

CUMHACHT-BRITE Research Digest

Volume 1



2019/20



MIC

CUMHACHT

WORLDWIDE RESEARCH IN INITIAL & SECONDARY EDUCATION

BRITE

CUMHACHT-BRITE

Research Digest

Volume 1

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SHARING YOUR PASSION AND CURIOSITY

Dr Maurice Harmon - Editor *Cumhacht-BRITE* Research Digest

As the academic year of 2019/20 draws to a close, we reflect on all that people have achieved and lament the many lost opportunities due to COVID-19. One of these losses was a scheduled showcase of student research through the launch of *Cumhacht: Building Research in Initial Teacher Education (BRITE)* at Mary Immaculate College. Like so many other events, we have now moved this showcase online with the launch of *Cumhacht -BRITE: Research Digest*. This publication provides an opportunity for students to share their research with each other, with the college community and with the broader education landscape. It affords an opportunity to celebrate the excellence in research that is evident across all of our initial teacher education (ITE) programmes. The sharing of findings marks a pivotal step on one's research journey and enriches the education landscape, with new insights and information, informing practice going forward and consolidating the power of the 'teacher-as-researcher' for students on our early learning and care, primary and post-primary programmes.

The importance of a research rich teaching profession is highlighted by contributions from Early Childhood Ireland, The Department of Education and Skills and The Teaching Council in the opening pages of this publication. This is carried through in the student research that spans early childhood education, curricular areas, special education, deaf education and self-study. It is hoped that through this engagement in research during their ITE programme all students will be committed to developing a research environment in their future educational settings, as lifelong learners. As Zora Neale Hurston said 'Research is formalised curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose' and it is through this formalised curiosity that teachers can enrich their own lives as educators, and the lives also of the students they teach.

I wish to acknowledge and thank my colleagues in the Faculty of Education for their work in supervising the students during their research journey and the many schools and teachers who facilitated the students' projects; Dermot Comerford for the design of our logo and layout of the publication; Dr Maresa Duignan, Teresa Heeney and Bríd Murphy for their thought-provoking contributions; Prof Emer Ring for penning the introduction and her support in the development of *Cumhacht-BRITE* and finally the students, without whose impressive research, this first edition of *Cumhacht-BRITE Research Digest* would not be possible.

IN SUCH SHARED ACTIVITY, THE TEACHER IS A LEARNER, AND THE LEARNER IS, WITHOUT KNOWING IT, A TEACHER (DEWEY, 1916)

Prof. Emer Ring - Dean of Education (Early Childhood and Teacher Education), MIC

It is indeed my pleasure to be invited to write a short introductory piece for the first edition of the Mary Immaculate College *Cumhacht-BRITE Research Digest*. The Mary Immaculate College *Cumhacht-BRITE Research Digest* is designed to bridge the research experience in initial teacher education with the developing role of the teacher as researcher on the continuum of a teacher's life-long learning journey. Influenced by the great American Philosopher John Dewey (1859-1952) "teacher" in this context denotes the craft of teaching across all of our programmes at Mary Immaculate College, from early childhood through primary and right through to post-primary level. The central role of the "teacher" as an interpreter and guide as the child rediscovers, re-enacts, and reconstructs his/her experience was central to Dewey's concept of teacher identity (Camp Mayhew and Camp Edwards, 1936). Dewey's aspirations for the teaching profession as a dynamic self-evolving, knowledge-creating, democratic reflective learning community continues to be even more relevant today in preserving teacher autonomy and professionalism (Ring, et al, 2019).

'Cumhacht' being the Irish word for 'Power' captures the inherent power of research in early childhood and teacher education. The research reported in this publication illustrates the exceptional commitment of our staff and students to excellence. We are very proud of this first *Cumhacht-BRITE Digest* and are inspired by the commitment of our students to engage in critically grounded research, and thus contribute to the creation of a robust foundation on which to build high-quality practice and pedagogy.

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THE IMPORTANCE OF RESEARCH IN INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION

Brid Murphy - Acting Head of Teachers' Learning & Research, Teaching Council.

'If education is not informed by research, what is it informed by?' (Firth, 2019).

Initial teacher education is the first step on the continuum of teacher education; the first stage of the multifaceted and dynamic career that is teaching. The sense of professional identity that begins to develop during ITE shapes the rest of a teacher's career. What role does research play in this career and why is it important in initial teacher education?

As Firth (2019) writes, 'teaching is a highly complex skill. It is one of the most demanding of all professions, because it involves not just dealing with human beings..... but modifying something intangible- the formation of new memories.' Teaching involves planning, preparation, developing strategies, and making decisions in an unpredictable environment. In fact, teachers could be described as the most natural of researchers; continually devising new ways to influence knowledge building and improve the quality of their practice.

How does research support quality teaching? By providing a richer understanding of how learning works, research can be seen as empowering for the teacher, who as an agentic, autonomous professional can make informed decisions and in doing so provide better quality teaching for their students.

As Sahlberg (2012) points out, the development of the research mind-set begins at ITE and continues throughout a teacher's career. Building the foundations of a systemic approach to research at the ITE stage means that student teachers engage with and in research on their practice, reflect on it and improve their teaching accordingly. They model an approach to learning that teachers wish pupils to adopt - enquiring, engaged and critical.

The many ways in which research can play a role in initial teacher education were highlighted by BERA in 2014: 'the content of such programmes may be informed by research-based knowledge; research can be used to inform the design and structure of teacher education programmes; teachers and teacher educators can be equipped to engage with and be discerning consumers of research; teachers and teacher educators may be equipped to conduct their own research, individually and collectively.' The role of research in ITE is in fact so important that it is now state policy in Ireland to situate ITE within the university structure, drawing on and integrating it within a thriving education research culture.'

The Teaching Council, as the professional standards body views teachers as autonomous professionals, as life-long learners who take responsibility for their own learning and always are committed to quality teaching. As far back as 2011, the Council's Policy on the Continuum of Teacher Education cited

the capacity for student teachers to reflect on their own practice and research, as central to teaching. This view is borne out in the Council's accreditation criteria (2011) which makes student teacher and teacher educator engagement in and with research a requirement of programme accreditation. The Council's Cosán framework (2016) also sees research as a key process to support teachers' life-long learning.

By embedding research in ITE, and other developments under the Council's Research Strategy (2016) such as an online library freely accessible to all registered teachers, support for research sharing platforms such as T-Rex as well as providing funding under the Research Support Framework, the Teaching Council wishes to support the development of a vibrant research culture whereby teachers as reflective practitioners and enquiry-oriented learners are actively engaging in and with research, and confidently using research in reviewing and developing their practice on an ongoing basis.

The recognition of teaching as a research-informed profession is one of the most significant challenges as well as opportunities, this century. The ability of teachers to respond to the complexity of need that is becoming ever more apparent can only be augmented by really embedding research - in all its many forms - in their daily practice. By connecting theory with practice via research in ITE, Ireland will have a profession of research informed teachers alongside a wealth of teacher informed research.

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PLAY IS THE HIGHEST FORM OF RESEARCH

Teresa Heeney - CEO, Early Childhood Ireland

I'm delighted to contribute to the first edition of the Mary Immaculate College *Cumhacht-BRITE Research Digest*. For a number of years now, Early Childhood Ireland has hosted a research day for passionate early learning and care students and early childhood researchers, practitioner-researchers, and early years specialists from private and community services, third-level institutions, children's charities, government departments and agencies in Ireland. This event has become a truly collegial space for knowledge creation, data generation and leadership. Participants join together to listen to and learn from each other's original research studies and reflections on practice. In an approach that resonates with early childhood, insights are co-constructed through dialogue and reflection.

Due to the success of our Research Day and the appetite that was out there for sharing research findings, an expert working group was put together in Early Childhood Ireland to discuss the possibility of developing our own Research publication. As an early years' organisation with a large membership, we are very keen to provide opportunities for both our members and all those with an interest in early learning and care to share and document vital research findings. We know that data generation and access to up-to-date research is crucial to our growing and developing early learning and care sector. Our footprint for research data sharing is now firmly on the ground, and our working group began the process of developing our very first National Early Years Research Day Proceedings publication.

We recruited expert external members to our Scientific Committee and each member of the Scientific Committee brought expertise from the field of early childhood care and education. There followed a very rigorous process which included a call for papers, double blind peer review, feedback and updates. We are delighted that our inaugural Research Day Conference Proceedings Publication will be launched online later this year. The issue captures a rapidly professionalising early learning and care sector, in the process of developing a body of child-centred research on and for practice, policy and services, seeking to really transform the ECEC sector so that children learn and thrive, and have only the very best experiences.

We hope that it will help to shape educational and care practices, our own thinking and policy decisions, and actions concerning the major challenges facing Irish early childhood education and care into the future.

INDEED, EDUCATION WITHOUT RESEARCH OR INNOVATION IS EDUCATION WITHOUT INTEREST

Dr Maresa Duignan - Assistant Chief Inspector – Early Years Inspection and Policy, Department of Education and Skills.

When I was invited to write a short reflection for this first edition of the Mary Immaculate College *Cumhacht-BRITE Research Digest*, these words of Loris Malaguzzi (1920 -1994), founding father of the Reggio – Emilia approach to early childhood education, came to mind. In common with other great educationalists such as John Dewey and Lev Vgotsky, Malaguzzi, rejected the ‘transmission of knowledge’ theories of education prevalent at the time of his own teaching career. He believed in education as a key mechanism for achieving greater equity and social justice for all in society. The concepts of empowerment and engagement were central tenets in achieving these goals. Empowerment is activated through recognition of the agency of the learners, no matter their age, in the construction of their own learning in partnership with appropriately skilled and knowledgeable adults. Engagement is stimulated and sustained by ensuring that research and innovation are at the heart of all learning activities.

Regular reflection in and on practice is a critical aspect of being an effective professional educator. A reflective mindset is important whether it is the newly qualified teacher, exploring the theory to practice implications of the ‘real-life’ classroom or the seasoned practitioner taking on the challenge of innovative pedagogical approaches, or a new group of children! The capacity to question, revisit and where necessary revise the knowledge, practices and values that inform our work will ensure that learning experiences are relevant and vibrant for all the learners we encounter.

The ability to be an active practitioner/researcher is a most valuable skill in the professional educator’s toolkit. The contributors to this journal are testimony to the commitment of Mary Immaculate College to ensure that those who graduate as teachers, from early childhood to post primary and beyond, are equipped and committed to engage in research in all its dimensions.

This is a very timely initiative in the history of the development of early years professionals in Ireland. The publication of *Professional Award Criteria and Guidelines for Initial Professional Education (IPE) (NFQ Level 7/ 8) degree programmes in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) for the ELC (Early Learning and Care) sector* in 2019 is currently informing the review of all courses leading to these awards. At the heart of these new criteria and guidelines is the idea of professional formation. This refers to the journey, both personal and professional, from inspired entrant to a course of study to confident graduate ready to meet the challenges of the professional workplace. Research in all its forms, is at the heart of this journey. It harnesses curiosity, focuses inquiry and challenges creativity in the pursuit of knowledge and understanding. It builds on the work of work of our predecessors and provides strong foundations for future development. A vibrant research community is a strong indicator of a thriving profession and I look forward to seeing further evidence of this growth in future editions of Cumhacht-BRITE.



AN INVESTIGATION TO DETERMINE INFANT CLASS TEACHERS' PERCEPTION OF PLAY ON CHILD EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN IRISH INFANT MAINSTREAM CLASSROOM CONTEXTS

Claire Murphy, Mary Immaculate College

ABSTRACT

Emotional regulation is defined as the control of feelings in conjunction with various affective responses¹. Research posits that emotional development includes self and social awareness, encompassing personal relationships². Today, Ireland has witnessed a significant rise of play-based pedagogues in infant classrooms, a consequence of *Aistear: The Early Childhood and Curriculum Framework*³. The rationale for this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the Irish context, by unearthing infant teacher perceptions of play on child emotional development in the early years. Overall, this study contributes to comprehending the need for playful learning climates to ensure fruitful emotional development.



CONTACT

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INTRODUCTION

The objective of this research is to develop a greater insight into whether infant class teachers perceive play to positively or negatively influence a child's emotional regulation. Play is recognised as the innate language of childhood, enshrined in policies both nationally and internationally. Historically, Ireland did not recognise the paramount role of early childhood care and education (ECCE) in child development. However, outlooks towards play have evolved resulting in the development of national play legislation. Such a revolutionization of views is a consequence of international policies which promote the child's right to play. Today, play is seen as an effective pedagogical tool for educational practice in the early years, having many benefits especially in terms of child development³. Numerous policies highlight this, one such being the *Primary School Curriculum*⁴ underscoring the importance of play towards the developmental domains of the child, including physical, social, spiritual, moral, cognitive, and emotional. Furthermore, the *Ready to Learn: Whitepaper on Early Childhood Education*⁵ endorsed holistic development, whilst highlighting the importance of providing quality education in Irish infant classrooms. Research asserts play's propitious nature in influencing neurological development, which in turn enables different developmental domains to flourish, including that of emotional development.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

The researcher engaged in semi-structured interviews which were deemed most suitable as they enabled dialogue on play and child emotional development with teachers who had relevant experience with playful techniques, thus an interactive process⁶. This method allowed flexibility where the researcher probed the response to questions facilitating participants to guide interview direction, yielding further information. Throughout such interviews the researcher listened to participant's responses and strived for comprehension on the meaning interviewees placed on the issue being explored⁷. Individual twenty-minute interviews were conducted in quiet settings which were electronically recorded and transcribed for data analysis. A total of four interviews were conducted within the Munster Region. Thus, taking the form of small-scale study, encompassing both rural and urban primary schools.

FINDINGS/ RESULTS

Participants noted the benefits and drawbacks of play-based approach to child emotional development:

Value of Play: All teachers were cognisant of play being a crucial component of ECCE and an effective medium through which children learn. Understandably, participants had contrasting views on the advantageous nature of play. All teachers demonstrated a positive outlook towards play in infant settings, with the *Aistear* framework³ pivotal in achieving this. Teachers denoted play to be an invaluable methodology in supporting skill development, particularly those social and self regulatory. **Play Typography:** A consensus emerged, regarding play to be an avenue to facilitate emotional development. However, divergent views were expressed to the primary play type which should be embraced to maximise emotional learning, with socio-dramatic play proving most frequent of the vast play typography. **Barriers to Play:** Participants were cognisant of challenges which prevent children from reaping the benefits of play-based learning, underscoring time constraints and CPD as significant barriers. Collectively, participants stressed they felt curricula overload was a key challenge in implementing play-based approaches, with the results-driven focus of the past continuing to permeate the classroom. **Role of Teacher:** Data analysis indicated teacher attitudes inspire positive practice, as they are enthusiastically utilising play in their classrooms, with diverse roles embodied by the infant teacher conveyed: facilitator, co-player, assessor and scaffolder. **Play as a Pedagogy:** Participants recognised the advantageous nature of hands-on, active discovery learning to contribute to the holistic development of the child. Many teachers viewed playful pedagogies as avenues to embed play-based activities, techniques and strategies to enhance teaching and learning. Availability and utilisation of resources and the diverse needs of children were noted important factors to be considered.

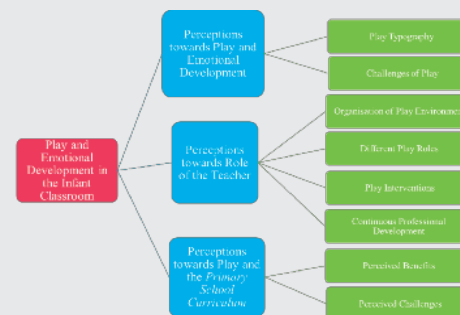


Figure 1. Themes

DISCUSSION

Play Experiences setting Foundations for Life: Play was perceived vital for holistic, psychological and emotional development, transmitting key self-regulatory and coping strategies. Furthermore, play was seen to establish friendships, whilst exponentially developing language. Fundamentally, augmenting child emotional intelligence, with effects lasting throughout life. **Paramountcy of Socio-dramatic Play:** Teachers distinguished this play to act as an intermediary structure, where children strived to comprehend complex feelings, providing an avenue where solutions to challenges were identified, and emotions understood. It was acknowledged that children who are isolated or experience discomfort in play settings may not reap these rewards. Solitary play, particularly art-based play, was deemed more suitable for these children. **Time Limits:** For teachers, play interventions were restricted by demanding classroom curricula. They illustrated children become emotionally vulnerable during play and if abruptly concluded, distress can be caused, consequently disrupting what otherwise may have been a positive regulatory experience. *Aistear* was noted to facilitate a thematic approach to play, thus alleviating some pressures associated with curriculum overload, as subject integration was feasible during this time.

CONCLUSIONS

It is clear policy must be revised from a socio-emotional wellbeing perspective to ensure such is enshrined within the infant classroom, where curricula can clearly be integrated with play approaches. Findings validate the necessity of compulsory Continuous Professional Development to address incongruity in the area of play and emotional growth in infant contexts. Primarily, this research highlighted play as a complex process, supporting children's emotional development during vulnerable periods of childhood.

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THE IMPACT THAT KINAESTHETIC ACTIVITY CAN HAVE ON LEARNING REINFORCEMENT IN INFANT CLASSROOMS.

PERCEPTIONS OF PRESERVICE AND PRACTICING INFANT TEACHERS.

