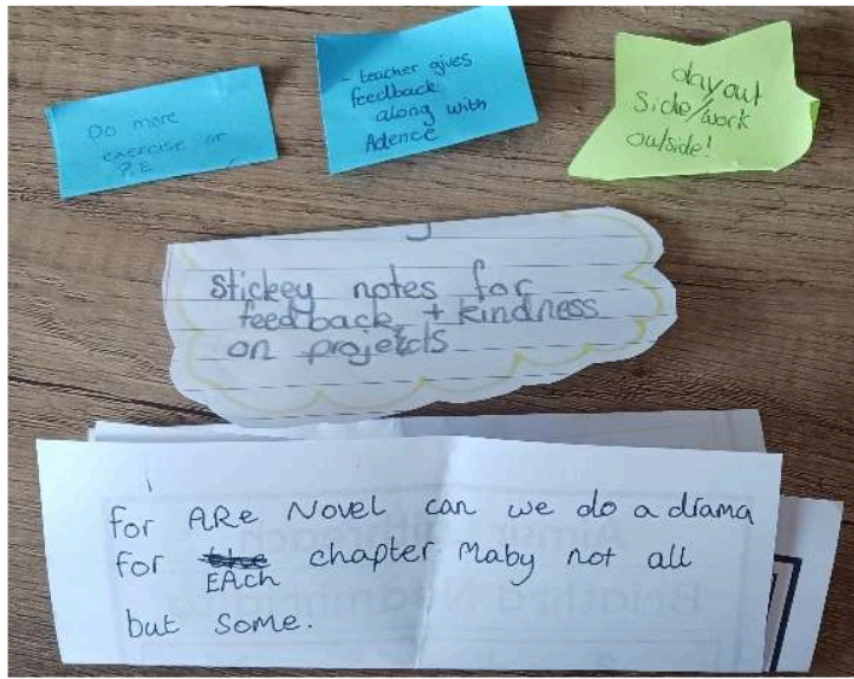


Image 28 – Example of some class improvement ideas

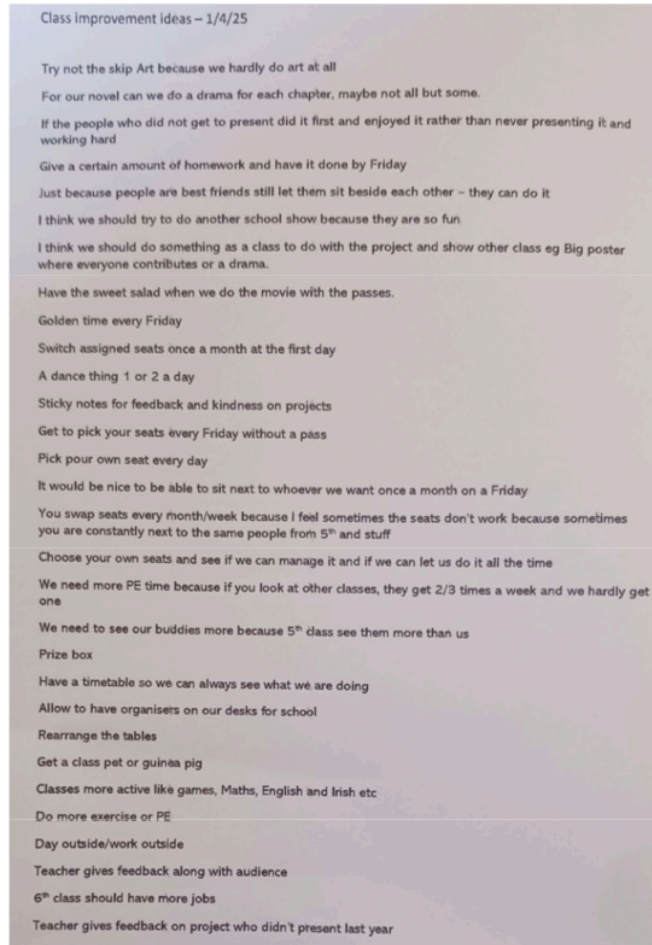


Image 29 – Full list of class improvement ideas

Lundy (2007, cited in Forde et al., 2018) believes that children's right to express their voice is embedded in their relationships with adults.

I could see this clearly within the classroom. When our relationships within the classroom began to improve, children felt comfortable sharing their ideas when they knew they were valued and welcomed.

4.6.5 Collective Empowerment

The first example of whole class empowerment came from one of their suggestions from the "Class improvement box" was holding *Morning Meeting* outdoors. The pupils eagerly

arranged their chairs in a circle, clearly enjoying the change of setting, possibly because they chose the location themselves.

This preference aligns with the Froebelian approach, which highlights the importance of the physical environment in learning. Froebel argued that environment and atmosphere are as vital as the content taught (Bruce, 2019).

I felt going outside was better because it gave everybody a breath of fresh air before work. (Child C, Personal Reflection, April 2025)

I do like going outside because it feels like everybody is in a better mood. Child E, Personal Reflection, April 2025)

I think going outside is better because it is refreshing and new but after a while the novelty might fade. (Child L, Personal Reflection, 2025)

While studying the Easter Rising, pupils were asked to create projects based on an aspect of the Rising. Originally, I had planned that pupils would create an example of recount writing based on their learning. This, however, was not in keeping with my values of empowerment and dialogue so after a class discussion to brainstorm ways to show their learning, pupils shared their ideas.

Pupils mentioned that instead of a written piece of work that might not be as engaging or as inclusive for everyone, suggestions consisted of PowerPoints, posters, booklets, drama scenes and songs. From there, I allowed them time to think about the format they would use to present their learning. Pupils chose their own group members, topic, audience and presentation format.

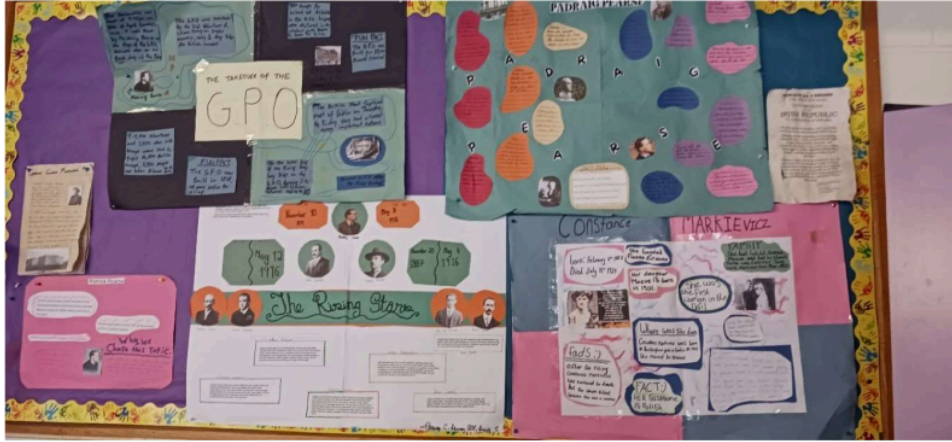


Image 30 – Easter Rising projects

The pupils suggested that fifth class would have the pleasure of being their audience. The pupils also wished that they could receive feedback from their spectators. Pupils later agreed that teachers and students should write comments on sticky notes for each group after their presentations. This showed a great sense of engagement and commitment to their learning.

“We usually spend ages on a project, do it and then that’s it. It’s over. After all the hard work” (Pupil A, Class discussion, April 2025)

“Feedback would be nice because we can take them home and read them after the project is finished” (Pupil P, Class discussion, April 2025)

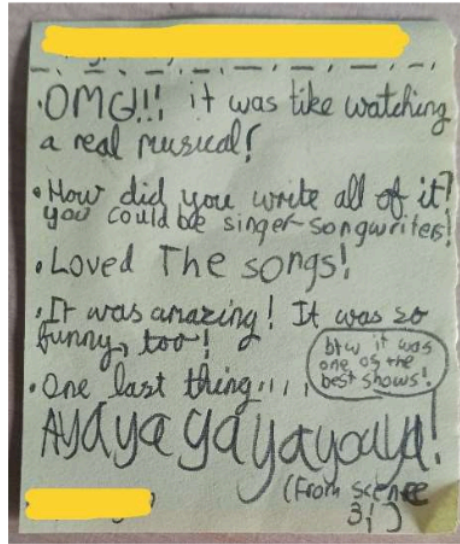


Image 31 – Example of feedback after the project

The projects were a resounding success, featuring a diverse range of presentations. There was a great variety of PowerPoints, posters, song, chants, drama scenes, poetry, raps and artwork. In agreement with Fredrick Froebel's belief that all children have the potential to be creative if creativity is encouraged and enabled (Pascal and Bertram, 2021)

I loved creating the Easter rising project because the freedom of presentation was so empowering. (Child W, Personal Reflection, April 2025)

I liked having a choice [projects] because we like drama. A bit because we were completely in control. I thought our feedback was really good. (Child AA, Personal Reflection, April 2025)

Yes, felt like I was on top of the world for a brief moment of time. The feedback was amazing. I got a ton and felt like a celebrity. (Child BB, Personal Reflection, April 2025)

During a discussion with one of my validation group members, who watched all the presentations, she remarked that each presentation was well matched to each group and that the format they chose matched the pupils' strengths.

This was a perspective I hadn't thought about but reflected on it afterwards. It was wonderful to hear that the pupils were choosing a format that allowed them to showcase their talents.

A couple of weeks later, when I gave history test results back to one pupil she commented:

"I used the chant from the presentation to help me in the test. I sang the chant, and I wrote down the answers" (Child S, discussion, May 2025).

This was a wonderful feeling as an educator to see that this intervention helped this pupil recall facts they might have otherwise struggled to remember.

4.7 Finding 3: Laughter and listening play imperative roles in creating an atmosphere that supports the enhancement of relationships.

4.7.1 Laughter in the Classroom

After two–three weeks, the positive impact of *Morning Meeting* on the class dynamic became clear. I found myself laughing and smiling more than ever, and pupils' increased opportunities to make decisions led to a noticeable improvement in the overall class mood.

Mary Kay Morrison (2007) believes that when you find fun, laughter and teachers with a sense of humour, learning thrives. Laughter is described as a possible contributor to a more democratic classroom environment, softening traditional power structures and encouraging free expression. (Sidorkin 1999, cited in Omer-Attali, 2025).

Morning Meeting have provided insights from students I might not have otherwise heard, allowing us to share answers to questions that are both fun and revealing.

People always start laughing during morning meeting. (Child I, Personal Reflection, February 2025)

I like how the meetings make everyone laugh together. (Child B, Personal Reflection, February 2025)

I think my classmates love Morning meeting because everyone laughs and looks happy. (Child T, Personal Reflection, February 2025)

They seem very happy, smiles, laughs and all engaging while interacting together. (Validation Group, March 2025)

During a conversation with a critical friend, she suggested using a Diamond Nine activity to explore what pupils felt was important for enhancing classroom relationships. I asked the pupils, arranged in eight groups of three, to rank nine statements as part of this activity. The Diamond nine activity is effective for revealing students' beliefs and motivations while promoting discussion (Niemi et al, 2015).

Diamond Nine statements

- 1. Working together on group projects helps build strong teamwork skills.*
- 2. Complimenting others encourages a positive classroom environment.*
- 3. Sharing personal experiences helps us connect and build friendships.*
- 4. Being kind to everyone makes the classroom feel like a safe place.*
- 5. Respecting each other's opinions even if they are different builds trust.*
- 6. Listening to each other helps us understand different points of view.*
- 7. Helping others when they struggle shows you care.*
- 8. Laughing together and having fun strengthens friendships.*
- 9. Apologizing when you make a mistake shows maturity and respect.*



Image 32 – Example of the Diamond 9 activity

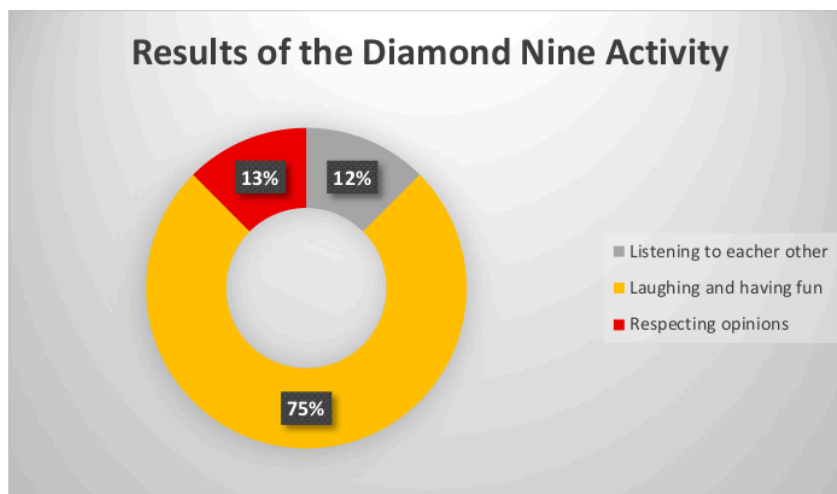


Image 33 – Results of the Diamond 9 Activity

Pupils clearly value laughter and shared moments of joy as vital for fostering connection and sustaining positive peer relationships. Humour can reduce the strength of reprimands

and that reasoned, empathetic communication is more effective than authoritative approaches (Tartwijk et al., 2009, as cited in Postholm, 2013). Humour thrives in an environment of trust and is a major factor that contributes to building trust. (Morisson, 2007).

