Hibernia College

Primary Education Papers

Volume 1

Contents

Foreword

The introduction of a research component to initial teacher education (ITE) by the Teaching Council was a welcome enhancement to the Professional Master of Education in Primary Education (PMEP) programme at Hibernia College. Here at Hibernia College, we recognise that conducting research in an educational setting is an important aspect of every educator's professional life in order to improve pedagogy and school practice. Conducting small-scale research in schools can have a profoundly positive impact on student teachers, pupils and the participating school and staff.

On our programme, students complete a 10,000-word dissertation, which forms 10 credits of the assessment of the "Advanced School Experience: Using Evidence-Based Research to Inform Professional Practice" module. Student teachers choose a research topic from four different theme areas: (1) Teaching, learning and Assessment, (2) ICT, (3) Psychological and Sociological and (4) Inclusion and Differentiation. The purpose of the research module is to enable students to work independently and demonstrate the ability to plan, implement and evaluate an empirical investigation that integrates concepts, theories, knowledge and skills central to the curriculum on their programme of study. As well as being supported by the Head of Research throughout this module, students are also assigned a research supervisor, whose role is to provide a support framework and critical analysis of their work as it develops.

This publication provides an overview of the research of some of our PMEP student teachers from the September 2014 cohort. These students were the first group to complete the research module as part of our programme. For many of our students, this was the first research project they had ever completed, and we are delighted to disseminate their work to highlight excellent examples of student research being undertaken on our PMEP programme.

Mary Kelly
Programme Director

Aoife M. Lynam
Head of Research

Meeting the Challenges of Effective Inclusion of SEN Pupils in a Medium Size Non-DEIS Irish Mainstream School, by Seán Burns

Biography

Seán Burns is from Co. Clare. His educational qualifications include a Bachelor of Civil Engineering and Dioplóma sa Ghaeilge. He is a qualified special needs assistant. He graduated from Hibernia College in November 2016 with a Professional Master of Education (PME) in Primary Education. As part of this programme, Seán completed research on "Meeting the Challenges of Effective Inclusion of SEN Pupils in a Medium Size Non-DEIS Irish Mainstream School". He has worked in mainstream and special needs settings. He is currently teaching Rang I in Barefield NS, Ennis, County Clare.

Meeting the Challenges of Effective Inclusion of SEN Pupils in a Medium Size Non-DEIS Irish Mainstream School, by Seán Burns

Research Supervisor: Ms. Kate Stapleton

Abstract

The understanding of mainstream teachers of inclusion as a concept as well as their experiences of including children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) is investigated in a medium-sized non-DEIS band primary school through a series of semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 80% of the mainstream teachers in this school. Data collected was qualitative in nature. The data was examined using thematic analysis, and a number of prominent challenges to inclusion emerged, such as time constraints, role of parents, upskilling and training for teachers, provision of additional resources, reduction in class size and teamwork. The researcher outlined six main recommendations that would benefit mainstream teachers in their efforts to deliver a successful and caring inclusive mainstream classroom environment. Areas for future research have also been identified.

Keywords: Inclusion, special needs, mainstream school, challenges, teacher

Introduction

Children with special needs are increasingly being educated alongside their mainstream peers. It is a practice which, if done correctly, can benefit both the child and society as a whole (Daly, 2014).

There are many positive aspects of teaching in an inclusive setting. Through this study, the researcher sought answers to the following key research questions:

1. What is your understanding of inclusion of special needs pupils in mainstream education?
2. Can you identify the benefits and challenges that inclusion of special needs pupils has brought to your school?
3. Do you think the needs of SEN pupils are being met in mainstream education?
4. What recommendations would you suggest for improving SEN provision in your school?

Literature Review

In Ireland, the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools has been supported by national legislation. The Education Act (1998), the Education (Welfare) Act (2000), the Equal Status Acts (2000 and 2004), the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (2004) and the Disability Act (2005) provide a legislative framework for the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs in

mainstream schools. The Education Act (1998) supports the implementation of an educative structure that is sufficiently flexible to cater for the diversity of needs that children bring to the school setting.

In terms of prevalence, the Irish Primary Principals Network (IPPN) identifies that, in Ireland, an average of 25% to 30% of all primary teachers now work in supporting a pupil or pupils with a diagnosed special education need in mainstream classrooms (IPPN, 2015).

Even though internationally there are many definitions of inclusion, from an Irish perspective, there are no such definitions either in the Education Act (1998) or in the Education for Persons with Special Education Needs Act Ireland (2004). For the purpose of this research, the EPSEN Act (2004) provides that: A child with special educational needs shall be educated in an inclusive environment with children who do not have such needs unless the nature or degree of those needs of the child is such that to do so would be inconsistent with (a) the best interests of the child as determined in accordance with one assessment carried out under this Act or (b) the effective provision of education for children with whom the child is to be educated (Government of Ireland, 2004, p.7).

The researcher was influenced by the research methods and writings of American, English and Irish educational theorists. In America, Richeson undertook a case study approach to researching the effectiveness of inclusion in a public school (cited in Academia, 2015). This research highlighted many unanswered questions with regard to inclusion that need answering in order for inclusive teaching to be effective. In the United Kingdom, the Warnock Report (1978) made significant references with regard to the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools (Nind and Wearmouth, 2005). MacBeath (2006) argues that "physically sitting in a classroom is not inclusion" as children in this situation are not having their educational needs met. Such children are in a setting that is inappropriate for satisfying their educational needs. In relation to inclusion in Ireland, considerable research has been undertaken. Travers et al. (2010) conclude that the remaining sections of the EPSEN Act (2004) should be implemented and that adequate support should be provided to support school adherence to inclusive policy implementation. Callan (2013) argues that inclusion can only be successful if adequate resources and training are provided in order to fully meet the needs of children with special needs. Tilestone et al. (2003) state that "young people with disabilities should be guaranteed not just equal access to mainstream school curricula but equal opportunity to participate in all aspects of school life" (cited in Meegan and MacPhail, 2006, p.27). There is evidence that some teachers have reservations about the effectiveness of inclusion in day-to-day school practice (Shevlin et al., 2013). The Irish Learning Support Teachers Association (ILSA: 2015) note that schools are having some difficulty in meeting the needs of all pupils in an inclusive setting. Woods (2014) questions the integrity of the Department of

Education and Skills in promoting inclusion in the Irish Educational system. This concern is caused by reductions in the allocation of resource teaching hours and in the funding necessary for employment of Special Needs Assistants. In summary, inclusion is about the placing of a pupil with special education needs in a mainstream class allowing his or her full participation in all aspects of school life. Much of the literature highlights difficulties and problems associated with this practice. It is the intention of this research to add additional information to this debate so that recommendations can be made for enhanced inclusivity for SEN pupils in Irish mainstream education.

Methodology

The researcher was influenced by the views of Gordon (2009); Ryan et al. (2009); O'Gorman and Drudy (2011); and Whitehead McIntyre (2012) — all of whom advocate the use of the semi-structured interview method for the collection of qualitative data. They note that the strengths of this interview approach are simplicity and flexibility. This one-on-one semi-structured interview technique chosen by the researcher was appropriate for this research study, as the research was required to generate in-depth discussions based on the types of personal perspectives, stories and experiences that would have been unlikely to be shared in either a focus group or a questionnaire. The research methods used in this research encourage teachers to share their experiences of working with SEN pupils in mainstream classrooms.

The researcher's interview schedule contained a maximum of 10 questions, which were carefully chosen to generate open discussion. All participants gave their informed consent, via a signed written consent letter, to participate and to have their comments recorded. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. The transcript was then given to each interviewee to check that it was a true reflection of the insights and experiences as related by each respondent. This ensured both the validity of the data and interpretations made by the interviewer. The data was analysed using a process of thematic analysis.

Thematic analysis is a method for "identifying, analysing and reporting themes within data" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.79). The researcher utilised the following six phase guide for analysing data, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) in the following table:

STEP	PHASE	DESCRIPTION OF THE PROCESS
1	Familiarise yourself with your data	Transcribing the data, reading and re-reading the data, noting initial ideas
2	Generate initial codes	Code manually using highlighters to indicate potential patterns
3	Searching for themes	Collating codes into potential themes and

		gathering all data relevant to each potential theme
4	Reviewing the themes	Re-read your entire data to ascertain if any additional data has been missed during the earlier coding stages.
5	Defining and naming the themes	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme; Generating clear definitions and names for each theme
6	Producing the report	The analysis must provide a concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive and interesting account of the data, within and across the themes. Extracts need to be embedded within the analytic narrative.

To ensure the validity of this research project, the following measures were taken to offset any researcher's personal bias:

1. The piloting of a semi-structured interview schedule
2. The avoidance of "leading" questions during the interviews
3. The return of transcripts to interviewees to confirm that their views and experiences were accurately represented
4. All the participants in the semi-structured interviews were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality, which enhanced opportunities for them to be open in their responses
5. Every effort was made to ensure objectivity
6. The six phase guide for analysing data, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), was strictly implemented.

The researcher sought to achieve research reliability through achieving a balance between unstructured features such as open-ended questions and rapport with respondents, and thematic analysis. Anastasi (1976) asserts that such an approach can "provide a rich harvest of leads" for future exploration and research (cited in Michelson & Ray, 1996, p.258). Despite measures being undertaken to ensure the reliability and validity of this dissertation, the researcher is also aware of its limitations, such as the small sample size with 12 classroom teachers volunteering to participate in the study.

Results: Answering Key Research Questions
The thematic analysis process, as described above, produced four major themes and a number of sub-themes. These themes and sub-themes can be summarised in an integrative diagram as follows:

Effective Inclusion in a Mainstream School

Understanding of Inclusion

- Curriculum and Differentiation
- Social Participation
- Holistic

Postive Benefits

- Feelings of Acceptance
- Professional Development
- Social Diversity
- Resources

Challenges

- Time Constraints
- Role of Parents
- Continuous Professional Development
- Provision of Additional Resources
- Reduction in Class Size
- Communication and Teamwork

Role of Teacher

Mainstream Teacher

- Differentiation
- Communication
- Facilitation

Support Teacher

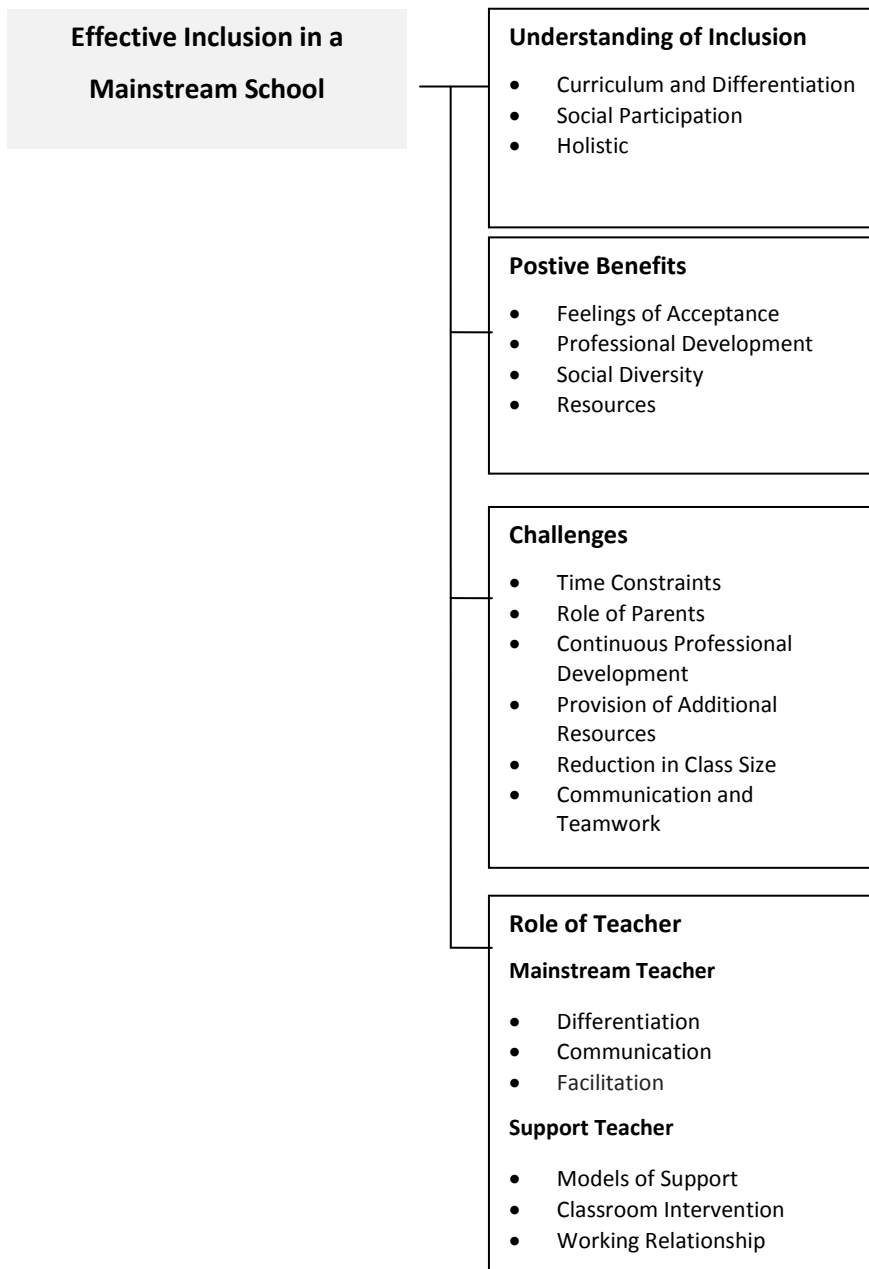- Models of Support
- Classroom Intervention
- Working Relationship

Figure 1: Main Themes and Sub-Themes for Effective Inclusion in a Mainstream School

Understanding of Inclusion

All participants had a deep understanding of inclusion as evidenced in the comments of the participants. These will be outlined in the following sections.

Positive Benefits

Teachers demonstrated a very positive attitude towards inclusion. Teacher K suggests "overall it is positive; children do not see any differences now". Teacher E was enthusiastic in stating that he was a "big fan of it (i.e. inclusion)". This positivity towards inclusion can also be summarised as follows: "inclusion is a great concept, one needs to weigh up its advantages and disadvantages. This concept is one of the strengths of our education system" (Teacher I). Teacher C observes that pupils "get so much by seeing other special needs children. They get to see and experience that not everyone is at their ability; they get to see kids that are say physically disabled or kids that have behavioural needs, more understanding of stuff and others, just more accepting across the board really and then learn that respect for others, that everyone is different and has their own needs." Teacher F asserted that "the teacher becomes a better teacher because you have to work harder to include the children with special needs so your planning has to be better". Teacher G alluded to the fact that "we live in a diverse society and I think our classrooms show that with the amount of diversity in them...everyone is different and everyone has their own needs". Teacher J notes that inclusion of SEN pupils has the advantage of bringing "extra resources, extra staffing and that benefits all the children".