Richelle Hoare, Mary Immaculate College

ABSTRACT

This small scale research study is focused upon the possible impact that kinaesthetic activity can have on learning reinforcement in infant classrooms. The educational publications of the Aistear Curricular Framework and the Siolta Quality Framework Manual have outlined that playful interactions are essential for young children to learn effectively. The opinions of preservice and practicing infant teachers were sought through qualitative data analysis in the form of interviews and questionnaires. Similar to the writings of Jensen et al (2019), the concept of children learning through playful experiences has formed the backdrop of this research study.



CONTACT

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INTRODUCTION

The Primary School Curriculum Introduction (NCCA, 1999) promotes an active, hands on learning experience for all children is paramount for their successful learning of new information. This statement is significant as the curriculum underpins all teaching and learning experiences that take place in the infant classroom. I began to consider whether preservice and practicing infant teachers agree or disagree with this statement based on their experiences of working with junior and senior infant children. I have become familiar with the Aistear Curriculum Framework and the active strategies it emphasises for effective learning in the infant classroom. This publication allows me to believe that young children may learn more effectively when they are immersed in a learning experience that requires manipulation of materials and interactions with others.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

This study is qualitative dominant as the personal opinions of preservice and practicing infant teachers were sought to answer this research question. Creswell's Six Step Approach was utilized following the interviewing of infant teachers and completion of questionnaires by preservice teachers. It was essential to hold semi structured interviews with practicing infant teachers as I wanted to understand the opinions of teachers working with young children. I considered that their personal bias towards kinaesthetic activities may affect the way preservice teachers answer the questionnaire. I anticipated on receiving honest answers from both participating groups as specific questions were included in both the questionnaires and interview schedules. Twenty six questionnaires were completed by preservice teachers, while six practicing infant teachers were interviewed.

FINDINGS/ RESULTS

Both participating groups stated that there are possible benefits and possible drawbacks associated with the use of kinaesthetic learning methodologies to reinforce learning in the infant classroom. One practicing infant teacher explained that hands on learning activities could particularly benefit children with learning difficulties. It was interesting to note that both teaching cohorts mentioned the beneficial impact that kinaesthetic activity can have on the mathematical understanding of young children. Preservice and practicing infant teachers commented that Aistear provides a foundation for reinforcing new oral language content. Practicing infant teachers emphasised the emotional development that can take place through active learning in the form of self regulation, while both groupings commented on the beneficial impact that hands on learning has for fine and gross motor skill development. The researcher noticed that the positive themes documented are similar to the writings of Broadhead (2006), as play promotes social, physical, emotional and intellectual development. The possible drawbacks of time management, classroom management and planning were mentioned by both cohorts, however preservice teachers mentioned potential drawbacks to a greater extent.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study propose that there is an overall beneficial impact associated with learning reinforcement as a result of incorporating kinaesthetic activity in the infant classroom. There was a heightened response relating to the positive reinforcement of learning as the children became engaged in an activity that they believe has playful elements. Jensen et al (2019) enforces this statement as when children believe that a learning activity is playful, their holistic development is enhanced. Practicing infant teachers noted the benefits of social and emotional development. These were not previously considered by the researcher. The aspects of classroom and times management were mainly discussed by student teachers. It should be considered that preservice teachers do not have full employment in an infant classroom and they therefore have less experience of working with young children than practicing infant teachers.

CONCLUSIONS

This findings of this research study have displayed that kinaesthetic activity has predominantly a beneficial impact on learning reinforcement in infant classrooms. The possible benefits and possible drawbacks of kinaesthetic learning have been identified by both preservice and practicing infant teachers. It is interesting to note that preservice teachers associate more drawbacks with the use of kinaesthetic activities.

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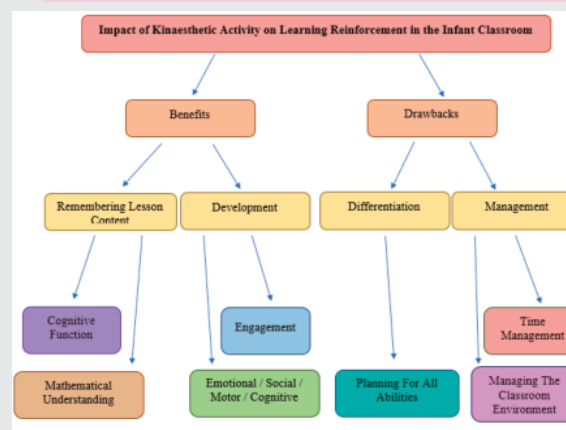


Figure 1. Coded Themes.

THE IMPORTANCE OF MUSIC IN THE INFANT CLASSROOM

Úna O'Mahony, Mary Immaculate College

ABSTRACT

This research investigated the benefits and challenges of exploring music with children in the infant classes. It examined how music can support learning in other subjects and identified the resources which are perceived to facilitate music teaching/learning. After interviewing six practicing infant teachers, many benefits emerged, including how music was perceived to enhance pupils' literacy skills. However, many challenges also emerged including how curriculum overload creates difficulty for teachers in implementing music lessons.



CONTACT

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INTRODUCTION

I have witnessed throughout different school placements how pupils responded enthusiastically to the peer interaction and active participation that music offered. However, I also encountered challenges while teaching music. I discovered that the Government of Ireland allocates fifty minutes a week to music in the infant classroom (GOI 1999). This time allocation indicates that music must be supporting the pupils' learning and development. Aistear highlights effective ways infant teachers can set up their classroom environment to facilitate music (NCCA 2009). Therefore, emphasis on music in pupils' learning has increased in recent years. However, it is important to consider if this heightened emphasis is reflected on infant teachers' perceptions of music.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

A qualitative approach was used as my research question sought opinion-based responses. Six practicing infant teachers were interviewed using a semi-structured approach. I implemented a thematic analysis approach to code the data and I colour coded the themes and subthemes (Table 1). I applied an interpretivist paradigm to accumulate meaning from the participants' responses. I implemented peer debriefing to identify any questions which were potentially leading and corrected them following my peer's feedback. I stored all transcripts electronically with password protection to ensure the identities of my participants were secure. I also provided information and consent sheets to my participants to ensure they were fully aware of the research in which they were participating.

FINDINGS/ RESULTS

A series of skills were perceived to develop from the music strands, including hand-eye co-ordination skills from instrumental music, literacy skills from singing and rhythmic co-ordination skills from listening. Furthermore, music was perceived to nurture social development in children and background music was believed to improve pupils' task engagement levels. The incorporation of music strategies were viewed to enhance pupils' decoding and reading fluency skills, while also contributing to their development of maths concepts. Teachers believed instruments, music programmes and specialist music teachers were all valuable resources for supporting the teaching of music and enabling its benefits to unfold. However, increased noise levels during music lessons created difficulty for many teachers. It also emerged that curriculum overload was challenging and leads to negligence of music, as findings suggested that time available is primarily being allocated to core subjects. This finding is supported by (DeVries 2011). Low confidence levels surrounding music teaching was evident, particularly due to some participants' beliefs that they had inadequate musical experience/talent. Pupils were perceived to struggle with performance anxiety and lack of motivation to practice.

Table 1: Thematic coding

Codes	Emerging Basic themes	Emerging Organised themes	Emerging global theme
(IL), (SG), (LG), (C), (PF), (MM)	Music strands	Learning achieved through music	Music in the infant classroom
(SK), (V), (W), (BM), (MY), (EX), (SD)	Holistic development		
(N), (O), (MA), (SO), (LC), (ST)			
(LOS), (PR), (LA), (PA)			
(IS), (PG), (PL), (PI)	Traditional support	Music teaching and learning aids	
(TY), (MT)	Modern support		
(EN), (IR), (MS), (GD)	Core subject	Subject integration	
(P.E.), (A), (S.E.S.E.)	Secondary subject		

DISCUSSION

The key findings suggest that pupils in the infant classroom can benefit significantly from engagement in music, on both an academic and holistic level. However, findings also suggest that measures are necessary to address the challenges encountered during music. NCCA (2009) placed additional emphasis on music in the infant classroom. This study suggests that this additional emphasis is predominantly supported by infant teachers, as their perceptions reflect how music policy can be effectively implemented into practice to support pupils' development in the early years.

CONCLUSIONS

It may be necessary to place greater emphasis on music in teacher training and to introduce professional development courses based around music for practicing teachers. Furthermore, a review of the music curriculum/programmes could address the challenges outlined in the findings section.

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PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS' APPROACHES TO PROMOTING THE MUSICAL ENGAGEMENT OF LEARNERS IN SENIOR CLASSES, REGARDLESS OF THEIR EXTRA-CURRICULAR MUSIC EXPERIENCE

Jessica O'Shea, Mary Immaculate College

ABSTRACT

For twenty years, the Irish primary curriculum has attempted to foster all pupils' lasting musical competence and confidence (NCCA 1999). However, my experiences as a student teacher and international research suggests children's declining engagement in school music as they approach their senior primary years (De Vries 2010; Evans 2016), which is likely exacerbated by their varying extra-curricular music attendance (Lamont 2002). Using qualitative methodology, this research explores the perspectives of five practicing primary teachers regarding the impact of senior pupils' extra-curricular musical experiences on their engagement in school music and their approaches to promoting all children's musical engagement regardless of the same.



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INTRODUCTION

Music is unparalleled in its capacity to provide children with personally and socially enriching experiences, with consistent participation contributing to skills and attitudes which promote lifelong musical engagement. However, music is a unique subject in the Irish primary school curriculum that although all children receive a basic education in it, the musical skills of a small minority are significantly enriched by their engagement in extra-curricular activities (Deloughry 2014). It is my experience that this *hidden curriculum* and the resulting discrepancies between children's extra-curricular and school music experiences tend to have negative implications for senior primary students' musical self-efficacy and motivation. As little research has been conducted into the implications of Irish primary children's varying extra-curricular music experiences for their engagement in classroom music, or on teachers' response to the same, this study attempts to explore the perspectives of five musically experienced primary teachers on the same.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

As educational research is focused on the perspectives of individuals, in this case the participants' experiences of primary music education, every effort was made to interpret and present their viewpoints as objectively as possible. Purposive sampling informed the selection of all participants as it was necessary that they had previously taught in a senior primary class and were themselves musically confident. A combination of volunteer and convenience sampling was also used, resulting in a range of demographics and school types being represented, including DEIS, non-DEIS, single-sex and co-educational schools. Data collection comprised of five semi-structured interviews (Silverman 2014) using a qualitative paradigm due to the expectation of rich data (Cohen *et al* 2007) and the potential to explore participants' perspectives in detail. Validity and reliability were achieved by conducting a pilot interview before collecting data, member checking and peer review. Finally, the principles of principles of beneficence, non-maleficence, autonomy, confidentiality, and fidelity were adhered to in order to ensure the study's ethical basis (BERA 2018).

FINDINGS/ RESULTS

While the proportion of pupils attending extra-curricular music tuition varied between schools, the teachers agreed that those with significant musical exposure demonstrated higher musical self-efficacy and engagement than their less experienced peers. However, participants' perspectives as to whether a lack of extra-curricular experience influenced pupils' in-school musical engagement varied; some participants noted a potential for negative peer comparison to deter musically inexperienced pupils, while others asserted that a lack of extra-curricular music experience did not influence pupils' engagement in classroom music. In some instances, this appeared to be informed by the nature of extra-curricular music attendance in the school, with musically inexperienced children seemingly being less affected in terms of their engagement in contexts where few students took part in extra-curricular music tuition. The teachers' strategies for encouraging all pupils' musical engagement regardless of their extra-curricular music experience included: active participation and performance; accommodating children's 'musical baggage' or prior musical experiences and multiple genres in their teaching; a risk-free and structured environment; opportunities for experimentation and social music-making; and whole-school music initiatives.

DISCUSSION

The teachers' perspectives on senior pupils' musical engagement were generally influenced by their teaching contexts and values, with observations regarding the potential for musically inexperienced pupils' engagement to be negatively affected in schools with significant extra-curricular attendance supporting Lamont's observation of the same (2002). The teachers' approaches to promoting musical engagement were also coherent with the literature, including findings regarding the benefits of incorporating children's 'musical baggage' into teaching (Burnard *et al* 2008; Kenny *et al* 2016), accessible instrumental tuition to facilitate social music-making (Moore 2019), a risk-free learning environment (Deane *et al* 2015) and participation in meaningful musical activity (Flynn 2016). These strategies appeared to be informed by their own musical and teaching experiences and their understanding of the importance of positive musical encounters for children's continued musical engagement.

CONCLUSIONS

Having explored the participants' experiences of teaching music in senior primary classes, it is clear that effective work is being undertaken in schools to promote all pupils' musical engagement, regardless of their encounters with extra-curricular music. It is essential that this issue is addressed in future policy, research and teacher education and practice so that all children might access enjoyable and formative musical experiences, both in the classroom and beyond it. As one participant so aptly put it:

"You never know what you're fostering in anyone...but we might be planting a seed of a hobby for the future".

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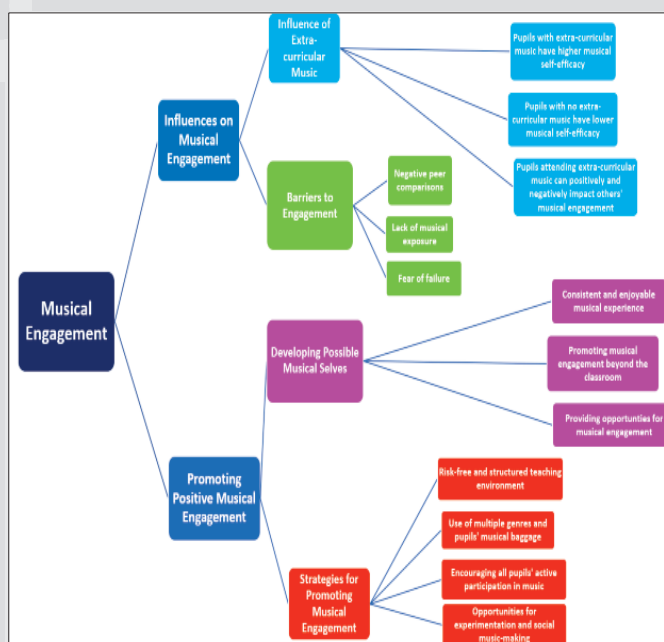


Figure 1. Summary of the Emergent Themes

An Exploration into the Affective Challenges for Teachers in the DEIS Primary School Context

Áine Collins, Mary Immaculate College

ABSTRACT

This study explores the affective challenges for teachers in the DEIS primary school context, and offers a unique contribution to the emerging research that focuses on teachers' occupational stress and job satisfaction. Currently there is limited national literature identifying the specific challenges experienced by teachers working within the disadvantaged primary school context. Hand-in-hand with the limited literature on this topic is a lack of policy and issue-specific supports in place to support teacher wellbeing and resilience. It is probable that this deficiency results to some degree in teacher burnout, with the DEIS context experiencing high levels of teacher turnover (INTO 2015). Using qualitative methods of research, this study conducts semi-structured interviews with five teachers in the DEIS primary school context. Throughout these interviews the participants identify the affective challenges they experience teaching in the DEIS context. The findings suggest that teachers in the DEIS context are not adequately prepared for the challenges associated with their role, resulting in increased levels of stress and frustration. The findings also show that teachers working in the DEIS context do not consider their wellbeing or resilience to be prioritised or adequately supported within the education system. A review of existing literature and policy, combined with the qualitative research conducted for the study, suggests that current policies and interventions in place to support teacher wellbeing and resilience do not sufficiently meet teachers' needs in these areas.



CONTACT

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INTRODUCTION

The foremost purpose of this study is to identify the affective challenges experienced by teachers in the DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) primary school context. In doing so, this study hopes to provide a basis from which to better support teacher wellbeing and resilience in the Irish educational context.

The primary research question for this project has been identified as:

What are the most common affective challenges for teachers in the DEIS primary school context?

As is clear from the outlined research question, the context for this study is rooted in DEIS policy and practice. The DEIS programme is a national educational programme which aims to address educational disadvantage amongst children and young people in Ireland. However, this study argues that there is a gap in DEIS policy regarding how best to support teachers in this context, and that this cannot be adequately addressed until the affective challenges faced by teachers in this context are identified.

The rationale for pursuing this research topic is rooted in:

1. The researcher's personal experiences, motivations and interests.
2. The limited national research in this area.
3. The recognition of the teacher as central to their students' wellbeing and achievements.

METHODOLOGY

This study focuses on, and gives value to, the subjective experiences of the participants, and attempts to understand more fully the experience of teaching within the DEIS context. As a result of the subjective nature of this study, a qualitative approach to research was adopted, and data was collected by conducting semi-structured interviews. Interviews provided the flexibility for subjective data to be gathered, and enabled the participants to express their opinions as influenced by their lived experiences. Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to explore any unforeseen themes that emerged throughout the interview process.

Prior to pursuing the research topic, ethical approval for the project was received from the Mary Immaculate Research Ethics Committee. Interviews were conducted with consenting adults only, and informed written consent was obtained from all participating parties prior to the interview process. Data collected was stored on a private computer, and kept in a safe place at all times to ensure no loss of data. The researcher will hold the collected data for no longer than three years, as per Mary Immaculate College ethics regulations.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The findings of this study outline that, in the participants' experience, teaching in the DEIS context presents a number of unique challenges. This study has identified the affective challenges experienced by teachers in the DEIS context as:

a) Additional Responsibilities

b) Social Class and Socioeconomic Background

c) Behavioural Issues

d) Multiculturalism

e) Parental Involvement

f) Funding and Supports

Each of the above challenges has been found to negatively impact the participants' affective state. However, the extent to which the participants are impacted by these challenges is dependent on their school context.

Despite the recognition of teaching as a challenging career, the findings of this study highlight that teachers do not consider their wellbeing or resilience to be adequately supported within the education system. This suggests that the existing measures in place to support teachers in these areas are insufficient.