Conversely, in Omer-Attali et al., (2025) study, laughter is seen as a disturbance by teachers, and as a rebellion of the classroom hierarchy. The study noted that laughter was limited, and its occurrence was unwelcome.

While I did enjoy the laughter that *Morning Meeting* brought, I was torn with how to manage the aftermath.

“They can get loud and excitable, and it can be hard to bring them back. It depends on what someone says and obviously we need the little bit of laughter but sometimes it can be hard to bring them back. Even though I have tried to let them ... where the laughter finishes off but that then eats into our time a little and while slow pedagogy is good, I am finding that certain answers... get a bigger reaction and they then start taking, laughing and joking and start talking to the person beside them so it can be hard to bring them back”. (Joyce, Reflective Journal, 3rd March 2025)

As an educator, this information and experience will be vital for my future practice. It was wonderful that children felt safe to laugh during *Morning Meeting* and made me reflect on the fine line between encouraging laughter and fun but also not allowing it to overpower the meeting.

4.7.2 Empathic Listening

Covey (2020) explains the idea of Empathic Listening as listening with your heart. You listen for feeling, for meaning, for behaviour. The children’s responses towards their peers’ listening show a need for time and space to share their thoughts.

“You’re dealing with the reality inside another person’s head and heart. You’re listening to understand. You’re focused on receiving the deep communication of another human soul”. (Covey, 2020: 246)

I think everyone thinks Morning meetings are fun because we like to listen to people’s thoughts (Child J, Personal Reflection, February 2025)

We are learning to listen and pay better attention to others (Child V, Personal Reflection, February 2025)

The Morning meeting is helping our class by listening to others' thoughts (Child I, Personal Reflection, February 2025)

I felt listened [to] and giddy (Child S, Personal Reflection, February 2025)

Covey (2020) agrees with Lundy (2007) that few people have had training in listening, and it has been widely recognized for the need for adults to receive training in the need of active listening. Many pupils in this study mentioned listening as an important aspect in fostering relationships.

Listening was exceptional for a class who find this hard. Everyone was following the person speaking. (Validation group questionnaire, March 2025)

We had our morning meeting, and we were doing History. I do feel they were all listening really well. I was surprised I didn't have to be stopping and starting but they seem to be very engaged in it. Maybe we're getting used to listening to each other. I do feel the listening is improving. (Joyce, Personal Reflection, 26th February 2025).

4.8 Conclusion

As aforementioned, the overarching aim of this research was to enhance the teacher-student and peers' relationships in my classroom. Through engagement with self-study action research as well as embracing my values as an educator, I have gained a new perspective on my practice.

The data in this study aligns with Acosta et al. (2019 cited in Wilkins et al., 2023) who state that students who feel that their teachers embrace caring and positive relationships tend to experience a stronger sense of connection to both their school and their peers.

Through the reflexive thematic analysis, three key findings reinforced the enhancement of strong relationships as well as adopting a slow pedagogy within the classroom.

This slow approach coupled by the encouragement of shared decision-making, not only balanced the power dynamics within the class but also supported the development of independence, creativity, and personal growth, as Laidlaw (2018) suggests.

We didn't deviate from the curriculum and academic work. As a class, we prioritised connecting with each other which led to a more engaged and regulated learning environment.

In agreement with Noddings (1999 cited in Noddings, 2005), as I enhanced the relationship with my students, I learned about their interests, concerns, talents and needs. I could see the pupils becoming more open and forthcoming in their interactions with me as we slowly began to build trust and care. These elements resonate with my own values as well as Froebel's work.

"It is all a unity; everything is based on unity, strives towards and comes back to unity".
(Froebel cited in Lilley 1967: 45)

Chapter Five: Conclusion

5.1 Summary of Research

This research journey was aimed at enhancing relationships within a primary classroom setting. I participated in Educational Action Research whereby I became critically reflective about my practice. This self – study action research required me to realise that “being professional and developing professionally involve constantly monitoring one’s practice and questioning oneself” (McDonagh, 2020:13).

My research questions at the centre of this study were:

- *How can I enhance the relationships in my classroom?*
- *What interventions do I need to include in my teaching?*
- *How can I encourage, support and maintain positive peer relationships in my classroom?*
- *How can I live by my values of connection, fairness, respect, empowerment and dialogue while this research is being undertaken?*

This research project aligned with my values and as a result qualitative data was created from my interventions and research cycles. My values motivated me to question my practice as well as the assumptions I had acquired as an educator over the past number of years.

Two research cycles were carried out for this project. Data was collected through my reflective journal, pupils’ reflective journals, questionnaires, observations, critical friends and validation group feedback as well as an interview with Dr. Treasa Bowe.

The first research cycle involved *Morning Meeting*. *Morning Meetings* were an extremely appropriate intervention to aid the enhancement of relationships as this approach required all children, alongside the teacher, to sit together in a circle and be seen, heard and valued. *Morning Meeting* is shown to promote positive behavioural outcomes and address students’ often-neglected emotional and social development (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2007).

As a class, we engaged in *Morning Meeting* for twenty -thirty minutes, five days a week. Each morning, every child was greeted, invited to share their thoughts on a daily question, participated in a group activity and contributed to our morning message. This structured

morning routine provided a calm start to our day, allowed us to regulate ourselves, fostered positive teacher-student and peer relationships, encouraged empathetic listening and laughter as well as developing connective instruction and care.

Morning Meeting was a welcome change to the usual routine, yet some children found the initial experience uncomfortable. Speaking publicly and sharing their personal experiences placed some pupils under pressure. Consequently, I adapted the questions to reduce the pressure felt by the pupils and slowed down the introduction of each element.

In the second research cycle, students explored Empowering Beliefs as part of the sixth class Weaving Wellbeing Program (Forman and Rock, 2017). These lessons revealed the importance of empowerment from within by using strategies such as helpful self-talk, developing a growth mindset and recognising thinking traps. These lessons encouraged the pupils to become more aware of their mental health.

During this research cycle, the focus moved towards pupil empowerment within the classroom. Pupils were encouraged to discuss events or tasks where they felt empowered as well as recognising where they might like to increase the decision-making about their learning. Suggestions were placed in a “Classroom Improvement Ideas” box and this led to children creating suggestions and ideas for future empowerment activities and tasks.

I was uncertain about the children's ability to participate meaningfully but it became clear that the pupils were eager and active participants. As Lansdown (2004) asserts, that with appropriate information and support, children can and should be active contributors to their learning environment.

The interventions triggered a natural shift within the classroom. As the children were empowered to share their ideas, they presented valid suggestions and ideas on how to improve the interventions within the research cycles.

This balance of power within the classroom as well as my own guilt in underestimating the pupils, encouraged me to adopt a more participatory approach to my action research whereby pupil autonomy is respected and encouraged.

The pupils were enabled to make several decisions on their learning outcomes which culminated in history project presentations in various formats that enhanced their creativity, fostered engagement as well as promoted child agency. Teachers who support students' independence, by listening, responding, and offering choice, encourage greater motivation and curiosity (Flink et al., 1990, cited in Lundy, 2007).

The idea that we, as educators, prioritise connection before curriculum demonstrates how engaged children become with learning when time for connection is intentional and valued.

As well as including the pupils' decisions in this action research, I also embraced a slow approach to my practice. Slow pedagogy offered us time to listen, laugh, share and make decisions. This in turn allowed for relationships and connections to be enhanced, both with me, their teacher and their peers.

In an article by Danielle Gullachi (2019), Miriam Tanti explains that slow pedagogy creates space for connection, for relationships to grow, and for learning to deepen. "Slow needs time. Slow is about connecting to self, others, and place." (Gullachi, 2019)

5.2 Reflection

"I value children's voice and everyone being involved, there are times when, I maybe suppress that or stifle that..." (Joyce, "Reflective Journal, 20th August 2024).

Jack Whitehead and Jean McNiff (2006) discuss the concept of being "a living contradiction," and the journal entry above serves as evidence that I recognised this within myself at the beginning of this research journey. This is where my values were not being fully realised in my practice and by recognising this, it was the first step towards improving my practice through self-study action research.

According to Ertesvåg et al., (2024) student's watch the way teachers respond to other students. These interactions with students set a standard for the teacher in how to interact in the classroom and can also affect the quality of peer relationships and the learning within the classroom in general.

This made me reflect on a previous classroom event, before the introduction of this study's interventions where I needed some pupils to be truthful about an incident that had occurred.

I tried to stay close to my values of fairness, respect and dialogue and encourage truth and honesty. However, as the truth was not initially forthcoming, I reacted quite strongly.

“Maybe there was an assumption on my part that I should be shown respect. But where does that respect come from? Maybe I assumed, that because it’s a value of mine, that the children should automatically share that value. Maybe that’s a question for all my values. Just because I have those values, doesn’t necessarily mean that the children will have them or that the children would understand the importance of them or how important they are to me”. (Joyce, Reflective Journal, 27th December 2024).

This journal entry as well as my earlier poem on “A Strong Teacher” show how deeply entrenched my assumptions and beliefs are. I have accepted that I am most definitely a “living contradiction” (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006). Within action research, living contradictions are the connecting points between past actions and future practice (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006).

Change can be transformative, but it can also be extremely difficult. It has been overwhelming to realise I am not the teacher I set out to be. I feel like I have started the process of “wide awakesness” (Greene, 1995; 80). I am a teacher with many contradictions that were previously undisputed before this research process.

Self-study research has the best possible way of having an influence on the field of teacher education practice because “it potentially involves change in the self and that is where change is least likely, but most apt to occur.” (Vanassche and Kelchtermans, 2015:519)

5.3 Claim to Knowledge

5.3.1 Personal Impact

Through my participation in this course, I believe I have learned a lot about myself, both personally and professionally. I have become more of a reflective practitioner, which has been both beneficial but also confronting.

I began to question my actions, my assumptions and become more aware and mindful of my responses and reactions towards the pupils in my care. Engaging in critical reflection was an emotional journey for me as it brought many feelings to the surface. However, it is a journey that is worthwhile as it challenged me to question and understand my practice.

This research journey forced me to live as closely to my values as possible. By embracing slow pedagogy in my personal life, I became more reflective and less reactive in my interactions with loved ones. I became more present within my day-to-day life as well as becoming more compassionate with myself and others. Self-compassion relies on an attitude of kindness towards oneself especially during difficult times when one is being self-critical. (Neff, 2003).

5.3.2 Professional Impact

“One of the outcomes of critically reflecting on your practice is the development of new knowledge or new learning” (Sullivan et al., 2016: 123). This research journey has altered my approach in how I enhance connections and relationships with children. I have learned so much about my professional identity through the process of reflection. Brookfield (2017) argues that if an educator is not critical of their practice, reflective practice may reinforce their assumptions and beliefs instead of fully questioning them.

The anonymous feedback from the pupils’ reflective journals informed my research and challenged my assumptions more than I had ever thought possible. Brookfield (2017) asserts that teachers cannot possibly know the power dynamics of a classroom without regular anonymous feedback from students.

Morning Meeting enhances children’s social and emotional skills as well as creating a dedicated and intentional time to learn, listen and laugh with each other. When we empower pupils to take ownership of their learning, their autonomy becomes an incentive for creativity and engagement. *Morning Meeting* and pupil empowerment naturally lend themselves to developing a slow pedagogy. Time is a limited resource in schools, yet I have seen firsthand how time is crucial for the enhancement of relationships in the classroom.

When I realised that my assumptions were hindering my practice, I was compelled to become more authentic, more compassionate and more open, both as an individual and as an educator.

This in turn enhanced my confidence in my abilities as well as developing positive connections with the pupils. This mirrors Pianta’s (2006) belief that if the teacher – student relationship is positive, this can influence a teacher’s feelings of competence, agency and effectiveness.

As I reflect on my values and my vision for my future practice, I hope I can create a classroom where pupils feel supported, listened to and empowered. In a world infatuated with social media and the comparison of others, how wonderful it would be if every child could love themselves for who they are and that by being their full authentic self, they will always be good enough. This belief may follow these children into adolescence and adulthood as well.