Meeting the Needs of SEN Pupils

Such was the positivity within the school that 75% of the 12 teachers interviewed maintained that the needs of their special needs pupils were being met. The following graph illustrates the teachers' opinions in relation to this data:

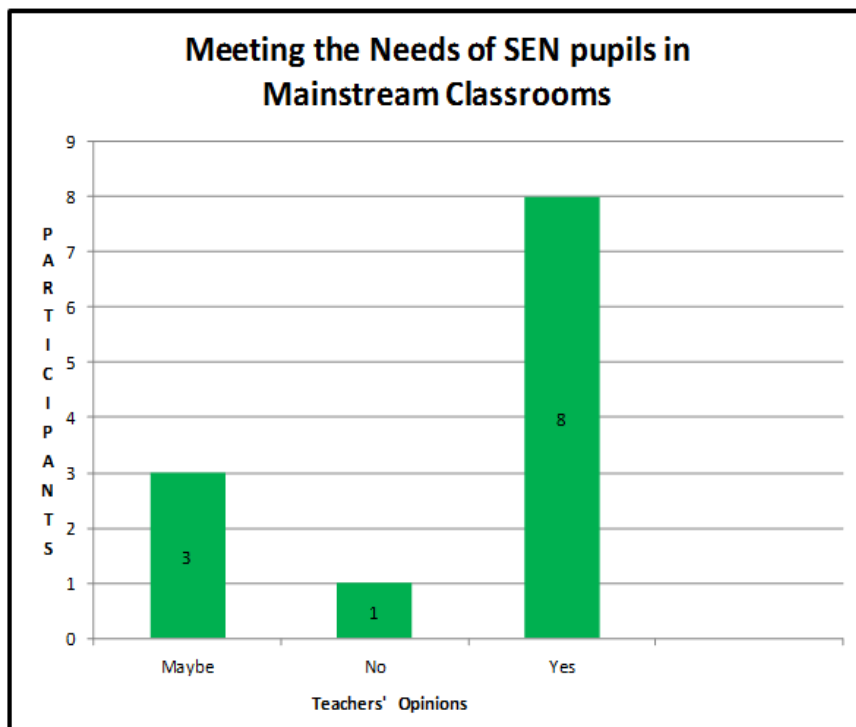## Meeting the Needs of SEN pupils in Mainstream Classrooms

Figure 2: Meeting the Needs of SEN Pupils

While 75% of teachers were positive about the inherent value of inclusion and about meeting the needs of their SEN pupils, the teachers indicated that the following situations were regarded as unsuitable for the inclusion of SEN students in mainstream education:

- When students presented with severe emotional difficulties that could lead to violence
- When the presence of SEN students impacts negatively on the ability of other children to learn

Clearly, different views were expressed with regard to teaching SEN pupils with severe needs, but overall, the teachers' attitudes towards teaching SEN pupils were very positive.

Challenges

Many mainstream teachers experienced challenges with regard to effectively including SEN pupils in their classrooms. In terms of consistency and repetition, as a general overview of all 12 semi-structured interviews, six key challenging themes emerged.

Such challenges imposed difficulties both for the class teacher and for the other pupils in the class. The researcher concludes that the following are the six major challenges, in order of difficulty:

1. Time constraints
2. Role of parents
3. Continuous professional development
4. Additional resources
5. Reduction of class size
6. Communication and teamwork

The six key challenging themes, identified above, will now be further discussed in the following section.

Discussion

Time Constraints

The interviewees argue that inadequate time provision for differentiation, planning and meetings with the support teacher and parents can lead to needs of the SEN child not being satisfactorily serviced. Teacher D proposed that "differentiated text books" be used as a mechanism for coping with teacher time constraints in the classroom. In the modern era with a variety of text books available for primary school children, book publishers should be encouraged to produce differentiated text books that would cater for the different student abilities within a classroom. The availability of differentiated texts would ensure that all students are reading/studying the same theme but SEN students are using a text that is appropriate to their ability level.

Role of Parents

Teachers are of the opinion that there is a need for parents to be educated with regard to their child's educational, behavioural and social goals so that the most appropriate school for their child can be determined. Teacher L highlighted the importance of having an "educated parent" when dealing with the needs of an SEN child, as "an educated parent is crucial for the correct decision" as regards school placement.

Upskilling and Training in Differentiation Methodologies and Special Needs Teaching

In the opinion of Teacher K, "staff are not adequately trained to the needs of the child; you rely on the SNA to help you". Teacher B notes that while she was trained 15 years ago, that "this is all new and learned through guidelines from other staff and staff meetings". This teacher "has (had) no specific training from the Department". This research concludes that the Department of Education and Skills needs to consider co-ordinating and financing a national inclusion training programme for all teachers that would be mandatory and not based on the voluntary good will of teachers.

Provision of Additional Resources

In 2012, the Department of Education and Skills introduced a 15% reduction in resource teaching hours from the 2010 levels, as recommended by the Special Education Review Committee (SERC) report (Cradden, 2014). This reduction impacts negatively on satisfying the needs of SEN children in mainstream education and needs to be reversed as a matter of urgency.

Reduction in Class Size
It is not conducive to inclusion if the class size is too large to meet the needs of both the SEN child and the mainstream child. Teacher D asserted that teachers do not have enough time as "class sizes are quite big to meet the demands of the average child, let alone the SEN child". On average, there are 25 pupils in Irish classes compared to an EU average of 21 pupils per class (INTO, 2015).

Communication and Teamwork
In line with the opinions of teachers in this study, international literature on the pedagogy of teaching for students with disabilities recognises that collaboration and teamwork are essential for ensuring success (Friend and Cook, 2010, cited in Queensland Government, 2011).

Recommendations for Successful Inclusion of SEN Pupils in a Mainstream School
As a result of the above analysis, six key practices need to be considered for implementation by the school to ensure that the educational needs of the child with SEN are in a fully inclusive manner. These are:
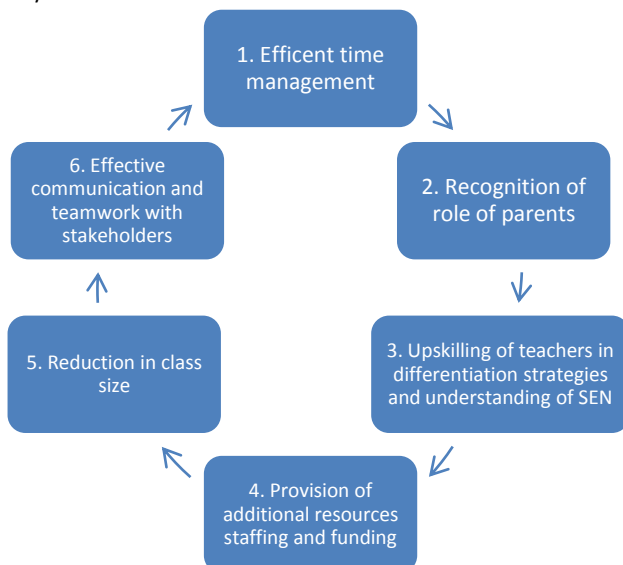

Figure 3: Key Recommendations for SEN Provision in Mainstream Education

Conclusion

This study answered the key research questions as regards inclusivity through eliciting the insights and experiences of mainstream class teachers. Six main recommendations (Figure 3) arose from the findings of this research for improving inclusion within the school. The researcher also identified further research that should be undertaken:

1.   Identifying an appropriate definition of "inclusion"
2.   Recommendations as regards appropriate class sizes for inclusive mainstream classrooms
3.   Exploring the reversal of the 15% reduction in low incidence teaching hours
4.   Broadening SNA role to combine caring for the SEN child and assisting the teacher in educating the child
5.   Educating parents in relation to their SEN child's appropriate school setting
6.   Introduction of compulsory special needs educational training in all training colleges
7.   Immediate implementation of all sections of the EPSEN Act 2004

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Multiple Intelligence Theory: A Critical Examination of its Application in the Classroom in an Irish Context, by Laura Priestley

Biography

Laura Priestley recently completed a Professional Master of Education (PME) in Primary Education. Prior to this, she studied for a Bachelor of Science Degree in Business and Management and, shortly after, began a career in banking. Laura spent four years in banking where she gained valuable work experience. During this time, she coached and trained many new employees. Seeing and helping others succeed reinforced her passion for teaching. The opportunity then arose to spend time in Australia. While working in banking abroad, Laura gained valuable knowledge, interpersonal skills and life experience, which she believes has greatly benefited her on entering the teaching profession.

Multiple Intelligence Theory: A critical examination of its application in the classroom in an Irish context, by Laura Priestley

Research supervisor: Dr Lucie Corcoran

Abstract

Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligence Theory, first published in 1983, has revolutionised our view of intelligence. Gardner (1993) believes that each person has an intelligence profile containing different combinations of all nine intelligences. Some of the intelligences are strong and referred to as strengths, and some are not that well developed and referred to as weaknesses. Gardner's Multiple Intelligences include linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, kinaesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, naturalistic and existential intelligence. The focus of this study is to examine the application of Multiple Intelligence Theory in the classroom in an Irish context.

Introduction

"Standardised tests are used to measure a child's reading and mathematical achievement and to determine children's progress in those areas. Information from the tests is important given the vital role of literacy and numeracy in enabling children to access the full curriculum" (NCCA, 2007, p.60). Literacy and numeracy or linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligence are essential in the classroom; however, should these be the only determinants of a child's intelligence? The intention of this study is to examine teachers' perceptions of intelligence and to explore how these perceptions influence practice in the classroom. This is an important study because the findings will provide insights into an aspect of teaching practice that requires further examination. Furthermore, findings may inform teacher training and practice in classrooms.

Literature Review

"The Primary School Curriculum celebrates the uniqueness of the child, as it is expressed in each child's personality, intelligence and potential for development" (Government of Ireland, 1999, p.6). It is evident from this statement that children are unique; hence, they think and learn in many different ways. Subsequently, teachers are faced with the challenge of teaching children with a diverse range of needs, strengths and abilities. VanSciver (2005, p.534) stated that "teachers are now dealing with a level of academic diversity in their classrooms unheard of just a decade ago". As a result, many educators are now using Howard Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences to help them understand and meet the individual learning styles of

students in their classroom. Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences was first introduced in the 1980s. Prior to this, the traditional view was of a single intelligence measured by the Intelligence Quotient (IQ). For this reason, multiple intelligence theory has greatly impacted the way we view intelligence and it has had profound effects on education, which the researcher will discuss.

Theories of Intelligence

Traditionally, intelligence has been measured through standardised tests, IQ tests or aptitude tests. Alfred Binet, a French psychologist, successfully created the first "intelligence test" known as the IQ test for "intelligence quotient". IQ tests have had the biggest impact on the educational system. Carvin (2004, p.3) states that the "American education is dictated by the student's scores on a battery of intelligence tests, from kindergarten through university". Therefore, one's ability to answer questions on tests of intelligence has determined their level of intelligence, as indicated by the older children in Fry's research (1984). Cowan et al. (2005, p.469) argue that there are "problems with the fact that an intelligence test in a limited time (e.g. an hour) is used to predict outcomes taking much longer (e.g. months or years)". Similarly, Terman (1921, p.131) warned that "we must guard against defining intelligence solely in terms of ability to pass the tests of a given intelligence scale".

Charles Spearman, a British psychologist, provides another view to the concept of intelligence as general intelligence or the "g" factor and specific intelligence the "s" factor. Spearman (1904) used the method of mental ability tests to test his theory, and he concluded that a single general intelligence factor could account for all variables. The psychologist Louis Thurstone (1938) argued with Spearman's concept of general or single intelligence by offering a theory based on seven "primary mental abilities" – verbal comprehension, reasoning, perceptual speed, numerical ability, word fluency, associative memory and spatial visualisation.

Howard Gardner also challenges the traditional or single view of intelligence with his model of multiple intelligences. Gardner's model of multiple intelligences recognises that everyone has different cognitive strengths and that each individual possesses all of the following nine intelligences to a certain degree: logical-mathematical, linguistic, musical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, naturalist and existential intelligence (Gardner, 2006). Robert Sternberg agrees with Gardner's theory that intelligence is not a single or general ability. Sternberg's theory (1997) is based on a triarchic theory of intelligence, intelligence and the internal world (analytical intelligence), intelligence and experience (creative intelligence) and intelligence and the external world (practical intelligence). It is evident that there are different perspectives on what constitutes intelligence; however, having a single factor for what constitutes intelligence in an education system could prove detrimental to those who do not comply with that specific

intelligence. Considering Thurstone's seven primary mental abilities, Sternberg's triarchic theory of intelligence or Gardner's multiple intelligences provides opportunities to cater for the uniqueness of the child through a diverse range of approaches.

Multiple Intelligence Theory in the Classroom

Although Gardner's multiple intelligence theory was not initially designed to be implemented in education (Viadero, 2003), over time, this theory has provided educators with explanations for the different ways that students learn. Traditionally, many schools have an emphasis on teaching through linguistic and logical forms, and intelligence is generally measured by means of standardised testing. In accordance with the multiple intelligence theory, "a student's potential is not the sum of his or her intelligence "scores", as some multiple intelligence inventory measures on the market imply" (Gardner et al., 2006, p.24) and it is essential to allow students to express concepts in multiple ways. Therefore, Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences is very relevant to education as it focuses on the individualisation of the child. Gardner (1993) believes that through education, the intelligence profile can be changed and improved. Multiple intelligence theory can be used as a model of practice in the classroom as it provides opportunities to accommodate the different ways in which students learn and to vary their learning experience accordingly. It also offers the child the realisation that there are many different ways to be "smart". Armstrong (2009) gives simple terms for eight of the multiple intelligences in relation to the classroom, which are as follows: linguistic – word smart, logical-mathematical – number smart, spatial – picture smart, bodily-kinesthetic – body smart, musical – music smart, interpersonal – people smart, intrapersonal – self smart and naturalist – nature smart.

The Role of the Teacher

The teacher plays a vital role in the implementation of multiple intelligences theory as they are responsible for the classroom culture and environment. The teacher must identify students' strengths and provide them with opportunities to use or improve these strengths. Teachers can use students' strengths as a foundation for planning lessons and learning activities in the classroom (Williams, 2002). A great benefit of the multiple intelligence approach to learning is that it encourages the creativity of teachers in developing teaching strategies suitable to multiple intelligences. By tapping into "different intelligences, learners are more likely to experience the curriculum as something that is meaningful, personalised and relevant" (Gouws, 2007, p.64).

There is a variety of ways that the teacher can implement multiple intelligence theory in the classroom. It can be done by means of a learning activity or centre, lesson presentation, lesson planning, grouping students with similar or complementary profiles or by having a focus on career education. Rettig

recommended that teachers should plan their lessons with intelligence or multiple intelligences in mind (Rettig, 2005). However, this is not implying that they need to create nine different activities in accordance with the nine identified intelligences. Instead, they should select a few intelligences to target in a lesson or activity (Moran et al., 2006). Over time, this aims to target all students and also challenge students to learn in a variety of ways.

Upon reviewing all the literature, it is evident that there is extensive research in the field of multiple intelligences. Furthermore, researchers often praise and criticise the theory. The criticism is due to the fact that it is hard to measure and exactly define one's intelligences. The literature suggests that the theory of multiple intelligences can be used to benefit the teacher and learning experience by identifying students' strengths and weaknesses, using a variety of learning styles and differentiating instruction. It is not always possible "for a teacher to accommodate every lesson to all of the learning styles found within the classroom" (Fogarty, 2005, p.13), but it is hoped that over time, through a variety of approaches, the teacher will be able to target the multiple intelligences of the students in the classroom. The curriculum allows for "difference in capacity and in the range of individual intelligence" (Government of Ireland, 1999, p.6); therefore, the application of multiple intelligence theory in the classroom could prove useful to ensure this. Thus, the research questions that this small-scale piece of research set out to explore were:

1. How would a teacher define intelligence?
2. Are teachers aware of their students' intelligence(s), and do they plan their lessons according to their students' type of intelligence?
3. What intelligence perspective is most influential in Irish education?
4. Does the Irish Primary School Curriculum allow teachers the time to plan and cater for all intelligences of children?

Methodology

The purpose of the research project, as defined in the previous section, is essential for determining the method of data collection. The researcher has taken several things into consideration – the effectiveness, feasibility, appropriateness and meaningfulness of the research method to be chosen (Hannes et al., 2015). Patton (2005) describes qualitative research as data analysed directly from observation of real-world settings and in-depth interviews containing open-ended questions. Alternatively, quantitative research methods "tend to emphasise that there is a common reality on which people can agree" (Newman & Benz, 1998). Therefore, in order to achieve the aims of the study, the researcher has chosen qualitative research methods in order to conduct face-to-face in-depth interviews with the research participants. Researchers who use qualitative methods seek a deeper truth (Greenhalgh and Taylor, 1997) and given the nature and aims of this research project, this is deemed the most appropriate approach.