CONCLUSIONS

This study has identified three main conclusions from the research findings. These are as follows:

1) Teaching in the DEIS primary school context brings with it numerous affective challenges.

2) Initial Teacher Education does not adequately prepare students for the challenges of teaching in a disadvantaged context.

3) The resilience and wellbeing of teachers in the DEIS context is not prioritised, or adequately supported.

Within its defined scope, this research project has identified the affective challenges for teachers in the DEIS primary school context. To promote teacher wellbeing and resilience, current policy and practice needs to be reviewed, improved, and informed by the specific challenges impacting teachers. It is hoped that this study will mark the beginning of much needed further research in this area.

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“HOW LACK OF EDUCATION CAN IMPACT THE LIVES OF CHILDREN FROM A DISADVANTAGED AREA.”

Róisín Long, Mary Immaculate College

ABSTRACT

This study looks at the impact education can have and how it can change someone's life. Specifically, it discusses issues people might face due to lack of education. Educational attainment has a major influence on the choices made in life. In the background literature review section, the researcher outlines the reasons for the investigation, their personal interest in the project, the causes and impact of educational disadvantage and refers to existing literature to support their comments. Thereafter, the findings chapter focuses on a number of reliable studies, giving a balanced view of research conducted in relation to factors perceived to impact 'educational disadvantage' positively or negatively. The study looks at how the government responds to questions of inequality in education which exists in society today. The effect the DEIS school plan has had on children from disadvantaged areas is considered. This study looks at education ranging from primary school right through to third level education. The mixed methods methodology studies were collected and analysed to produce issues faced by those experiencing educational disadvantage.



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INTRODUCTION

The motivation for this study arises from the researcher's personal interest in the area of DEIS having grown up in a disadvantaged area and having attended a non-DEIS school, the researcher noticed many differences. The researcher cites support from parents and being fortunate enough to have received opportunities to obtain an education as pivotal to the choice of research question and a driver behind the desire to make a difference and ensure education is valuable to and valued by all. During their school-going years the researcher noticed differences between DEIS and non-DEIS schools and became increasingly interested in why these schools were set up and the impact they had on the children who attended them. Notable between DEIS and non-DEIS areas, a difference in students' attitude was evident, different rate of attendance stood out, attention to detail in homework differed and desire to progress to third level education varied greatly. This research aims to outline the issues people living in DEIS areas face, how this impacts their attitude to education, what policy makers have implemented to overcome the issues and how well received they have been, how they worked and what remains to be achieved to ensure an equal society for everyone.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

As this study is based on a broad research question the methodology chosen by the researcher, to incorporate all aspects of educational disadvantage, was mixed methods. Mixed methods is a technique used in research which is becoming increasingly popular and being recognised as a third method to research (Kuhn, 1962). Mixed methods is an approach to research where both qualitative and quantitative studies are analysed. The study was not confined to research conducted in Ireland only, with studies from the US, UK and Australia analysed. The researcher specifically chose studies from around the world to allow for bigger volumes of research, ensuring more generalisable findings. As Morse and Niehaus (2009) as cited in Palinkas et al. (2015), observe, “whether the methodology employed is quantitative or qualitative, sampling methods are intended to maximize efficiency and validity” (Palinkas et al., 2015). The participants used in this study are parents/carers of children in a variety of areas including DEIS and non-DEIS areas relating to the Irish context. The study also includes parents from a variety of other countries to include the view of different cultures and to see if culture has an impact. It uses studies that reported interviews or surveys with parents with varying levels of education as well as people from the general public in regard to health.

FINDINGS/ RESULTS

Research conducted by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) on DEIS initiatives shows that there was an increase in reading levels in all classes between 2007 and 2010. This report interestingly noted that the increase was higher for lower level classes with the biggest increase in 2nd class. Within this second-class, Weir et. al (2011) cited in Smyth et. al. (2015) stated that reading scores increased from 22.8 out of 40 correct answers to 24.3 (Smyth. et. al 2015 p. 6). While this shows the DEIS plan initiative is benefitting students it must be noted that these scores are considerably lower than the average score of second-class children in non-DEIS schools who have an average of 29 (Smyth. et. al 2015 p. 6). Similar findings were reported by The ERC (2017) with an increase in readings scores and mathematic scores between the years 2013 and 2016 recorded, Figure 1.1 and 1.2 (Kavanagh et. al 2016, p. 14). A 2008 American study measured the relationship between educational attainment and drug use. This consisted of 1,242 1st grade male and female students in a low socio-economic area. Mothers of the students were interviewed, and the researchers had access to school records and police records. This study found that people who dropped out of school were substantially more likely to report drug use in comparison to those with a college degree, 3.78 and 1.00 respectively (Fothergill et. al, 2008, p. 7). Research shows parents' educational level is found to have effects on children's educational level in particular their reading ability. Research conducted by Smyth et. al (2009) examined the reading level of 9-year olds in Ireland and found that there was a 12.2 point gap in reading ability between children whose parents have a degree and children whose parents have only been educated to primary school level (Smyth et. al, 2009 p. 95). This study also found that children from highly educated families engage in reading for fun, outside of school and an emphasis is placed on education by the parents (Smyth et. al, 2009 p. 93). The absence of leisurely reading outside of school may be one of the factors contributing to the lower levels of reading ability found with children from families with a lower level of education.



Figure 1.1

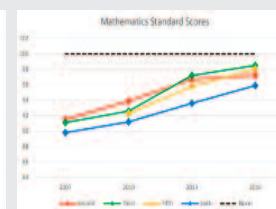


Figure 1.2

DISCUSSION

The Irish government has recognised the issue of educational disadvantage the country is facing. They have implemented several strategies to tackle this problem. Strategies such as the Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025 which is intended to improve the issue of poverty and social exclusion. In 2005 after much research invested in the topic the government set up the DEIS school initiative. Various schools who qualify received extra resources, more teachers to provide for smaller classes, free lunches and sometimes breakfasts and other resources where needed. This is to help children who may be living in poverty to have enough to eat, or children who come from families with low levels of education to receive extra attention in classes (Department of Education and Science, 2005). Studies show that these children living in disadvantaged areas face many problems such as crime, drug and alcohol intake, higher mental health risks, lower general health and lack support and help from parents. Researchers show the importance of the influence of parents on children's lives. When it comes to the impact their education level has on children, researchers differ in opinions. In the Education Inequality Report 2019, Ms Waters CEO of An Cosán, stated that a young person's family and their experience of education has a major impact on their decision to complete school (O' Loughlin. et al, 2019, p. 11). While Berthelsen and Walker (2008) state that if parents have high expectations and respect the education system these values will be passed onto the child regardless of their educational level (Berthelsen & Walker, 2008).

CONCLUSIONS

After reviewing many studies there are a number of recommendations on how to improve the issue of educational disadvantage. Firstly, Barnardos state that while the DEIS school initiative is working and has had many benefits, it needs to review how it targets schools and children as not enough children are being helped (Finlay & Gibbons, 2009, p. 11). The Education Inequality Report, 2019 states that DEIS schools should implement programmes of internships to help students progress to higher professions (O' Loughlin et al, 2019). The Healthy Ireland Survey, 2018 suggests that in the coming years groups will target, support and communicate with the people who are engaging in smoking, binge drinking or drug intake, “to help move towards a healthier society” (Department of Health et al., 2018). Finally, Focus Ireland suggest that one to one tutoring would improve students' academic abilities and raise their self-esteem. This tutoring could ultimately prevent students in disadvantaged areas from disengaging with the education system and falling into the pattern previously exerted by their siblings or parents.

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ALIENATING ASSESSMENT: THE EFFECTS OF A LABEL OF SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS (SEN) AND VICARIOUS CONTACT ON WRITING ASSESSMENT

Cora Howe, Mary Immaculate College

ABSTRACT

Assessment literacy emerged in recent decades in response to the growing discourse regarding assessment for accountability (Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2014). Drawing on a sociocultural theory of learning, assessment literacy involves critically reflecting on assessment practices to promote equity in education (Willis, Adie & Klenowski, 2013). Using Pastore and Andrade's (2019) model of assessment literacy, the present study sought to examine the effect of a label of Special Educational Needs (SEN) on teacher judgement during assessment. The current study also investigated if a vicarious contact intervention with people with SEN would reduce bias in assessment. An experimental between-subjects design was employed. Participants comprised of 100 pre-service and in-service primary school teachers from Ireland. The experimental group were exposed to vicarious contact videos over the course of four weeks while the control group watched distractor videos. All participants then assessed a writing sample, as completed by a fictitious student with or without a label of SEN. The results found that a label of SEN alone did not result in reduced assessment scores. However, there was more variance in assessment scores for writing with a label of SEN, with the vicarious contact group scoring the writing lower than the control ($p = .019$). There was also a significant difference in assessment with a label of SEN based on teacher level ($p = .011$). Considering these results, practical considerations of classroom assessment practices are discussed. Future directions for developing teacher assessment literacy are also outlined.



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INTRODUCTION

- Globalization and industrialization has changed the role of assessment in education.¹
- Assessment has become increasingly concerned with results to promote economic growth.²
- Results are compared across countries and published in league tables such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA).³
- Results are compared to ensure accountability in education in terms of equity and progress.³

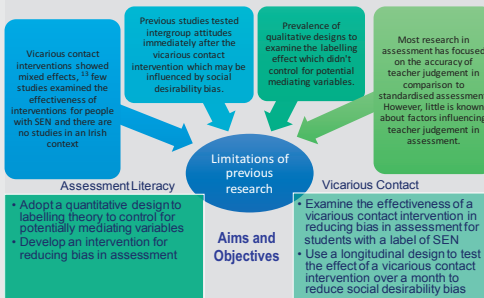
Is assessment objective?

- However, others argue that assessment cannot be objective and may further inequity in education.⁴
- Labelling theory: Students with a label of Special Educational Needs (SEN) are at risk of lower teacher expectations.⁵
- In previous studies, teachers had lower expectations and lower ratings of achievement for students with a label of SEN in comparison to similar achieving non-labelled peers.⁶
- Studies have also found that pre-service teachers scored the academic achievement of students with SEN lower than in-service teachers.⁷
- Other studies reported that teacher level did not have a linear relationship with assessment accuracy because experience may have a positive or a negative effect on implicit attitudes.⁸

Assessment Literacy

- Assessment literacy developed as a response to assessment for accountability with the aim of developing assessment literate teachers who critically reflect on their own assessment practices in light of the sociocultural context.⁹
- Pastore and Andrade's model of assessment literacy incorporates the sociocultural context of assessment ranging from national education policy to contextual factors like professional practice and the classroom context.⁹
- Researchers recommended that contact with people with SEN would challenge stereotypes and reduce bias in assessment.⁷
- The role of intergroup contact in reducing prejudice has been widely studied in social psychology since Allport's (1954) intergroup contact theory.¹⁰
- Contact can occur vicariously through media, which is known as vicarious contact.¹¹
- The media acts as a primary source of information for teachers about SEN.¹²

Limitations of Previous Research



METHODS AND MATERIALS

Design and Measures

- 2 x 2 between subjects experimental design

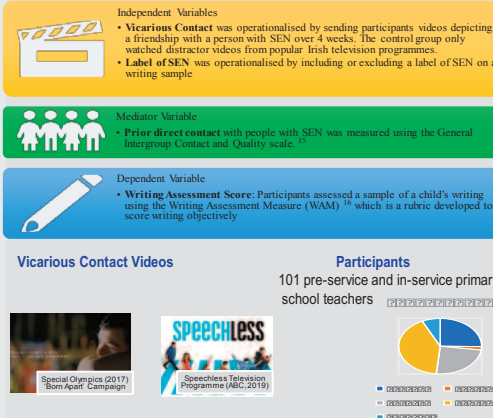


Figure 1. Proportion of participants based on teacher level.

RESULTS

Label of SEN and Assessment

- When a label of SEN alone is considered alone, there was no significant difference in writing assessment scores between children with a label of SEN and children without a label of SEN, $U = 1193$, $z = -.222$, $p = .85$.
- However, there was more variation in assessment scores for writing with a label of SEN, which was not found in writing without a label of SEN.

Vicarious Contact Intervention

- The vicarious contact intervention group scored the writing with a label of SEN significantly lower than the control group, $F(1,48) = 5.84$, $p = .019$, partial eta squared = .11.
- Prior direct contact had no effect as a mediator variable.

Teacher Level and Assessment

- Teacher level had a significant effect on writing assessment scores for children with a label of SEN, $F(4, 45) = 3.71$, $p = .011$, partial eta squared = .25.
- Dunnett's C post hoc tests revealed that:
 - There was a significant difference between first-year student teachers and in-service teachers (mean difference = 4.37, 95% CI = [1.18, 7.57]).
 - There was also a significant difference between fourth-year student teachers and in-service teachers (mean difference = 4.17, 95% CI = [1.41, 6.93]).
 - First and fourth-year student teachers scored the writing the highest
 - Graduated teachers scored the writing the lowest

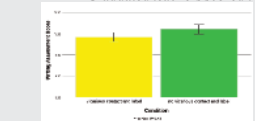


Figure 2. Differences in writing assessment between the vicarious contact condition and control.

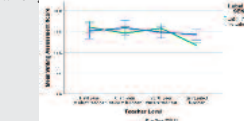


Figure 3. Variation in writing assessment based on teacher level.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Label of SEN:

Previous research has reported the labelling effect in observational studies which did not control for potential mediating variables.⁶ However, the current study suggest that the label of SEN alone may not result in lower teacher expectations. There were greater variations in assessment scores for writing with a label of SEN, based on vicarious contact and teacher level.

Teacher Level:

First year student teachers were engaging in professional placement at the time of the study and fourth year student teachers had just finished their final placement. As these two groups scored the writing the highest, they may have been more conscious of their role as assessors. These findings align to a view of assessment literacy as dynamic which changes with experience rather than linear.⁸

Vicarious Contact:

The media may subconsciously perpetuate negative implicit attitudes towards people with SEN.¹¹ Prior direct contact may be a more reliable intervention than vicarious contact.

Implications

Practical Implications

- As the student population becomes increasingly heterogeneous, there is a need to equip teachers with the skills to teach this new generation.¹⁷
- Need for teacher training modules and continuous professional development to focus on developing assessment literate teachers.
- Even standardised assessment methods like rubrics may not be objective.

Theoretical Implications

- Labelling theory: Move away from focusing on the effects of a label and start to consider factors which may make a teacher more susceptible to the effect.
- Contact hypothesis: Consider conditions where indirect contact may have a negative effect on implicit attitudes.

Policy Implications

- Part of Ireland's commitment to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities includes promoting positive portrayals of persons with disabilities on the media.¹⁸
- As part of this commitment, greater attention is needed to the role of the media in shaping implicit attitudes towards people with SEN.

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THE USE OF SOCIAL STORIES AND INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES TO ASSIST PERSONS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS IN OVERCOMING THEIR SOCIAL DEFICITS

Ruth Kennedy, Mary Immaculate College

ABSTRACT

Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) impedes a person's social skills and social interaction. It is difficult for individuals with ASD to participate in everyday life due to their social deficits. Social stories and the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) helps persons with ASD to learn the necessary social skills to function in everyday society.

In the early 1990's social stories were created by a former schoolteacher in to try to improve the social difficulties faced by people with ASD. This literature review, reviews studies carried out to determine the effectiveness of social stories and the best ways one can implement them in the classroom. In recent years the use of ICT and assistive technologies are considered a crucial component of the education of an individual with ASD. Literature reveals that by incorporating the use of ICT and virtual environments (VEs) in the education of person's with ASD not only do their interests and participation levels rise but it also provides a 'safe' and 'judgement free' environment with minimal distractions. The frequent use of ICT allows for continuity and repetition and it also provides a motivation factor for individuals with ASD as the use of ICT is predictable and consistent.



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INTRODUCTION

Autism Spectrum Disorders, commonly referred to as ASD, are a range of developmental disorders that include autistic disorder, Pervasive Development Disorder and Asperger Syndrome (PDD-NOS; American Psychiatric Association, 2000). Children and adults with such disorders often face difficulty with social development and ability (Caines, 2017). These social impairments comprise of social initiation and social interaction (Grossard et al., 2018). Such social impairments can cause functioning in everyday life to be particularly difficult for persons with ASD as it impedes on their learning abilities and communication skills (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2016).

The ability of children with ASD to communicate with others varies drastically from person to person (Stasolla et al., 2014). Providing children with ASD with social skills-based training has proven successful for developing social initiation and social interaction (Radley et al., 2014). Implementing as little as 60-90 minutes of social skills-based training weekly has shown much promise (Milner, 2013).

Continuously, there are significant advances in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), which can be used to improve the education of children with ASD. Recent literature has stated that children with ASD particularly enjoy working with devices such as computers and iPads, as they provide them with what they consider to be a 'safe' environment with no expectations or social interaction (Konstantinidis et al., 2009). ICT can be monitored and controlled and does not provide many distractions which is therefore suitable for the education of children with ASD (Green, 1993). The classroom environment can often be difficult to control fully which can prove difficult for children with ASD as it requires social interaction and spontaneous thinking, however, with ICT the conditions are the same each day and limit the amount of change in the child's daily life (Frith et al., 1991).