I must challenge the traditional perception of teacher power and control, embracing instead caring practices which support pupils' social and emotional development. McKay and Macomber (2023) believe that teachers have a responsibility to foster a classroom rooted in care and to move beyond delivering a pre-set curriculum.

Accepting myself as a "living contradiction" (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006) has been an essential step in transforming my practice. If I truly wish to foster a classroom environment where students feel empowered and connected, I must have the courage to be authentic, responsive, and deeply connected to the students I teach.

"Staying vulnerable is a risk we have to take if want to experience connection". (Brown, 2010:69)

5.4 Limitations

Although these findings may be useful for those working in similar settings, it must be noted that due to the self-study nature, there are limitations for this study.

This study consisted of two interventions which were in place for a short period (eight weeks in total). Time was a limitation to this study. To gain further insight into the validity of the findings it would be beneficial to begin these interventions from the first school day to see the full impact within a class for the whole school year. This study concentrated on one specific age-group of children. It would be beneficial to extend this study to contrasting school environments and multiple age ranges to compare the results.

5.5 Implications for Future Practice

The *Primary School Framework* (NCCA, 2023), features "Wellbeing" as an important element in Irish Primary schools. As well as that, The National Council for Special Education (NCSE, 2025) have released the NCSE Relate document. It provides

professional learning, practical approaches and a selection of tools to help educators support students with understanding and connection.

When students feel included, connected and a sense of belonging, they can truly participate in a meaningful way. This will be a very welcome document for educators as it empowers educators to prioritise “connection over compliance” (NCSE, 2025).

Transforming my practice to embrace a relational pedagogy will allow me to place relationships at the heart of my teaching and learning. I look forward to presenting my findings to the staff of my school at the beginning of the next school year. I have presented my research at my university for further analysis by other perspectives in my field. I hope to pursue further professional development in the future.

Based on my findings and research into relationships, I have developed an understanding of how to enhance the relationships and connections within my classroom. The potential of this research will be transformative to my practice as well as my future career.

By focusing on a slower pedagogy and resisting neoliberalism ideals and academic outcomes, I prioritised time for pupils to share with one another through *Morning Meeting*. This prioritisation developed a classroom of care where pupils’ own relationships and connections were given space to grow and flourish. As a result, pupils became more aware of their own mental health, expressed greater creativity and developed decision making and empowerment skills.

Attendance among students has reduced across Ireland in recent years. (Department of Education and Youth, 2025) According to Tusla’s Annual report (AAR) and Student Absence Report (SAR), for the 2022-2023 school year, over 110,000 primary students missed twenty or more days. We need to shift the focus from the neoliberal characteristics entrenched within our schools toward a slower, more relational pedagogy.

I recommend that all schools allow dedicated time to connect and share with pupils. This intentional time may aid in the reduction of teacher stress and burnout and may make education more sustainable for educators in the future. This time for connecting also must be encouraged among all school staff. The building of a class community as well as a staff community. bell hooks (1994: 8) writes that

“As a classroom community, our capacity to generate excitement is deeply affected by our interest in one another, in hearing one another’s voices, in recognizing one another’s presence.” bell hooks (1994:8)

References

- Alan, Ü., & Atalay Kabasakal, K. (2020) Effect of number of response options on the psychometric properties of Likert-type scales used with children. *Studies in educational evaluation*. 66, Article 100895
- Andersen, J.F. & Andersen, P.A. (1987) Never Smile Until Christmas? Casting Doubt on an Old Myth, *Journal of thought*, 22(4),57-61.
- Anyon, Y., Atteberry-Ash, B., Yang, J., Pauline, M., Wiley, K., Cash, D., Downing, B., Greer, E. & Pisciotta, L. (2018) “‘It’s all about the relationships’”: Educators’ rationales and strategies for building connections with students to prevent exclusionary school discipline outcomes’, *Children & Schools*, 40(4), 221-230.
- Ashcroft, L. (1987) Defusing "Empowering": The What and the Why, *Language Arts*, 64(2), 142-156.
- Ball, S. (2012) ‘Performativity, commodification and commitment: An I-spy guide to the neoliberal university’, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 60(1),17–28.
- Bondy, E. & Ketts, S. (2001) “‘Like being at the breakfast table’”: The power of classroom morning meeting’, *Childhood Education*, 77(3), 144-149.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101 [online] Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa> (Accessed 4 January 2025).
- Braun V and Clarke V. (2013) *Successful qualitative research: A practical guide for beginners*. London: Sage
- British Educational Research Association (BERA). (2024), *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research* (5th ed). [online] Available at www.bera.ac.uk/publication/ethical-guidelines-for-educational-research-fifth-edition-2024 (Accessed 24 July 2025).
- Brockbank, A., and McGill, I, (2006) *Facilitating reflective learning in higher education*. 2nd ed. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Brookfield, S.D. (2017) *Becoming a critically reflective teacher*. John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated. [online]. Available at: ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/nuim/detail.action?docID=4790372 (Accessed 5 September 2024).
- Brown, B. (2010). *The Gifts of Imperfection: Let go of Who You Think You’re Supposed to Be and Embrace Who You Are*, Hazelden Publishing. [online] Available at: teamilluminate640278060.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/the-gifts-of-imperfection-8freebooksnet_.pdf (Accessed 3 August 2025)

Bruce, T., Elfer, P., Powell, S. & Werth, L. (2019) *The Routledge International Handbook of Froebel and Early Childhood Practice: Re-Articulating Research and Policy*. London: Routledge.

Bruce, T., McNair, L. & Whinnett, J. (2020) *Putting Storytelling at the Heart of Early Childhood Practice: A Reflective Guide for Early Years Practitioners*, Taylor and Francis, Milton.

Byrne, D. (2022). A worked example of Braun and Clarke's approach to reflexive thematic analysis. *Quality & Quantity*, 56(3), 1391-1412.

Clark, J. 2012, "Using diamond ranking as visual cues to engage young people in the research process", *Qualitative Research Journal*, 12 (2) 222-237.

Central Statistics Office (2023) *Europe number of primary school teachers by sex and county [online]*. Available at: <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/hubs/p-wmi/womenandmeninirelandhub/education/teachers/> (accessed 5 July 2025)

Cohen, L., Manion, L. & Morrison, K., 2018. *Research methods in education*. (8th ed). New York: Routledge.

Cooper, K.S. (2014) 'Eliciting Engagement in the High School Classroom: A Mixed-Methods Examination of Teaching Practices', *American Educational Research Journal*, 51(2), pp. 363-402.

Covey, S.R. (2020) *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Revised and Updated: 30th Anniversary Edition*. Simon & Schuster.

Dadds, M. (2001) 'The politics of pedagogy', *Teachers and Teaching*, 7(1), 43-58.

Department of Education and Skills (2011) *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011–2020* [online]. Available at: assets.gov.ie/24521/9e0e6e3887454197a1da1f9736c01557.pdf (accessed 30 June 2025)

Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2017) *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children*. [online]. Available at: www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Children_First_National_Guidance_2017 (Accessed 23 July 2025)

Department of Education (2023) *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools (Revised)*. [online] Available at: assets.gov.ie/static/documents/child-protection-procedures-for-primary-and-post-primary-schools-revised-2023 (Accessed 23 July 2025)

Department of Education and Skills (2025) *National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) resources and publications*. [online]. Available at: www.gov.ie/en/department-of-

[education/collections/national-educational-psychological-service-neps-resources-and-publications](#) (accessed 7 July 2025)

Docherty, T. (2013) 'In the academy, speed kills learning' [online]. Available at: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/comment/opinion/in-the-academy-speed-kills-learning/2005764.article> (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

Dolton, A., Adams, S. & O'Reilly, M. (2020) 'In the child's voice: The experiences of primary school children with social, emotional, and mental health difficulties', *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 25(2), 419–434.

Durlak, J.A., Weissberg, R.P., Dymnicki, A.B., Taylor, R.D. & Schellinger, K.B. (2011) 'The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions', *Child Development*, 82(1), 405-432.

Edwards, D. & Mullis, F. (2003) 'Classroom meetings: Encouraging a climate of cooperation', *Professional School Counselling*, 7(1), pp. 20-28.

Endedijk, H.M., Breeman, L.D., van Lissa, C.J., Hendrickx, Marloes M. H. G., den Boer, L. & Mainhard, T. 2022, "The Teacher's Invisible Hand: A Meta-Analysis of the Relevance of Teacher-Student Relationship Quality for Peer Relationships and the Contribution of Student Behavior", *Review of educational research*, 92(3)370-412.

Ertesvåg, S.K., Havik, T., Sørensen Vaaland, G. & Stahl Lerang, M. (2024) 'Teachers' instructional support and students' peer relationships in the classroom', *Teachers and Teaching*. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2024.2389394> (accessed 3 July 2025)

Ervin, S. (2022) *The Classroom Behavior Manual: How to Build Relationships with Students, Share Control, and Teach Positive Behaviors*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Farmer, T.W., Lines, M. McA. & Hamm, J.V. (2011) 'Revealing the invisible hand: The role of teachers in children's peer experiences', *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 32(5), 247-256.

Fisher, D. & Frey, N. (2019) "'There was this teacher..." Student-teacher relationships are critical – and must be cultivated', *Educational Leadership*, 76(8), 82-83.

FitzPatrick, S., Twohig, M. & Morgan, M. (2014) 'Priorities for primary education? From subjects to life-skills and children's social and emotional development', *Irish Educational Studies*, 33(3), 269–286.

Fitzsimons S., O'Farrell, P., & Furlong., C. (2025) Crisis in the classroom: burnout and stress amongst Irish teachers. *RTÉ Brainstorm* [online] 10 April 2025. Available at www.rte.ie/brainstorm/2025/0410/1506656-ireland-teachers-schools-burnout-stress-mental-health-dcu-survey (accessed 7 July 2025)

Flaherty, A. (2018) 'Power and empowerment in schools' in *Contemporary Pedagogies in Teacher Education and Development*. IntechOpen. Available at: https://researchrepository.ul.ie/articles/chapter/Power_and_empowerment_in_schools/19819492?file=35227210 (accessed 6 July 2025)

Forde, C. et al. (2018) Learning from children's voice in schools: Experiences from Ireland. *Journal of educational change*. 19 (4), 489–509. [online] Available at: //doi-org.may.idm.oclc.org/10.1007/s10833-018-9331-6 (Accessed 5 May 2025)

Forman, S. & Rock, M. (2017) *Weaving Well-Being*. Outside the Box Resources.

French, G. (2013) *The Place of the Arts in Early Childhood Learning and Development*. Commissioned paper from the Arts Council, Ireland. [online]. Available at: arrow.tudublin.ie/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1024&context=aaschsslrep (accessed 7 July 2025)

Foley, N. (2023) *Education Policy, Dáil Eireann Debate* [online]. Available at: www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2023-04-18/573/ (accessed 3 July 2025)

Garavan, M. (2016) Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed. In: Dukelow, F and O'Donovan, O., eds. (2016) *Mobilising classics: reading radical writing in Ireland*. Manchester University Press. 123-139.

Gehris, J.S. (2014) It's about the relationships, *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance*, 85(5), 5-7.

Glenn, M. (2023) Extending knowledge by developing a "slow approach" to action research, *Educational Action Research*, 31(3), 592-607.

Glenn, M., Roche, M., Sullivan, B., McDonagh., C. (2023) *Action Research for the Classroom: A Guide to Values-Based Research in Practice*. Taylor & Francis Group.

Greene, M. (2005). Teaching in a Moment of Crisis: The Spaces of Imagination. *The New Educator*, 1(2), 77–80. [online] Available at: <https://doi-org.may.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/15476880590934326> (Accessed 30 July 2025)

Gullachi, D. (2019) *A vision of "slow education"* [online]. Available at: <https://www.educationmattersmag.com.au/a-vision-of-slow-education/> (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

Hargreaves, A. (1998) 'The emotional practice of teaching', *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 14, 835–854.

Harmsen, R., Helms-Lorenz, M., Maulana, R. & van Veen, K. (2018) 'The relationship between beginning teachers' stress causes, stress responses, teaching behaviour and attrition', *Teachers and Teaching*, 24(6), 626-643.

Hayes, N., O'Toole, L. & Halpenny, A.M. (2017), "Locating the Child at the Centre of Practice" in *Introducing Bronfenbrenner*, revised edn, Routledge, United Kingdom, 78-92.

Hickey, G., Smith, S., O'Sullivan, L., McGill, L., Kenny, M., MacIntyre, D., Gordon, M. (2020) 'Adverse childhood experiences and trauma-informed practices in second chance education settings in the Republic of Ireland: An inquiry-based study', *Children and Youth Services Review*, 118, 1-12.

Holt, M. (2002) 'It's time to start the slow school movement' [online]. Available at: https://courses.educ.ubc.ca/socials/Articles/Maurice_Holt_Slow_Schools.pdf (Accessed: 1 November 2024).