Therefore, the researcher decided that semi-structured interviews with qualified primary school teachers would be most suitable for this study. This provided the researcher with the opportunity to allow participants to elaborate and explain their answers during the interviews. It was critical to ensure that data collection was accurate and systematic during this research. Open-ended questions were used to ensure that the participants were not guided by the researcher. Probing questions were used by the researcher when necessary for the research participants to elaborate on their answers. The interviews conducted were 15–20 minutes to ensure that they were focused and had direction. For this study, research participants were chosen on the basis of their teaching experience to ensure that the data collected reflected a broad range of teaching experience. Purposive sampling ensured that there was a variety of teaching experience among all the participants.

Prior to commencing this study, ethical approval was sought and granted by the Hibernia College Dublin Ethical Committee. Participation relating to the interviews was entirely voluntary. Research participants were given verbal and written information about the study, the aim of the study and the opportunity to discuss and ask questions about the study. "Limitations may include threats to trustworthiness, and a major threat to trustworthiness could be respondents' biases" (Bowen, 2005, p.218) — the researcher gave this careful consideration before conducting interviews in order to avoid bias. As stated by Ritchie and Lewis (2003) the qualitative research method used here attempts to provide a holistic understanding of the research participants' views of intelligence and multiple intelligence theory in the context of their lives overall.

The researcher chose thematic analysis for the data of this study. This involves analysing data and sorting it into categories and "it helps researchers move their analysis from a broad reading of the data towards discovering patterns and developing themes" (Boyatzis, 1998). This chapter detailed the qualitative research method chosen for the study. Through face-to-face semi-structured interviews with primary school teachers, the researcher collected the data.

Results

The researcher asked all participants in this study, "How do you define intelligence?" It quickly became evident from participants' responses that there are various interpretations of what constitutes intelligence, such as knowledge, understanding, interpretation, retention, ability, achievement and creativity. Three out of eight definitions of intelligence made reference to different types of intelligence, such as logical, emotional, social and creative. Therefore, some participants believe that intelligence can be defined by a variety of aspects and not just academic performance. Secondly, the participants were asked what they understand to be the meaning of

"traditional intelligence" or "general intelligence". All participants' definitions of "general intelligence" made reference to mental ability, knowledge and tests.

All participants in this study said they are familiar with Howard Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligence and all agreed that there is more than one type of intelligence amongst students in classrooms in Ireland. The types of intelligence identified were logical, linguistic, kinaesthetic, visual and musical. Participants advised that children show their intelligence through reading, writing, solving problems, and reasoning, through art, social interactions and working collaboratively. It soon became evident from the responses that linguistic and logical intelligence was referred to as most prevalent in Irish education. Four participants stated that linguistic and logical intelligence is the most influential in Irish education. Participant three stated that the "3 r's reading, writing and arithmetic are seen as the most influential in the Irish classroom, "book smart" or "maths smart"". It was clear from the respondents' answers that the linguistic and logical intelligence are most prevalent due to the demands of the Primary School Curriculum.

Five of the eight participants had already made reference to standardised tests when defining "traditional" or "general intelligence", that intelligence is easily measured through standardised tests; however, most stated their disapproval of them as an indicator for a child's intelligence. It was clear from participants' responses and views of standardised tests that they have a very narrow focus. When asked to elaborate on their responses, all participants agreed that standardised tests are just the measure of one form of intelligence on one particular day and, most importantly, that these results can be affected by various factors, such as fatigue, distractions or illness. It is evident from the data that standardised tests should not be used as the only indicator for a child's intelligence.

Seven out of eight participants plan their lessons according to their students' type of intelligences. All participants stated they aim to do so by varying their teaching strategies, approaches, methodologies, tasks and activities. However, a common sub-theme emerged — the challenges faced when doing so. Seven out of eight participants stated that due to time constraints, large amounts of paperwork and an overcrowded curriculum, they do not think the Irish Primary School Curriculum allows teachers the time to plan and cater for all intelligences of children. However, it was noted that through integration or thematic planning, natural links are made which cater for multiple intelligence. In conclusion, it must be noted that all participants agreed that there are multiple types of intelligence in Irish classrooms. It is beneficial to consider these when planning or differentiating instruction; however, there are challenges faced when doing so, such as an overcrowded curriculum and time constraints.

Discussion

The researcher aimed to answer the question "What is Intelligence?" using the data collected and the literature reviewed. Participants in this study were asked how they define intelligence. Three participants made reference to knowledge, applying this knowledge or what they have learned to particular situations or to ultimately achieve a goal. One participant stated it is a person's ability to adapt to a range of new situations. This corresponds with Cowan et al. (2005, p.469) who state "a natural way to define intelligence, the ability to adapt to new situations". Two participants made reference to social intelligence in their definitions, which corresponds with the data from research conducted by Fry (1984) with teachers in the US.

All participants in this study clearly identified that there is more than one type of intelligence in the classroom. This corresponds to the Primary School Curriculum, which allows for "difference in capacity and in the range of individual intelligence" (Government of Ireland, 1999, p.6). Participants in this study firmly reported that one's intelligence should not be solely determined by scores on a test. The responses from participants show a change in how intelligence is perceived and viewed. There has been a clear move by teachers from the traditional view of intelligence, which is only measurable by IQ or standardised tests. Participant two agrees with this through her response, "They should be used carefully as a tool when assessing a child and not as a determining factor". Gardner is also in agreement with this as he claimed that "a student's potential is not the sum of his or her intelligence 'scores'" (Gardner, 2006, p.24). Most participants associated the traditional form of intelligence with school and tests for which they strongly disagreed as being a measure for one's intelligence. Through their negative responses for standardised tests, most participants referred to the narrow focus of these tests.

Half of the participants in this study agreed that linguistic and logical intelligence is the most influential type of intelligence in Irish education. Two participants were uncertain of which intelligence is most prevalent in Irish education. Participant one claimed that a lot of children display kinaesthetic and visual intelligence. The last participant interestingly stated that Irish education places too much emphasis on measured or academic intelligence. Therefore, Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences is very relevant to education as it focuses on the individualisation of the child and not just measured intelligence. This corresponds to the primary curriculum, which celebrates the uniqueness of the child and caters for individual indifference (Government of Ireland, 1999). Gardner (1993) believes that through education, the intelligence profile can be changed and improved.

Reference was made to the significant role of the teacher in the literature review chapter. Teachers can use their students' strengths as a foundation for planning lessons and learning activities in the classroom (Williams, 2002). Seven out of eight participants in this study said they plan their lessons according to their students'

intelligence. One participant said they do not plan according to their students' intelligence type; however, she stated that it is your duty as a teacher to use a broad range of instruction and methodologies while teaching — thus catering for students' different strengths and intelligence types. Further parallels with the literature are evident through participants' responses. Gouws states that by tapping into "different intelligences, learners are more likely to experience the curriculum as something that is meaningful, personalised and relevant" (Gouws, 2007, p.64).

Teachers' perceptions and definitions of intelligence were outlined in this chapter. Teachers are aware of their students' intelligences and of the benefits of planning according to these. The data indicates that linguistic and logical intelligence is most prevalent in Irish Education. The Irish Primary School Curriculum does not allow teachers the time to plan and cater for all intelligences of children. However, through integration, thematic planning and varying methodologies, intelligences can naturally be catered for.

Conclusion

The data suggests ways in which teachers can cater for multiple intelligences. These include thematic planning, integration, differentiating instruction and varying teaching strategies and methodologies — thus, reaching more children and engaging them in the learning process. As stated in the curriculum, we must cater for the uniqueness of the child and take into account individual difference (Government of Ireland, 1999). Subsequently, planning and catering for all intelligences of children is beneficial in this process. As the literature and data suggests, the teacher plays a vital role in the application of multiple intelligence theory in the classroom. The teacher must identify students' strengths and provide them with opportunities to use or improve these strengths. As educators, we take the possibility of Multiple Intelligence Theory into account more often than not, as it ultimately helps us to see that all students are capable of success.

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Beatha Teanga í a Labhairt: Measúnú ar Shealbhú agus ar Labhairt na Gaeilge i Ranganna na Naíonán i nGaelscoileanna, le Clíona Frost

Beathaisnéis

Tógadh Clíona Frost le Gaeilge agus Béarla mar theangacha baile agus d'fhreastail sí ar Scoil Lorcáin, Baile na Manach. Bhain sí amach céim BA sa Léann Daonna (Gaeilge agus Fraincis) ó Ollscoil Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath. Chaith Clíona breis agus deich mbliana ag saothrú i ngort na luathbhlianta Gaeilge, ag forbairt seirbhísí agus acmhainní, ag soláthar oiliúna agus ag stocaireacht ar son na hearnála. Thug sí faoin gcúrsa PMEP le Coláiste Hibernia agus anois is múinteoir gaelscoile í, lonnaithe i mBaile Átha Cliath.

Beatha Teanga í a Labhairt: Measúnú ar shealbhú agus ar labhairt na Gaeilge i ranganna na naíonán i nGaelscoileanna, le Clíona Frost

Stiúrthóir Taighde: Mr Art Ó Suilleabháin

Coimriú
Is í príomhaidhm an taighde seo léargas a thabhairt ar na cleachtais reatha i ranganna naíonán i ngaelscoileanna maidir le teanga labhartha na ndaltaí sa sprioctheanga, .i., an Ghaeilge.

Mar thoradh ar an méadú ar líon na ngaelscoileanna, tá níos mó páistí ná riamh ag sealbhú na teanga agus ag tabhairt faoin gcumarsáid i dteanga nua ó thús a saol scoile. Tá an taighde seo préamhaithe go daingean i dteoiricí Bronfenbrenner (múnla éiceolaíoch ar fhorbairt an duine) agus Vygotsky (zón neasfhorbartha). Bronnadh cead eitice ar an taighdeoir agus ansin rinneadh teagmháil leis na príomhoidí agus na rannpháirtithe sa dá ghaelscoil a bhí roghnaithe. Cuireadh seachtar faoi agallamh aonarach agus baineadh leas as ábhar na n-agallamh sin chun an cheist taighde a phlé agus a scagadh go mion. Is léir go bhfuil obair mhór idir lámha sa dá ghaelscoil seo agus iad ag cur teanga labhartha na Gaeilge chun cinn ar bhonn laethúil.

Eochairfhocail: An Ghaeilge, gaelscoil, tumoideachas, sealbhú, measúnú

Réamhrá
Déanann an taighde reatha, préamhaithe i dteoiric Bronfenbrenner agus Vygotsky cur síos ar na cuir chuige agus ar na modheolaíochtaí éagsúla atá i bhfeidhm ag múinteoirí i ranganna na naíonán chun tacú le sealbhú na Gaeilge, tuairimí na múinteoirí ar éifeacht na gcur chuige agus a dtionchair ar an sealbhú teanga. Tá neart taighde déanta go hidirnáisiúnta agus anseo in Éirinn ar cheist an tumoideachais (Baker (2011), Cummins (1998), Harris (2007) agus Ó hAiniféin (2007)). Baintear leas as ocht bpríomhthréith an tumoideachais (Ó hAiniféin, 2007) a chuimsíonn na múnlaí uile a fheictear i ngaelscoileanna fud fad na tíre. Tá bealaí le tabhairt faoin measúnú sa luathoideachas aitheanta in *Aistear* (CNCM, 2009) agus luíonn siad go maith leis an sealbhú agus foghlaim teanga a tharlaíonn i ranganna naíonán i ngaelscoileanna. Pléitear na comharthaí cumais don Ghaeilge labhartha leagtha amach ag Déiseach (2001) agus na moltaí a dhéanann sí maidir le saibhriú teanga labhartha na ndaltaí. Is í seo mórcheist an taighde seo: Conas mar a thugann múinteoirí na naíonán faoi mheasúnú ar shealbhú Gaeilge labhartha na ndaltaí i ngaelscoileanna?

Vygotsky agus an Zón Neasfhorbartha
Nuair a luann Vygotsky (1978) an téarma "the zone of proximal development" (an zón neasfhorbartha), an rud atá i gceist aige ná an difríocht idir an méid gur féidir le páiste

a bhaint amach leis féin agus an méid gur féidir a bhaint amach le treoir agus tacaíocht duine eile a bhfuil scileanna níos airde aige. Cruthaíonn an duine eile creat tacaíochta nó scafall don pháiste chun an dul chun cinn a éascú agus an deis a thabhairt dó scil/eolas nua a fhorbairt.

Deir Mhic Mhathúna (2011) go dtagann fás agus dul chun cinn ar pháistí nuair a úsáideann siad an sprioctheanga agus iad ag súgradh - "foghlaimíonn siad nithe nua dá bharr" (Mhic Mhathúna, 2011, lch. 25), .i. go mbíonn siad ag gníomhú sa zón neasfhorbartha. Labhraíonn Lucero (2014) faoin gcreat tacaíochta teangeolaíoch a chuidíonn leis an bpáiste an teanga a labhairt, trí thacaíocht fhreagrach agus aireach ar an bhfoghlaim, a sholáthraíonn an múinteoir. Tacaíonn an cur chuige seo, an fhorbairt sa zón neasfhorbartha, leis an bhforbairt ar theanga neamhfhoirmiúil, laethúil a chloistear anuas ar an sprioctheanga acadúil sa seomra ranga.

Bronfenbrenner agus an tSamhail Bhith-Éiceolaíoch

De réir na hoibre déanta ag Bronfenbrenner (1979) ar mhúnla éiceolaíoch ar fhorbairt an duine, tá tionchar an-suntasach ag timpeallachtaí an pháiste agus ag an scáth a chaitheann imeacht ama ar fhorbairt iomlán an pháiste agus ar conas mar a fhoghlaimíonn an páiste. Tugann Bronfenbrenner (1979) le fios go bhfuil an t-idirchaidreamh idir an duine, an timpeallacht agus cúrsaí ama mar bhunús leis an gcreat agus gur comh-mhaireachtáil agus comhoibriú idir na nithe seo ar fad a chinntíonn an dul chun cinn.

Measann O'Toole, Hayes agus Mhic Mhathúna (2014) go dtugann an creat teoiriciúil seo cead dúinn súil a chaitheamh ar shaol an pháiste ar leibhéil éagsúla agus go bhfuil tionchar aige ar an saol sin.

An Curaclam Bunscoile

Foilsíodh *Curaclam na Bunscoile* i 1999 agus tugann an curaclam tús áite do ról na Gaeilge i saol na scoile agus luann sé toradh sonrach di – chun féiniúlacht agus cultúr dúchasach an pháiste "a shainmhíniú agus a chur in iúl" (Rialtas na hÉireann, 1999, lch. 27) móide feasacht ar chumarsáid a dhéanamh sa Ghaeilge. Tá ról eile luaite sa churaclam do scoileanna Gaeltachta agus scoileanna lán-Ghaeilge - tacú leis na páistí ar fad "máistreacht ….ar an nGaeilge" (Rialtas na hÉireann, 1999, lch. 43) a bhaint amach.

Creideann Coady agus Ó Laoire (2002) go bhfuil deacracht bhunúsach leis an gcuraclam maidir le múineadh na Gaeilge agus múineadh trí mheán na Gaeilge mar nach bhfuil aitheantas tugtha do na difríochtaí agus dúshláin oideolaíochta a bhaineann leis an dá rud.