BACKGROUND RESEARCH

The developmental disorder commonly referred to as ASD is defined by difficulties in areas such as social interaction, repetitive behaviour patterns and social communication (APA, 2013), however, it can greatly vary from person to person with regard to severity, language, intellectual, and functional impairments and symptom presentation (Geschwind, 2009). Social impairments to date remain the trademark deficit for person's with ASD (APA, 2013). It proves difficult for persons with ASD to initiate and maintain eye contact, respond to social situations and to understand the feelings of others (Baker, 2001; Baron-Cohen, 2004; Boyd et al., 2008; Hart et al., 2008; Janzen, 2003; Klin et al., 2007). Such social deficits impact negatively on the development of strong, trustworthy and meaningful relationships, which consequently contribute to social anxiety, peer rejection, poor academic performance and social isolation (Bellini, 2006; Bellini et al., 2007; Tantam, 2000; Welsh et al., 2001).

It is strongly suggested by Spence (2002) that in order to fully understand the difficulties that social impairments can pose on your everyday life, one must differentiate between 'social skills' and 'social competence'. 'Social skills' are defined as basic abilities which include the ability to make and maintain eye contact, and the ability to initiate and engage in social interactions (Carter et al., 2005). However, 'social competence' is then defined as a person's ability to create meaningful relationships, otherwise known as the outcome of a social interaction (Carter et al., 2005). Research shows, that although children with ASD are capable of developing friendships, it is the quality of these friendships and the number of these friendships that are developed that differ greatly from the typical child (Koning et al., 2001). Unfortunately, it is not uncommon for individuals with ASD to be subjected to bullying or social isolation (Little, 2002) which can then lead to loneliness (Bauminger et al., 2003). Therefore, it is also common for parents of children with ASD to help their children during the friends making process (Bauminger et al., 2001).

The social deficits that children with ASD face can impact their long-term success in everyday life (Howlin et al., 2004; Romanczyk et al., 2005). For a child with ASD to benefit from their education, interventions are required to allow monitored social interactions to take place to help aid the children through their social deficits (Gutierrez et al., 2007; Harrower et al., 2001).

REVIEWING LITERATURE

Between 1990 and 2010 a range of treatment strategies evolved in an attempt to rectify some of the social deficits and challenges persons with ASD face on a daily basis (Karkhaneh et al., 2010). Such strategies and approaches vary greatly in their delivery methods, their theoretical groundwork and the intensity of involvement required from parents, teachers and peers (Karkhaneh et al., 2010). In the early 1990's Gray and Garand (1993) stated that social stories can aid individuals with ASD's social understanding and behaviours in social situations in a positive manner (Karkhaneh et al., 2010). Carol Gray was a former schoolteacher and in 1993 she created social stories to assist persons with ASD with their social deficits (Kokina et al., 2010).

One of the main goals of social stories is to address the debilitating difficulties faced by persons with ASD (Kokina et al., 2010). Social stories aim to provide important information regarding social norms to individuals with ASD (Gray, 1998, 2004). Social stories outline specific techniques and responses one could use in social settings in a definitive format (Gray, 1994). One must ensure that a social story is easily understood and reassuring for the target audience (Gray 1994). A social story should portray a specific event or activity and should outline what responses and behaviours are socially accepted and expected for such events or activities. In order to see the benefits social stories can have on an individual it is crucial, from the beginning, to monitor the progress and frequency of the interventions (Gray, 1995, 1998). This task is frequently carried out by parents or teachers and should track any changes that occur regarding the targeted behaviour (Karkhaneh et al., 2010).

In 2004, Sansosti et al. reviewed studies that were carried out regarding social stories and stated that although certain studies reported that there were positive outcomes from social stories, he urged readers to consider these statements with caution as he felt these studies lacked variables, experimental control and evidence (Sansosti et al., 2004, Karkhaneh et al., 2010).

In contradiction to this, Feinberg (2002) carried out a study that involved 34 children all of whom had been diagnosed with ASD and were between the ages of eight and thirteen (Karkhaneh et al., 2010). The main requirement for this study was that each child had to have a minimum of 'phrase speech' (Feinberg, 2001). This study compared the positive outcomes, interventions involving social stories have on children with ASD compared to interventions solely relying on regular stories regarding social skills (Karkhaneh et al., 2010). This study resulted in Feinberg concluding that the involvement of social stories in interventions improves the teaching of social skills and the overall social skills scores achieved by the children.

In 2010, a further review was conducted by Karkhaneh et al. During this rigorous systematic review, the authors looked at six controlled trials conducted to test the effectiveness of social stories, including the study carried out by Feinberg (2002). The findings of the systematic review support the view that social stories can "...positively affect the social understanding and behaviours of children with ASD" (Karkhaneh et al., 2010, p.642). This coincides with Gray's work that was conducted in the 1990's, where she created social stories with the intention to target individuals with high-functioning autism. High functioning autism is defined as having a minimum of 'phrase speech' or being able to communicate with others either verbally or non-verbally using pictures, etc... (Karkhaneh et al., 2010). It was Gray's intention that social stories would be created and personalised for a specific person and situation (Karkhaneh et al., 2010).



DISCUSSION

There has been a tremendous amount of research conducted in recent years on the use of ICT to educate people with ASD (Konstantinidis et al., 2009; Boucenna et al., 2014). New technologies have been developed which create real-life scenarios in a controlled setting to help individuals with ASD (Josman et al., 2008; Grossard et al., 2018). Through the use of ICT, the presentation of materials can be adapted to better suit persons with ASD, and research has shown that the use of ICT sparks interest within such individuals (Bernard-Optiz et al., 2001; Grossard et al., 2018). "Information and Communications Technology (ICT) has the potential to transform the educational opportunities and life chances to people whose special educational needs may otherwise marginalise them" (NCCA, 1998, p.3). As ICT is growing so rapidly the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) in Ireland has designed an ICT framework advising teachers how to incorporate ICT and the vast benefits it can have paying particular attention to children with special educational needs (SEN).

During the last decade many virtual environments (VEs) have been created which are considered to be a modern take on a social story to help people with ASD to overcome the challenges they face daily (Enyon, 1997; Eddon, 1992; Konstantinidis et al., 2009). "VE are able to mimic specific social situations in which the user can participate in role play" (Boucenna et al., 2014). VEs aim to reduce stress and anxiety and promote independent interaction (Boucenna et al., 2014). Similar to social stories, VEs create real-life scenarios that are realistic and life-like, which depict everyday events and social interactions (Boucenna et al., 2014). A study carried out by Trepagnier et al. (1999) proved that incorporating animation and familiar sounds and voices make VEs attractive to people with ASD. "Recent works have demonstrated the ability of participants with ASD to use and to interpret VE successfully and to learn simple social skills using the technology" (Boucenna et al., 2014).

CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, individuals with ASD are faced with difficulties daily that others may struggle to understand (Caines, 2017). It is necessary for persons with ASD to learn to manage and deal with the social deficits they face in everyday life (Caines, 2017). This can be particularly aided with the use of social stories. Today technologies have been created to help humans' complete daily tasks and this is no different for persons with ASD (Meylinda et al., 2018). Assistive technologies help to allow people with ASD to overcome the deficits they may face regarding social skills and social interactions (Meylinda et al., 2018).

This paper reviews literature of how assistive technologies can help individuals with ASD to improve their social skills and social interactions through the use of social stories and many pieces of literature were discussed throughout to support this. In conclusion, the use of assistive technologies can be of vital importance in the education of children with ASD to improve their overall social functioning.

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TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES OF THE INCLUSION OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN MAINSTREAM EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Over the 20th and 21st centuries, there has been a resolution in terms of attitudes towards special educational needs (SEN) and special needs education. Children with SEN now have the right to be educated within a mainstream setting through the implementation of inclusive education. This study explores inclusive education through the eyes of primary school teachers, offering a practical insight into the realities of implementing inclusive education. It explores the challenges and opportunities encountered by teachers when implementing inclusive education, as well as the supports teachers have in the process. This study investigates the effect of diversity and inclusion in education. The findings indicate the need for the involvement of various stakeholders in order for inclusion to be a success, making evident that while inclusive education impacts those involved in many positive ways, such as social development, creating diversity and empathy as well as benefiting the class teacher for example, inclusion can often be interrupted by the obstacles that exist within the Irish education system.



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INTRODUCTION

In the past, words such as 'idiot' and 'spastic' were used to describe those with SEN (Wong, 1996, pp.1-2). Traditionally, schools in Ireland segregated those with SEN into separate schools, hospitals and care institutions until the late 1970's and 1980's (McDonnell 2002, cited in, Lodge and Lynch 2004). Over the 20th and 21st centuries, enormous transformations can be seen on the increased rights of the education of children with SEN. Irish policies regarding special education have been guided by various worldwide policies, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the UNESCO Salamanca Statement document on Special Needs Education (1994) as well as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) (Travers, et al., 2010, p.1). Ireland's major development in SEN provision dates back to the milestone Special Education Review Committee Report (SERC), which recommends 'as much integration as is appropriate and feasible with as little segregation as is necessary' (GOI, 1993, p.22). Since the Education Act (1998) recognised the right to a suitable education for every child in Ireland, a large amount of legislation which has 'influenced thinking, policies and practices' based on the promotion of inclusive practice has been developed, such as the Equal Status Act (2000), the EPSEN Act (2004), and the Disability Act (2005) (Travers, et al., 2010, p.1). Despite enhanced education provision for those with SEN as well as improved policies, it is widely noted that teachers face challenges when providing inclusive education due to insufficient funding and lack of sufficient teacher training, to name a few. This study identifies these concerns and certain gaps that have arisen between the literature, theory and practice, highlighting the factors that hinder a teacher's implementation of inclusive practice.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

Qualitative research was used as the research methodology, which can be established by 'talking directly with people... and allowing them to tell the stories unencumbered by what we expect to find or what we have read in the literature' (Creswell and Poth, 2018, p.45). Data was collected by doing 6 semi-structured, face-to-face, interviews with primary teachers. Purposive sampling was used for the research to capture the experiences from participants who have much knowledge of SEN. A teacher in this situation was in the best position to give a true picture of inclusion and diversity in a classroom. The research sites and participant details are identified in the table below. The researcher used the Braun and Clarke method of thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a 6-phase process which Braun and Clarke outline. It is a method for 'identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data' (Braun and Clarke, 2006, pp.78-79).

Participant	Gender	Teaching Length	School type
Pseudonyms			
Hannah	Female	2 years	Urban, DEIS
Amy	Female	10 years	Urban, Non DEIS Gaelscoil (with much DEIS experience)
Tara	Female	9 years	Urban, DEIS
Emily	Female	11 years	Rural, Non DEIS
Leah	Female	2 years	Urban, Non DEIS
Sorcha	Female	13 years	Urban, Non DEIS Gaelscoil

FINDINGS/ RESULTS

Factors that Hinder a Teacher's Implementation of Inclusive Practice

This theme deals with the obstacles recognised by participants from personal experiences when implementing inclusive practice.

1 Lack of Mandatory Teacher Training Main Barrier

Participants feel ill equipped to teach the diversity of SEN present in contemporary mainstream classrooms. Amy argues, 'we got a few tips in theory, but in practice... we really weren't equipped to deal with it'. The participants argue that limited modules on SEN is not sufficient to prepare them for the real world. Hannah states, 'I can't say 100% that I'm catering for all of their needs because there's so many of them... so training wise, I wasn't prepared to be honest'. Hannah highlights the gap between policy and practice, as it is stated that children with SEN have the right to be included but 'how do you include a child who is a danger to themselves and to everybody else in the classroom?' Rose, et al. (2015) and Florian and Rouse (2009, cited in, ibid), mention the relevance of lack of training for teaching in inclusive settings. Participants indicated that insufficient training can negatively impact teacher attitudes. Amy argues 'if you didn't have that training, it could cause teachers to have negative attitudes towards inclusion... they're not aware of it and they don't have the experience'. Shevlin, et al., (2009, p.2) name this 'unfamiliar territory'. The Participants argue that SEN as a specialism should not be optional and should be mandatory.

2 Lack of Supports

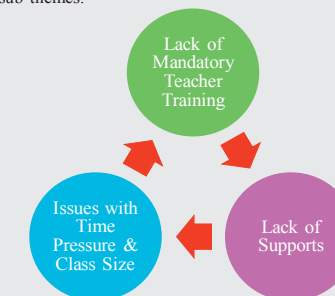
Participants acknowledged that a lack of physical and human supports hinder a teacher's ability to implement inclusion. This corresponds with the literature mentioned by O'Toole and Burke (2013), Anati (2013) and Lodge and Lynch (2004), who discuss the impact of inadequate resources on inclusive education. Emily argues, 'there are a lot of hoops you have to jump through to get any additional support' as well as naming a lack of resources as 'really hindering inclusion being met effectively in the Irish education system'. Emily is of the belief that '80% of resources' are sourced/made by teachers themselves and that they require additional support in terms of SNAs, 'things to deal with children who have sensory issues', more literature for children who have 'emotional needs', 'educational psychologists' and 'occupational therapists' to be 'more readily' available to schools, as well as 'more funding to purchase more expensive resources to help these children'. Akin to this, Leah states that resources are 'primarily made' by her and mostly have not been handed to her.

3 Issues with Time Pressure and Class Size

Other common issues that arose from all participants regarding inclusive education included time and class size. Though the SET constructs the IEPs for the children with SEN within Hannah's class, she stated, 'I'd be skimming through it because I don't have time to go through five different IEPs... it's extremely time consuming'. She also mentions the importance of meeting the needs of the child, however it 'takes time to get to know their needs in the first place'. Similarly, Amy argues that if class sizes were smaller, 'planning would be a lot easier. The thoughts of inclusion and how to include children would be a lot easier' due to having more time. Sorcha suggests if the 'government could commit to not having more than 20 pupils in any classroom', this would help to solve the issue. Shevlin, et al. (2013), Horne and Timmons (2009) and Westwood and Graham (2003), note time and class size as being issues present in inclusive education, however the personal experiences of the participants shed light on how these issues commonly impact inclusion in reality, which is not in detail within the literature explored.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The discussed theme within the findings has been divided into the following sub-themes:



Various challenges encountered by the participants regarding the implementation of inclusion have been addressed, which corroborated with much of the literature, such as by Rose, et al. (2015) and O'Toole and Burke (2013). When reflecting on these findings, the number of issues relating to insufficient SEN teacher training, the lack of resources as well as issues relating to class size and insufficient time surprised the researcher. Though these issues are highlighted in the literature, the detail and reasons behind why each of these are problematic in reality due to personal experiences has been eye-opening to the researcher, which was not discussed in detail within the literature studied. The findings emphasise the importance of the SET and the SNA within an inclusive classroom, which is stressed in the literature. However, due to inadequate funding and resources, certain participants mentioned the requirement for more readily available SETs, SNAs and outside agencies such as SLTs.

Though inclusive education has proven to be complex, as Haug (2017) states that no school has succeeded in the creation of an inclusive education system that rises to the standards required, inclusive education has undergone enormous transformation throughout the centuries, leading to the development of respect and high regard for inclusion and the use of positive language to describe SEN in comparison to outdated literature of the past, such as language mentioned by Wong (1996). The positive outlooks and experiences of teachers surrounding inclusive education, verifies this major societal change for the better. However, factors that hinder a teacher's ability to implement inclusive education is dominant within the findings.

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AN EXPLORATION OF HOW CHILDREN WITH MATHS DIFFICULTIES ARE SUPPORTED DURING THE TEACHING OF MATHS IN THE MAINSTREAM CLASSROOM.

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how children with maths difficulties are supported during the teaching of maths in the mainstream classroom. Maths difficulties are a high-priority area of education which is significantly under-researched (Kucian & Aster 2015). A qualitative methodology was used to examine teacher's perceptions of how children with maths difficulties are identified, monitored and supported in the primary classroom. The merits and limitations of various models of instructions was also investigated.



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INTRODUCTION

The researcher selected this topic as they believe it is relevant today as there is a growing awareness of how difficulties in maths in primary school-aged children can impact on lifelong future learning (Chinn 2012). Furthermore, maths difficulties are very challenging for teachers as the majority of children with maths difficulties are taught in mainstream classrooms, and many teachers do not possess the specific expertise needed to help them (Wadlington & Wadlington 2008). The researcher believes this topic will inform future teaching of maths and will also add to the body of knowledge regarding maths difficulties.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

Due to the exploratory nature of this study, the data collected was qualitative. Qualitative research places emphasis on individuals lived experiences taking account participants personal reflections of teaching children with maths difficulties. The data collection methods of semi-structured interviews and a reflective diary were utilised in this study. The semi-structured interview allows the researcher to probe the participants (Table 1) in order to gain a more in-depth insight into how teachers best support the needs of children with maths difficulties. The reflective journal was anecdotal, allowing the researcher to have a greater understanding of how children with maths difficulties were supported in primary classroom.

Participant	Type of teacher	Service	Type of school	Geographical Region
Participant 1	SET teacher	32 years	Urban All Boys Senior School	Connacht Region
Participant 2	SET teacher	28 years	Urban DEIS Band 1 school/ Large rural School	Connacht Region
Participant 3	Mainstream Class teacher	6 years	Urban All Boys Senior School	Connacht Region
Participant 4	Mainstream Class teacher	16 years	Large Rural School	Connacht Region
Participant 5	Final year student teacher	Student teacher	Mary Immaculate College	Connacht Region
Participant 6	Final year student teacher (Specialism SEN)	Student teacher	Mary Immaculate College	Connacht Region

Table 1: Participant Information

FINDINGS/ RESULTS

The findings revolve around the four following themes (Figure 1):

1. Identifying children with maths difficulties:

Teacher's primary means of identifying maths difficulties was teacher observation which indicated that screening/diagnostic maths assessments were not fully utilised in primary schools.

2. Importance of early identification

Children's early numeracy experiences and formation of foundational number skills e.g. estimating were viewed as fundamental to overcoming maths difficulties.