Honoré, C. (2004) In Praise of Slowness- Challenging the Cult of Speed [online]. Available at: https://imp.dayawisesa.com/wpcontent/uploads/2023/07/In-Praise-of-Slowness_-Challenging-the-Cult-of-Speed.pdf (accessed 1 July 2025)

hooks, bell (1994) *Teaching to transgress: education as the practice of freedom*. New York, N.Y: Routledge.

Jasper, M. (2013). *Beginning Reflective Practice*. Andover: Cengage Learning EMEA.

Joyce, J. and Sixth Class Students. (2024/2025) *Personal Reflective Journals*.

Joyce, J. (2024) *Personal Reflective Journal*, August 2024 to date.

Joyce, J. (2025) Interview with Dr. Treasa Bowe, 21 May 2025 [Zoom recording].

Kemmis, S. (2006) 'Participatory action research and the public sphere', *Educational Action Research*, 14(4) 459-476. [online] Available at: doi.org/10.1080/09650790600975593. (Accessed 7 May 2025).

Kincade, L., Cook, C. & Goerdt, A. (2020) "Meta-Analysis and Common Practice Elements of Universal Approaches to Improving Student-Teacher Relationships", *Review of educational research*, 90(5)710-748.

Kindermann, T.A. (2011) 'Commentary: The invisible hand of the teacher', *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 32(5), 304-308.

Kriete, R. & Davis, D., (2014) *The morning meeting book: Creating a caring community in the classroom*. (3rd ed) Greenfield, MA: Centre for Responsive Schools. [online] Available at: www.responsiveclassroom.org/sites/default/files/pdf_files/mm_intro.pdf (accessed 10 October 2025)

Laidlaw, M. (2018) 'Living Hope and Creativity as Educational Standards of Judgement', *Educational Journal of Living Theories*, 11(2), 27-64.

Lansdown, G. (2005) Can You Hear Me? The Right of Young Children to Participate in Decisions Affecting Them. Working Papers in Early Childhood Development, No. 36. *Bernard van Leer Foundation*.

Lawrence-Lightfoot, S. & Davis, J.H. (1997) *The Art and Science of Portraiture*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Li, W. (2015) Strategies for Creating a Caring Learning Climate in Physical Education. *Journal of physical education, recreation & dance*. [Online] 86 (4), 34–41.

Lim, W.M. (2025) What Is Qualitative Research? An Overview and Guidelines. *Australasian marketing journal*. 33 (2), 199–229. [online] Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1177/14413582241264619> (Accessed 23 July 2025)

Lundy, L. (2007) “Voice” is not enough: Conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child', *British Educational Research Journal*, 33(6), 927-942.

Lynch, K. (2022) *Care and Capitalism*, 1st edn, Polity Press, Newark.

Lynch, K. (2010) Carelessness: A hidden doxa of higher education, *Arts and humanities in higher education*, 9, (1), 54-67.

Martin, A.J. & Dowson, M. (2009) ‘Interpersonal relationships, motivation, engagement, and achievement: Yields for theory, current issues, and educational practice’, *Review of Educational Research*, 79(1), 327–365. [online] Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654308325583>. (accessed 3 December 2025)

McAteer, M. (2003) *Action Research in Education*. London: Sage Publications.

McDonagh, C., Sullivan, B., and Roche, M. (2019) *Enhancing practice through classroom research: a teacher's guide to professional development*. (2nd ed). London: Routledge.

McDonagh, C., Roche, M., Glenn, M. & Sullivan, B., (2020) *Enhancing practice through classroom research: A teacher's guide to professional development*. (2nd ed) London: Routledge.

McKay, C. & Macomber, G. (2023) ‘The importance of relationships in education: Reflections of current educators’, *Journal of Education*, 203(4), pp. 751-758. Available at: <https://journals-sagepub-com.may.idm.oclc.org/doi/epub/10.1177/00220574211057044> (Accessed: 29 October 2024).

McNiff, J. (2017) *Action research: all you need to know*. Los Angeles: SAGE.

McNiff, J. (2014) *Writing and doing action research*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

McNiff, J., (2013). *Action research: Principles and practice*. 3rd ed. Abingdon: Routledge.

McNiff, J. & Whitehead, J., (2002). *Action research: Principles and practice*. 2nd ed. London; New York: Routledge Falmer.

McNiff, J. & Whitehead, J., (2005) *Action research for teachers: A practical guide*. 1st ed. Milton Park, Abingdon: David Fulton Publishers.

Moran, E., Walsh, E. & Sloan, S. (2025), "Promoting a restorative culture in schools: Insights from school leaders Promoting a restorative culture in schools: Insights from school leaders", *International journal of educational research open*, vol. 8, 100397

Morrison, K.A. (2008) 'Democratic Classrooms: Promises and Challenges of Student Voice and Choice, Part One', *Educational Horizons*, 87(1), 50-60.

Morrison, M.K. (2007) *Using Humour to Maximize Learning: The Links Between Positive Emotions and Education*. Blue Ridge Summit: Rowman & Littlefield Education.

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2023) *Primary Curriculum Framework*. Dublin: The Stationary Office. [online] Available at: <https://www.ncca.ie> [Accessed 3 January 2025].

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2009) *Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*. Dublin: The Stationary Office.

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (1999) *Primary School Curriculum Introduction*. Dublin: The Stationary Office.

National Council for Special Education (2025) NCSE Relate: A regulation-first approach to reframing behaviour and supporting student engagement and participation. [online] Available at: <https://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/NCSE-Relate.pdf> (Accessed 30 July 2025).

Neff, K. D. (2003) The Development and Validation of a Scale to Measure Self-Compassion. *Self and Identity*. 2 (3), 223–250.

Newton, A. (2024) Active listening for effective student engagement, *Journal of learning development in higher education*, 32.

Ní Chínseallaigh, E., Shipsey, M., Minihan, E., Gavin, B. & McNicholas, F. (2025) Burnout Persists in Teachers in Ireland Post-COVID-19: A Qualitative Follow Up Comparative Study", *International journal of environmental research and public health*, vol. 22, no. 4, pp. 641.

Ní Dhuinn, M., Uí Choistealbha, J., Hamilton, J. & Kaur, T. (2023) Meaningful methodologies in initial teacher education practicum research. *Irish Journal of Education*, 47(7), 76–98.

Niemi, R., Kumpulainen, K. & Lipponen, L. (2015) 'Pupils as active participants: Diamond ranking as a tool to investigate pupils' experiences of classroom practices', *European Educational Research Journal*, 14(2), 138-150.

Noddings, N. (1984). *Caring: A feminine approach to ethics and moral education*. University of California Press.

Noddings, N. (2003) Is Teaching a Practice? *Journal of philosophy of education*, vol. 37, no. 2, 241-251.

Noddings, N. (2005) 'Caring in education', *the encyclopaedia of informal education*, [online] Available at: www.infed.org/biblio/noddings_caring_in_education.htm. (Accessed 27 July 2025)

Noddings, N. (2012) 'The caring relation in teaching', *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 37(2), 241-251.

Noddings, N. (2013), *Caring: a relational approach to ethics & moral education*, 2nd, edn, University of California Press, Berkeley.

Ombudsman for Children. (2023) A Piece of My Mind Report. Children's Mental Health Survey: Stressors, Supports and Services. [online] Available at: [chrome-www.oco.ie/app/uploads/2023/05/A-Piece-of-My-Mind-Report.pdf](https://www.oco.ie/app/uploads/2023/05/A-Piece-of-My-Mind-Report.pdf) (accessed on 1 July 2025)

Omer-Attali, M., Lefstein, A. and Netz, H. (2025) 'Laughter and classroom boundaries', *Language and Education*, 39(1), 154–172. [online] Available at: doi: 10.1080/09500782.2024.2360976. (Accessed 21 July 2025)

Ormond, L. (1944). Let There Be Laughter in the Classroom. *The Clearing House*, 19(2), 112–113. [online] Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00098655.1944.11473981> (Accessed 20 July 2025)

O'Toole, C. (2022) When trauma comes to school: Toward a socially just trauma-informed praxis, *International journal of school social work*, vol. 6, (2).

Pascal, C. & Bertram, T. (2021) What do young children have to say? Recognising their voices, wisdom, agency and need for companionship during the COVID pandemic. *European early childhood education research journal*. 29 (1), 21–34.

Pianta, R.C. (2006) 'Classroom management and relationships between children and teachers: Implications for research and practice', in Evertson, C.M. and Weinstein, C.S. (eds.) *Handbook of Classroom Management: Research, Practice, and Contemporary Issues*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, 685–709.

Postholm, M.B. (2013) 'Classroom management: What does research tell us?', *European Educational Research Journal*, 12(3), 389–402.

Professional Development Service for Teachers (2019) *Restorative Practice Phase 1: An evaluation of PDST CPD provision*. [online] Available at: www.pdst.ie/sites/default/files/Restorative%20Practice%20Report%20.pdf (accessed 21 June 2025)

Quin, D. (2017) "Longitudinal and Contextual Associations Between Teacher-Student Relationships and Student Engagement: A Systematic Review", *Review of educational research*, vol. 87(2)345-387.

Reeve, J. & Cheon, S. H. (2021) Autonomy-supportive teaching: Its malleability, benefits, and potential to improve educational practice. *Educational Psychologist*. 56 (1), 54–77.

Responsive Classroom Approach, (2017) What is the Responsive Classroom Approach? [online]. Available at: <https://thecoopschool.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Responsive-Classroom-Parent-Handout-2.pdf> (Accessed 6 July 2025)

Responsive Classroom (2019) [Image] [online] Available at: <https://x.com/responsiveclass/status/1158757101570854912> (Accessed 10 February 2025)

Responsive Classroom (2023) What is Morning meeting? [online]. Available at: www.responsiveclassroom.org/what-is-morning-meeting/ (Accessed 6 July 2025)

Responsive Classroom (2025) *Responsive Classroom Approach* [online] Available at: <https://online.fliphtml5.com/gunoe/xigm/#p=1> (Accessed 7 August 2025)

Riley, P. 2010, *Attachment theory and the teacher-student relationship: a practical guide for teachers, teacher educators and school leaders*, 1st edn, Routledge, London; New York.

Rimm-Kaufman, S.E. & Chiu, Y.I. (2007) "Promoting social and academic competence in the classroom: An intervention study examining the contribution of the Responsive Classroom approach", *Psychology in the schools*, 44(4),397-413.

Robson, C. & McCartan, C. (2016) *Real world research. A resource for users of social research methods in applied settings*. (4th ed) Wiley.

Roorda, D.L., Helma M. Y. Koomen, Spilt, J.L. & Oort, F.J. (2011) "The Influence of Affective Teacher–Student Relationships on Students’ School Engagement and Achievement", *Review of Educational Research*, 81(4) 493-529.

Roorda, D.L., Jak, S., Zee, M., Oort, F.J. & Koomen, H.M.Y. (2017) "Affective Teacher-Student Relationships and Students' Engagement and Achievement: A Meta-Analytic Update and Test of the Mediating Role of Engagement", *School psychology review*, 46(3) 239-261.

Rowe, M.B. (1986) 'Wait Time: Slowing Down May Be a Way of Speeding Up', *Journal of Teacher Education*, 37(1), 43-50.

SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration) (2014) *SAMHSA's concept of trauma and guidance for a trauma-informed approach*. [online] Available at: https://www.nasmhpd.org/sites/default/files/SAMHSA_Concept_of_Trauma_and_Guidance.pdf (Accessed: 19th April 2025).

Schon, D. A. (2017) *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*. Aldershot: Routledge. [online] Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315237473> (Accessed 23 July 2025).

Schraw, G., (2013) Conceptual Integration and Measurement of Epistemological and Ontological Beliefs in Educational Research. *ISRN Education*, vol. 2013, 1-19. [online]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1155/2013/327680> (Accessed 6 January 2025)

Sidorkin, A. M. (2025) The polyphonic relational epistemology. *Educational philosophy and theory*. 57 (3), 248–261.

Skerritt, C. (2019) 'Privatization and 'Destatization': School autonomy as the 'Anglo neoliberalization' of Irish education policy', *Irish Educational Studies*, 38(2), pp. 263-279.

Skerritt, C. (2023) 'A sinister side of student voice: Surveillance, suspicion, and stigma', *Journal of Education Policy*, 38(6), 926-943.

Spilt, J.L., Koomen, H.M.Y. & Thijs, J.T. (2011) "Teacher Wellbeing: The Importance of Teacher—Student Relationships", *Educational psychology review*, 23(4) 457-477.