An Tumoideachas

Ó lár an chéid seo caite, tá clú agus cáil ar an tumoideachas mar mhúnla leis an dara teanga a shealbhú i suíomh scoile. Bhronn Johnson agus Swain (1997) ocht

bpríomhthréith a thugann tuiscint an-bheacht dúinn ar an tumoideachas, agus bhain Ó hAiniféin (2007) leas as na tréithe seo ina thaighde freisin. Is mar seo a cuireadh leagan Gaeilge ar fáil:

1. An T2 (Gaeilge sa chás seo) teanga teagaisc na scoile.
2. Leanann an curaclam tumoideachais an gnáthchuraclam T1.
3. Tá tacaíocht láidir do T1 an dalta. Tugann tuismitheoirí, oidí agus an pobal iomlán an tacaíocht seo.
4. Is dátheangachas suimíoch atá mar aidhm ag an gclár.
5. Is sa seomra ranga don chuid is mó a théann daltaí i ngleic leis an sprioctheanga.
6. Tosnaíonn na daltaí sa chóras leis an leibhéal cumais céanna sa sprioctheanga nó gar dó.
7. Bíonn na múinteoirí dátheangach.
8. Is scáthán den chultúr logánta atá sa seomra ranga (Ó hAiniféin, 2007, lch.10)

Deir Cummins (1998) linn nach foláir don mhúinteoir deiseanna a thabhairt do dhaltaí an sprioctheanga a úsáid mar ghnáth-theanga chumarsáide. Ardaíonn Hickey (2001) ceisteanna faoi mhúineadh na sprioctheanga agus faoin tionchar a imríonn an t-idirtheangachas ar chainteoirí dúchasacha na Breatnaise. Molann sí an gá atá leis na hacmhainní cuí ionas gur féidir tabhairt faoi mhúineadh ar leith le cainteoirí dúchasacha chomh maith le tacaíocht a thabhairt do na foghlaimeoirí sa seomra ranga. Creideann Mac Corraidh (2008) go bhfuil sé de dhualgas ar mhúinteoir gaelscoile "bheith ag caint níos mó agus níos minice ná a chomhghleacaí in earnáil an Bhéarla" (Mac Corraidh, 2008, lch. 5). I measc na nod a thugann sé, tá: eispéiris choincréiteacha a sholáthar, pleanáil a dhéanamh do theanga na gceachtanna agus do theanga cumarsáide le linn na gceachtanna, straitéisí míniúcháin, parafrásáil agus simpliú a fhorbairt, agus an Ghaeilge neamhfhoirmiúil a chur chun cinn i gcónaí. De réir *Curaclam na Bunscoile* (Rialtas na hÉireann, 1999), tá tábhacht ar leith leis an teanga labhartha chun tuiscint agus cumas na ndaltaí a fhorbairt ar bhealach comhtháite. Leagtar béim ar an gcaint mar bhunstraitéis i ngach uile cheacht ábhar curaclaim i ngaelscoileanna.

Ina halt *Arís is arís eile,* deir Mhic Mhathúna (2010) "gur féidir leas tairbheach a bhaint as scéalta" (Mhic Mhathúna, 2010, lch. 39) agus molann sí an mhodheolaíocht mar uirlis leis an nGaeilge a shealbhú agus a spreagadh. Leagann Ellis agus Brewster (2014) béim ar an scéalaíocht agus ar leabhair mar phointe tosaigh do ghníomhaíochtaí foghlama teanga. Meabhraíonn Shiel, Creagan, McGough agus Archer (2012) dúinn go bhfuil cúig bhealach le tabhairt faoin measúnú i gcomhthéacs teanga labhartha: "(i) féinmheasúnú, (ii) comhráite, (iii) breathnóireacht, (iv) tascanna sa suíomh agus (v) tástáil" (CNCM, 2009, lch. 106). Is den riachtanas é go gcinnteoidh múinteoirí go bhfuil measúnú idir lámha ar dhul chun cinn teanga na ndaltaí i ranganna na naíonán, chun aon mhíthuiscint a sheachaint agus brú a chur ar chumarsáid sa sprioctheanga (Ó

Duibhir agus Cummins, 2012). Creideann Déiseach (2001) go bhfuil féidearthachtaí ann maidir le próifíl a fhorbairt ar inniúlachtaí teangeolaíochta i seomra ranga na naíonán Gaelscoile. Maidir leis an measúnú neamhfhoirmiúil, molann Déiseach (2001) go gcuirfí "líofacht, blas, cruinneas agus saibhreas teanga" (Déiseach, 2001, lch. 212) san áireamh. Mar sin, d'eascair na ceisteanna taighde thíos as an léitheoireacht a rinneadh ar an litríocht:

1. Conas mar a thugann múinteoirí na naíonán faoi mheasúnú ar shealbhú Gaeilge labhartha na ndaltaí i ngaelscoileanna?
2. Cad iad na cleachtais reatha i ranganna naíonán gaelscoileanna maidir le measúnú ar labhairt na sprioctheanga?
3. An bhfuil uirlis mheasúnaithe ar leith, dírithe ar shealbhú Gaeilge labhartha, de dhíth i ngaelscoileanna?

Modheolaíocht

Tá an taighde seo bunaithe ar eolas a bhailiú, a chíoradh agus a anailísiú ó ghrúpa beag múinteoirí naíonán i ngaelscoileanna maidir leis an sealbhú/saibhriú teanga a thugann siad faoi deara sa seomra ranga. Is taighde tuairisciúil atá anseo, áit a ndéantar plé agus anailís ar fhreagraí ó phríomhoidí agus múinteoirí naíonán gaelscoileanna ar pholasaithe atá i bhfeidhm agus ar chleachtais atá faoi réim sna scoileanna sin maidir le teanga labhartha na bpáistí. De bharr théama agus réimse an taighde seo, luigh sé le réasún go mbeadh an obair fréamhaithe in obair na múinteoirí naíonán i nGaelscoileanna. Úsáidtear cásanna staidéir, de réir Yin (2004), chun fianaise thurgnamhach a bhailiú, agus a anailísiú ar mhaithe le ceist taighde ar leith. Dhá chás staidéir atá sa taighde seo. Rinneadh plé ar an dá chás ag baint úsáide as an modh plé comhtháite tras-chásanna (Yin, 2004, lch xii) seachas díriú go mion ar gach cás ar leith.

Braitear ar fhéintuairisc na múinteoirí atá faoi agallamh chun patrúin ghinearálaithe a aithint (Niaz, 2007). Is léir gur tuairiscí suibiachtúla, bunaithe ar thuiscintí na múinteoirí féin ar an teoiric atá ann, agus go bhféadfadh tuairimí frithráiteacha a bheith ann, agus iad ag tagairt don scoil nó don chomhthéacs céanna. Is ar mhaithe leis na heasnaimh a sheachaint a tugadh faoi thaighde modhanna measctha, .i. taighde cainníochtúil agus cáilíochtúil. Tá an modh taighde seo bunaithe ar anailís a dhéanamh ar ráitis na rannpháirtithe agus tuiscint agus brí a chur orthu trí phriosma na dteoiricí roghnaithe.

Is sampla beag atá idir lámha ag an taighdeoir – dhá Ghaelscoil i mBaile Átha Cliath. Is cinnte nach raibh an sampla seo ionadaíoch ar mhúinteoirí Gaelscoileanna timpeall na tíre, ach creideadh go mbeadh eolas na rannpháirtithe leordhóthanach le ginearálú agus tuiscintí a bhaint amach.

Seoladh ceistneoir chuig na príomhoidí maidir leis an scoil féin, an polasaí tumoideachais sa scoil, conas mar a chuirtear sin i bhfeidhm agus faoin tionchar a imríonn sin ar Ghaeilge dhaltaí uile na scoile. Is eolas cainníochtúil a bailíodh ó na ceistneoirí seo, a thugann spléachadh ar staid reatha na scoileanna seo. Múinteoirí

naíonán a cuireadh faoi agallamh leathstrúchtúrtha. Cuireadh ceisteanna orthu faoin a gcleachtais ranga i dtaobh thacaithe le sealbhú agus saibhriú Gaeilge na bpáistí, an tuiscint atá acu ar an múnla tumoideachais scoile agus conas mar a dhéanann siad meastóireacht ar an dul chun cinn. Mar chuid den agallamh lorgaíodh moltaí maidir le tacaíochtaí breise a bheadh inúsáidte sa seomra ranga.

Torthaí agus Anailís

Is gaelscoileanna fadbhunaithe lonnaithe i mBaile Átha Cliath iad an dá ghaelscoil seo, bunaithe le breis agus 25 bliain, le dlúthnascanna ina gceantar agus liostaí feithimh acu. Is scoileanna lán-Ghaelacha atá iontu, le héiteas Caitliceach. Leagtar béim ar chuile ghné de chultúr na hÉireann sa dá scoil, idir chluichí an Chumainn Lúthchleas Gael, rince Gaelach, cheol traidisiúnta agus bhród as oidhreacht na scoileanna. Líon múinteoirí sa scoil:

	Scoil A	Scoil B
Líon múinteoirí	22	11

Tá foireann de 22 i Scoil A a chuimsíonn na múinteoirí tacaíochta foghlama, múinteoirí acmhainne agus múinteoirí ranga. I Scoil B tá foireann de 11 múinteoir, múinteoirí acmhainne agus tacaíochta foghlama san áireamh.

Polasaí na Gaeilge

- Scoil A: Is polasaí tumoideachais atá i bhfeidhm, .i. ní thosaítear ar mhúineadh an Bhéarla go dtí i ndiaidh na Samhna sa dara bliain ar scoil.
- Scoil B: Deir Scoil B nach bhfuil an tumoideachas iomlán i bhfeidhm sa scoil. Tosaítear ar mhúineadh na teanga baile, .i. an Béarla den chuid is mó, sa dara téarma i ranganna na naíonán, sin le rá an téarma i ndiaidh na Nollag sna Naíonáin Bheaga.

Eolas faoi na múinteoirí

Tugadh cuireadh chun agallaimh do ochtar san iomlán – seisear múinteoirí ranga, múinteoir tacaíochta foghlama amháin agus cúntóir riachtanais speisialta amháin. Sa deireadh d'éirigh leis an taighdeoir bualadh le seachtar – ráta freagartha de 87.5%. Nuair a cuireadh an cheist maidir le tionchar na timpeallachta ar shealbhú Gaeilge na bpáistí úsáideadh focail ar nós "fonn labhartha" (SA2M3, 2016), "nádúrtha" (SA2M5, 2016) agus "dúthracht na bpáistí" (SA2M8, 2016) le linn na n-agallamh chun cur síos a dhéanamh ar an iarracht sin. Sa léaráid thíos, feicimid na focail agus téarmaí a d'úsáid na hagallaithe ar an ábhar seo.

Nocht na hagallaithe roinnt mhaith tuairimí dearfacha faoin gcuraclam Gaeilge, ina measc go bhfuil sé "leathan…..éifeachtach" (SA2M2, 2016), "an-dhúshlánach….. go leor cuspóirí" (SA2M3, 2016), "dúshlánach" (SA2M10, 2016) agus "an-leathan". Sin ráite rinneadh cáineadh ar an gcuraclam chomh maith, ach go háirithe maidir leis an gcumarsáid, "níl béim ar chomhrá ná ar chumarsáid" (SA2M3, 2016) agus nach bhfuil sé in oiriúint do scoileanna lán-Ghaeilge. Dúirt duine eile go raibh gá le "modhanna nua-aimseartha" (SA2M2, 2016) le go mbeadh éifeacht ag an gcuraclam.

Dar le agallaí SA2M4, faoin am a shroicheann siad Naíonáin Shinsearacha tá "muinín acu abairt iomlán a chur le chéile" (SA2M4, 2016) agus iad i mbun chomhrá le chéile. Tuairiscíonn roinnt múinteoirí go mbíonn athrá agus cleachtadh ar an teanga cheart ar siúl go minic agus an múinteoir i mbun cainte don chuid is mó.

Measúnú agus Pleanáil
Léiríonn na torthaí taighde go mbíonn na rannpháirtithe de shíor i mbun na hoibre seo, ag "nótáil cá bhfuil na páistí agus pleanáil" (SA2M4, 2016). Pléadh na comharthaí cumas atá leagtha amach ag Ó Siadhail agus Déiseach (2004) agus aontaíodh go raibh siad úsáideach mar threoir agus go mbeadh gach dalta sa rang san áireamh, ach ardaíodh ceist faoi conas tabhairt faoina a n-úsáid agus an mbeadh aon nasc le *Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile* (An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna, 2015). Tugtar faoin gcomhrá go laethúil sna ranganna ar fad idir obair bheirte, chluichí, léitheoireacht agus athrá (SA2M3, 2016 agus SA2M8, 2016).

Ábhar agus cláir teanga
Tugadh ardmholadh do na cláir teanga ach d'aontaigh formhór na rannpháirtithe go raibh dúshláin agus deacrachtaí leo ar fad (SA2M5). Pléadh dhá chlár ar leith, *Séideán Sí* (2003), agus *Bua na Cainte* (2015). Den chuid is mó nocht na rannpháirtithe go raibh

siad sásta le *Séideán Sí* (2003) mar bhun ábhar agus saibhreas teanga ann. Tugann an léaráid thíos spléachadh ar na tuairimí a léiríodh le linn na n-agallamh:
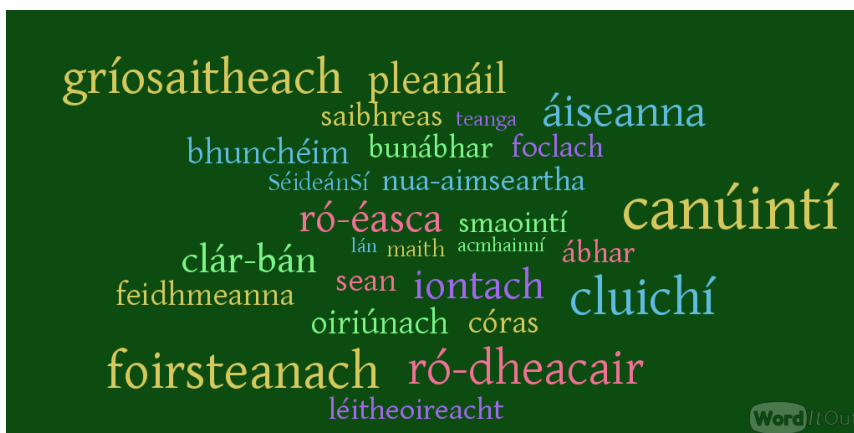
Conclúid

Meabhraíonn rannpháirtí amháin dúinn go bhfuil "gach cineál foghlaimeoir sa rang" (SA2M3, 2016) agus mar sin go bhfuil dualgas orainn a chinntiú go mbíonn na deiseanna céanna ag gach dalta an Ghaeilge a shealbhú ina bhealach féin. Le blianta beaga anuas tá an Chomhairle Náisiúnta Churaclam agus Measúnachta (CNCM) ag obair ar churaclam teanga nua, *Curaclam Teanga Bunscoile* (CTB) (An Roinn Oideachas agus Scileanna, 2015), agus foilsíodh é ag deireadh 2015. Tógann an CTB ar phrionsabail *Curaclam na Bunscoile* (Rialtas na hÉireann, 1999) agus ar na prionsabail ar a bhfuil *Aistear, Creatchuraclam don Luath-Óige* (CNCM, 2009) préamhaithe. Anseo thíos tá moltaí a tháinig chun cinn le linn agus mar thoradh ar an taighde reatha: CTB – oiliúint a thairiscint i ngach ceantar agus do gach múinteoir bunscoile ar an gcuraclam nua. Ní raibh na rannpháirtithe sa taighde seo ar an eolas faoi in aon chor. Seicliosta/teimpléad le taifead a choimeád ar dhul chun cinn teanga labhartha na ndaltaí, bunaithe ar an obair atá déanta ag Ó Siadhail agus Déiseach (2004) agus an CTB (Roinn Oideachas agus Scileanna, 2015). Oiliúint ghairmiúil a sholáthar do mhúinteoirí ar conas tabhairt faoi mheasúnú teanga labhartha na ndaltaí. Tháinig roinnt nithe eile chun cinn le linn an taighde a chuirfeadh go mór le réimse léinn na gaelscolaíochta: Na baic/dúshláin a chuirtear ar thuismitheoirí leis an nGaeilge a labhairt lena bpáistí. An staid reatha maidir le hoiliúint ghairmiúil – idir oiliúint réamhsheirbhíse agus inseirbhíse – ar mhúineadh agus ar shealbhú na dara teanga.

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Physical Education in Irish Primary Schools: Exploring the Factors that Affect Pupil Participation, by Karen Dunne

Biography

Karen Dunne is a primary school teacher and is currently teaching 1st and 2nd Class. She recently graduated from Hibernia College, Dublin, with a First Class Honours in a Professional Master of Education (Primary). She also holds a Bachelor of Arts in Humanities from St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, where she studied Geography and Mathematics. Karen has an academic interest in physical education, which stems from her involvement in sport. She is an avid athlete and her main event is the heptathlon although she participates in other individual disciplines not limited to those included in the heptathlon. She has won several national titles including the National U/23 400 m Hurdles title in 2016 and won the National Senior Heptathlon title in 2014 and 2015. Therefore, a personal and professional interest provided a motivation for this study. A question posed by a child provided a catalyst to explore children's level of engagement during PE. During her first school placement, the child asked, "When are we doing something fun?" towards the end of a PE lesson. As physical education is not a classroom-based subject, Karen decided to explore what factors, if any, influence children's participation in lessons.