3. Strategies used to support children with maths difficulties

The use of concrete materials and visuals through frequent guided practice was viewed essential in facilitating the CRA sequence when teaching abstract concepts.

4. What instruction model best supports children with maths difficulties.

The needs of the child was deemed most important when selecting instruction model with most participants selecting small-group instruction as most beneficial for learning needs of children with maths difficulties



Figure 1. Thematic map.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A series of recommendations were identified during findings of this research.

- Due to lack of mathematic screening till 2nd class participants highlighted a need for assessment at the end of junior infants which would aid the challenging identification process of maths difficulties and ensure children experience full beneficence of early intervention.
- Greater use of concrete materials and visuals to facilitate CRA sequence in upper primary towards abstract topics could be attained by increasing accessibility of concrete materials and creating maths language displays.
- Additional research into the various models of instruction and how they support children's learning on a long-term basis is needed in an Irish context. This would give valuable insights into the specifics of implementing strategies and best-fit instruction

CONCLUSIONS

Maths difficulties are a relatively under-researched facet of education, and many teachers feel they do not have the specialised expertise to support pupils. However, this research signifies that teachers have implemented significant measures to establish learning environments where all children can achieve their potential mathematically.

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DEVELOPMENTAL LANGUAGE DISORDER (DLD) – ‘THE MOST COMMON CHILDHOOD DISORDER YOU’VE PROBABLY NEVER HEARD OF’

Yvonne Molloy, Mary Immaculate College

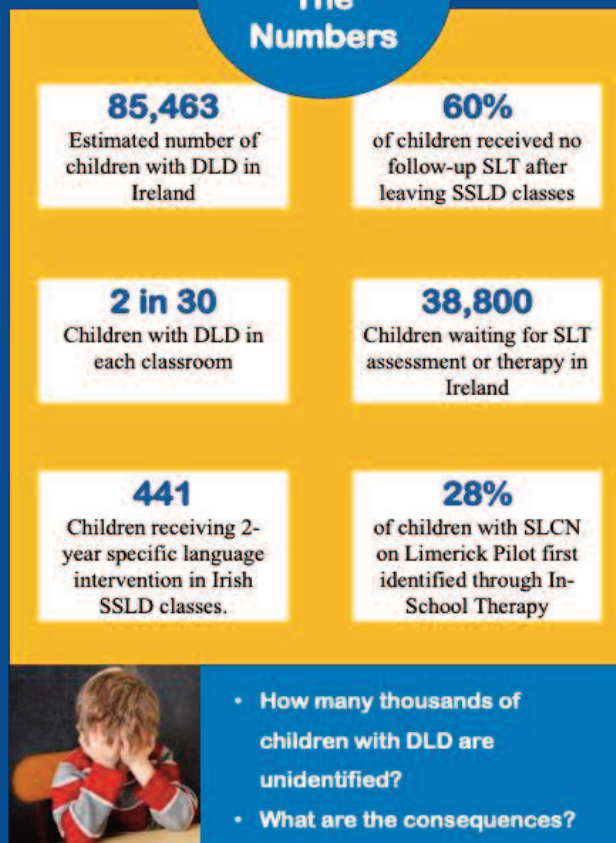
BACKGROUND

- DLD is a disorder that is more prevalent than autism and dyslexia, yet awareness among teachers and the general public is poor relative to its frequency and severe impact (Bishop 2010).
- DLD is described as ‘the most common childhood disorder you’ve probably never heard of’ and is characterised by difficulties in drawing meaning from what is said or written, with significant problems using speech sounds, words and sentences or other symbols in speaking and writing (IASLT 2017).
- It is a persistent, pervasive and lifelong condition, for which there is no ‘cure’. Consequently, consistent interventions are required rather than short-term packages of care.
- Its implications for children’s social, emotional and behavioural outcomes can be devastating.
- Affecting long-term mental health, employment opportunities and social adjustment; the long-term negative implications of DLD are both personal and societal.

METHODS

- This study examined the efficacy of In-School Speech and Language Support for children with Developmental Language Disorder in mainstream primary schools in Ireland.
- It evaluated the implications, benefits and challenges of teacher-SLT inter-professional collaboration.
- Qualitative data was collected by interviewing teachers and Speech and Language Therapists (SLTs).

DLD The Numbers



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FINDINGS

- The key findings highlight a deficit of awareness and knowledge of DLD among teachers.
- Positive school leadership and engagement by all stakeholders is key to the success of the collaborative process.
‘There has to be buy-in from everyone’.
- Children were particularly identified as central in co-designing their personal goals.
- Aligning SLT and teacher goals requires modification of curricula and learning foci.
- Emphasis on compensatory strategies, social and communication skills and generalisation is accepted as most beneficial for the child with DLD.
- Early identification and intervention by co-designing and co-facilitating universal, targeted and specific supports to achieve measurable progress is recognised as a key goal of in-school therapy.
- The school is the preferred setting for support rather than the clinic-based model, allowing therapists to observe children in their natural, social environment and among their peers.
‘You see the kids where they’re really supposed to be’

CONCLUSIONS

- The research and study indicate that early identification and implementation of evidence-based supports, while unable to ‘cure’, can interrupt the cycle of cascading consequences.
- The In-School Demonstration Model (DES 2017) and the new Inclusion Model (DES 2019) mark a new chapter towards an international, evidence-based research and legislation-informed model of in-school therapy. This study outlines the advantages and challenges of such a model for the child with DLD and children with other language and learning needs.

INVESTIGATING THE IMPACT OF *Lámh* ON THE LIVES OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN IRELAND

Rachel Coen, Mary Immaculate College

ABSTRACT

This research project investigated the impact of the manual sign system *Lámh* on the lives of children with special educational needs (SEN) in Ireland.

This study was concerned with the perceptions of *Lámh* held by teachers and SNAs in both the mainstream and special education setting.

Using qualitative methodology, this study explored if *Lámh* is effectively supporting children with special educational needs in Irish schools.



CONTACT

Rachel Coen
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INTRODUCTION

This study identified ways in which *Lámh* supports children with SEN in Ireland from the perspective of teachers and SNAs. *Lámh* is an adapted form of Irish Sign Language. *Lámh* is used with children and adults who have a general learning disability. *Lámh* signs are always used with speech.

The motivation for this research study derived from the researcher's personal interest in Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) and more specifically sign language. Two other critical factors also informed this research study:

1. Classroom observations of the detrimental impact of language and communication difficulties during professional placements while undertaking the Bachelor of Education programme.
2. The limited availability of literature pertaining to *Lámh*.

METODOLOGY

This qualitative research project took place in two settings. A special school and a mainstream primary school, both in the west of Ireland, were selected for this research project.

The researcher was eager to converse with teachers and SNAs about *Lámh* and the impact that it had on the lives of children with SEN. Semi-structured interviews were very effective at revealing the participant's opinions about *Lámh*. Moreover, this interview style allowed the participants to expand on their personal experiences using *Lámh*.

FINDINGS

Several conclusions have been drawn from the research findings. These conclusions are summarised as follows:

1. The analysed data illustrated that *Lámh* supports teaching and learning in both the mainstream classroom and the special education setting. Participants discussed how *Lámh* reduces the frustration associated with not being understood. This consequently reduces the frequency and extremity of negative behaviours in the classroom.
2. *Lámh* positively impacts the development of language skills and the communication competence of children with SEN. Participants discussed how *Lámh* improves both receptive and expressive language skills. Participants believed that *Lámh* particularly benefits the expressive language ability of children in the mainstream school setting due to the reduced severity of their needs.
3. *Lámh* allows the child to communicate with others and provides opportunities for socialisation. Participants also praised *Lámh* for improving children's confidence and allowing the child to become more independent.
4. Participants expressed how *Lámh* is more reliable, cost-effective and accessible than other forms of AAC. However, *Lámh* must be used daily by trained and dedicated communication partners in order to be effective.
5. Participants identified several factors which must be considered when implementing and sustaining *Lámh* engagement. Communication partners must be trained to use *Lámh* and commit to using it daily. *Lámh* must always be accompanied by speech. Participants recommended using *Lámh* as part of a total-communication approach, compromising of *Lámh* signs, spoken language and visual supports.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- A network of dedicated *Lámh* communication partners both inside and outside of school is vital for successful implementation and sustainment of *Lámh*.
- Parental perception of *Lámh* was identified as a challenge to *Lámh* engagement. This challenge is heightened if English is an additional language for the child and their family.
- Participants recommended more frequent *Lámh* training and suggested annual refresher courses. Participants also suggested updating existing online material to appeal to older children.
- In the interest of supporting children with SEN and complying with national and international inclusive legislation, *Lámh* should be welcomed in all classrooms and by all school personnel where necessary.

CONCLUSIONS

Future research is encouraged to further investigate the impact of *Lámh* on the lives of children with SEN in Ireland.

Research about *Lámh* and other forms of AAC in Irish classrooms is limited. There is a great opportunity to further investigate the role of AAC in the modern classroom.

Following the completion of this qualitative research study, the researcher was able to reveal the value of *Lámh* in terms of supporting teaching and learning, reducing negative behaviours, fostering independence, enhancing confidence and promoting the development of social skills.

EXPLORING TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES OF THE EDUCATION OF DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING (DHH) CHILDREN IN MAINSTREAM PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN THE MUNSTER REGION.

Robert Moloney, Mary Immaculate College

ABSTRACT

This study is concerned with the perceptions of the educators of deaf and hard of hearing (DHH) students in mainstream primary schools in the Munster region. In accordance with many researchers, this study shows that this cohort encounter challenges within mainstream settings, with issues such as a lack of teacher training, DHH awareness and Visiting Teacher (VT) support being frequently cited as posing significant barriers to providing fully inclusive educational experiences to these students.



CONTACT

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INTRODUCTION

DHH children are affected at a critical stage of language development, which can have detrimental effects on their educational progress. Despite such effects, Marschark and Hauser (2012) note that DHH children have equal intellectual potential, while being deaf or hard of hearing need not have an adverse effect on their cognitive development. However, in numerous studies DHH children continue to lag behind their hearing peers.

Recent statistics indicate that approximately 5,000 children in Ireland will have a permanent hearing impairment (NCSE 2011). While the majority of these children now attend mainstream settings, many organisations cite the deficit of research concerning DHH children and their experiences in primary education in Ireland. Moreover, the research that is available predominantly groups DHH students together from all school levels.

In light of such views, it is pertinent for this study to examine the current provision of education for DHH children, while also providing additional research on this topic that is concise in age demographic. The benefits of such research include, offering insights into current practice and presenting recommendations for possible improvements.

Methods and Materials

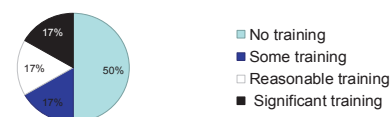
This research is grounded in a qualitative methodology. For Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative research is conducted when the researchers requires a complex detailed understanding of the issue and "This detail can only be established by talking directly with people... and allowing them to tell their stories unencumbered" (p.45).

An important step in the data collection process is engaging in purposeful sampling, while as Creswell (2014) notes, "The idea behind qualitative research is to purposefully select participants... that will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question" (p.189). Accordingly, this study involved engaging in interviews with educators of DHH students in mainstream primary schools in the Munster region in order to ascertain their perspectives

FINDINGS/ RESULTS

Although the NCSE (2011) stress the need for teachers to be aware of DHH students and their educational needs, findings from this study indicate that this is not commonplace in DHH education as all participants noted there is a deficit in teacher training in this cohorts' education. This is illustrated in the figure below.

DHH Teacher Training among Participants



All participants criticised the CPD opportunities available in Ireland for educators to upskill in DHH education. Participants that have received training and attended these courses were not satisfied with the training offered and the availability of these courses.

This study found that the Visiting Teacher Service (VTS) for the deaf is significantly under-resourced. It was discovered that current VT caseloads consist of 250 DHH students. This is in stark contrast to the claims of the NCSE (2009) of VT caseloads ranging from 60 to 90 students, which raises concerns about governmental bodies' insights regarding the experiences of VTs working in DHH education.

In the literature, a common perception is that this cohort academically lag behind their hearing peers, particularly in terms of literacy.

Do DHH Students Struggle in Terms of Literacy?



According to the figure above, 67% of participants noted that DHH students struggle with varying degrees in terms of literacy, which corroborates the findings from the literature, while the VT reaffirmed the findings of the notable studies that DHH students' literacy levels plateau at the ages of 9 or 10.

DISCUSSION

It is recommended that governmental policy address the teacher education of DHH students and incorporate DHH education modules into all Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes. This will ensure that all educators have an appropriate knowledge of these students so that they can be successfully served in mainstream educational settings.

It is also pertinent for educators to have the opportunity to undertake CPD opportunities in DHH education. By receiving substantial training in this educational area, all educators would be knowledgeable of the needs of DHH students and would be able to ensure that this cohort can experience fully inclusive education. This will allow teachers not only to be aware of how best to instruct and include such students but also to reduce the reliance on the VTS to provide such information. This would allow for DHH education to move away from the VTS model, which perhaps it might be time for, as it would be more beneficial for every teacher to be capable of addressing the needs of this cohort, as is seen in other areas of SEN education.

CONCLUSIONS

All participants noted a lack of teacher training, CPD opportunities and a shortage of VT visits, while several teachers also noted a lack of governmental support as posing problems in providing a fully inclusive education for DHH students. It may therefore be suggested that this cohort are not adequately served in mainstream contexts for the most part, which was corroborated by 67% of participants in this study.

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AN EXPLORATION OF THE TEACHING STRATEGIES USED TO ENHANCE THE LEARNING OF DEAF/HARD OF HEARING CHILDREN IN MAINSTREAM PRIMARY SETTINGS

Emma Murray, Mary Immaculate College

ABSTRACT

This research project is an exploration of the teaching strategies used in mainstream primary classrooms to enhance the learning of deaf or hard of hearing children (hereinafter referred to as “D/HH”). Specifically, this study explores the challenges and benefits of including D/HH children in mainstream settings, the importance of early identification and intervention, school placements, language and literacy development and technological supports for D/HH children. The researcher used qualitative research methods throughout the study to collect data through interviews and reflective diary compilation. Such data collection and ensuing data analysis was guided by the exploration of topic related literature.



CONTACT

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INTRODUCTION

This research project focuses on teaching strategies that enhance learning experiences of D/HH children in mainstream educational settings. Deafness is defined as ‘not having sufficient hearing for it to play a role in daily life’ (Marschark 2007, p.34) while hard of hearing is defined as having ‘a degree of hearing loss’ (Marschark 2007, p.34). The objective of this research was to explore views of in-service primary teachers to ascertain which teaching strategies are considered most beneficial in supporting learning of such children.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

For the purpose of this study, interviews were conducted with five in-service teachers in a mainstream primary setting. Interviews allow for exploration of ‘people’s perceptions, meanings, definitions of situations and constructions of reality’ (Punch and Oancea 2014). All interviews conducted focused on interviewee experiences; thus defined as contextual interviews (King and Horrocks 2010). Each interview was semi-structured, allowing interviewees to impose structure on the interview process in collaboration with the interviewer (Powney and Watts 1987). The interview schedule was based on enquiries of embedded questions and reoccurring themes arising during reading of relevant literature. Each interview contained ten base questions with additional questions asked in particular interviews due to the semi-structured design of same. Probing occurred throughout by asking interviewees to elaborate or give examples during discussion. For this reason, interviews varied in duration, lasting 10-25 minutes. Interviews were recorded on a voice-recording device and were later transcribed for analysis. A reflective diary was also generated based on experiences gained while working with a hard of hearing child in a mainstream setting. Such reflective practice enabled provision of first-hand experiences in relation to teaching and learning of D/HH children.

FINDINGS/ RESULTS

School Placement:

- D/HH children’s educational attainment and social/emotional development benefits from inclusion in mainstream educational settings.
- Lack of Deaf awareness in mainstream schools was highlighted as a primary challenge caused primarily by lack of appropriate CPD for teachers.
- Accessing the National Curriculum in full was highlighted as an additional challenge for D/HH children in mainstream schools resulting in requirements for curricular adaptations and differentiation by teachers

Assistive Technology:

- Classroom based assistive technology supports the learning of D/HH children and is fundamental for their success in mainstream classrooms.
- Personal hearing devices, when maintained properly, provide access to learning in mainstream educational settings for D/HH children.

Language and Literacy Skills Development:

- Good listening environments must be created in classrooms to support language development of D/HH pupils in mainstream settings.
- Teachers have an important role to play in the language development of D/HH children in mainstream settings through the expanding, repeating and recasting of language utterances.
- Visual Phonics approach along with pre-teaching and post-tutoring of new vocabulary promotes reading skills development in D/HH children in mainstream classrooms.
- Writing content must relate to children’s own lives and pre-teaching and post-tutoring must also occur to promote written communication skills in D/HH children in mainstream settings.

Early Identification and Intervention:

- Early identification, when accompanied by consistent early intervention programmes, lessens barriers to language and learning for D/HH children.
- Early intervention programmes facilitate support for D/HH children in relation to sensory development, language development, assistive technology, Visiting Teacher access and early years education; thus impacting on their future learning within mainstream settings.

DISCUSSION

The study highlighted that numerous benefits and challenges exist in relation to inclusion of D/HH children in mainstream schools. Such aspects must be taken into consideration in school placement planning for D/HH children. The research also revealed the importance of early identification and intervention for the D/HH child and their families. The complexities of language and literacy skills development for D/HH children was explored with appropriate strategies outlined to support learning in this area. Finally, the necessity of technological support for D/HH children in mainstream primary settings was established while highlighting the lessening of barriers that such devices offer.