Sullivan, B., Roche, M., McDonagh, C. & Glenn, M. (2016) *Introduction to Critical Reflection and Action for Teacher Researchers* [online]. Available at: <https://www-taylorfranciscom.may.idm.oclc.org/books/mono/10.4324/9781315693033/introduction-critical-reflection-action-teacher-researchers-bernie-sullivan-m%C3%A1ir%C3%ADn-glenn-mary-roche-caitrona-mcdonagh> (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

Tanti, M. (2018) Thinking out-of-the-box: Slow as a panacea for creating democratic education in Australian schools, *ASCILITE Publications*, 522-526.

Teaching Council of Ireland (2016) *Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers*, 2nd edn. Dublin: Teaching Council of Ireland.

Thomas, M. & Carvajal Regidor, M. (2021) "From "Slow" to "Being 'Lazy' and Slowing Down" and the Impact on Student Learning", *Teaching and learning inquiry*, 9, (2) 1-14.

Titheradge, D., Hayes, R., Longdon, B., Allen, K., Price, A., Hansford, L., Nye, E., Ukoumunne, O.C., Byford, S., Norwich, B., Fletcher, M., Logan, S. & Ford, T. 2019,

"Psychological distress among primary school teachers: a comparison with clinical and population samples", *Public health (London)*, 166, 53-56.

Tovey, H. (2012) *Bringing the Froebel Approach to Your Early Years Practice* [online]. Available at: web-p-ebsohost.com.may.idm.oclc.org/ehost/detail/detail?vid=0&sid=87c5dc2f-33e2-46ca-899c-45c2d0dc34c2%40redis&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtG12ZQ%3d%3d#AN=506759&db=nlebk (Accessed: 31 October 2014).

Tovey, H. (2020) 'Froebel's principles and practice today' [online]. Available at: <https://www.froebel.org.uk/uploads/documents/FT-Froebels-principles-and-practice-today.pdf> (Accessed: 5 October 2024).

Tronto, J.C. (1998) 'An ethic of care', *Generations*, Fall, 22(3), 15-20.

Trottier, P., 2016. *Relationships Make the Difference: Connect with Your Students and Help Them Build Social, Emotional, and Academic Skills*. Pembroke Publishers, Limited. [online] Available at: <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/nuim/detail.action?docID=4871519> (Accessed 5 January 2025).

UNICEF Innocenti (2025) – Global Office of Research and Foresight, *Innocenti Report Card 19: Child well-being in an unpredictable world*, UNICEF Innocenti, Florence [online] Available at: www.unicef.org/innocenti/media/11111/file/UNICEF-Innocenti-Report-Card-19-Child-Wellbeing-Unpredictable-World-2025.pdf (Accessed on 5 August 2025)

United Nations (1989) *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. [online] Available at: www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child (Accessed 21 July 2025).

Ünver, H., Rodopman Arman, A. & Nur Akpunar, Ş. (2022) 'Metacognitive awareness and emotional resilience in children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder', *Scandinavian Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Psychology*, 10(1), pp. 33-39.

Vanassche, E. & Kelchtermans, G., 2015. The state of the art in self-study of teacher education practices: A systematic literature review. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 50, 124-135. [online] Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2014.995712> (Accessed 2 January 2025).

Whitehead, J. & McNiff, J., (2006). *Action research: Living theory*. London: Sage.

Whitehead, J. (2018). *Living Theory research as a way of life*. Bath: Brown Dog Books.

Whitehead, J. (2019) Contributing to Moving Action Research to Activism with Living Theory Research. *The Canadian journal of action research*. 20 (3), 55.

Wilkins, N. J., Verlenden, J. M. V., Szucs, L. E., & Johns, M. M. (2023). Classroom Management and Facilitation Approaches That Promote School Connectedness. *The Journal of School Health, 93*(7), 582–593. [online] Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/josh.13279> (Accessed 24 July 2025)

Wong, H.K. & Wong, R.T. (2018) *The First Days of School: How to Be an Effective Teacher*. 4th edn. Mountain View, CA: Harry K. Wong Publications, Inc.

Yao, Z. & Wong, L. (2021) ‘The effect of the Dizi Gui intervention on peer relationships and teacher-student relationships: The mediating role of prosocial behaviour’, *Journal of Moral Education, 50*(3), 384-400.

Appendix 1A



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

*Chairperson – Board of Management,
St. Luke’s School,
Churchyard Lane,
Douglas,
Cork*

13/1/25

Dear Chairperson,

I am currently undertaking a part time Master of Education programme at Maynooth University. I am seeking permission to do research in my current class (6th class).

As part of my degree, I am doing a research project. The focus of my research is based on enhancing relationships and building a classroom community. I intend to carry out research in the classroom by the introduction of “Morning Meeting” as well as some weekly lessons on Empowering Beliefs.

The data will be collected using observations, surveys as well as a daily teacher journal. The children will also have their own “personal reflective journal” where they can record their ideas and feelings.

Parents/Guardians as well as the pupils will receive information about the research I intend to carry out. They will be asked to give their written consent before the research begins. Their responses will be treated confidentially, and identities will be anonymous.

Individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from this research. All information will remain confidential, and information will be destroyed in a stated timeframe in accordance with the University guidelines. The correct guidelines will be complied with when carrying out this research.

I hope to enhance the relationships within my class and to encourage powerful communication links between myself and the children in my care. My focus is entirely on my own practice.

In order to carry out the research, I need the Board of Management approval to proceed, and I would be very grateful if you could agree to this request.

Yours sincerely,
Jennifer Joyce

Appendix 1B



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

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

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s),

I am currently studying for a Master's degree in Education (Research in Practice) at Maynooth University Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education.

As part of my degree, I am doing a research project. The focus of my research is based on enhancing peer and student –teacher relationships in the classroom.

In order to do this, I intend to carry out research in the classroom by incorporating activities and tasks that support positive relationships.

The data will be collected using observations, questionnaires, a daily teacher journal and a pupil's reflective journal. The children will be asked to reflect their thoughts and opinions on the activities they engaged in. Your child's name and the name of the school will not be included in the thesis that I will write at the end of the research.

Your child can decide not to participate at any time.

All information will be confidential, and information will be destroyed in a stated timeframe in accordance with the University guidelines. The correct guidelines will be complied with when carrying out this research.

All children will be included in the activities/tasks, but I will not gather data/research on your child until you grant approval.

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

If you have any queries on any part of this research project, feel free to contact me by email at jennifer.joyce.2025@mumail.ie

Yours faithfully,

Jennifer Joyce

Appendix 1B



*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?

I am undertaking the Master of Education in the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education at Maynooth University. As part of this, I am required to conduct an action research project, examining an area of my own practice as a teacher researcher. This project will involve an analysis of my own practice. Data will be generated using observation, reflective notes, and questionnaires. I am then required to produce a thesis documenting this action research project.

What are the research questions?

- How do I enhance teacher-student relationships and peer relationships in the classroom?
- What impact do these classroom relationships have?

What sorts of methods will be used?

- Observation, Reflective Journal (pupil and teacher), questionnaires.

Who else will be involved?

The study will be carried out by myself 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 leaders, Prof. Marie McLoughlin and Dr Suzanne O'Keefe 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: jennifer.joyce.2025.mumail.ie

Appendix 1B



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

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

Parental/Guardian Consent Form

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

I voluntarily agree to the participation of my child in this study.

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

Parent /Guardian Signature _____

Parent /Guardian Signature _____

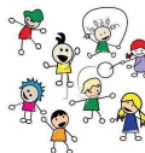
Date: _____

Name of Child _____

Child's signature _____

Date:

Appendix 2



Child's name

I am doing a project in college about relationships in school. I would like to find out how we can create good relationships with each other.

I be asking you for your opinions using surveys and by keeping a reflective diary in school.

I will be sharing what we learn in a way that everyone can understand.

Would you be ok with that? Circle one.

YES ✓

NO ✗

I have asked your Mum or Dad or Guardian to talk to you about this.

If you have any questions, I would be happy to answer them.

If you are happy with that, could you sign the form that I have sent home?

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

Appendix 2



Child's assent to participate

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

Name of child (in block capitals):

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 3



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

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

Critical Friends Consent Form

Dear _____,

As you may know, I am currently studying for a master's degree in education (Research in Practice) at Maynooth University Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education. As part of my degree, I am doing a research project. The focus of my research is based on enhancing peer and student –teacher relationships in the classroom.

In order to do this, I intend to carry out research in the classroom by incorporating activities and tasks that support positive relationships. The data will be collected using observations, questionnaires, a daily teacher journal and pupil's reflective journals.

As part of this data collection, I also need to validate my research by asking my critical friends for feedback at different times of this research. I would like to invite you to give permission to use your feedback in my research. Feedback from you may be in the form of phone calls, email and or questionnaires.

Your name, the children's names or the name of the school will not be used in my research project.

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

If you have any queries on any part of this research project, feel free to speak to me directly or contact me by email at jennifer.joyce.2025@mumail.ie

Yours faithfully,

Jennifer Joyce

Appendix 3



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

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

Critical Friend Consent Form

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

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

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

Signature _____

Date: _____

Appendix 4



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

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

Validation Group Information Sheet

Dear _____,

As you may know, I am currently studying for a master's degree in education (Research in Practice) at Maynooth University Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education. As part of my degree, I am doing a research project. The focus of my research is based on enhancing peer and student –teacher relationships in the classroom.

In order to do this, I intend to carry out research in the classroom by incorporating activities and tasks that support positive relationships. The data will be collected using observations, questionnaires, a daily teacher journal and pupil's reflective journals.

As part of this data collection, I also need to validate my research by asking my colleagues to observe my interventions and share their valued and trusted opinions.

I would like to invite you to give permission to observe my classroom at certain times over the next couple of weeks, answer some specific questions as well as write your ideas/opinions on what you have seen.

Your name, the children's names or the name of the school will not be used in my research project.

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

If you have any queries on any part of this research project, feel free to speak to me directly or contact me by email at jennifer.joyce.2025@mumail.ie

Yours faithfully,

Jennifer Joyce

Appendix 4



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

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

Validation Group Consent Form

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

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

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

Signature _____

Date: _____

Do you think you get on well with your teacher?

Yes – Definitely

Yes – Somewhat/at times

No

Comments – Why do you think this? – What might help?

Do you feel like you can share your ideas in class?

Yes – Definitely

Yes – Somewhat/at times

No

Comments – Why do you think this? – What might help?

Do you think you get on well with your teacher?

Yes – Definitely

Yes – Somewhat/at times

No

Comments – Why do you think this? – What might help?

Do you feel like you can share your ideas in class?

Yes – Definitely

Yes – Somewhat/at times

No

Comments – Why do you think this? – What might help?

Appendix 6

Full transcript of Zoom Interview with Dr. Treasa Bowe – May 21st 2025

Treasa Bowe: Hi, Jennifer, how are you?

Jennifer Joyce: Hi Treasa, how are you?

Treasa Bowe: I'm good. Thanks.

Jennifer Joyce: Thanks, so much for this. I've decided to go back to Maynooth and do my master's. And it's an action in research, and I suppose it was something I always thought I would go back to do but it just never happened. But my concern, I suppose, was that kind of building relationships, and I suppose I had moved from a 4th class to a 6th class. I really saw the difference. Oh, this isn't going to be, maybe as easy as I had thought from maybe the younger. And so I suppose when I saw you talking about morning meetings. I did the webinar with you, and I was like, this is something I've never seen before what a lovely start to the morning! I started the masters last August, and I only was able to kind of start into my research cycles and use it in February. But I tested the water with my 6th class last year and started off towards the end of the year, and they well, I didn't take any feedback from them, but from the general kind of consensus in the class, they loved it. I suppose I loved it as well. I loved bringing it forward to them, so I suppose I'm kind of just would love to kind of ask you. I suppose you've used it longer way longer, obviously, than I have. You've seen it, from its very source over in LA, and I suppose that's my 1st question. When you saw it firsthand, what were your initial thoughts kind of when you saw it? And how was like? Was the structure very similar to what you have now.

Treasa Bowe: Yeah, the structure is similar. I suppose the 1st thing is like, there's a lot more CPD in general in American schools. And when I moved to work in America, we had a whole month. Teachers were back in a month before the students. Later on, it became 2 weeks. So they have that time to, I suppose, establish their practices, and that's why they were really able to lay down that we were doing morning meetings, because, you know, in an Irish school like, if you've got the Croke Park hour and somebody says to you like, you're going to do morning meeting. Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, totally. And then, if you have the interest in it, you do it. And if you don't, like if nobody comes back to you. You didn't get to it.

Yeah, when I heard about it first. It didn't sit naturally with me. My instinct was that's the morning part is a very important part of the class, and you know I do morning meetings in my own way, where I talk through what we're going to do for the day. I'm not sure like that this 20 min is going to be valuable time, but because I had to do it.