Physical Education in Irish Primary Schools: Exploring the factors that affect pupil participation, by Karen Dunne

<u>Research supervisor</u>: Mr Barry Moyles

<u>Abstract</u>
The aim of this research sought to investigate factors, if any, that affected children's participation and engagement in Physical Education lessons. A mixed-mode methodology was utilised, incorporating semi-structured interviews and a questionnaire distributed to children in three different school contexts in 3rd to 6th Classes. All children who participated in this research liked and enjoyed PE, and many of these children engaged in sports outside school. Results indicated that inclusion; activities, teachers' ability and resources influenced children's engagement and participation in PE. Children's engagement with PE was found to increase simultaneously when there was time to run around; fun; opportunity to interact with peers or friends; group activities and playing games.

<u>Key words</u>: Physical education, fun, children, participation, engagement

<u>Introduction</u>
Physical Education (PE) is one of twelve subjects in the Irish Primary School Curriculum. It is mainly concerned with movement and engagement with activities that are an integral part of the educational process, which distinguishes it from other curricular areas. One of the key aims of the PE curriculum is to provide children with the knowledge, skills and attitudes to enable them to lead full, active and healthy lives. However, amidst a society with an increasingly sedentary lifestyle, this aim is becoming harder to achieve. This research set out to examine what factors, if any, affect children's participation in PE as there has been limited research on children's participation in PE in Irish Primary Schools.

<u>Literature Review</u>
Importance and Benefit of Physical Education
Physical Education (PE) has been noted as a key factor in children's physical activity participation. It is through a school-based PE programme that children first experience structured sport and physical activity and form the foundation for future sporting and physical activity participation. The curricular area of PE contributes to the holistic development of the child as without it, the NCCA suggest, the education of a child would be incomplete (1999a).

The important role of PE has also been highlighted with the recent marked increase in the prevalence of childhood obesity worldwide. In Ireland, currently more

than 20% of children are overweight or obese (Heinen et al., 2014). Unpublished estimates from the WHO suggest Ireland is set to become the most overweight and obese country in Europe by 2030 as "the proportion of obese and overweight men in Ireland is projected to rise to 89 per cent with a corresponding 85 per cent of women falling into this category" (Flaherty, 2015). Okely, Booth and Patterson state "that fostering enjoyment of, and participation in, physical activity during childhood and adolescence may contribute to an increased prevalence of participation in the adult population" (2001, p.1899). With well-being and health benefits in mind, it is paramount that schools provide and ensure that every child participates in physical activity as a method to counteract these trends towards obesity and inactive behaviours in children (Morgan and Hansen, 2008; Wood and Hall, 2015). Ironically, research by Fahey, Delaney and Gannon found that children's participation in extra-curricular activities outside of school is greater than in PE or in extra-curricular sport within school where only 12% of children never participate in sports outside school, which is considerably lower than the 25% of primary pupils who never participate in extra-curricular sport inside school (2005, p.58). Furthermore, children from lower socio-economic backgrounds are much less likely to participate in non-school activity such as sport and physical activity in the community than children from higher socio-economic backgrounds (Woods et al., 2010).

Access to Physical Education
All children are entitled to access to all areas of the PE curriculum, although it is noted that teachers acknowledge "that children have different physical attributes and strengths" and therefore "different approaches to individual and group activities and different motivations" are needed depending on the activity/sport (INTO, 2007, p.12). While children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) are being differentiated for and included in mainstream classrooms, barriers to a full educational experience still exist. The barriers include a lack of facilities, reluctance by PE teachers to accept responsibility for a pupil with a disability, transport difficulties and, most of all, attitudes. Research has shown that teachers do not feel adequately able to accommodate children with SEN in PE lessons (Crawford, 2011; INTO, 2007; Meegan and MacPhail, 2006).

Extrinsic and Intrinsic Motivation for Participation in PE
Research has established that both children and teachers rate fun and enjoyment as a priority for PE and are important factors for participation (Garn and Cothran, 2006; Tannehill and Zakrajsek, 1993). The opportunity to be part of a team has also been linked to increasing participation (Garn and Cothran, 2006; MacPhail et al., 2008). Research by Garn and Cothran (2006) noted that personal competency and achievement influenced children's choice on most and least fun activities in PE.

Teacher ability and resources/facilities

Despite research highlighting the potential benefits of PE, the successful delivery or effectiveness of any curriculum area in primary schools may be limited by those responsible for its delivery. Major inhibitors to children's participation include lack of time, expertise, interest and resources (INTO, 2007). In Ireland, generally, PE is taught by the class teacher and, consequently, it is considered that primary teachers are poorly equipped to teach PE (Morgan and Hansen, 2008). Children's participation can be influenced through the teacher-child relationship and the teacher's own interests by encouraging and providing opportunities to be physically active and instilling the belief that there is a positive relationship between activity and health (Garn and Cothran, 2006; Kirk, 2006; Lewis, 2014). Further barriers to provision of quality PE include unsuitable facilities and a lack of equipment and resources. Following review of the literature outlined above, the following three research questions emerged to underpin the current research. They are:

1. What do teachers and children see as the benefits and weaknesses of Physical Education and what changes are required?
2. Are children extrinsically or intrinsically motivated to participate in PE?
3. Does partaking in sport outside of school affect children's participation in PE? If so, is it across each of the strands or specifically in relation to their "favourite" sport(s)?

Methodology

Research Design

A mixed-method methodology approach was utilised during the research. The qualitative data provided an indication of what the problems/issues were and a range of reasons for these whilst numerical data provided an indication of the extent of the problems.

Population, Sample and Participants

Children from 3rd to 6th Class were selected in three different school contexts: a rural school, a DEIS (Band 2) school and an urban school. This study was approved by the Hibernia College Ethics Committee and informed consent was sought from the school principals, the children's parents/guardians and each individual child. The research operated under the procedure of opt-in.

Not all children were eligible to participate as the researcher implemented inclusion criteria which all participants had to adhere to partake in the research. The final number of children who participated in the research was 55 — 26 boys and 29 girls. After removal of participants whose data was incomplete, the questionnaire completion rate was 85.5% yielding a total sample of n=47. A total of four interviews took place with two female and two male teachers.

Methods of Data Collection
Prior to the collection of data, the researcher conducted a pilot of the children's questionnaire and teacher interview to evaluate their effectiveness for data collection purposes.

Quantitative
Questionnaires were used to collect general information from children about their sporting interests and investigate aspects pertaining to PE. Several close-ended and rank-order questions were used to ensure consistency in responses across the spectrum of participants. As the number of children surveyed was small, the inclusion of a descriptive qualitative approach in the questionnaire was deemed suitable for a more holistic view of children's response to PE. Several open-ended questions were included, which also allowed freedom in responses.

Qualitative
To ensure the study was conducted with rigour, a further data collection method was used to triangulate the data and achieve a higher degree of validity and relatability of the results. Semi-structured interviews were selected with the class teachers to collaborate, enhance and provide a different viewpoint to the initial children's questionnaire data. The interviews were conducted at a time that suited the class teacher and were recorded using an audio-recording device. The interviews were then transcribed verbatim by the researcher.

Data analysis
Throughout the research, the researcher reviewed and analysed the data continually considering new data and information. Initially, the questionnaires and interviews were analysed separately and recurring themes were identified (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The research was analysed using codes which were formulated based on an examination of the earlier themes. Many different key words and phrases were identified from the data that was used as initial codes. During the coding, more detailed code descriptors were developed and continually revised. This formed the basis of a thematic analysis, applying the constant comparison method. The process of inductive analysis was then undertaken; this approach involved the researcher moving from specific observations to general statements.

Results
Importance and Benefit of Physical Education
PE plays an important role in children's well-being especially having regard to the alarming statistics on obesity. The children's perception of the importance and benefit

of PE was somewhat mixed and it is important that the school provides physical activity as three teachers noted:

- Teacher A: "…that the children get tired quite quickly during the PE lesson especially those who don't partake in sport outside schools."
- Teacher B: "They need exercise, you'd notice here if they are in on a wet day they can be hard to handle."
- Teacher C: "There is always a small core group who are reluctant because they are not getting enough exercise themselves. They're overweight, not active and activity is not encouraged at home outside of school hours."

Some 56% of children stated that they spend enough time at PE and noted that: "Because we are tired after", "When I do [PE] I am sweating" or "Because sometimes I get tired in 5 minutes". On the other hand, all children surveyed "liked" sport and PE. Some children acknowledge the importance of PE as the term "exercise" was frequently cited in children's responses and comments, which included: "I like sports, it's fun and gets you fit", "It's good for me and I enjoy it", and "It is good for exercise."

Access to Physical Education
All teachers noted a child's access to PE is influential in their participation and, therefore, inclusion and differentiation was important. Teacher D has two children with SEN in his class; however, they do not specifically differentiate the activities as: "…while my expectation of them and what they are able to do is different of what I expect everyone else to do but they…themselves do not want any differentiation made for them...". These sentiments were also reflected in Teacher C's comments that you would: "…tailor your expectations to suit. You would also keep a check on pairings and who is in their group for activities to ensure that all children are patient and respectful...".

Extrinsic and Intrinsic Motivation for Participation in PE
A common theme to emerge was children's description and perception of PE. All children surveyed stated that they enjoy and think PE is fun. Some of the reasons why children like/enjoy PE included:
"It is fun because we play fun games", "It is fun and enjoyable" and "I think it is fun, you do fun things". This is reiterated by Teacher A who stated that the key to an engaging PE lesson is "…a fun and engaging warm-up or activity…" and Teacher D who just stated "fun". One of the most common perceptions about PE is the "break from work". Responses in the children's questionnaire supports this by mentioning the word "work" in an intrinsic motivational way: "It [PE] gives us less time to do work", "It's not as boring as doing work" and "Time off class work".

However, from a teacher's point of view, PE and physical activity positively affected behaviour and concentration. Teacher A: "I use PE as a total break from the

classroom and learning", Teacher B: "…we do it first thing in the morning and they are…kinda calm for the rest of the day…like…it wears them out.", Teacher D: "I always put in…em…a 5 minute activity break, about roughly every hour to hour and a half because you can't expect them to sit all day…and get something done." Both children and teachers alike noted that class grouping and PE activities were important. All teachers concurred that children were more likely to participate in group activities. This is supported by 78% of children who indicated a preference of PE lessons when they work/play in groups. On the contrary, 91% children acknowledged if they did not get to play/work in groups, it does not prevent them from participating. The enjoyment of group activities is clearly outlined as the strand unit of games was the most popular ranked strand unit with 64% choosing it as first preference. This corresponds to the children's extra-curricular activities, where team sports represented 61% of sports played outside of school.

Teacher ability and resources/facilities
The teacher's ability can have an influential impact on children's participation in PE, which was noted by all teachers and 80% of children stated their teacher affects their participation in PE for reasons such as: "She tries to make it fun so everyone will do it", "He says 'come on you can do it' or says 'that was great'", and "The teacher tries to make sure everyone has something to do". This shows that teachers can impact children's participation as teachers noted: Teacher A: "I find the children really…em…engage when you come across as fun and energetic...", Teacher C: "the teachers' enthusiasm has more of an impact than their ability in spot." and Teacher D: "if the teacher is active and the teacher is involved in sport because it gives…an awareness and an appreciation of the importance of PE."

Finally, while the availability of PE facilities and resources varies from school to school, 87% of children agreed that their school had enough PE equipment while the same view was not held by all teachers: Teacher A: "…we now have the opportunity to complete our PE lessons indoors", however, "we don't have benches and mats so…it's hard to do all the areas of the gymnastics strand."
Teacher D: "There is a shared indoor facility with the girls' school…so if you were only to do PE according to your time allocation, you would only do 40 minutes, two thirds of your time instead of the full 60 minutes."

Discussion
Examining children"s and teachers" perceptions about the importance, implementation and organisation of PE may provide insights into reasons for or lack of participation in the subject. The findings of this study have confirmed that children like and enjoy PE and regard it as fun and a break from work. The perceived factors influencing children"s participation and engagement in PE can be summarised into

three sections: (a) Benefits and weaknesses of PE, (b) Extrinsically or intrinsically motivational factors and (c) Participation in sport outside of school.

From the findings, children and teachers have a divided opinion on the purpose of PE — a view supported by previous studies. Teachers acknowledge the importance of PE as a subject both for mental, social, health and physical benefits (Wood and Hall, 2015), which is highlighted by Teacher D, who stated that through PE children: "…have an appreciation and understanding of the importance of physical activity in their daily lives which then feeds into eating properly, exercising properly and doing what they should...". It is apparent that children do not view PE as a subject but rather a break from "work", which is possibly attributed to the way PE is implemented in school as 51% of children's responses included reference to the word "fun". As identified by prior research, "fun" and "enjoyment" are imperative to increasing PE participation, thus intensifying children's willingness to participate (Bailey and Dismore, 2005; Garn and Cothran, 2006; Tannehill and Zakrajsek, 1993). Nevertheless, 100% of participants surveyed liked, enjoyed and considered PE fun.

Time constraints and the view that PE is not a priority subject are other weaknesses that have been identified by the research which prevented children from fully participating in the PE curriculum (INTO, 2007). 46% of children felt they did not spend enough time on PE although three of the four teachers interviewed stated that they rigidly adhered to one hour of PE per week. Although a definite link between PE and academic performance has not been established, teachers in this research feel that PE positively affected behaviour and concentration and gave all and/or more time to physical activity during the week, particularly if children did not get out during break time due to weather conditions (Jensen, 2008; Mahar et al., 2006; Shephard, 1997 and Taras, 2005). While PE has its place in the curriculum, Bailey states "it should not interfere with the real business of schooling, which many believe to be academic achievement and examination results" (2006, p.399). This was supported by Teacher C, who stated that: "sometimes it can be difficult to fit all required classes in during the teaching week to get all academic material covered…" The inadequacy/unavailability of appropriate facilities in schools as identified by Woods et al. (2010) and the INTO (2007) was confirmed by three teachers interviewed who stated they had a very rigid timetable for indoor facilities due to access and availability issues, which affects children's ability to fully participate with the PE curriculum. Conversely, 87% of children felt their school had enough PE equipment.

A clear extrinsic motivating factor identified in this research was that of the teacher's ability; 67% of children stated that the teacher influences their participation in PE. Supporting Garn and Cothran (2006) and Hassandra, Goudas and Chroni (2003), teachers in this research outlined that an enthusiasm for the subject is important. An intrinsic motivating element of PE can be obtained through the opportunity to work collaboratively and co-operatively. This supports research by Garn and Cothran (2006)

and MacPhail et al. (2008) where children linked teamwork to enjoyment in PE. This is clearly seen, as 78% of research participants indicated a preference of completing collaborative activities, 91% stated that the non-provision of this aspect does not affect their participation. In line with research by the INTO (2007), all four teachers stated the games strand was taught the most.

A total of 95% of children surveyed participated in sports and there was a direct relationship between participation in sports outside of school and their preference with the various PE strands within the school (Carroll and Loumidis, 2001). In addition, 78% of children surveyed participated in inter-school competitions, which supports research by Fahey, Delaney and Gannon (2005) that found that children's participation in extra-curricular sport is greater outside of school than inside. While previous research found that less children from lower socio-economic backgrounds participated in sport outside of school in comparison to those from higher socio-economic backgrounds, data from this research found little difference between participation in extra-curricular activities between lower and higher socio-economic backgrounds as all children in the class surveyed in the DEIS (Band 2) school participated in sport outside of school, in comparison to 82% in the rural school and 88% in the urban school (Woods et al., 2010).