CONCLUSIONS

It is evident various benefits and challenges exist relating to placement of D/HH children in mainstream primary settings. However, when teachers are aware of strategies that support learning in such settings, D/HH children can flourish in educational progression. Such support from teachers allow benefits of inclusion to far outweigh challenges; thus ensuring all children are reaching their potentials. When teachers are prepared and supported in provision of mainstream education for D/HH children, they develop high expectations for such children. Such anticipations and prospects allow children to benefit holistically from inclusion as educationalists remain cognisant of the following quote:
“Deaf people can do anything hearing people can, except hear.”

-Dr. King Jordan

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INIÚCHADH AR NA STRAITÉISÍ A ÚSÁIDEANN MÚINTEOIRÍ CHUN GAEILGE A MHÚINEADH MAR CHÉAD TEANGA DO PHÁISTÍ I NGAELSCOILEANNA.

Niamh Sheehy, Coláiste Mhuire gan Smál

ACHOIMRE

Dirítear ar na straitéisí a úsáidtear sna naíonáin chun Gaeilge a mhúineadh sa tráchtas seo. Is topaic é seo atá go mór i mbéal an phobail mar gheall ar na polasaithe An Straitéis 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge (Rialtas na hÉireann 2010), Aistear (2009) agus Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile (2019).

Breathnaítear ar na modhanna múinte a úsáidtear chun Gaeilge a mhúineadh agus an tslí go dtugtar spreagadh do pháistí.

RÉAMHRÁ

Tá an tumoideachas agus an dátheangachas go mór i mbéal an phobail leis na cianta.

Foilsíodh Aistear (2009) agus Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile (2019) chun tacú le cumarsáid na bpáistí. Ní cloistear tuairimí na múinteoirí ró-mhinic faoi na polasaithe seo. Is i aidhm an taighde seo ná tuairimí, taithí agus dúshláin múinteoirí naíonán a chur in iúl.

Tá spéis agam i gcursaí Gaelscolaíochta agus rinneas socrúchán scoile i nGaelscoil.

TORTHAÍ TAIGHDE

Tháinig na téamaí seo a leanas chun solais ón bpróiseas bailithe sonraí: *Modhanna múinte chun Gaeilge a mhúineadh*, *Cleachtas an Mhúinteora*, *An Tumoideachas*, *An Dátheangachas agus Ról an Tuismitheora*.

Modhanna Múinte chun Gaeilge a mhúineadh:

Úsáideann na múinteoirí spraoi sna naíonáin chun Gaeilge a mhúineadh. Baintear úsáid as drámaíocht, cluichí teanga, biongó, amhráin agus rím.

Athrá- Tá athrá fíor-thábhachtach chun Gaeilge na bpáistí a fhorbairt sa chéad chúpla seachtain ar scoil. Tá sé tábhachtach tógaint ar an bhfoghlaim go céimniúil.

Aistear- Thaitin Aistear go mór le múinteoirí Scoil B, ach i Scoil A ní dhéanann siad Aistear mar gheall ar an easpa acmhainní agus ar an easpa ama ar scoil. Cheap mé go raibh sé seo suimiúil mar den chuid is mó sa litríocht ní luaitear ach na buntáistí a bhaineann le h-Aistear.

Tuismitheoirí- Tá tionchar an-láidir ag tuismitheoirí ar shuim an pháiste sa Ghaeilge. Ní gá don tuismitheoir a bheith líofa sa Ghaeilge chun suim a léiriú in obair an pháiste.

PLÉ AGUS MOLTAÍ

Plé- Is léir go bhfuil iliomad buntáistí ag baint leis an tumoideachas agus an dátheangachas. É sin ráite, tá dúshláin ag Gaelscoileanna agus níl an córas gan locht. Sa taighde seo, déantar cúpla moladh don domhan oideachais chun feabhas a chur ar ár nGaelscoileanna.

Moltaí-

Foilsitheoirí- Breis ábhar tacaíochta a chur ar fail do mhúinteoirí naíonán i nGaelscoileanna.

Tuismitheoirí- Má fhaigheann an páiste tacaíocht le Gaeilge sa bhaile, músclaítear suim an pháiste sa Ghaeilge.

Múinteoir naíonán i nGaelscoil- Píoc téama na seachtaine agus déan athrá ar an bhfoclóir nua i réimse ábhair trasna an churaclaim.

MODHEOLAÍOCHT AN TAIGHDE

Baineadh úsáid as an bparaidim thógachaíoch sa taighde seo chun tuairimí agus peirspictíochtaí difriúla a chioradh.

Beartaíodh an modh cáilíochtúil a úsáid mar bhí sonraí pearsanta ag teastáil uaim in ionad na bhfigiúirí agus na staitisticí a fhaightear i staidéar cainníochtúil.

Rinneadh agallamh leath-struchtúrtha agus grúpa fócais le múinteoirí naíonán i ndá Ghaelscoil. Baineadh úsáid as an dá straitéis chun sonraí a bhailiú agus chun éagsúlacht a fháil mar tá buntáistí agus míbhuntáistí ag baint leis an dá straitéis.



Niamh Sheehy
Coláiste Mhuire gan Smál, Luimneach

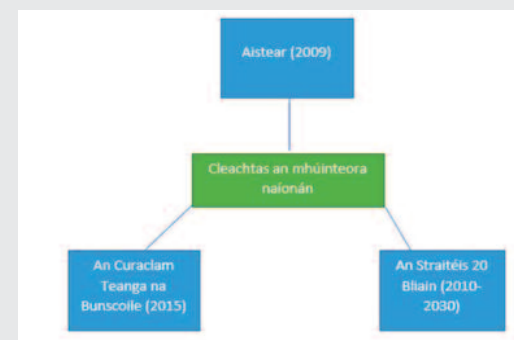
CONCLUÍDÍ

Níl aon amhras ach gur phróiseas casta é an tumoideachas. Tá sé riachtanach Gaeilge chruinn agus shaibhair a mhúineadh do pháistí chun todhchaí na Gaeilge a chosaint. In ainneoin an bhrú, is léir ón taighde go bhfuil múinteoirí ag cur réimse straitéisí i bhfeidhm chun an Ghaeilge a mhúineadh agus mar sin tá todhchaí na Gaeilge dóchasach agus geal.

TAGAIRTÍ

An Chomhairle Náisiúnta Curaclaim agus Measúnaithe (2009) Aistear: An Chreatchuraclam Luath-thumoideachas, Baile Átha Cliath: An Chomhairle Náisiúnta Curaclaim agus Measúnaithe.

An Chomhairle Náisiúnta Curaclaim agus Measúnaithe (2015a) An Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoileanna-Scoileanna Gaeltachta agus lán Ghaeilge, Baile Átha Cliath: An Chomhairle Náisiúnta Curaclaim agus Measúnaithe.



Figiúr 1.1- Caidreamh idir na polasaithe agus an múinteoir

AG CUR DÚSHLÁN ARD-OIRD AR FÁIL DO NA HARDRANGANNA I MBUNSCOILEANNA T2 AGUS FOGHLAIM THAITNEAMHACH SA GHAEILGE Á SPREAGADH GO COMHUAINÉACH

Sinéad White, Mary Immaculate College

COIMRIÚ

Déantar cur síos sa tráchtas seo ar na dea-chleachtais chun dúshlán ard-oird a chur ar fáil do dhaltai le linn foghlama na Gaeilge. Dirítear isteach ar na hardranganna i mbunSCOILEANNA ina bhfuil an Ghaeilge mar dhara teanga in Éirinn. Scrúdaítear an litríocht atá ar fáil maidir leis an ábhar seo. De réir na litríochta, tá go leor buntáistí ag baint le cothú scileanna smaointeoireachta ard-oird le linn teanga a mhúineadh agus í a fhoghlaim. Cé go bhfuil litríocht ar fáil ar chleachtais smaointeoireachta ard-oird i múineadh na dara teanga go ginearálta, níl mórán ann maidir le scileanna ard-oird i bhfoghlaim na Gaeilge. Cosúil le foghlaim in aon ábhar, tá áit lárnach ag an spreagadh i bhfoghlaim na Gaeilge, agus tugtar é seo faoi deara. Baineadh úsáid as taighde cáilíochtúil chun an t-eolas a bhailiú.



TEAGMHÁIL

Sinéad White
Mary Immaculate College, Limerick

REÁMHRÁ

Tá comhaontú ann go gcaithfidh oideachas an t-aonú aois is fiche scileanna smaointeoireachta ard-oird a chur chun cinn (Shirkhani agus Fahim 2011; Richland agus Simms 2015). Nuair atá scileanna an fhoghlaimeora sáite go huile is go hiomlán le dúshlán ard-oird, deirtear go dtéann sé/sí isteach i “state of flow” (Csikszentmihalyi 1990, lch.128). “Goals that are perceived as moderately difficult raise motivation and convey a clear sense of progress, which raises efficacy” (Schunk 2003, lch.164). Sa léirbhreithniú ar Churaclam na BunSCOILE (2008), aibhsíodh úsáid theoranta scileanna teanga ard-oird agus scileanna smaointeoireachta (CNCM 2008, lch.150). Molann torthaí na tuairisce níos mó ábhair tacaíochta a chur ar fáil do mhúinteoirí maidir le forbairt agus cothú scileanna smaointeoireachta ard-oird an dalta (CNCM 2008, lch.204). Is í aidhm an taighde acmhainn tacaíochta a chur ar fáil do mhúineadh na Gaeilge i scileanna ina bhfuil an Ghaeilge mar dhara teanga.

MODHANNA AGUS ÁBHAI

Baineadh úsáid as taighde cáilíochtúil chun teacht ar fhreagra na ceiste taighde. Rinneadh cúig agallamh leath-struchtúrtha. Thug na hagallaimh léargas ar na straitéisí éagsúla atá in úsáid ag múinteoirí chun dúshlán ard-oird a chur ar fáil agus foghlaim thaitneamhach a spreagadh. An fáth go raibh uimhir bheag de rannpháirtithe i gceist ná chun go mbeadh an taighdeoir in ann léargais níos cruinne a fháil, staidéar níos doimhne a dhéanamh agus torthaí níos tairbhiúla a bhaint amach taobh istigh den teorainn ama. Fuarthas sampla ón uile phobal trí shampláil áise. Eachtraí neamhspleácha ab ea na heachtraí seo. Rinneadh iarracht cothromaíocht a chinntiú maidir le líon na mban agus líon na bhfear, chomh maith le haois agus taithí na rannpháirtithe. Bhí beirt fhear agus triúr ban faoi agallamh agam. Bhí beirt acu ag múineadh ar feadh timpeall daichead bliain, chaith beirt eile cúig bliana déag ag múineadh, agus bhí rannpháirtí amháin ag múineadh thart ar sheacht mbliana. Bhí meascán de scoileanna tuaithe agus uirbeacha i gceist chomh maith. Rinneadh tras-scríbhinn ar gach agallamh. Nuair a bhí na cúig agallamh scríofa amach, rinneadh códú orthu. Tháinig na teidil agus fotheidil don anailís ó na sonraí.

TORTHAÍ

Cuirfear na torthaí in iúl faoi na téamaí a d’eascaíodh ó na hagallaimh.

Dúshlán ard-oird

Straitéis a oibríonn chun an smaointeoireacht ard-oird a chur chun cinn sna hardranganna ná tascanna cruthaitheacha a chur os comhair na ndaltaí, mar shampla, rólímirt, fógra a chruthú, plé ranga agus comhrá. Is fiú deiseanna léitheoireachta agus scríbhneoireachta neamhspleácha a chur ar fáil chun go mbeidh an paiste in ann scileanna a thraschur ó shuíomh go suíomh. Moltar an Ghaeilge a chomhtháthú le hábhair eile. Leis an bhFoghlaim Comhtháite Ábhar agus Teanga, tugtar deis do na daltaí smaoinéamh i slí dhifriúil ar ábhar agus ar theanga.

Tacaíocht chun dul i ngleic le dúshlán

Sonraíodh straitéisí maithe chun freastal ar idirdhealú ionas go mbeadh ar chumas gach dalta dul i ngleic le dúshlán ard-oird. Moltar ábhar lasmuigh den churaclam a chur ar fáil do dhaltai ar ardchumas. Is féidir úsáid a bhaint as réimse ceisteanna, rogha a thabhairt do pháistí le tascanna agus meascán de ghrúpaí cumasacha agus measctha a chur le chéile. Tugann am fanachta deis don dalta smaoinéamh ar an tasc agus freagra níos fearr a chumadh. Ina theannta sin, b’fhiú go mór é úsáid a bhaint as na modhanna múinte, as céad teanga an dalta agus as an Ghaeilge neamhfhoirmiúil chun teanga nua a mhúineadh chun dul i ngleic le tascanna ard-oird.

Taitneamh

Maidir le taitneamh agus dúshlán ard-oird, mhol na rannpháirtithe gan an-iomarca béime a chur ar bhotúin sa teanga, ach ar an malairt, muinín na bpáistí a fhorbairt. Moladh úsáid a bhaint as an nGaeilge neamhfhoirmiúil go minic chun go bhfeictear an Ghaeilge mar theanga bheo chumarsáide. Straitéisí eile ab fhéidir le múinteoirí úsáid a bhaint as chun dalta a spreagadh ná rogha a thabhairt dóibh agus comórtas éagsúla a chur ar siúl le duais le bua. Gan dabht, moladh tábhacht ábhair shuimiúil agus ábhair oiriúnach freisin.



PLÉ

Is léir ó na torthaí go gcreideann múinteoirí go bhfuil ról fíorthábhachtach ag an smaointeoireacht ard-oird do dhaltai sa lá atá inniu ann. Gan dabht, nuair a cuirtear dúshlán ard-oird as Gaeilge os comhair dalta i scoil Bhéarla, tá dhá thasc i gceist; an tasc ard-oird agus an tasc sa dara teanga. Caithfidh an múinteoir tacaíocht a thabhairt do na daltaí le dúshlán mar seo. Moltar ionchur teanga a mhúineadh roimh ré chun go mbeidh an teanga riachtanach acu. Labhraítear faoi thábhacht an t-idirdhealú, go háirithe tábhacht an scafaill, chun freastal ar chumais éagsúla sa rang. Anuas ar sin, tá sé de dhualgas ar mhúinteoirí bunSCOILE páistí a spreagadh le bheith rannpháirtithe i réimse leathan ábhair, agus smaoinéamh go criticiúil orthu (CNCM 2019). Ní eisceacht í an Ghaeilge. Bhí comhaontú i measc na rannpháirtithe go bhfuil spreagadh thar a bheith tábhachtach i dtaobh aon tasc. Maidir le spreagadh agus dúshlán ard-oird go sonrach, caithfidh go mbeadh an t-ábhar suimiúil agus ar leibhéal oiriúnach chun na daltaí a spreagadh chun dul i ngleic le tascanna dúshlánacha. Baineann an ghné seo le féin-éifeachtúlacht an dalta (Bandura 1986).

CONCLÚID

Taispeánann na príomhthorthaí na dea-chleachtais atá in úsáid ag múinteoirí sna hardranganna chun dúshlán ard-oird a chur ar fáil do dhaltai agus foghlaim thaitneamhach na Gaeilge á spreagadh ag an am céanna. Mholfaínn do mhúinteoirí timpeall na tíre úsáid a bhaint as na dea-chleachtais seo ina seomra ranga féin. An t-oideachas is fearr ná an t-oideachas a chuireann dúshlán roimh an dalta.

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A RED WARNING STORM: HOW WELLBEING ISSUES ARE PRESENTING IN IRISH PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

This study outlines how wellbeing issues are presenting in Irish primary schools by identifying the specific issues that are arising, how they are impacting students and how schools are responding to the challenges. While the prevalence of child wellbeing issues in current times is apparent (Keane 2017), information regarding what exactly these issues are and the implications for children and schools is lacking, particularly in an Irish context. Using qualitative methods, this study provides a broad picture of these challenges through the lens of Irish principals. The issues found to be of prevalence were harmful impacts of social media and technology, increases in child anxiety, decreases in child resilience, and harmful impacts of family trauma and the loss of parental time. The issue of social media will be discussed in this poster.

The study also highlights the current discrepancies between Irish national policy regarding child wellbeing and practice within schools, the need for strong familial support in the area of wellbeing and the increasing pressures on schools as a result of increased wellbeing issues.



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INTRODUCTION

Positive child wellbeing has been shown to link with positive academic achievement (Marques et al. 2011), with this relationship being noted as significant (Miller et al. 2013). The connection between child wellbeing and academic outcomes should place this topic at the heart of national policy and educational discourse. The existence of positive wellbeing has direct consequences on the teaching and learning being done in schools. The prevalence of child wellbeing issues is on the rise. Between 1998 and 2014, the number of children who reported themselves as feeling low once or more a week for six months rose from 23% to 28% (Keane 2017). One of the key factors in this is the rise of social media and technology. The use of social media has been linked to issues such as cyberbullying, sleep deprivation, increased peer pressure and post-traumatic stress disorder (Le Heuzey 2012). Evidence also shows detrimental impacts on the body image of older children when they engage with highly visual social media, such as Instagram and Snapchat (Marengo et al. 2018). From these issues stem mental health challenges like anxiety, depression and suicide (Wilson 2008). In addition to social media, Wilson (2008) noted that violent TV programming and video games leads to an increase in child aggression. A 2006 study by Bushman and Huesmann noted strong links between violent media and aggressive thoughts and increased anger. They also found that while this type of media has no long-term impact on adults, it does on children, suggesting children are unable to process media which is not age appropriate.