Later, they gave us training in responsive classrooms. They do an awful lot. So like we had, it was online training at the time because we were in Covid, and we were online for over a year, so that they really stepped in there. And I think it was at that point that the power of it really came home to me. I think, in the most traumatic time, in the time

when we were furthest apart from each other. Morning meetings were the strongest part of our bond, and I didn't believe that I could establish a community or develop relationships with children I would never meet. There were some children in that classroom that I never ever got to meet, because I hadn't met them the previous year. We never came back in person. For all the students I got I had 9 students that came back by the end hybrid.

But if the students weren't in the school the following year, and some of them weren't. I didn't ever meet some of my students that I taught for a whole year. Yes, we could develop a really strong relationship, and I think it was through morning meetings. Because and the other thing was like what was going to make the children want to come to school when you have the power to just say to your mommy, I've switched on the laptop, but you can just totally switch off. There is really nothing the teacher can do about any of this. What made them want to come to school in the morning was morning meetings. It's a very structured thing. And I think that's the biggest thing that Irish teachers have to get their head around because we have a version of morning meetings in our heads. So you'll see a lot of I suppose Irish teachers call it morning meetings, but what they're doing is revision.

Jennifer Joyce: That's definitely one thing that I've seen will say wjem I speak to people about Morning meetings. They say Oh we're kind of doing what you're doing.

Treasa Bowe: That's the first thing where you have to very constructively say. There is like there's a trademark, if you want to call it for morning meetings. So when you're saying morning meetings, you do have to say that there are 4 elements, and you are talking about the greeting element. And then you're talking about the sharing elements. And you're talking about the game element, and the one I find hardest is the message. I find what I do with that is that's our kind of goal setting or focus of the day, and I go about it that way. I've slightly tweaked what they would do, but I think its still embracing the spirit of what they're looking for but making it more specific to my students. So it has to have those 4 elements.

Some say we do a little bit of revision of maths in there. Now that's not like you can't bring academics into it. You absolutely can. But the priority must be the social and emotional side of it. So that's 1 of the concerns I always have with morning meeting that because everybody is so, I suppose invested in what they normally do a lot of times. They genuinely believe that they're doing it but they're not.

Jennifer Joyce: That's kind of another question I had like, we'll say you mentioned there that the structure is so important, and I suppose I'm very much keeping to that structure like you say, the morning message is a little bit like we talk about our day, and we kind of plan the day ahead. But I suppose we'll say, from your experience of kind of seeing it in LA bringing it back to Ireland like, I suppose. What is your kind of thought process on the structure like? As part of your training, as you say, with responsive classroom, did they kind of go through, I suppose the reasoning behind that structure?

Treasa Bowe: Yeah. So that like they look at the 1st thing is that, like every child, and it's a big thing in America, every child gets greeted in the morning, and a lot of American schools will have something called Threshold, where the principal will be at

the gate or at the door of the school to welcome everybody coming in. In American schools the teacher will be at the door of the classroom to welcome the child in. And again, that was something in the beginning I was unsure of. I'm very busy in my classroom. You know I'm going around and I'm talking to them, and they were like it matters that you were standing at the door. Setting the tone, welcoming the child in seeing them come in. So, nobody slips in. You have been there to welcome them online. I was very conscious that without the greeting a child mightn't have been greeted in the morning or mightn't have spoken in the morning. That was my big thing with both the greeting and the sharing, that it was the opening your mouth to say something, and particularly like unmuting yourself. But it's the same in class. It's so powerful to build that community part where it's not about greeting your friends. It's about greeting other people in the class, and teachers have the capacity to take a litmus test of their class all along. I know that one of the weaknesses of this year's class is that they prioritise their close friendship so much that they unintentionally isolate others like they're not trying.

Jennifer Joyce: Yeah.

Treasa Bowe: They are so about their friends that they don't realize that they are turning their back on somebody else. So our focus all year has been about inclusion and not having patterns in your greeting, and we've addressed it through this. And that formal part of it makes it become a habit. That when I had a sub in a couple of weeks ago, and she told me that when they played a game, they all said, now we must make sure that we don't like have patterns in in what we do. It's not girl, girl. And then, boy, boy, boy, boy they were, they were conscious of whether they agreed with me or not. And like they've had their voice, it's about student voice as well. So they've been able to speak out and say. Well, I just think like that I'm really close friends with this person so I should be able to. Yes, but the likelihood is that you already have. Yes, in the yard you've already said hello to that person.

What we're looking at is this is the formal start of our school day, so you are greeting the people that you are going to be working with. And in addition to the people that you may choose so it's important in terms of expanding and breaking the cliques that might be in the class. The sharing is really important, then, in terms of a child getting to express their opinion. It's elevating student voice and also being able to agree or disagree with somebody respectfully.

And I think the most important thing that I often get from is the active listening. So it's not as much about the child saying something. It's about what's the child who's not saying something doing like, is it okay for them to just sit and look at the table. You know the social skills that you need here, and these are all developed with the children. So it's that really great time you do need to turn and look towards, not have to make eye contact, but look towards the person who's speaking agree with them. Do you speak out, do you say, Oh, my goodness for me, too! Or are you taking away from them? Is there a nonverbal signal that we can use? So all of this is what sets up all the rest of the collaborative work that we do. Because, like, if we are trying to focus in on content in literacy class. At some point we have to have taught the social side of it, and we have to have thought, how can you sustain a conversation in a group. How can you disagree or agree, or challenge somebody? And that comes often from the sharing part?

Again we pick the game very carefully to suit the needs of the class. So they think they're just playing alibi. But like they're often going great. You actually need to be mixing in groups or doing this.. Is it the right thing to do? If somebody makes a decision in your group and you're going? Why did you do that? Address it. So, there's a place for all of us.

The morning message. I think that's really important, particularly for our neurodiverse students to look and go. This is what you can expect from today. It's also a chance to set us all up for success. We can say, okay. So you know, yesterday evening this happened, and you know we talked about it at the time. Now, how are we going to make sure that we have a successful day? What are the things that we can do? And you're like setting the positivity part of it going today we need to do this. Yes. So that's how I address the morning meeting part. I'm sorry. The morning message. I see that as our kind of what is the thing we need to do today in order for us to be successful.

Jennifer Joyce: Yes, yeah, that makes a huge amount of sense. And it's just things now that you're saying. And I'm kind of thinking back to my own morning meeting this morning. I'm like, Oh, yeah, they're all kind of jumping in at the moment. It would be great to start it in September.

Treasa Bove: Like this. This has been a year's work building a community of the class in a way I didn't have to do with the same group last year. They all have different personalities, and they come together differently as a group. And it's looking at going. Their strengths are this there are areas that I want to develop because I want us to be a community.

Jennifer Joyce: Hmm.

Treasa Bove: And the place where you do that is, in your morning meeting, more than any place else. You're trying to apply it in every other subject. Teach it someplace.

Jennifer Joyce: And I suppose just part of your webinar, you would have said, like to scaffold. It doesn't start all together. Don't go all the way in with the 4 items, maybe start with your greeting, and I suppose, would you like, would you? Would that depend on your class, would you say? Like, I suppose, the way I did? It was like what you said I did one week of the of the greeting. Then I did the second week. The greeting and the sharing like. Is that something that I suppose you would have always seen? Is that what they would have done in in LA like to stagger or just depend on the class, I suppose.

Treasa Bove: Depends on the experience. Like, if they've been doing morning meetings all along, you're just establishing yourself within their community in a large way, and some classes you can say, Oh, my God! Well, they're thriving on this, so you don't have to scaffold it as much. Sometimes the scaffolding is for the teacher as much as anything else for them to become more competent, and the other form of scaffolding you can do is until you know your class put in some of the more structured ones. So, like some of the greetings are less structured. Like the fisherman greeting is one that my class love where you come into the circle and you cast your net. They come in like a fish, so they love that, but last year's class mightn't have loved it as much. So until you know how people are going to react. The languages is an easier win where we're just

draw to everybody. And that's really, really structured. And it's a comfort and a safety one. Similarly, like the would you rather is a more structured sharing one than what do you think you would do in this situation or an open question? So it's about knowing your kids before you make it more, I suppose, higher order thinking, or make it riskier in terms of what you might share, but it also just keeping it a very safe environment, so that they know they can just do one thing and it's just oh, I would rather do this, because and then, later on, when they're more comfortable sharing, they can share more about themselves in in.

Jennifer Joyce: And I suppose just that meant that that comment there about being comfortable, I suppose, having the class I have, and they'd be full of chat. They're lively, bunch, and I said, God, did they love morning meeting? Now? They love talk they they will. I assumed that. I suppose that's part of. I suppose, this year my assumptions that I'm talking about. But and it was very interesting because I actually got them to reflect. They had little notebooks and journals, and they actually wrote down or were able to verbalize to me in class discussions on how they felt it was going, and a few of them, you know were, oh, this is great! This is fine. I love talking in front of a group, and while there was other children who I thought might not be, you know brilliant to talking in front of the group, but would have the hand up and wouldn't mind talking in a very structured class, with maybe not everybody looking at them, so I don't know whether it was a circle or whether it was just the opportunity to speak, and everyone is listening. But there was a good good handful, I'd say it about about 8 to 10, where that they were not comfortable, and this was kind of February of 6th class, you know, and I suppose I was surprised at that that they were writing down their words where they might feel judged, and they felt like everyone was staring at them. They felt under pressure. They were the kind of words that were coming back. And I suppose, would you have seen that as well like for your like, and I suppose, how do you? I suppose we we talked about it. We discussed it. We mentioned about like, if you're if you're talking to someone else, you're not giving them the time. How do you, I suppose, develop that? Is it something you bring up in the morning message, or is it bigger? Is it a bigger thing.

Treasa Bove: It's where you're looking going. Okay, knowing that they don't feel comfortable with sharing as much. It's not that you shy away from it. But you go back to okay. Can I make it more structured and then move it back. So one of the things that's really important is to give children time to think. That very often when we're going through is we're going. And 20 min now time is ticking. So here's the question, and the 1st person is answering it here. And that 1st person is going great. I didn't have a chance to think at all. So about saying, Okay, we're going to give thinking time. Everybody's going to think when ready thumbs up, and we'll know that you're ready to begin. And allowing that 1st person the chance to say, Look, could you come back to me.

Person number 10 can't say, can you come back to me? Because I they not only have had the opportunity to think, but they've heard other people. So you absolutely can piggyback on somebody else's idea. You know, I completely agree with what Mary's saying. For me it's the same. So the comfort without the first person is the person that has kind of the most awkward one, and they have to think so, making sure they have thinking time. If they're also really uncomfortable, you can always do like a quick pair

share, and then come back in, so that everybody's already shared their idea with somebody else, and then they can choose to say, Well, you know, my idea was this, or actually, I'm going to talk about Elaine's idea because I thought it was really good. So they they can take somebody else's. I think it's like it's really good to get them to reflect on things. But there's also a difference between feeling discomfort, and you know it not being good for you. Which actually isn't a problem with showing something that you're working on. But like you listen, and you take in. And it can be worth explaining this year's class, that they don't like, but I think it's really valuable is giving compliments to somebody else.

Jennifer Joyce: Yeah, I haven't done that one yet.

Treasa Bowe: It valuable for them to hear what somebody else says about them, but they were very uncomfortable, and they what they said is like, you know you mightn't know this person very well, and we've been in the class with them for 3 years. If you don't know them well enough to give them one compliment, then this is a reflection on where we are, and we need to change this up. But it's also like I was looking, going. So this is something I need to work on giving and receiving compliments, because that's really important. And it's something like we do. Thankful Thursday night, because they have to be able to say, I really appreciate that you did that. Yeah, thank you. That was a lot of effort, and it sets the tone of the classroom as well, where we're saying, Well done, you! I'm delighted for you. They are actually delighted for you that you get that and they're all just things that we work through it. Often enough we work through the discomfort of it.

Jennifer Joyce: Yes, yeah. I've only kind of started since February, and I would have kind of they would have verbalized it like that. The morning meeting, especially the neurodivergent children are saying "it puts me into a good mood, and they're the kind of words they'd say. It puts me into a good mood, starts us off on the right note. We're laughing together, you know. There's a positive start to the day.

That was our old tradition - mental maths. I kept it going because the teacher before me did it, and it just I never questioned it. And that was it. Is it kind of mainly 6 class you would have done it with, or.

Treasa Bowe: No Well, because I have 5th and 6th I've done it. But this year we're doing it whole school in Ireland. It's done whole school in America. So, in America it was kindergarten to 8th grade.

Jennifer Joyce: Okay. You know the responsive classroom with even their website and the morning meeting book, they'd say that it can increase the academics. I can see how it can increase like with the relationships and the connections. But I suppose now that you've had done it long term. Would you see that? Or how are you finding that you'd assess that like? Is that something that you look for? Or have you seen it at all, that claim about the academics.