Implications and Limitations

Due to the small-scale nature of this research, a representative sample of the entire population was not used and, therefore, this research does not represent all factors or reasons that affect children's participation in PE. Furthermore, as all children who participated in the research liked sports and 95% participated in sport outside of school, the researcher was unable to examine the views of children who do not like sport/PE. This is an aspect which would have greatly enhanced this research. Furthermore, more quantitative analysis of a wider range of classes and schools would provide more extensive results.

Conclusion

The finding that teachers believe PE is regarded as fun and enjoyable by children is encouraging. Children enjoyed PE as it provided them with time to run around, an opportunity to interact with peers or friends and play games. Furthermore, the children's inclination to participate in co-operative and group activities was noted and without these, children were not deterred from participating. Considering time constraints and an emphasis on academic achievement, it was acknowledged that both children and teachers noted the importance and benefit of the subject and that more time should be allocated. Access to a holistic PE curriculum in all schools remains an issue and support/investment in equipment and facilities needs to be addressed to

prevent and curb growing obesity statics, which supports findings in the CSPPA study by Woods et al. (2010).

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The Effects of Family Separation on Primary School-Aged Children and the Effectiveness of the Supports in Place for These Children, by Maria Glynn
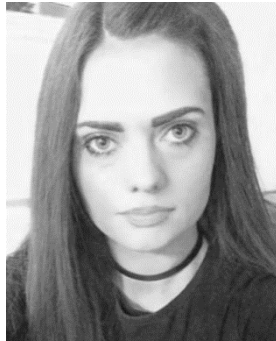
Biography

Maria Glynn has recently completed the Professional Master of Education (PME) in Primary Education with Hibernia College. Prior to this, she received a Bachelor degree in Social Care Practice and a Master of Arts. She worked on a voluntary basis with a number of children and families from separated backgrounds. The topic of this research was subsequently influenced by her pervious social care experience and prospective role as a primary school educator.

The Effects of Family Separation on Primary School-Aged Children and the Effectiveness of the Supports in Place for These Children, by Maria Glynn

<u>Research Supervisor</u>: Dr Aoife M. Lynam

<u>Abstract</u>
The current small-scale study ascertained the effects of family separation (FS) on children in primary education while assessing teachers' views and opinions on the effectiveness of the supports in place. The study adopted a qualitative approach in the form of semi-structured interviews (n=10). The data collection process involved the participation of professionals from both the teaching profession and the social care sector; this allowed for the process of data source triangulation to occur. The researcher chose to interview professionals from both sectors due to their expertise of working with children. It enabled the researcher to gather in-depth knowledge and compare and contrast participants' views and opinions in relation to the impact of FS on children. The results generated from the interviews were presented in summary form, reflecting on Denscombe's (2010) suggestion. The main results are as follows. Firstly, FS affects all children; however, there is a dichotomy of opinion among professionals as to the age group most significantly affected. Secondly, the findings suggest that the effects of FS impact on a child's physical, psychological and social development. Thirdly, it became evident that primary school teachers find it difficult to deal with children experiencing FS. The researcher made conclusions based on the previous research examined and the current data collected. Following the conclusions, recommendations were presented in terms of their theoretical and empirical implications for primary school teachers, and directions for future research and professional practice were identified.

<u>Keywords</u>: Family separation, effectiveness of supports, physical, psychological and social impact, academic performance, qualitative research

<u>Introduction</u>
The rationale for this current study is based on two main reasons. Firstly, a number of studies, both nationally and internationally, have been carried out on the issue of family separation (FS). These studies (Amato, 2003; Arkes, 2015; Aughinbaugh, Pierret & Rothstein, 2005; Faber & Wittenborn, 2010; McCullough, 2009; Mooney, Knox & Schacht, 2013; Potter, 2010; Wood, Repetti & Roesch, 2004) produced a general consensus and concluded that FS is an emerging issue in today's society worldwide. Subsequently, public concern is growing in relation to the effects on children who are experiencing this kind of change in their family life. For society, this means that the physical, psychological and social needs of more children are being adversely affected.

Secondly, the issue of FS is of particular importance to the teaching profession. As teachers, we have a duty to safeguard and protect the welfare of all children while meeting their various needs. Therefore, it is essential that teachers are competent and confident in identifying the effects of FS. This will subsequently enable them to put in place relevant supports to ensure that these children will progress significantly in all dimensions of their life — spiritual, moral, cognitive, emotional, imaginative, aesthetic, social and physical.

While there has been significant research done in this area, the researcher identified deficits in the previous studies conducted. Current literature generally focuses on the impact of FS on children over eight years of age. However, little research has been carried out on the impact of FS on children under the age of eight years. Furthermore, only one study has been conducted on professionals' opinions in relation to the effectiveness of existing supports for children experiencing FS. Therefore, the researcher believes that this study is necessary to bridge this information deficit as it (1) focuses on all primary school-aged children and (2) incorporates professionals' opinions in relation to the effectiveness of supports for children of FS backgrounds within the education system.

Literature Review
Background of the Study
The increase in FS has followed an international trend in the last few decades. From 1960 to 1980, the prevalence of FS has doubled (D'onofrio, 2011). According to these researchers, cohabitation has become an alternative to marriage and, subsequently, cohabiting unions are more fragile than marriages. This was also supported by other researchers who indicated that children born to unmarried parents are more likely to experience the separation of their parents than children of married parents (Le Bourdais & Neill, 2000; Marcil-Gratton, Le Bourdais & Lapierre-Adamcyk, 2002). As children are growing up in more diversified environments today, a number of children are being affected.

According to researchers, FS affects children, particularly under the age of four, due to the occurrence of rapid developmental changes in cognitive, emotional and social domains (D'onofrio, 2011; Emery, 2011 & Fahlberg, 1991). This means that children may be more or less vulnerable to separation depending on their stage of development. Furthermore, the effects of FS during this period of a child's life can have lasting consequences on the child's well-being and adjustment in later years (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Small & Covalt, 2006). Therefore, it is essential that those who participate in children's lives (for example, primary teachers) have an awareness of the effects of FS.

Theory of Attachment

In order to have an understanding of the issue of FS, we must firstly look at attachment theory. Attachment, according to child psychoanalysts such as Sigmund Freud, is "an affectionate bond between two individuals that endures through space and time and serves to join them emotionally" (Freud & Solnit, 1973, p.57). In support of Freud, Bowlby (1988), who was a psychoanalyst and the founder of the attachment theory, describes attachment as a lasting psychological connectedness between human beings.

The earliest attachments, for the majority of children, are to their parents, who become sources of both safety and gratification (Fahlberg, 1991). Bowlby (1973) found that secure attachments enable children to have positive expectations of themselves and others. Similarly, children who lack continuity in relationships (children of separated backgrounds) develop insecure attachments, which subsequently affect children's social development and self-esteem (Bowlby, 1973). In support of this, Fahlberg (1991), who has considerable expertise in attachment therapy, found that the two primary factors that influence a child's reaction to separation are the strength of the attachment being broken and the abruptness of the separation. As a result, responses can vary from severe depression in children who have developed a strong attachment with their caregivers and are abruptly separated to almost no reactions in children who have been emotionally neglected.

Importance of School's/Teacher's Role

Yuk Yee Luk-Fong (2011) considered the importance of schools providing support to children experiencing FS. Yuk Yee Luk-Fong (2011) acknowledged that the two worlds of home and school are held together and what is happening in one context is constantly having an impact on the other. According to Parke and Clarke-Stewart (2001), communication is one of the most important aids in minimising negative effects of FS. Subsequently, teachers can play an important role in facilitating this communication with children. Children who have the opportunity to communicate and express their emotions can enable them to make sense of the separation and make them feel like what they are experiencing is validated (Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2001). Despite the importance of the teacher's role, the strength of children's connections with both parents can only begin with the teacher being aware of the circumstances of the child's family. This, therefore, emphasises the importance of parents informing teachers of a FS. However, an Irish study conducted by Hogan et al. (2002) found that no parents informed their children's class teachers of a separation in their family.

Previous Research Studies

The impact of parental separation has been a topic of international social, psychological and family research for many years (Rodgers & Pryor, 1998) and is

currently a matter of national and international concern. Subsequently, there is a growing body of research which considers the views and experiences of children who have experienced FS (Amato, 2003; Arkes, 2015; Aro & Palosaari, 1992; Aughinbaugh, Pierret & Rothstein, 2005; Crow & Ward-Lonergan, 2003; Emery, 1999; Evans, Kelley & Wanner, 2001; Faber & Wittenborn, 2010; McCullough, 2009; Mooney, Knox & Schacht, 2013; Peris & Emery, 2004; Shaw, 1999; Shaw, Winslow & Flanagan, 1999; Steele, Sigle-Rushton and Kravdal, 2009; Thompson, 1998; Pagani, Boulerice & Vitaro, 1999; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Potter, 2010; Wood, Repetti & Roesch, 2004). A number of findings have emerged from these studies ranging from academic difficulties, greater disruptive behaviours, poor self-esteem to emotional distress. However, it is important to note that due to the uniqueness of the child, which is reiterated in the Primary School Curriculum 1999, the impact of FS differs significantly for each child.

Despite the findings of such studies, evidence shows that many of the negative outcomes of children from separated families did not derive from the disruption itself but rather from the processes leading up to the separation, for example, the anticipation of a potential separation and less parental contact (Emery, 1999; Peris & Emery, 2004; Shaw, Winslow & Flanagan, 1999). Thus, the research questions were:

1. What impact(s) has family separation on a child's performance in primary education?
2. Does the impact of family separation vary from one child to another, and if so, what causes these variations?
3. What support and assistance measures are available for both the child and the teacher to deal with the impact(s) of family separation in meeting the child's needs?
4. Are the support and assistance measures within the Irish State adequate in meeting the needs of the child and, subsequently, adequate in enabling the teacher to progress the child to reach his/her maximum potential?

Methodology

Methodological Design

According to Corbin and Strauss (2008, p.16) qualitative research enables the researcher to "enter into the world of its participants" and to "see the world from their perspective". Subsequently, qualitative research, in the form of semi-structured interviews, was deemed to be the most appropriate data collection instrument for this study for the following reasons. Firstly, it enabled the researcher to attain an insight into professionals' perspectives and experiences of working with children who have experienced family separation (FS). Secondly, it enabled flexibility in relation to the questions asked and the information provided. Thirdly, it revealed in-depth data and, subsequently, enabled the development and exploration of themes. Furthermore, it

enabled clarification from participants on particular information. Finally, this approach enabled a balance of power to be created between the researcher and participants.

Sampling Strategies
Non-probability sampling in the form of purposive sampling and snowball sampling was employed for this study. Firstly, purposive sampling enabled the researcher to choose a sample which was specific to the study (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2005). Secondly, snowball sampling enabled the researcher to use participants, already known to her, to make contact with future participants (Sarantakos, 2005). These connections were made through participants who were selected as a result of purposive sampling. As the researcher is not yet within the primary teaching sector, the identification and selection of teachers and other professionals was a challenge. Therefore, snowball sampling was not only a suitable strategy but also very beneficial to the researcher.

Data Analysis
Data analysis involved three stages, reflecting on the work of Braun and Clarke (2006). As the researcher is the primary "instrument" of data collection and analysis, reflexivity was deemed essential (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Glesne, 1999; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Wolcott, 1995; and Watt, 2007). Experts contend that writing is an integral part of analysis, not something that takes place at the end (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Russell & Kelly, 2002). With this in mind, after each interview, the researcher developed a diary of the information gathered. This enabled the researcher to reflect on the information provided by participants and, subsequently, develop the main ideas that emerged with future participants. Marshall and Rossman (2006) recommended that immersion in and familiarity with the research is an essential stage. Following this recommendation, the researcher transcribed each interview, thus familiarising herself with the data. This completed the first stage of analysis: Familiarisation with Data Collected. The second stage "Generation of Initial Codes" involved inductive analysis. Inductive analysis involved the process of discovering patterns and codes in the data (Patton, 2002). The researcher developed patterns by writing notes on the transcripts that related to an interesting point and used highlighters to indicate different codes. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2005) argued that transcriptions do not reveal everything which took place in an interview. With this in mind, interviews were played on the dictaphone while the researcher analysed the data, which enhanced reliability of data. The researcher also used the "Constant Comparative Method" to look for differences in the data. This ensured that all relevant information was included. The third stage, "Searching for Themes", involved the researcher sorting and compiling the list of codes into potential themes. Following this, the final stage "Reviewing, Defining and Naming Themes", the researcher developed a thematic map. This enabled the

researcher to present a visual representation of the relationship between codes, themes and sub-themes.

Enhancing Credibility of Qualitative Research

As there was only one researcher responsible for the collection of data in this study, bias and subjectivity were heightened and issues regarding the credibility of results were raised. Taking this into consideration, a number of processes were carried out to ensure the credibility of results (Bell, 2004; Cohen et al., 2005; Denzin, 1989; Polit, Beck & Hungler, 2001; Reynolds, 1979; Silverman, 1993 & Walford, 1994). Firstly, the interview schedule was pilot tested. Silverman (1993) and Walford (1994) suggest that careful piloting of interview schedules to carry out interviews enhances reliability of research studies. Secondly, a process known as triangulation was carried out. Two types of triangulation were used. These were known as data source triangulation and investigator triangulation (Bryman, 2004; Denzin, 1989; Sarantakos, 2013). Data source triangulation refers to multiple sources of data used in a study (Bryman, 2004; Denzin, 1989). For this study, a number of key professionals who have expertise of working with children were interviewed. Investigator triangulation refers to using more than one person to collect, analyse and interpret the data (Denzin, 1989). Interview transcripts were independently analysed by critical friends, in addition to being analysed by the researcher. This process is also referred to as "dependability" (Polit, Beck & Hungler, 2001). Polit et al. (2001) expressed that in order to ensure credibility of research, a process known as "dependability" must be carried out. Thirdly, a process known as "member checking" often referred to as "respondent validation" was carried out (Polit et al., 2001). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), "member checking" is the most important process in the establishment of credibility of data. After the conduction of interviews, each interview was transcribed and emailed to participants. This enabled participants to validate, confirm and reinterpret their information. This process ensured that the findings generated were truthfully represented (Cohen et al., 2005; Polit et al., 2001).

Results

The results were presented in summary form, under four themes which emerged during the data analysis process.

Theme One: "All children are affected by Family Separation, regardless of their age."

All participants believed that family separation (FS) has a huge impact on all children. However, the majority of participants (majority of whom are from the social care background) reported that FS has a more significant impact on younger children, while some participants (primary school teachers) argue that older children are more significantly affected. Participants reported that children develop a secure attachment

with their caregivers from a young age; this attachment becomes fragmented when a FS occurs. This subsequently has an adverse effect on the child. Furthermore, it was reported that FS particularly affects younger children, as they are "self-absorbed" (Participant 1, Primary School Teacher, Junior/Senior Infants, Male, DEIS school) and are therefore likely to blame themselves for the FS.

Despite the reasons provided, some participants reported that young children adapt more easily to FS for the following reasons: younger children (1) do not fully understand FS and will have little recollection of it as they develop into adulthood and (2) are more inclined to talk about the separation and express their emotions which will subsequently assist them in dealing with the separation. According to some participants, FS has a significant effect on older children as they are reluctant to talk about their family situation for different reasons. One participant reported: "They bottle it up as they are conscious that they are different to other kids in their class" (Participant 3, Primary School Teacher, 3rd Class, Female, Non-DEIS school). Another participant stated: "They are ashamed of their FS and are unwilling to accept it" (Participant 4, Psychologist, Male). Furthermore, it was reported that older children have a better understanding of FS, often resulting in them adopting a parental role. For example, one participant reported: "She is constantly putting her energy into how Mammy feels on her own" (Participant 10, Child Care Manager, Female). Another participant reported: "He often put on a brave face for his younger brother and took the place of Daddy" (Participant 8, Primary School Teacher, 6th Class, Male, Non-DEIS school). Despite the effects on older children, it was argued that older children are more likely to cope with FS in a coherent manner as they have the knowledge and coping skills to do so.