In one interesting study, children themselves identified things like social media as "a threat to mental wellbeing." (O'Reilly et al. 2018), highlighting that they have an awareness of the issue and concerns about the impacts it will have on their wellbeing.

The rapid development of the area of social media and technology is leaving parents and teachers struggling to find guidance in how to manage social media (Richards et al. 2015). This research aimed to shed light on an area of the Irish education landscape that is little discussed, but of huge importance. It is important that the topic of child wellbeing, and the impact social media and technology are having on it, is not overlooked but rather placed at the fore of educational discourse.

METHODOLOGY

Research Question & Embedded Questions:

The research question for this study was:

"How are child wellbeing issues presenting in Irish primary schools?"

The following embedded questions were then designed:

- What specific issues are teachers dealing with regarding child wellbeing in Irish primary schools?
- How are schools supporting children to deal with these issues?
- How are schools supported in dealing with these issues?

Epistemology:

The aim of this study was to gain insight into the wellbeing issues presenting in Irish primary schools from the perspective of school principals. The most appropriate way to do this was deemed to be a phenomenological-based qualitative study using semi-structured interviews.

Recruitment Method:

Participants were recruited using purposive sampling. The principals were from both DEIS and non-DEIS schools, rural and urban and were both male and females. There was no restriction on career history.

Procedure:

Participants were recruited via email. Information sheets were provided, before they were given an informed consent sheet to sign. Participants were reminded their participation was voluntary and of their right to withdraw, as well as of the contact information provided. Interviews were audio-recorded, with recordings uploaded to a password-protected folder.

Participants:

Anonymised participant profiles are described in Table 1.

Data Analysis Techniques:

The data gathered was analysed using thematic analysis, following the approach advocated by Braun & Clarke (2006).

Trustworthiness:

Credibility was ensured by triangulating the data through the varied experiences of the participants, as well as using member checks. A reflexive journal was kept to ensure subjectivity, alongside the use of memos to keep the study focused (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Ethical Considerations:

This study was approved by the Mary Immaculate College Ethics Committee.

FINDINGS

The threat of social media and technology to children's wellbeing was deemed a key finding in this study and was identified by all participants. One of the key concerns that arose in this area was the effect of overexposure to social media on children's behaviour, namely the increase in aggression from children who engage in violent games and media. These findings mirror those of Wilson (2008) and Bushman & Huesmann (2006). Participants noted this aggression presents in both the classroom and yard:

"They can get very aggressive... using language that wouldn't be appropriate to their age, violent language. They might be very wound up, or on edge in the room.. The aggression would definitely play out in the yard." (Denise)

This evidence clearly outlines how social media and technology can impact upon social behaviour, and strongly suggests that children are not emotionally able to handle the media they are accessing, with childish intentions having harmful outcomes. Further evidence was found to indicate negative impacts on peer relationships; cyberbullying was noted as becoming highly prevalent in the findings here support studies by McElvaney et al. (2018) and Le Heuzey (2012). The impacts of this behaviour on children are far-reaching and have much more long-term effects than face-to-face disagreements would;

"They start a game online and there's 5 or 6 in the group, and then somebody publicly gives out about one child saying "You're useless" or whatever, that is just massive for a child nowadays. It's a public rejection amongst their peer group, you'd never see that before." (Bonnie)

The group dynamic of such incidents means the event not only upsets the child being targeted and the child bullying, but the wider peer group as other children witness the behaviour and experience the negative fallout, a finding which links to that of Callaghan (2019). This cyberbullying also extends into social media. Peer comments, coupled with overexposure to falsely perfected realities can cause children to view themselves negatively, especially regarding their physical appearance. These findings corroborate the work of Marengo et al. (2018). Three participants noted this is particularly concerning in senior classes, with one such example outlined below.

"What's in the media in regards to what is a good looking girl or boy, you've to be very conscientious then of a child who's not confident about their own body or their own appearance, and children can be very hurtful at times as regards that so you have to be conscious that nothing negative is being said online." (Conor)

The threat of social media and technology is something participants feel is worsened by a lack of supervision at home, with parents either oblivious to the types of media their children are accessing, or too busy to notice the harmful effects. This is of huge concern to schools, with all six participants noting that schools can only do so much without proper parental support, while also acknowledging the pressures parents are under in current times.

"I think the use of technology in the home is not supervised adequately, and then parents are amazed when their children are engaging with areas that are certainly not age appropriate. It leads to problems which spill over into the school with regards to online bullying and inappropriate online behaviour." (Carla)

This lack of realisation by parents may link to Bushman & Huesmann's findings in 2006. It may be possible parents are unaware of children's inability to process what they are accessing, but this theory is only applicable to certain media exposure and cannot explain the overall issues presenting, which are better explained by lack of parental awareness of children's social media and technology use, and the impacts that use can have.

Participant	Gender	School Area	School type	DEIS/Non-DEIS
Derek	Male	Rural	Mixed	DEIS
Bonnie	Female	Urban	All boys	Non-DEIS
Karl	Male	Urban	All girls (boys in infants)	Non-DEIS
Denise	Female	Rural	Mixed	DEIS
Carla	Female	Rural	Mixed	Non-DEIS
Conor	Male	Urban	Mixed	DEIS

Table 1: Participant Profile Table

DISCUSSION

The findings show that an underlying theme; societal change is both causing, and being furthered by, the increase in child wellbeing challenges in Ireland. Through this research it has been possible to step back and examine how the transformations our communities have undergone have had effects on people of all ages, particularly children. The growth of social media and technology on have added increasing pressure to children's lives, and the issues resulting from this are the products of an ever-changing, fast-paced society. These pressures are steadily infiltrating children's lives physically, mentally, socially and educationally, with the consequences of the impacts noted in this study.

It is evident from the findings that the lack of supervision regarding technology and access to social media are things that are occurring outside of school and are therefore not only impacting school experiences but their childhood as a whole. The rise of social media and technology is a societal change that demands concern, as it is still relatively new and developing in different directions on a constant basis. While other factors such as stressful home situations may be increasing, they are not new challenges as this modern phenomenon is, and so the consequences of them may be better anticipated, despite still not being properly supported. In the case of social media and technology, understanding is not only lacking in schools but also in homes. This challenge, in conjunction with the others mentioned, have combined to create a modern landscape of childhood that is rife with new pitfalls.

This acknowledgement of societal change must also extend into schools. The desire of participants to help students was evident throughout the study. This desire, and the sense of familiarity participants displayed in relation to their students, parents and wider communities clearly outlines the pivotal place schools have within our society. They are hubs, not only for learning, but for the socialisation of children and their families, supporting development in a multitude of ways. The idea that the societal changes outlined above are not having a serious impact on how schools are running and the atmospheres amongst both the student body and staff, would be both ill-informed and negligent. As children and families dealing with a variety of challenges mix in school settings, the impacts of such challenges are felt on a wider scale. Teachers are adapting to weather these new storms and their roles are changing in response to the wider changes throughout the communities they work in. As society continues to shift at an unprecedented rate, so too will changes in schools. Awareness of this is crucial to smooth the path for both the children and staff who face this un navigated journey.

CONCLUSIONS

This study recommends that practical, focused education and awareness be generated around the short and long-term impacts of overexposure to social media and technology on children. As the study found that school support can only achieve so much in isolation, it is imperative that relevant information is shared with parents to protect wellbeing. The creation of accessible information regarding preventative and counteractive measures would allow parents to alleviate some of the pressures on schools and become more involved in the wellbeing of their children. This involvement could also instigate healthy dialogue between parents and children regarding online activities and wellbeing in general.

The findings also highlight the need for the expansion of teacher training in the area of wellbeing in general, but particularly in relation to social media and technology use. Such training would help schools to acclimatise to the new dynamics that are shaping the modern educational landscape.

While the above measures can be considered preventative, in order to tackle the issues already existing and presenting, the study supports the calls by McElvaney (2017) and Arensman (2018) for a national counselling service designed specifically for primary schools, with professionals who are equipped to help children in crisis.

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THE PERCEPTIONS OF PRACTICING PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS AND STUDENT TEACHERS ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ENQUIRY-BASED LEARNING IN THE PRIMARY GEOGRAPHY CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

This study centres on examining the perceptions of practicing teachers and student teachers on the implementation of enquiry-based learning (EBL) in primary geography. The variable of teaching experience level is a key element which underpins this research. Participants' understandings of EBL aid to further highlight the impact that educators' perceptions can have both on their teaching and students' experiences. The study emphasises the role of teachers in creating effective learning environments that support the principles of geography education. It promotes the idea that teacher confidence, subject interest and previous experiences play a role in understanding educators' perceptions of teaching through enquiry.



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INTRODUCTION

The way in which discrete primary geography time is used has an influence on students' acquirement of knowledge, with Dolan *et al.* (2014) stating in their research that student teachers' most influential past memories involved enquiry-based elements. The context of this research is influenced by McCoy *et al.* (2012) where it was outlined in their study that with a teacher's increasing level of experience, there was generally a decrease in the use of engaging teaching approaches. My research explores the current practices which are realistically being undertaken in the Irish context, and involves examining how supported practicing and student teachers feel within their engagement with geography education, particularly with EBL. An acknowledgement of these aspects could enable those involved in teacher training capacities an opportunity to examine these real experiences. It also aims to provide potential reasons as to why participants may not use this approach in their teaching.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

The mixed methodology research design used semi-structured interviews and surveys to gain views, with thirty participants overall contributing to the findings. Fifteen practicing primary teachers and fifteen student teachers participated, with the latter group in their final year of a four-year initial teacher education programme. This configuration was chosen to make the level of teaching experience the primary variable in the study. A survey was distributed to twenty-six participants, and contained a mixture of quantitative and qualitative questions. A further qualitative element was added through the use of semi-structured interviews. Four interviews were conducted, incorporating the views of two members from both groups studied. A reflective diary was also used for the duration of the research. Participants were selected through non-probability sampling, with a mixture of convenience, snowball and quota sampling used to identify equal amounts of potential participants. For qualitative data, 'thematic analysis' (Saldaña 2009, p.13) was employed when coding.

FINDINGS/ RESULTS

92.3% of survey respondents across both participant groups were taught predominantly themselves through a direct teaching approach. The majority of respondents saw their role as a teacher as one which involved facilitation, and survey participants recorded having an interest or high interest in geography (80.8%). There was also no distinct connection between confidence levels of adopting EBL approaches in geography and a teacher's experience level. Both practicing and student teachers perceived a number of benefits of EBL including enhanced skill development, meaningful learning experiences, increased participation and an acknowledgement of the pupil's role in learning, aspects also highlighted by Roberts (2010). However, challenges were noted by participants in relation to the classroom behavioural environment, engagement issues, group work concerns, suitability for all learners, a need for increased organisation, resource creation and time concerns, mirroring the conclusions of Roberts (2013). The majority of participants felt that EBL can be used throughout the primary school levels if it is adapted successfully. This finding emerged from two reoccurring views on the suitability of geographical EBL (Figure 1). These were **a)** EBL is suitable for all class levels and **b)** EBL is more suitable for older classes – (3rd to 6th class). The majority of survey participants believed that EBL was more effective than a direct approach in ensuring students' learning. The need for support in relation to implementing EBL across all primary class levels within geography was highlighted, with particular focus on the skills required by students to engage sufficiently with this methodology.

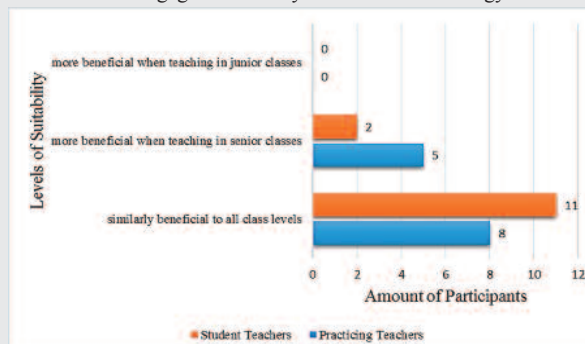


Figure 1: Survey Participants' Views on the Suitability of Geographical EBL with Primary Class Levels

DISCUSSION

Participants did not display a correlation between their experience level and their perceptions of using geographical EBL, with teacher training having an integral impact on student teachers' feelings of confidence, supporting the findings of Dolan *et al.* (2016). Personal interest in geography and a teacher's view of this subject were not found to have a major impact on participants' perceptions of teaching geography, suggesting that it was not representative that someone who enjoyed teaching geography would always have a keen interest in it. The most important factor that impacted on the suitability of EBL in primary geography related to participants' views on the skill requirements for children. Some participants felt that pupils needed developed skills to engage with EBL, an aspect highlighted by Roberts (2013). Participants who felt that EBL would not be as suitable in junior classes believed that skills needed to be well-established before engaging with EBL. This impacted on participants' outlook on the effectiveness of using this approach with infants.

CONCLUSIONS

Participants acknowledged that EBL involved students being central to the learning with teachers undertaking facilitation (Roberts 2010). Practicing and student teachers strongly believed in the potential of using EBL in geography teaching. Respondents also did not perceive a reduced need for EBL in senior classes. Research into using this approach with younger classes is a key recommendation of this research.

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A SELF-STUDY OF THE UTILISATION OF A DISCOVERY-BASED TEACHING APPROACH IN THE SESE SUBJECTS ON THE PRIMARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM.

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ABSTRACT

This is a self-study representing findings sought by a student teacher on a specific area of practice over the course of nine lessons. Dinkleman (2003) defines a self-study as an "intentional and systematic inquiry into one's own practice" placing the purpose of the study at improving one's practice. This study enabled me to critically reflect upon this specific part of my teaching practice with this purpose at the forefront. The findings indicate limitations and opportunities found within this teaching pedagogy and signified significant learning on a personal level. The recommendations sought from this research highlighted the significance and importance of reflecting critically as teachers in order to improve our practice.

INTRODUCTION

This study represents the utilisation of the discovery/enquiry-based teaching pedagogies within the SESE subjects on the primary school curriculum by means of a self-study research approach. The study focuses on a concern of the above teaching pedagogy with emphasis on how it can most effectively be used within the classroom and to discover any limitations which may occur. The study allowed for **critical reflection to engulf ones teaching practice** in this case, with the purpose of bettering ones teaching method to enhance the pupils learning in the classroom.

Loughran (2004) notes that self-study becomes a "focal point for those pursuing a better knowledge of their particular practice setting and the work of those with a concern for teaching...". The fore front of this study and this certain type of study resulted from the researchers own personal interest and passion in bettering their own teaching practice. Undoubtedly, bettering my practice as a self but more importantly with the main aim of enhancing the learning taking place in the classroom and in turn my future classrooms. The self-study method of research was chosen as it gave ample opportunity to delve into the critical reflection of the discovery-based teaching pedagogy of which is very important to utilise in the classroom.

The SESE subjects were the focal point of this study as indicated by the NCCA (2019) The study itself was informed by a number of critical factors:

- What are the limitations and opportunities of the discovery-based teaching pedagogy in the SESE subjects in an everyday classroom on professional placement?
 - Can the self-study format of critically documenting the above teaching pedagogy better a student teachers' knowledge and in turn their overall practice of it within the SESE subjects? benefit the overall education and learning of children. This signifies this study's invaluable rationale of - *Putting the child at the fore-front of my practice.*
- A trend appears from both critical factors mentioned above in that improving ones teaching practice is at the fore-front of this study and with that the improvement of the children's overall learning and their general benefit within the classroom

The UN Convention of the Rights of the Child article 29 advocates clearly that "Education must develop every child's personality, and abilities to the full". This strong statement implies that as future teachers, it is our duty and purpose to teach children to the best of our ability and being **reflective practitioners learning and improving our practice is vital to the rights of the children in our classrooms.**

METHODS AND MATERIALS

Self-studies and the methodological approaches used can vary intensely from each other however once the methods used are concrete examples of practice this will enable the study to readily resemble its validity and trustworthiness. This research was undertaken over a three-week period in April 2019. It was carried out during my second professional placement practice. The study focused on the discovery-based teaching pedagogy within the SESE subjects. Therefore, the research was carried out over nine hours of teaching in total- whereby history, geography and science were each taught for a total of 3 hours each with one-hour lessons in each of the SESE subjects weekly.

Personal Journaling: I used an allocated hardback to document and reflect prior, during and post each of the 9 lessons. I recorded 9 journal entries with over 35 pages of journaling. The focus of this personal journal was to note how I prepared for each lesson, to note how each lesson went and to then reflect critically on the lesson. The notes prior to and documenting how the lesson actually played out allowed for data to be retrieved and in turn critical reflection to occur based on what theory said should happen or indicating my own personal teaching beliefs. This data collection method proved to be the richest resource in my study and helped to indicate the self in self-study where my practice could then be altered and improved.

Conversations with peers/mentor: Critically conversations with a peer surrounding my teaching of the discovery-based teaching pedagogy took place. Here, insightful critiques and advice were noted of which I then critically reflected upon. Advice from my professional placement tutor was also indicated through means of the consultation document written upon looking at a lesson. Insightful data was noticed by means of this interactive data collection method. I had two conversations with a critical peer over the course of this study and received one consultation document by my tutor on a history lesson taught in week three of professional placement. Both aspects allowed me to identify any bias I may have had in relation to my teaching and that of this teaching pedagogy. Hence, "thereby allowing me to "move beyond self to examine practice" (Tidwell & Fitzgerald 2004) in order to provide rigor and validity through more objectivity in the research process" (Collins 2016).

Reading: Prior and post lessons reading and researching the teaching pedagogy of discovery-based learning allowed me to identify common data trends within the literature. These trends of what worked/didn't work enabled me to plan more effectively and trial if theory vs practice was the reality.