Treasa Bowe: You know, I do. I would have always worked really hard in getting children to elevate, like to elevate students. Voice was always a big part and having students taking personal stances on stuff and saying it. But I would have put a huge

amount of work into my collaborative groups, and that would have been an awful lot of like September's work. Really trying to establish.

Jennifer Joyce: Yes.

Treasa Bowe: And then I realized an awful lot of that is done through morning meeting. So, it's that part that the framework of all of our academics are established in. I can focus in on the content. I know I can say to them in a very tight English lesson, I can say, okay, turn into your groups there now, and I want you to discuss this.

I don't have to go around saying I told you to discuss it, and you should have been doing that because all of the framework of this was set up through morning meeting and through other kind of stuff in the 1st term.

But I can focus in on the meat of the lesson, knowing that the social and emotional side of it is being sustained and has been already developed, whereas in other group times particularly, you know, when they have groups changing and people are just saying, we just random 4 group people and they get picked in there. That's completely disconcerting for some students. I know community was built with this group, and I don't know how to talk to them, or I'll just let one person lead. We've established all of that through the morning meeting part.

I would say too, probably less brain breaks. Yeah. Now we have a lot of movement in our class. So like a lot of again, the social and emotional part and the regulation part are through good planning of lessons. So the lessons are broken into parts, and there's movement and talking. So there's a lot of different parts. But we're not like getting up and dancing in the class. But we address it through more formal structures. So I think it's a more natural and and probably a more research aligned approach. Yeah.

Jennifer Joyce: Yeah. And I suppose we'll say, obviously, I've kind of seen changes, we'll say within the relationships and the connections. But for you yourself have you seen a change, will say in your teaching how you start your day. Because I felt myself, I was like, this is regulating me. It's as much the teacher's part of the community. So, it's for them as well like on the days where traffic has been bad.

Treasa Bowe: We have all had something going on. We've all arrived in and gone okay, quick, quick. okay, stand up. We'll do this. The teacher is as much on edge as anybody else, whereas I do find it's helpful to have my morning meetings planned out because that takes that stress off.

What am I going to ask? So that part is done? I know every single week that the 1st 20 min of every lesson it's already set up, you know. It's already there, and it's such a routine for us now that, like I never have to worry about what's going to happen.

Is there somebody going to be upset? Is there somebody going to do this? That part? And I think it was that was more important in America. It was an inner city school, with 36 to 38 kids in my class, like things spiralled quickly. So, having like that morning where you're going, listen. This is what we're doing. This is a gentle start. It was also 7 o'clock start for them. So super early. So it was very important to regulate everybody. It makes a difference in Ireland as well in terms of everybody, teacher included, is just,

you know, taking that moment, and you know, setting the tone. This is what our expectations of the class are. This is, you know you speak up, you speak out, you share your opinions. I think it's even more important on the days that are different. So you know, days where you might have a match or time is tight.

What you show to the children matters when you have to make choices, shows your values. So if we only have an hour to do work before this is going to happen, and you spend 20 min of that time doing morning meeting what you're showing them is there is this social, emotional side. It's valuable enough that I'm not going to drop it, and that also builds the security for the students where they're going. We love morning meeting too much to drop it.

Now, when things get tough on the day that I need the most regulation, because you're rushing to school or a routine has changed. And this is like most upsetting for me is when teachers do say no. Actually, this 20 min matters even when time is tight. That's the message that no like starting our day right means listening to you speak, giving opportunities for you to work with other people, setting ourselves up for the day. That's valuable, that matters.

Jennifer Joyce: Yes, and would you have seen a difference between doing morning meeting with American children? And then Irish children?

Treasa Bowe: Americans are more natural at sharing. It's a more natural thing to share your opinion. And like that's just, I suppose, a societal thing that it's built into them more to want to share their opinion and to want to talk, whereas Irish children particularly depend on like I've taught children that are in 6 classes.

They've come up through a system of often sit and listen, and what we're doing there is saying, no, I want you to think, and I want you to speak, and I do want you to listen. But we've also trained our students often to listen and not talk, and that can mean to listen and not think as well. So you're saying like, I'm not going to say anything, but I'm just going to sit here, and if she asked me what Mary said, I have no idea. I didn't talk over Mary. I didn't, but I didn't also think about what Mary is saying.

We're looking for that part where we're saying a true community member cares about what the person is saying. They're listening to what the person is saying, and sometimes it's like teaching them.

Irish children are good at signals. They agree and disagree. But I do think that is actually a very good part of showing that you are listening. They're 2 very different mentalities. I think that the more we do it, the more natural it will become for the students to get into that.

There's some amount that you can do through non verbal's. So again, like what we're saying is, if the students who's speaking, if their voice matters. Then you don't want to speak over that. So, it could be like simple things like positioning yourself, or, you know, track to just giving the nonverbal I would only interrupt when it merits us.

I would feel when you're going. I'm so sorry. I'm really sorry, Mary, to stop your train of thought there, just there was noise in the background there, and I found it difficult. So

I'm just going to ask everybody here now again. And, Mary, could you repeat that. Be a perfect opportunity then for the morning message section where you're going to listen rather than I didn't want to stop when we were doing there.

However. I'm just wondering. Did everybody else have the same experience I had? So you try and put it back. Saying, Look, I'm the most important member of this community.

And I felt this, you're going. Look, this was my experience of it. Is this an experience? And then the next day I would put a message for myself on the board. Just a reminder. This is what we're doing. And the next day we'll be back again, saying, Okay, just even before we begin guys. Let's look at. Yesterday we said, this is something that we were going to work on. So I want to be really looking today for people who are pushing themselves to achieve this.

There's a lot of, you know, positive narration going on and setting the small goals the whole time. So you're not setting 2 or 3 goals, isn't this time. What we're looking at here is giving our friends the opportunity to speak. I

Interruption for anybody else, even if you're saying to your friend, that's true for me as well. Don't take that. You have your nonverbal. And you know, would it be helpful if we had a quick review at the end of that, where people could just say I felt this, or I felt that, rather than trying to over speak over our friends.

Jennifer Joyce: Yes, and you kind of mentioned there as well, that your whole, your school is doing it now Did you have to lead that, or was it seen in your like? Was there a very kind of an open kind of discussion about it.

Treasa Bowe: I've been very happy once I'm allowed to do something in my own class. sometimes the benefit of being in 6 classes. The school approached me about doing it, whether that was from the fact that they were tired of listening to me talking on Instagram about doing it, or whether I suppose I did have a particular interest.

I had a class before for 2 years. They were the most wonderful class, but they were a huge number of neurodivergent children in it, and they weren't a community at the start. They were very much a class of individual students. And when I say they became a community. They were this like the definition of community, they were just kids that completely embraced this.

And I think that did help in the school, seeing that there was a dramatic change across 2 years. But there was dramatic change in it, and that as we were looking at things like looking at nurture. And we did have it already. We had groups of students that were withdrawn in the morning, for, like. I suppose, what did they call them fitness club or stuff like that, you know. They needed regulation and they were being withdrawn, and they were then missing content.

So what we looked at then is saying, maybe all of our students need this, and maybe we don't need to be isolating students to give them what they need if everybody gets what they need. So it was school leadership that made the decision that they want everybody to do this. And then they asked me to do some presentations and some resources, and

they checked in on it during the year, so the expectations that every teacher does it. But teachers are free to adapt us and to make it. And what they found is that, like like me, there were a lot of teachers very dubious about it at the start, because 20 min like that's a waste of time. But the people who tried us were completely converted to us, and people who had concerns hadn't tried us. You know. They had, like, I said, you know, been left and just gone. Look, everybody is expected to do this. You need to do it. It went much better then.

Jennifer Joyce: And it would say, I'm moving down to 3rd class now, and I have every intention of starting in September. There are some pupils, you might not hear them for the whole day, and they only speak, maybe, to their friends, or they might say something small to you. And I suppose, yeah, just that younger collection of children, and I suppose how you'd kind of maybe recommend maybe starting it? Or is there any kind of differences or changes.

Treasa Bowe: I still would start with the greeting. And as you take that 1st 2 weeks to establish, you know the activities and the social and emotional side. You very quickly see where the needs are, and the needs are often different in that is, where people can be more introverted and more self-conscious in 6th Class. The fact that they're less self-conscious can often mean as well that they don't care about anybody else. Yeah, that's I'm so busy telling you the story about my pet rabbit. That I'm not even caring about other people getting times to share.

Jennifer Joyce: Yeah.

Treasa Bowe: That can be your goal. Like you'll, you'll quickly see where you might say, Okay, do you know what we need to do now is because we want to make sure that everybody in this class gets a chance to share their story. We need to be really conscious of just saying maybe one or 2 sentences about ours, and that the rest of the conversation might be something you have with me later.

But this is about sharing with everybody, so that everybody gets to share the time, and that can also be part of why you need to scaffold this where you're going with that sharing question that could take the whole 20 min in the beginning, whereas you're kind of getting that perky pace going where you go. That's brilliant. And now, and having that as your goal where you're saying, remember, we are just saying one sentence, you know. Think about it, and it's getting that part where it's not all about me. It's us as a community, and I share as part of that, but I must also listen to other people.

Jennifer Joyce: Yeah, yeah, it's a big thing, isn't it? I suppose, dealt with a you know, a group of children, or a couple of children that have kind of pushed back on morning meeting? Or have you always felt like they they, you know. They might feel a bit uncomfortable for the 1st while. But are they? Have you always felt they're fully invested.

Treasa Bowe: They may not have been fully invested, but they've been invested in some way. So like they've been as fully invested, I think, as they could be so every like and this often comes up with neurodivergent children. And like you're going, it's the same thing as anything else. You provide the same accommodations for them in one

meeting as you would the other class. You don't change it. So you're looking going. What might be the challenge this child is facing what scaffold can I put in place to support them? So for them? It might be that I'm not pushing them to extend their answer.

If that is a difficulty for them, maybe them saying one or 2 for the 2 options, that's where they're at. But you're looking at going, and how could I help them further? You know what is, what is their next step on this goal? And so I've had students who haven't loved it because it's made them feel uncomfortable in terms of it's a little bit outside their comfort zone, but they haven't balked at it. They've just gone. Okay, look, this is her and her us ideas, you know, coming back with this.

But again, they they've always shared it, and these are the children that often need it most that you know, to express an opinion, to collaborate with their classmates is something that they need, that explicit instruction on. And all of the stuff that I'm doing where it's, you know, you turn to face the person who's speaking, or you know. Listen and don't speak. If you have, you know, if you have to disagree, you need to express it in this way, and this is not the time to express it. But you can express a difference at this time. All of the really explicit teaching. They're the students that need it most. So just because it feels uncomfortable, doesn't mean it's not needed.

You know where the line is, where. This is not something I would ask this child to do. This child can do this. They won't like this. But it's still worth them doing it. In the same way, like the child who doesn't want to stop talking like they don't like that. The limit is put on in terms of time.

Treasa Bowe: It is good for them to realize that they are one of 30. So, therefore they need to be respectful of the other children's right to share as well. That's part of the difference, and I suppose it's part of the thing as teachers that we also need to see where we're going. What's right for his child mightn't always feel right to them. Mightn't always be something that they fully embrace. But it doesn't mean that it's not good for them in the long run, but it's how you approach it, and how you talk to them about it. That same formality to that instruction.

Jennifer Joyce: Yeah. And there was, I suppose, my second research cycle kind of ended up being a kind of a follow on from the morning meeting, but it was more about empowering, and, as you had said, the children's voice, so we one of the things that kind of came from them was like that. They we did a vote they wanted to keep on morning meeting, and so we're we have it now for the for the rest for the year, and but one of the things that came forward from it was that they they'd love to do an outdoor morning meeting. And then I they said, Look, we'd love to do a box. And I said, Look, I don't mind like if you have. You know, certain games that you'd like to do on certain days and certain questions, but has that? I know there's in some of your slides you kind of pick the your choice, but I suppose, when? When? When is the kind of, I suppose ideal time for that? And have you felt that? You know children enjoy, you know, maybe deciding on the question, because I've had that. But then I know they don't suit everyone, and I suppose you had mentioned that like, there's certain games that suit for things, and there's certain questions. But I suppose that whole idea of kind of putting it back on the

children and kind of they leading a morning meeting. I suppose I had that in my head, but I don't know how we've kind of gone back now when I'm fully leading it, you know, so I suppose any.

Treasa Bowe: Like these are all things that you can do. I think I give them, as the year goes on, particularly in term 3, and success. I give them a lot more choice in terms of the game in particular, that you're going okay. You know my games now, at this stage. Is there one that we haven't played in a while, and I would always have one up on the board you're going. This is the one I was thinking of.

Jennifer Joyce: Yeah.