Theme Two: "Children experience a range of effects following a Family Separation."
Participants reported a range of different effects children may experience as a result of FS. Some participants reported that children become "needy" and are constantly looking for praise and reassurance (Participant 10, Child Care Manager, Female). It was suggested that this may be due to the fact that children are now lacking the attention they previously received at home.
It was reported that children lack consistency in their lives as a result of FS. It was further reported that the regularity that was there prior to the FS no longer exists. For example, one participant reported that "Children often came to school without books or a school bag as they had a sleepover in Daddy's and left their school bag/book in Mammy's" (Participant 5, Primary School Teacher, 2nd Class, Male, DEIS).

Some participants explained that children constantly worry about their family situation. One participant reported: "He comes up to me several times asking me who is collecting him from school, constantly thinking and worrying about what is going to happen after school" (Participant 5, Primary School Teacher, 2nd Class, Male,

DEIS). It was further acknowledged that these ongoing worries prevent children from concentrating on their school work, subsequently leading to a possible deterioration in their academic performance.

Despite the physical and psychological effects of FS, some participants identified that children are often affected socially. It was reported that a FS impacts on a child's development of relationships with current peers and future friends. For example, one participant reported that "A child may take offence by something that is said by one of their peers due to the way he/she is feeling" (Participant 1, Primary School Teacher, Male, DEIS). It was further reported that children often become instigators of disruptive behaviour or develop "friendships" with a "bad choice of friends". In contrast, it was reported that children often withdraw from their peers and become reluctant to continue extra-curricular activities. One participant reported: "He withdrew himself completely from extra-curricular activities… he didn't want any of his friends knowing about his family situation" (Participant 3, 3rd Class, Primary School Teacher, Female, Non-DEIS).

It was agreed by all participants that the way in which parents deal with a FS can impact on a child's performance in school. It was reported that if the separation is not dealt with appropriately, the child's education is no longer a priority. One participant reported: "Education can often take a back seat to the issues going on at home" (Participant 3, Primary School Teacher, Female, Non-DEIS). Another participant stated: "The expectation for school work is no longer there with the upheaval that is going on at home" (Participant 7, Community Nurse, Female). Despite the significant effects of FS, some participants reported that FS can often be the best outcome for children. For example, it was emphasised that the processes leading up to a FS can be more detrimental to children than the disruption itself.

Theme Three: "Parents rarely inform us; we become aware of a Family Separation through our observations of children in our classes."
All participants reported that they were never informed of a FS by a parent due to unawareness of the effects of FS. One participant reported that "Parents don't see the need to inform you…the physical needs are easy to meet…it is the psychological and social needs that parents are not aware of" (Participant 1, Primary School Teacher, Junior/Senior Infants, Male, DEIS). Teachers stated that they are often alerted to the possibility of a FS by a child's deterioration in academic performance, citing reluctance among parents to report their FS to teachers. It was further reported that older children are less likely to talk about a FS than younger children; therefore, it is important to be aware of and respond to factors (such as lack of concentration) appropriately.

Theme Four: "We tend to make allowances for children of Family Separation."
It was reported that there is no support service within the Department of Education and Skills to assist teachers in identifying FS and implementing supports for children to reach their maximum potential. Subsequently, teachers find themselves making allowances for every behaviour and action presented by a child. One participant reported: "For every piece of homework not done, or every negative behaviour…I link it to his family situation and make allowances for him" (Participant 3, Primary School Teacher, 3rd Class, Non-DEIS). It was argued, that if teachers continue to make allowances for children, children will not reach their maximum potential. One participant reported: "Teachers need to have an understanding of the child's circumstances and offer support; but children need to learn…so if they are misbehaving, they will not learn…so there must be the same boundaries for all children" (Participant 8, Primary School Teacher, 6th Class, Male, DEIS).
Although there is no support service for teachers, hence, no set criteria in how to deal with a child who is experiencing FS, it was reported that it is necessary for teachers to provide the child with consistency and regularity in his/her life. One participant reported: "School is where children come every day…we can provide the consistency that they have just lost" (Participant 3, Primary School Teacher, 3rd Class, Female, Non-DEIS).

Discussion
Under each theme, discussion and analysis are presented based on the results generated from the semi-structured interviews and previous research carried out on FS.

Theme One: "All children are affected by Family Separation, regardless of their age."
Some participants (particularly those from the social care background) reported that FS affects younger children. In support of previous research, D'onofrio (2011), Emery (2011) and Fahlberg (1991) found that children of the age of starting school are particularly affected as it is a significant milestone in their lives (D'onofrio, 2011; Emery, 2011 and Fahlberg, 1991). Furthermore, D'onofrio (2011) and Emery (2011) found that FS also affects children under the age of four due to the occurrence of rapid developmental changes in their cognitive, emotional and social domains. Despite such evidence, participants did not make reference to the impact of FS of this age group. This may be due to the fact that the majority of participants (eight out of ten) have only experience of working with children aged four years and older.

It was identified by some participants (primary school teachers) that FS affects older children more than younger children. However, it is difficult to support or make an argument that older children are more affected as there is limited research exploring the impact of FS on children under the age of eight. However, it does

emphasise the need for further research focusing on the effects of FS on both younger and older children, in order to make a comparison.

Theme 2: "Children experience a range of effects following a Family Separation."
Empirical research has found that FS is associated with a range of negative outcomes for children, ranging from constant worrying to academic difficulties (Crow and Ward-Lonergan, 2003; Faber and Wittenborn, 2010; McCullough, 2009; Mooney, Knox and Schacht, 2013; Peris and Emery, 2004; Steele, Sigle-Rushton and Kravdal, 2009; Potter, 2010; Wood, Repetti and Roesch, 2004). This is supported by participants who explained that children constantly worry about their family situation. It was further acknowledged that these ongoing worries prevent children from concentrating on their school work, which subsequently leads to deterioration in their academic performance.

Theorists such as Freud (1973) and Bowlby (1973) emphasised that children who lack continuity in relationships (for example, children from separated backgrounds) develop insecure attachments, which subsequently affect their social development and self-esteem. In support of such theorists, participants (professionals from the social care background) reported that FS causes fragmentation of prior secure attachments with caregivers. In consolidating this finding, Fahlberg (1991) found that children who were well attached to their parents suffered severe depression in comparison to children who were emotionally neglected prior to their separation.

Despite the major impacts of a FS reported, some participants argued that FS can often be the best possible outcome for children, as it is often the first time for children to experience certainty and security. However, this was not supported in previous research. This may be due to the fact that past studies generally focused on children over a relatively short period of time. This subsequently prevented researchers from assessing the outcomes of these children.

Theme Three: "Parents rarely inform us; we become aware of a Family Separation through our observations of children in our classes."
One particular Irish study carried out by Hogan et al. (2002) emphasised the importance of the teacher's role, recommending that there is a need for greater support at the time of the disruption by teachers. However, it was reported by all participants that parents do not inform them of a FS. The majority of participants believed that they are not informed of a FS due to parents' lack of awareness of the effects of a FS. Subsequently, teachers must rely on their observations, which may not always be accurate and, in turn, prevents supports being put in place immediately for children.

Theme 4: "We tend to make allowances for children of Family Separation."
Although it is important for teachers to understand that FS is an emerging issue while being cognisant of the signs and effects of FS, teachers should also be aware that there may be other underlying issues and reasons for such behaviours. For example, previous literature (Arkes, 2015 and Aughinbaugh et al., 2005), found that the behaviours of children were merely mistaken as results of FS when, in actual fact, such behaviours related to a child's family background (for example, education was not a priority in the family home). Participants developed this finding further, reporting that they tend to quantify every action made and behaviour presented by a child as a result of FS, which in the long-term, may not have always been in the best interests of the child. This led the researcher to consider the need for further research to support or dispute the results generated in relation to the teacher's tendency to quantify children's actions as a result of FS. Furthermore, there is need for research to be carried out on the perceptions of teachers in dealing with FS in the classroom setting. Such research would be valuable to current teachers, on a national and international level, due to the emergence of FS worldwide.

Conclusion
This small-scale study, based on the views and opinions of teachers, ascertained the effects of family separation (FS) on primary school-aged children and assessed the effectiveness of the supports in place for children experiencing FS. In doing so, the researcher provided a critical analysis on FS, reflecting on current literature from a national and international review.

Following the review of current literature, the researcher adopted a qualitative approach in the form of semi-structured interviews (N=10) to gather the most appropriate information relevant to the aim of the study. Following the interviews, the researcher analysed the data and presented it in the Results chapter. A critical analysis on the similarities and discrepancies between the results from the interviews and current literature examined was presented in the Discussion chapter. Following this analysis, results were presented and conclusions were made. It was clear that there was a dichotomy of opinion between professionals from the social care sector and professionals from the teaching profession. Participants from the social care sector believed that FS has a significant effect on younger children due to the development of their secure attachment with caregivers. In contrast, professionals from the teaching sector argued that children in the senior classes are most likely to be affected as they are unlikely to express their emotions. Reflecting on this, it is clear that primary educators of all classes have a significant role to play in reducing the psychological, academic and social effects of FS.

Despite such effects of a FS, participants determined that children are not only affected when the disruption occurs, rather children may experience effects prior to the separation. For example, it was emphasised that the processes leading up to a FS can be more detrimental to children than the disruption itself. This emphasises the importance of parents immediately informing teachers of a FS so that supports can be put in place promptly to meet children's individual needs.

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Teachers' Perceptions of the Academic and Emotional Effects of Bullying on Children in Irish Primary Schools, by Rachel Hayes

Biography

Rachel Hayes is a newly qualified primary school teacher. She completed a Professional Master of Education (PME) in Primary Education with Hibernia College in which she received first class honours. Before this, she completed a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Early Childhood Care and Education. She believes that her primary degree stimulated in her a love for teaching and education. She has a keen interest in music and drama, which she loves to portray in the classroom environment.

Teachers' Perceptions of the Academic and Emotional Effects of Bullying on Children in Irish Primary Schools, by Rachel Hayes

Research Supervisor: Dr Lucie Corcoran

Abstract

This journal article examined teachers' perceptions of the academic and emotional effects of bullying on children in Irish primary schools. The purpose of this study is to provide an insight on bullying behaviours and the perceived effects in an Irish context. A mixed-methods approach was used to collect data. The teachers' perceptions were examined with self-completion questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The results indicated that 94% of teachers had experienced bullying behaviour amongst students before. Verbal and indirect bullying were reported to be most dominant amongst pupils. The researcher found that 73%–93% of participants reported that victims of bullying "always" suffer emotional effects such as anxiety and low self-esteem. The results indicated that 80–86% of participants reported that victims of bullying "often" suffer academic effects such as withdrawal, isolation, lower academic performance at school and home work, absenteeism and inattention. Regarding anti-bullying teacher training, the findings suggested that 66% of teachers have received no training. Despite the limitations of the current study, the data indicates the need for more anti-bullying training for teachers in primary school settings. Teacher training is needed to reduce the academic and emotional effects suffered by victims.

Introduction

There has been extensive research on the topic of bullying internationally. Olweus (1993, p.3) has carried out widespread research on bullying and his definition of bullying is widely recognised – it states "a student is being bullied or victimized when he is exposed repeatedly and over time to negative actions on the part of one or more students". This research study investigated what types of bullying are most common, teachers' perceptions of the academic and emotional effects of bullying, and perceptions of anti-bullying training. This research makes an important contribution to Irish research on bullying by using a mixed-methods approach.

This research study will answer three main research questions:

1. What are teachers' perceptions of the effects of bullying on children emotionally?
2. What are teachers' perceptions of the effects of bullying on children academically?

    3.   Do Irish primary school teachers have adequate training in dealing with bullying?

<u>Literature Review</u>
In order to put this study into context, an overview of the pertinent literature in relation to the academic and emotional effects of bullying is reviewed and analysed.

What is bullying?
There has been extensive deliberation surrounding the definition of bullying. A definition used in the field of bullying is that of Smith and Sharp (1994, p.2) who assert that bullying is "a systematic abuse of power". The victim of bullying in this case, cannot defend oneself against a bully due to an imbalance of power. Characteristics such as age, size, physical abilities, special needs and cultural backgrounds may be perceived as an imbalance of power.

Emotional effects of bullying on children
There has been widespread research suggesting a connection between the involvement of bullying and the emotional, physical and social effects on victims. "Bullying behaviour infringes upon the child's right to human dignity, privacy, freedom and security. It has an influence on the victims' physical, emotional, social and educational well-being" (Wet, 2005, cited in Aluede et al., 2008, p.151). Victims may suffer from feelings of inadequacy and worthlessness caused by bullying behaviour. Unfortunately, victims of long-term bullying are also more likely to be suicidal (Aluede et al., 2008).

       Another common effect associated with victimisation is low self-esteem. Victims may often be left feeling like they are to blame, which reinforces emotional states of low self-confidence and stupidity (Sanders and Phye, 2004). Furthermore, victims of bullying may suffer long-term effects which may lead into their adult life. Their personal relationships can suffer, particularly for male victims who experience difficulties such as shyness with women or problems in their intimate relationships during their adult lives (Smokowski and Holland Kopasz, 2005). Victims in later life who become parents may be over-protective of their own children in fear of what happened to themselves as children. Overall, there is clearly research to support that there are emotional effects of bullying on children.

Academic effects of bullying on children
Primary school is recognised as a safe environment for children to learn, flourish and grow. The children are the main focus in primary school and in order for them to reach their full potential: "such factors that affect learning and teaching, which include child growth, age, heredity, interest, home and social effect and violence in school

(including school bullying and peer victimization) need to be addressed" (Aluede et al., 2008, p.151). When children are bullied at school, it is common for them to withdraw themselves from the environment in which the bullying takes place. The victims will avoid places like the school yard, the toilets and the corridors. In effect, victims will even avoid school altogether and/or drop out. Aluede et al. (2008) suggests that rates of absenteeism and drop-out are higher among pupils who are bullied than pupils who are not.

A British study of students aged between eight to thirteen years found a significant negative connection between victims of bullying behaviour and their level of scholastic competence (Dake et al., 2003). This research suggests that low academic performance is connected with both the victim of the bullying and the bully him/herself; however, the victims are the ones most affected. In contrast to this, Nansel et al. (2001) "found no significant relationship between academic achievement and involvement as a victim or bully/victim". However, this research found that there was a strong relationship between poorer academic performance and the bully him/herself. This contrast in findings creates a rationale for the researcher to investigate the academic effects of bullying further.

Irish research on bullying
Purcell (2012) examined young children's, parents' and class teachers' perceptions of bullying in Irish primary schools. The findings revealed the difficulty of pupils' interactions in school and, also, the difficulty adults around them had defining and dealing with bullying effectively (Purcell, 2012). This study indicated the need for teaching training around anti-bullying procedures.

Teacher training
O'Moore et al. (1998) suggests that teachers do not see bullying as an important issue in schools. There is a worrying perception that bullying is part of school life and growing up. Teachers are reluctant to deal with bullying behaviour in hope of the behaviour diminishing itself. Though, it is important to note that this study was carried out over 15 years ago. This study gives the researcher rationale to investigate whether attitudes have changed since. An Irish study carried out by O'Moore et al. (1998, p.268) noted "Only a little more than half of pupils at primary and one-third of pupils at post-primary perceived their teachers to intervene when a pupil is being bullied". Thus, the research questions for the current research project are:

1. What are teachers' perceptions of the effects of bullying on children emotionally?
2. What are teachers' perceptions of the effects of bullying on children academically?

3. Do Irish primary school teachers have adequate training in dealing with bullying?

<u>Methodology</u>
Included in this methodology section is the research design that will be used to best answer the research questions posed in the study. This chapter describes the mixed-method approach of using qualitative and quantitative data collection methods in order to answer these questions.

Design
A mixed-methods research design draws on the methods of qualitative and quantitative designs. Punch (2005, p.28) claims that "Quantitative researchers collect facts and study the relationship of one set of facts to another". Using quantitative research allows the researcher to use a large sample size. On the other hand, a qualitative perspective is "more concerned to understand individuals' perceptions of the world" (Bell, 2014, p.51). Qualitative data allows the researcher to further explore the topic adding depth and detail to the research.