Lesson Planning: Although not originally set out as a data collection method my lesson plans for each lesson subsequently provided relevant data to this study. The changes made to the planning of a course of nine lessons was significant highlighting the progress of aiming to better my practice in this area as a result of carrying out this self-study. Planning also emerged as a huge requirement in my discovery-based teaching practice. lessons.

FINDINGS/ RESULTS

My findings will be presented under two main headings:

What I found

And

What I learnt - on this self-study journey.

What I Found:

From both personally journaling and reading I found a prevalent trend of how "reflection" and "critical reflection" of both data collection forms, allowed for many realisations and findings to occur.

At the start of the process the personal journaling was somewhat resembling that of a "note-taking" approach as opposed to critically reflecting on the process. Schoem's (1983) idea of "reflection in action" occurred at first. I found that learning how to critically reflect as Brookfield (1995) points out in his literature is more complex and definitely a life-learning process whereby one improves this skill through experience.

However, as this research continued, I found from practice and the experience of teaching alongside reading and research how to effectively critically reflect and to improve this skill.

Conversations with a critical peer (placement tutor in the case of this example) strongly beneficial to the process, my teaching of the discovery-based pedagogy and again the complexity of reflecting critically. *From my peer chat it was established how although a conscience effort (I thought) was being made the comment of "too much teacher-talk" was made* [Journal extract 2]. This was a common trend post critical peer conversations of the realisation of something new about my practice of this particular methodology in the classroom. In this scenario this form of data collection in the self-study process aloud for flaws or recommendations in my practice that oneself might never notice they are doing/saying which teaching. However, through this critical conversation I found that subconsciously I was talking a lot more throughout the lesson than needed especially within this teaching approach. This is a factor of my teaching that would of went unnoticed in my own reflection process of my teaching approach throughout the lessons. **This was a pivotal finding in my research as, not only did it identify a critical area for improvement in using this teaching pedagogy in the SESE lessons but also how to more effectively bring this pedagogical approach to the three particular lessons focused on within this study.**

What I learnt:

It is clear from the "what I found" results that two major factors were found. These findings enabled me to learn many things regarding my practice and the using the discovery-based teaching pedagogy within the three SESE subjects.

Personally, the overall self-study experience aloud me to extend my knowledge on reflection and on how to be an adequate reflective practitioner as stated above. This in turn, allowed me to learn new aspects regarding my teaching but also the learning experience itself regarding how best I can utilise the discovery-based pedagogy in the SESE subject was enlightened and extended.

From the personal journaling and observational note taking data collection forms two emerging trends were seen: Planning and Guidance. In each journal extracts 1 and 2 above these trends can be identified and validated as findings that re-occurred. In addition, both trends were evident and referred to in 7/9 journal entries and 2/3 observational note taking records.

Planning was a significant reoccurring trend emerging in the data collection methods used. As the essence of the referred teaching pedagogy is that of them being the agents of their own learning and discoveries. This of course signifies a substantial need of planning in order to make that discovery happen and be successful. As Smith (1983) stated in referencing to the functions of planning "there are many reasons to plan as there are types of planning".

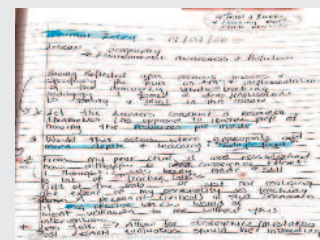


Figure 1. Personal Journal Extract.

He highlights here the importance of planning and indicates and confirms that there are numerous reasons why planning in education is essential. Of course, in the matter of this particular teaching pedagogy I found planning to be essential and the more planned and prepared I was for the SESE lessons the trend of success of the lesson prevailed more strongly.

Guidance- From reading, a conflict in the literature regarding discovery-based learning and how to best teach this pedagogy was identified. Both educational theories Piaget (1952) and Dewey (1993) showcase the idea of the learning being unassisted in their discovery leads to a better teaching and outcome of this pedagogy. In contrast both Mayer (2004) and Bruner (1961) advocate how assistance is absolutely needed when discovery-based learning is being used in the classroom. Unassisted, free-lance discovery-based learning pedagogies have been scrutinized as little evidence shows that this style of teaching leads to improved learning. The lack of structure, planning and availability of resources can result in unassisted discovery-based learning to be unsuccessful and potentially leave certain learners at a disadvantage (Mayer 2004). From my personal experience of this pedagogy throughout this research I agree with that of Bruner (1961) and Mayer (2004) in that assisting the learners is a requirement. **My teaching of the topic, when I guided the children and set them in the right direction, was found much more successful.**

CONCLUSIONS

The overall purpose of this study was to gather conclusions from the research question and embedded questions that were established.

Research Question:

How can a student teacher utilise the "discovery-based learning" teaching pedagogy in the teaching of the SESE subjects on the primary school curriculum?

Embedded Questions:

- What are the limitations and opportunities of the discovery-based teaching pedagogy in the SESE subjects in an everyday classroom on professional placement?
- Can the self-study format of critically documenting the above teaching pedagogy better a student teachers' knowledge and in turn their overall practice of it within the SESE subjects?

To conclude the findings, it is evident, that a student teacher can utilise the "discovery-based learning" teaching pedagogy in the teaching of the SESE subjects on the primary school curriculum. The utilisation however was personally represented by the self-study aspect of this dissertation.

The discovery-based teaching pedagogy is renowned and advocated by key educational theorists. The NCCA (2009) highlights the scientific and social nature of history, geography and science alike and therefore an active method of discovering topics in these subjects is appropriate. However, looking at myself and critically reflecting my teaching of this pedagogy led to the utilisation of it within the SESE subjects being effective and in turn bettered.

The SESE subjects have a wide variety of topics and the opportunities are endless in terms of resources in which allow the learners to discover. There was a variety of limitations also identified in this study such as the necessity personally found to assist and guide more in science lessons in order to achieve success in learning and in my teaching practice. Lack of space in the classroom, unavailability of resources which can't be made to aid this pedagogy are all limitations found on this journey. The most substantial conclusion is how the self-study enabled me to critically reflect more accurately and realise the importance of this skill in this practice of teaching. **The overall aspect of this study allowed me to identify areas in my practice of this pedagogy in which to improve or implement in order to better my practice. Bettering my practice, in turn, benefits the learners and that is what this profession is about.**

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A SELF-REFLECTIVE INVESTIGATION, INTO THE PERCEPTIONS OF A STUDENT TEACHER, ON IMPLEMENTING ACTIVE LEARNING WITH JUNIOR CYCLE STUDENTS (FIRST YEAR STUDENTS IN A CO-EDUCATIONAL SCHOOL).

Sandra Dunne, Mary Immaculate College

ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the perceptions held by a student teacher in their professional capacity, of implementing active learning with junior cycle students, in a Co-Educational School. Although active learning in post-primary schools has been well recorded in literature, not many researchers have focused on the perceptions of post-primary teachers in implementing the concept. Employing qualitative methodology, this reflective self-study explores the implementation of active learning with a first-year mixed cohort of students.



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INTRODUCTION

The motivating force for this study arose from the researcher's personal desire to gauge a deeper understanding of implementing active learning, through a self-reflective study, in a bid to improve her own practice. The junior cycle has recently been reformed and has welcomed updated subjects and introduced short courses. The primary focus of the junior cycle reform is around key skills, combined with new emphasis placed on learning, assessment and reporting, through active and more meaningful approaches. This has created a personal interest for the researcher to gain a deeper knowledge and understanding of the topic. Gibbs described active learning in a statement that discussed educators in agreement, that the perfect educational experience is where students come to class, readily prepared to actively capture the content, as opposed to passive absorption (1992). Therefore, it is imperative that post-primary teachers implement active learning with junior cycle students.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

To achieve the necessary sampling, the researcher teaches a first-year business studies class, with 19 students (9 boys and 10 girls), on 32 occasions. They then analyse their own practice through a reflective self-study approach. Various active learning methods were implemented, with some repeated but with adjustments when they were. The research method chosen for this study is a 'reflective self-study', based on a qualitative analysis of the writers, personal experiences. In response to the questions asked, this method will generate data through composition of a journal and critical reflection of the writer. Qualitative research centres around the experience and will deepen the understanding of the writer. This aligns with



Cohen *et al.* (2000) who believe that qualitative research places the researcher at the core of the experience.



FINDINGS/ RESULTS

There are three active learning methodologies which the writer focuses on. These are 'Blue Sky Thinking', 'Table Quiz' and 'Trashcan Basketball'. 'Blue Sky Thinking' was the least challenging to implement. Local images produced immediate response and engagement and provided extensive links which created a beneficial and in-depth discussion on the topic. The students appeared genuinely excited about a personal link to the topic being discussed. During the research period, an 'end of topic assessment' was held through co-ordination and hosting of a 'Table Quiz'. Results denoted a strong academic performance from all groups with a narrow margin between the highest and lowest scoring groups (chart 1). A noticeable outcome from the writer's observations, was the expression of relief across all students, followed by excitement, when they realised, they were not being individually assessed. This lines up with findings of Preville (2018, n.p.), which states group situations "recapture enthusiasm and remind students that their learning is not taking place in isolation". 'Trashcan basketball' 'stood out' as being particularly successful in terms of students both engaging with interest and grasping the learning outcomes. The activity involved some advance planning and a little time to set up at the start of class. Overall, this activity was 'priceless' to the observer personally, as they were fortunate to experience the enthusiasm, engagement, competitiveness and the affirmed learning of their students.

Team Name	Member Numbers	Result
American Dollars	Three	50
European Union	Three	45
Platinum Card	Three	45
Wall Street	Three	43
Central Bank	Two	42
Brexit	Two	40

Chart 1. 'Table Quiz' group results

DISCUSSION

Active learning is an instructional approach whereby students become actively engaged in the content, through meaningful methodologies. Researchers have highlighted that there are various outcomes to implementing active learning, including challenges such as student resistance, efficacy of techniques, preparation time and ability to cover the syllabus. Prior research outlines impacts to both teaching and learning. Teaching was found to be impacted positively, in a way that allows teachers to better engage with and support their students. Learning was found to have both positive and negative impacts. Positively, student's academic achievement improves (Gibbs 1992). However, a negative impact highlights an increase in student anxiety (Cooper *et al.* 2018).

CONCLUSIONS

Active learning implementation involves a higher level of planning and organisation, but nothing exhaustive. Active learning had a mostly positive impact on both teaching and learning for the researcher. Evidence of extremely effective learning outcomes were portrayed and from an instructional viewpoint, the teacher appeared extremely content and overjoyed on occasion with the success of the lesson. The teacher found, active learning with a competitive element, provided the most successful outcomes.

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ABSTRACT

Challenging behaviour has always been a topical subject within schools, which the media have resurfaced, due to the proposed reduced timetables being used as behavioural strategies, much to the dissatisfaction of the Minister for Education. However, this does cast light on the fact that more support is required when managing this issue in school. Much of the literature surrounding this topic aligns challenging behaviour with special educational needs (SEN), but this research project focuses on challenging behaviour without the presence of SEN. Therefore, a qualitative approach was used when gathering teachers' experiences of challenging behaviour in the classroom. The results show that an automatic association between challenging behaviour and SEN was made by participants. The severe forms of challenging behaviour are those in which meltdowns or outbursts of anger are expressed. These behaviours can be daunting to face and can shatter the confidence of teachers. While also breaking relationships between children, having a negative impact on the child both academically and socially. This project has looked into the consequences of such behaviour and how it should be dealt with, in a positive way to support the child and teach them how to manage it for the benefit of their future.



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BEHAVIOURAL ISSUES IN THE CLASSROOM HOW DOES CHALLENGING BEHAVIOUR IMPACT THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT OF THE CLASSROOM?

Claire Roche, Mary Immaculate College

INTRODUCTION

This research project is concerned with challenging behaviour and its impact on the learning environment of the classroom. The specific behavioural issues that this project will be focusing on are behaviours in which teachers pertain to be challenging. The researcher has particular interest in volatile challenging behaviours that lead to meltdowns and outbursts of anger.

There is much policy surrounding the topic of behaviour, particularly disruptive behaviour. In 1990, Circular 20/90 'Guidelines towards a positive policy for school behaviour and discipline' was drawn, outlining the importance and necessity of creating a Code of Behaviour in schools. In 1997, 'Report to the Minister of Education Niamh Bhreathnach, T.D. on discipline in schools' was written while another circular was also published, Circular 40/97 'Assaults on teachers/ school employees.' The outlined circulars and report mirror what has been stated in both the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000 and the National Education Welfare Board (NEWB) (2008), *Developing a Code of Behaviour: Guidelines for Schools*: that there is a need for parental support when establishing and implementing the Code of Behaviour in school.

The issue of challenging behaviour in classrooms across the country has been highlighted through reports and circulars published. But the media has recently brought to light the issue of reduced timetables being used as a behavioural management strategy. The Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) have stated that they believe the reduced timetables should be considered as a strategy, especially as a last resort if other strategies have failed. However, the Minister for Education, Joe McHugh, responded by saying the opposite, that it should not be used as a strategy. In light of all of this, the media have shown that challenging behaviour is a current issue faced by schools, highlighting a need for more time and support to be invested when addressing these current issues.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

A qualitative approach was adopted in order to collect teachers views on the impact of challenging behaviour on the learning environment of the classroom. The data collection was carried out through a series of semi-structured interviews and findings were derived, using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis techniques. The use of semi-structured interviews gave the interviewer an opportunity to follow up various points outlined by participants.

The six participants involved in this study were qualified teachers, working in rural or urban settings, within the counties of Galway, Cork and Dublin. They were identified by means of a purposive sampling strategy. Purposive sampling is generally chosen when the researcher 'desires to learn more about a specific scene or phenomenon' (Sharp et al. 2012, p. 37). In this case, the research project aimed to discover the impact that behavioural issues have on children's learning within the classroom environment. The participants were known to the researcher and were invited to take part in the study as their level of experience would assist in the findings of this project.

FINDINGS

The findings are presented under the following themes:

1. Teachers' assumptions of challenging behaviour.
2. The consequences of challenging behaviour.
3. Insights into approaches.

1. Teachers' Assumptions of Challenging Behaviour

When asked about their understanding of challenging behaviour, all participants described it as disruptive and the inability of being able to control one's emotions. This view is also very prominent in literature. Participants also automatically associated challenging behaviour with special educational needs (SEN). This is because children with SEN often express challenging behaviour more so than children who do not have SEN. Challenging behaviour can be expressed in many forms, the behaviour can be very volatile and aggressive or just involve talkativeness and the inability to follow rules. These behaviours need to be approached with care and support should be provided for the child, support coming from the class teacher and the parents/ guardians.

2. The Consequences of Challenging Behaviour

Challenging behaviour has a negative impact upon the classroom environment. It disrupts the process of learning and teaching. The participants were mostly concerned with how the behaviour would negatively impact the relationships between children, having damaging effects on them socially. Teachers have also succumbed to blaming themselves for the cause of the inappropriate behaviour, leading to stress and impacting on their confidence in their ability to teach and manage a classroom.

3. Insights into Approaches

Approaching challenging behaviour can be daunting, for the experienced and inexperienced teacher. Many teachers have fallen victim to reacting to a situation negatively, focusing on the behaviour rather than on the child and the help that they are crying out for. Although this inevitably happens, it is important to learn and put positive reinforcement strategies in place. Literature has mentioned many of the strategies that the participants commented on. However, literature does not mention the use of communication diaries, calm corners, using dojo points and target boards together. When using such approaches, parental support was remarked as essential when supporting the child and teaching them how to manage their behaviour. Many of the approaches teachers use can be used within the home setting, helping the child to manage their behaviour in a number of settings.

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings discussed, the researcher puts forward recommendations for practice and policy, while also suggesting potential areas for further research.

Practice Recommendations:

1. S.P.H.E (Social, Personal and Health Education)

S.P.H.E should be considered when informally exploring issues within the classroom. For example, using a method such as a circle time can equip the teacher and children with a safe space to express their views on various issues that arise, behaviour being one of them. By doing this, the child who displays the inappropriate behaviour also has an opportunity to express their

own feelings and together, the whole class can work towards finding a solution.

2. Wellbeing

Children's wellbeing is vital for growing and developing to their full potential. Schools need to invest time in introducing new ways in which to support this, which can be successfully achieved through an increased time spent on S.P.H.E. Incorporating methods such as meditation, mindfulness activities and circle time during S.P.H.E can help to reduce anxiety and stress created by school life. Taking the time out to get involved in these activities can help forge stronger relationships between teachers and their students. Such initiatives should incorporate parental involvement, building the bridge between the home and school community.

3. Professional Development

A survey conducted by the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) found that 'one teacher in four in most countries loses at least 30% of lesson time to disruptive student behaviour' (OECD 2009). Courses need to be provided in the area of managing challenging behaviour and time should be given to teachers to encourage them to take part in such courses.

Policy Recommendations:

The policy that should be maintained to a high standard is the code of behaviour. The guidelines provided by the National Education Welfare Board should be used to enhance the strength of the code of behaviour. This document should be reviewed and updated regularly and accordingly, ensuring that it is acceptable to staff, parents and students.

Further Research:

This research project has looked at challenging behaviour from the perspective of teachers. Further research into this topic could investigate the perspectives of SNAs (Special Needs Assistants) and the perspectives of children observing the behaviour. To enhance further research in this area, it would be beneficial to conduct a case study on a child who experiences challenging behaviour. A case study would provide further in-depth knowledge into how the child feels about their behaviour and how they feel best supported.

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