Treasa Bowe: How are we feeling about that this morning? Is there one that you prefer? And I? I follow them pretty much on that this morning because we're doing intercultural week in school. The question was different to the one that I had up. And I had planned to change it. Oh, sorry! Sorry! I meant to change that, and they said no, no, that is a great question.

So we went with that, so that it can be an option like coming up with questions. I think I would be more inclined to maybe get like you said a suggestion box, and then I would pick from those suggestions, and having them come up with it.

Yeah, but like having the choice of question today was great unintentionally. Yeah, so that can also be some way that you get the more student input into a good look. These are 2 questions that we can actually explore. One of those speaks to you, and it was a great one. It was about. If you could change one law in the country, what would it be and activation for it to be like homework in school?

And it wasn't, though they were really, really invested in what it was going to be, and there was great discussion about it. So I think it would normally for me be in a second part of the year. You want to make sure that they understand morning meetings pretty well. You know, these are the type of questions we can ask. You know, these are respectable because the questions always have to be really inclusive. They have to be something that everybody can give an answer to, no matter what their background, no matter what their circumstances. And they have to be safe questions.

Treasa Bowe: So it can take a while for the students to understand. These are the typical pattern of questions that come up. So that's what I would look for, I suppose. Then that you're like you're going to have the questions beforehand, and you would pick from them means that there's a safety net there as well that if somebody something in that they unintentionally don't see the consequences, it could be like your favorite person at home. That's not appropriate for every home so, or where is your favorite place to go on holidays? And you might have children there that you go. Okay, like that's grand. But like it might be. Where would you like to visit in the future? Is, or safe question than where is the best holiday that you've ever been on.

Jennifer Joyce: Yes, I know what you're saying.

Treasa Bowe: I love to talk about it because, like it. Yeah, it has been a game changer. Another good book to read is not directly related on it. But Zaretta Hammond, let me try

and pull up the name again. I think it's a culturally responsive teaching by Zaretta Hammond. It's a culturally responsive teaching in the brain. Her stuff is really good and it kind of encapsulates a morning meeting.

She really looks at student voice, student speaking and she comes at the idea of who we are as teachers. And she works with the idea that, like, it's not about us accepting everything from students and going all those poor "cratur", you know. It's very hard on them.

And she looks at building the relationship with students where you say I understand I do. I understand where you're coming from, but I also know what you're capable of and I'm your biggest cheerleader. But I don't accept anything less than what you are capable of. I won't push you harder than you need to go, but because I believe in you.

I will push you so it kind of fills in with all of that morning meeting philosophy where you're going. You are valuable. You are worthy. But because I know you're worthy. I also understand that you can do hard things, and you push through with that

Jennifer Joyce: Actually, kind of read something, and they can't remember now. I'm not one for the names, but a kind of a warm demander that.

Treasa Bowe: It's both your kind of compassion, but also your expectations, and, like you don't want to be cold which is what the traditional teacher was. But there's a danger that we fall in now to the oh, you're feeling tired, you know, and think I won't expect anything off you. And instead, you're going okay. You are feeling tired and trying to understand what's going on. So right now, maybe you need a break. But I am going to be bringing you back from that break, and I am going to be getting you to do this because I have faith in you and I know you can do this. Her work is excellent. I think it might fit in well with what you're doing.

Jennifer Joyce: Thank you! I was kind of filtering through my own values and just talking with my supervisor, and I suppose, looking up the hurry along curriculum with Marian Dadds and Slow pedagogy and the slowing down of education. And I think that's really fit in with morning meeting that we're not all. Go drive on! Come on! It's half 8. Come on! Get the homework down, which I was doing.

You know that this rush and this panic, and I suppose morning meeting has slowed me down, but I also feel I get an awful lot more out of them. And you probably find that as well, like 100%.

Treasa Bowe: But what they look at in America is. It's not the rush, but our lessons are too long in some ways. They're too long in terms of; we spend too long on an activity. What they're looking at is we're always talking about finishing stuff, and they don't. They're like literally going. It's a 3 min of an intro, and then you're only writing this for 2 min.

Jennifer Joyce: Wow!

Treasa Bowe: It's not enough time for anybody to sit and go. Oh, I don't think I get bothered getting started now, because, like I've got loads of time. So they're like, okay, I must start because it's 2 min to be finished. But the expectation of how much you produce is also less.

It doesn't need to be polished but it does need to be finished, because there's another step to the lesson. So because it's so broken in steps, you're going along with students as opposed to, you know, like on a curriculum day, where they say, Okay, just do this task for 20 min, and and you're gone.

They they break it more, so that if you're told you've got 5 min to do this. Then, as a teacher, I know where the next step goes, and I know where the next step goes. I find that that kept me on track, and it kept the students on track but because it also broke up what they were doing more.

Nobody was getting tired and bored. They were coming along with it. But yeah, no, she does an excellent job. It was relationships. We have a belief. And I think social media is part of the problem with this where we say, you know, if you've got a difficult class relationship.

And we make it kind of superficial in terms of if you just bond with your students, everything is going to be fine, and that makes it. Then, if my classes, you know, finding stuff challenging, do I not have a good bond with. Is it back on me? Is it the fact? And like you can have a great relationship with the child? But it doesn't stop them feeling what they're feeling, and it doesn't stop them, like, you know, acting out if there's something going on.

So instead, like she really looks at what does it mean? You know what what's going on here? And some of it, like I said, is to do a teacher talk. We speak too much. We're not giving the students the chance to talk.

And she says, like the person who's doing the talking is the person who's doing the learning.

So she's like, she's a great person to touch point of, like what your understanding of relationships and community with the students, and it breaks it down, and that I found that was my biggest moment where I went.

You have to work as hard on relationships and community as you work on anything else. It is not to do with being the nice teacher. It's not about being a cool teacher. About knowing the songs that the kids are singing, or you know you have to be your authentic self. Yes, not my thing. I got to stand in front of them and go. I have no idea. I have a relationship with them, because I'm standing there. I haven't a clue, but there are other parts where you're working on the relationship. She does all of that very well.

Treasa Bowe: And the openness. But it's authentic. So it's not. It's not somebody just saying, Well, I know your favorite band is this. So I'm just gonna put that into a match question. And you're like.

Treasa Bowe: They're smarter than that.

Jennifer Joyce: They are.

Treasa Bowe: More than that. Yes, that gives them a 5 seconds going. Oh, my goodness, you put that band in there! That's great!: It's like your relationship, how you treat them. Your understanding, the respect that you've given their role. But we can miss all of that in just thinking it's about having a good bond with them that matters. But it's not that superficial.

Jennifer Joyce: Yeah, exactly, exactly, Treasa. Thank you so much for your time.

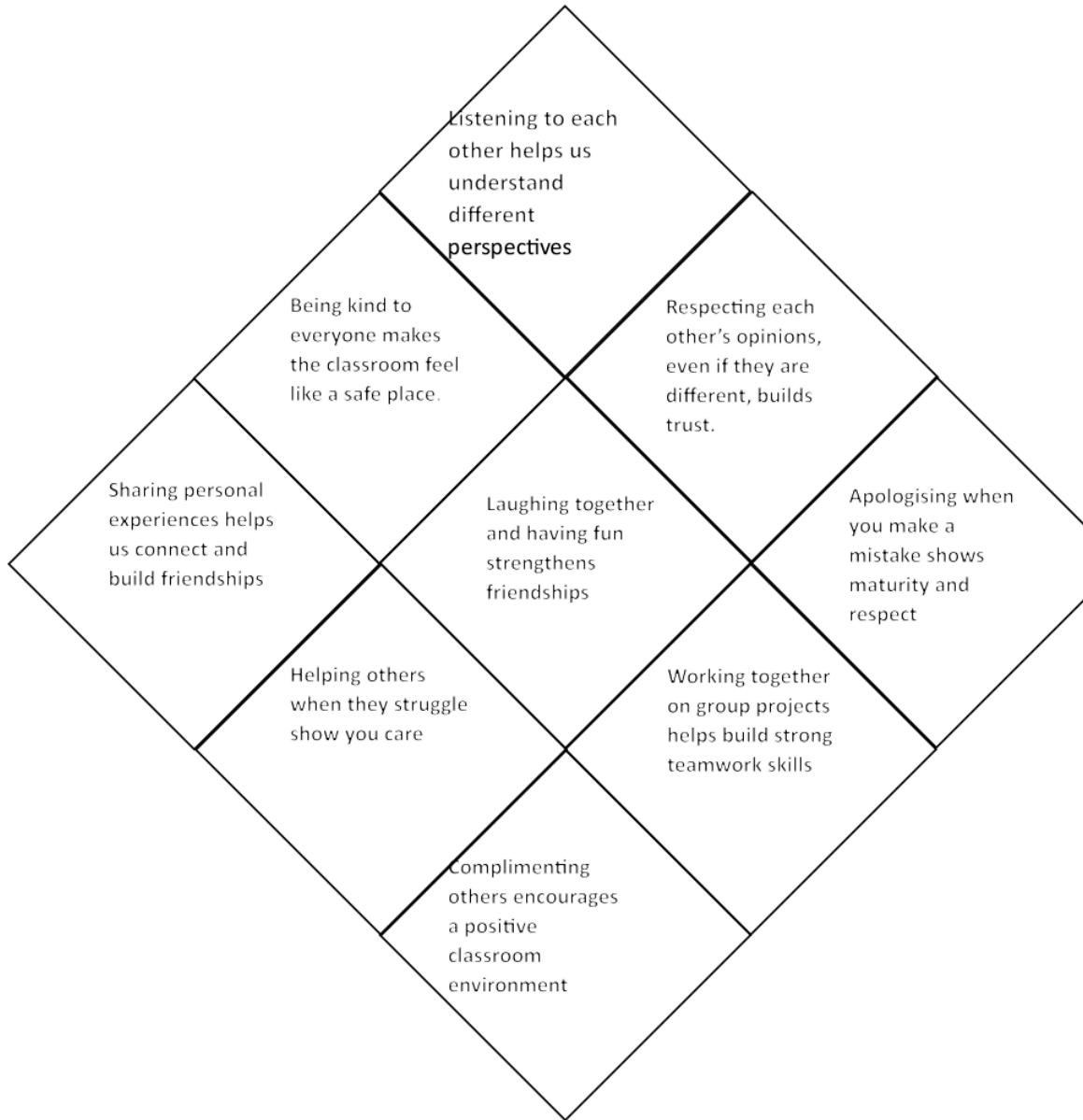
Treasa Bowe: Congratulations, and best of luck with the rest.

Jennifer Joyce: Oh, thanks so much. Thank you. 1 million. Thanks so much for your time.

Treasa Bowe: Bye, bye.

Jennifer Joyce: Bye, bye.

Diamond Nine



Appendix 8

Current Morning Routine (Before intervention)

Validation Group Questionnaire



- 1. What is the Current Morning routine in this class?**

- 2. What are your initial thoughts after observing our current routine?**

- 3. How do you think the children feel about this routine? What makes you think this? (observations, discussions etc?)**

- 4. Do you think the class is ready and engaged for their day of learning? Why? Why not?**

- 5. From your experience, how is this routine different/similar to other morning routines in other classrooms?**

- 6. Is there anything else you would like to add/suggest?**

Morning meeting Routine (After Intervention)



Validation Group Questionnaire

1. Describe the Current Morning routine in the class?
2. What are your initial thoughts while observing our current Morning routine?
3. How do you think the children feel about this routine? What makes you think this? (Observations, discussions, body language, engagement, participation etc?)
4. Do you think the class is ready and engaged for their day of learning? Why? Why not?
5. From your experience, how is this routine different or similar to other morning routines in other classrooms?
6. Do you see any benefits to this type of Morning meeting?
7. Is there anything else you would like to add/suggest?

Appendix 9



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

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

Interviewee Information Sheet

Dear Dr. Bowe,

I am currently studying for a Master's degree in Education (Research in Practice) at the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education, Maynooth University. As part of this program, I am undertaking a research project focused on enhancing peer relationships and student–teacher interactions within the classroom.

To support this aim, I will implement classroom-based activities designed to foster positive relationships, such as Morning Meeting and lessons centred on Empowering Beliefs. Data will be collected through a combination of classroom observations, questionnaires, a daily teacher journal, and pupil reflective journals. Additional insights will be gathered through discussions and questionnaires with my critical friends and validation group.

As part of this research, and to enrich the data collected, I would like to invite you to take part in an audio-recorded interview, either online or in person. Participation is entirely voluntary, and informed consent will be obtained beforehand.

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

If you have any queries on any part of this research project, feel free to speak to me directly or contact me by email at jennifer.joyce.2025@mumail.ie

Yours faithfully,

Jennifer Joyce



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

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

Interviewee Consent Form

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

I voluntarily agree to participate in an audio recorded interview for this study.

Signature _____

Date: _____