Ethical considerations
Prior to commencing the research, ethical approval was sought and granted by the Hibernia College Dublin Ethics Committee to ensure the highest ethical standards associated with the research. The researcher sought informed consent from school principals in order to collect data from teachers in their schools. The participants of the research were asked to give their informed consent by signing the consent sheet accompanying the questionnaires and interview questions. The participants' right to withdraw, their right to anonymity, and information regarding the researcher's contentment to answer questions participants may have were mentioned on the informed consent sheets.

Materials/Instruments
To answer the research questions efficiently, the researcher used two methods of data collection: self-completion questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The researcher chose questionnaires as a data collection method as "questionnaires tend to provide the broad picture of people's experiences and views" and they "make it possible to draw comparisons between responses" (Robert-Holmes, 2011, p.165).

Questionnaires were given to a larger sample size, gathering an overall perspective; therefore, this research project also used the data collection method of semi-structured interviews to gather more personal thoughts. Robert-Holmes (2011, p.165) suggests "that interviews add the "flesh" to the "bones" provided by the questionnaire survey". Semi-structured interviews allowed the focus to be shifted from

the researcher to the interviewee (Robert-Holmes, 2011). The interview questions were open-ended to encourage the participants to share their thoughts and opinions.

Convenience sampling

The researcher distributed the questionnaires to a convenience sample of thirty Irish primary school teachers mainly teaching in the midland area of Ireland. The sample of teachers consisted of 16% of males and 83% of females aged between 20 and 50 years who had between 0 and 50 years of teaching experience. This allowed a general overview of the teachers' perceptions in Irish primary schools. The researcher interviewed a convenience sample of five participants. Four of the participants were females currently teaching in rural schools around the midland area of Ireland. The female participants had a range of years of teaching experience; interviewee A had 13 years' experience, interviewee C had 8 years' experience, interviewee E had 10 years' experience, and interviewee E had 2 years' teaching experience. Interviewee B was a retired male principal with thirty-seven years' teaching experience in rural Irish primary schools.

Procedure

The researcher distributed the self-completion questionnaires to Irish primary school teachers from the 8th–25th January 2016. The researcher called to primary schools in person, seeking access to school staff from the school principals, to hand out self-completion questionnaires. To ensure the data was protected in the schools, the researcher left a sealed box with a slot to post the questionnaires in.

The researcher arranged a time to conduct the semi-structured interviews with the participants at their earliest convenience, which began on the 19th January 2016 and continued over the next four days. A copy of the questions was sent to the participants prior to the interview. The participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage, and they consented to being recorded for the purpose of the research prior to the interview.

Results

This section outlines the findings from the self-completion questionnaires. Then, the findings from the semi-structured interviews are broken up in five themes and presented. The five themes are (a) Verbal and indirect bullying, (b) Academic performance and emotional effects, (c) Anti-bullying policies, (d) Common intervention programmes, (e) Training and (f) Questionnaire findings. The findings showed that 94% of participants experienced bullying behaviour amongst students before while 6% did not.

Figure 1.1 on the next page shows the different types of bullying experienced by primary school teachers. This chart shows that 90% of participants experienced

verbal bullying in Irish primary schools, while 83% experienced indirect bullying and 61% experienced physical bullying before. Racial and cyber bullying have been experienced by 26% of teachers. Disablist bullying has been experienced by 20% and homophobic has been experienced by 16%.

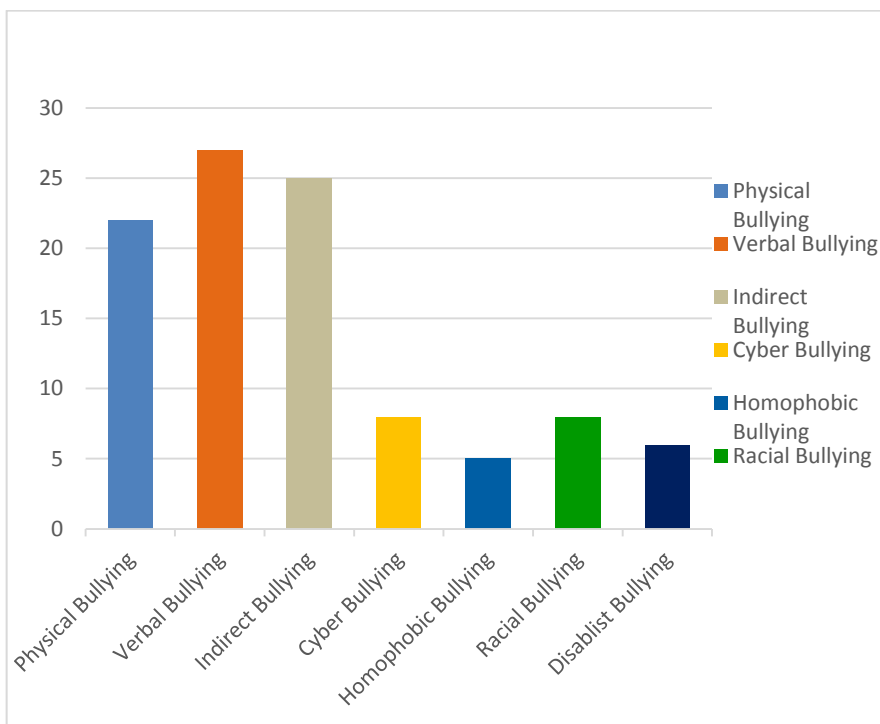Figure 1.1: Types of Bullying Experienced by Primary School Teachers

Figure 1.2., on the next page, shows how often teachers think victims of bullying may suffer different emotional effects outlined below. The researcher found that 73% of participants reported that victims of bullying "always" suffer anxiety and 93% reported that victims "always" suffer low self-esteem. Victims of bullying "often" suffer effects such as suicidal thoughts, depression, loneliness and fear, reported 80–86% of participants. Children "often" suffer effects such as social isolation, physical symptoms, panic attacks and anger, reported 50–66% of participants. The chart shows that 76% of participants reported victims of bullying "sometimes" suffer from eating disorders as a result of the bullying.

Figure 1.2: Emotional Effects Suffered by Victims of Bullying
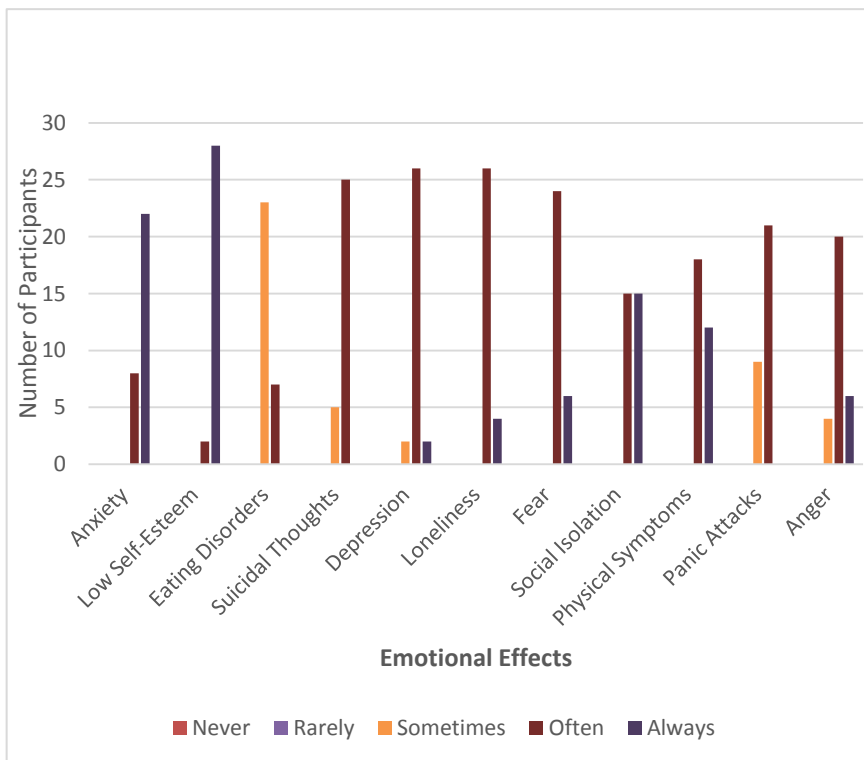
According to 80-86% of participants, victims of bullying "often" suffer academic effects such as withdrawal, isolation, lower academic performance at school and home work, absenteeism and inattention. A common trend is that 73–76% of participants reported that victims of bullying "sometimes" suffer from school drop-out and punctuality problems, while 86% of participants reported victims "sometimes" suffer from the inability to follow rules.

When answering question seventeen, "Do you feel you have adequate training for dealing with bullying behaviour from your primary degree?", 63% of teachers answered no, 20% answered yes and 10% are not sure. The researcher found that 66% of participants have received no training in-service to prevent/deal with bullying. These participants all reported that they would attend bullying prevention training if it was available to them. Findings show that 33% of participants have received training in-service to prevent/deal with bullying.

Interview findings
The researcher carried out five interviews with primary school teachers. A number of themes emerged upon analysis of the qualitative data, which will be reported in the following sections.

Theme 1: Verbal and indirect bullying
The first theme is "verbal and indirect bullying"; these are the two types of bullying which were most frequent amongst the interviewees. Interviewee C asserted that "I suppose between the two schools, the most common one would be name-calling or isolation of a child." Interviewee A supports this commenting, "it's usually mental abuse and most of the time it's very underhand where it's not out loud for everyone to hear."

Theme 2: Academic performance and emotional effects
This theme emerged from the data frequently as participants recalled incidents where victims of bullying were affected emotionally and/or academically. The findings suggest that victims of bullying are affected academically especially in their school work and performance. Interviewee D stated "let's say you see it in them not completing something or being so distracted that they can't listen because whatever has gone on in the yard is consuming their thoughts". Another participant commented that "the child may not want to go to school and you know if they do go to school they have a lot of anxiety" (Interviewee E).

Theme 3: Anti-bullying policies
The participants were asked about their familiarity with school anti-bullying policies and the DES guidelines. The findings indicated that the participants are all aware of the policies regarding bullying behaviour in the school and have knowledge of their contents. Interviewee D commented "so we have a policy in the school that we all adhere to, all the staff, and it's maintained every year, it's brought to staff attention, we review it and then we tweak it if it needs to be done every year". In contrast to this, interviewee A commented, "but all schools now have a pretty generic kind of anti-bullying policy and I actually find that it's very often schools aren't tailoring the policy to their own school, they're taking copies of generic examples and using that".

Theme 4: Common intervention programmes
This theme relates to intervention programmes in place in schools for preventing and dealing with bullying. When the participants were asked about their school implementing an anti-bullying intervention programme, the research found that bullying is mainly dealt with through the SPHE programme. Interviewee D says, "we

have the likes of Stay Safe and RSE" and interviewee A says, "I suppose the only way bullying is dealt with is through SPHE."

Theme 5: Training
This theme is with regards to teacher training in dealing and preventing bullying behaviours. Most participants in the research have not received recent training in dealing with bullying behaviour although all show interest in it. Interviewee A answers when asked about receiving training: "no but I would definitely be interested in it". In contrast to this, interviewee C claims, "with the anti-bullying training, say for me here now, I haven't been sent off on a course for this school but I know for the DEIS school I was in, yes, we had an in-service kind of day."

<u>Discussion</u>
Quantitative data analysis: Questionnaires
The majority of participants who took part in this research have experienced bullying amongst students in Irish primary schools. This supports Sanders and Phye (2004), who state that bullying is a consistent problem which occurs primarily in schools. This research study found that the majority of participants reported that victims of bullying "always" suffer emotional effects such as anxiety and low self-esteem. These findings support the research of Sanders and Phye (2004), who believe that victims may often be left feeling like they are to blame, which reinforces emotional states of low self-confidence and stupidity. These findings are also consistent with the research of Kumpulainen et al. (2001), which believes anxiety disorder is understandable considering victims are constantly unsafe in their environment and anxiously awaiting the next bullying incident.

The participants of the study were also asked about academic effects suffered by victims of bullying. The questionnaires yielded the majority of participants reported that victims of bullying "often" suffer academic effects such as withdrawal, isolation, lower academic performance at school and home work, absenteeism and inattention. These findings are in support of Dake et al. (2003), who found a significant negative connection between academic performance and victims of bullying. Dake et al. (2003) also stated that victims of bullying find it harder to adjust to school-related issues, which supports the present results.

Qualitative data analysis: Interviews
Theme 1: Verbal and indirect bullying
One participant asserted that name calling and isolation are most common, while another participant asserted that exclusion and ignoring others is common. These findings echo previous research carried out by Wang, Giannotti and Nansel (2009) on

the prevalence of bullying among US adolescents, which found that 53.6% of adolescents had been verbally bullied and 51.4% had been socially bullied.

Theme 2: Academic performance and emotional effects
One participant of the interviews stated that children are affected academically by bullying as they can be completely distracted and thinking of the bullying incidents during class. Another participant stated that victims lose concentration in class and often will not interact in the lessons. These findings are contradicted by (Nansel et al., 2001), who "found no significant relationship between academic achievement and involvement as a victim or bully/victim". The results of inattention and lower academic performance supports Ballard et al. (1999) research which highlights that victims of bullying have greater difficulty concentrating on school work and their academic performance suffers.

Theme 3: Anti-bullying policies
When the participants were asked about the steps they would follow in a case of bullying behaviour, there was a common theme of following the school policy. Interviewee D claimed that the policy is followed when dealing with bullying and that their school's anti-bullying policy is reviewed every year and adjusted if needs be. This finding supports the aims of the DES (2013) in highlighting that policies should include the steps involved in dealing with bullying behaviours and how to record the incidents. In contradiction to this, Interviewee A claimed that their school anti-bullying policy is quite generic and not tailored to their school. This suggests that while schools have an anti-bullying policy in place, it may be standard and not personalised to the school and students.

Theme 4: Common intervention programmes
Interviewee A indicated that the only way bullying was dealt with was in the SPHE programme. Another interviewee stated that lots of lessons regarding bullying and positive behaviours are dealt with in SPHE. A study carried out by Dake et al. (2003) suggests that there was a 50% decrease in the number of bullying incidents when an intervention programme was in place. In support of this, Olweus claims that children should be involved in making class rules against bullying and that there are class meetings about bullying which can be implemented through the SPHE programme (Dake et al., 2003).

Theme 5: Training
Four out of the five interviewees have not received any anti-bullying training pre-service or in-service. One interviewee stated that she did have an in-service day in the last school she taught in a number of years ago. The findings contradict the literature

from O'Moore (2000), who states that in order for policies to be effective, teachers and staff must avail of formal training programmes. In support of these findings, Purcell (2012) indicates the need for teacher training as the results suggested that teachers had difficulty defining and dealing with bullying behaviour.

Conclusion

This research project utilised a mixed-method approach to most effectively answer the main research questions. The findings indicated that the majority of participants experienced bullying behaviours in schools with verbal and indirect forms of bullying being the most common. These findings suggest that bullying is a continuous problem in schools and there is a need for anti-bullying teacher training. The research indicated that teachers report that victims of bullying suffer emotional and academic effects of bullying, yet 66% of participants have received no anti-bullying training. These findings indicate the need for mandatory training to effectively prevent and manage bullying behaviours amongst students in Irish primary schools.

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An Ghaeilge i gCois Fharraige: Teanga Bheo nó Teanga i mBaol, le Colm Ó Cualáin

Beathaisnéis

Rugadh agus tógadh an t-údar i mBaile an Tigh Mhóir, i gceantar Chois Fharraige, Contae na Gaillimhe. D'fhreastail sé ar Scoil Náisiúnta Sailearna, na hAille agus ar mheánscoil Choláiste Chroí Mhuire sa Spidéal. Tá BA (Onóracha) sa Léann Oidhreachta bainte amach aige ó Institiúid Teicneolaíochta na Gaillimhe-Maigh Eo agus Máistreacht Ghairmiúil sa Bhunoideachas ó Choláiste Hibernia. Is le Gaeilge a tógadh an t-údar agus tá suim mhór aige i gcúrsaí teanga.

An Ghaeilge i gCois Fharraige: Teanga Bheo nó Teanga i mBaol, le Colm Ó Cualáin

Stiúrthóir Taighde: Mr Art Ó Suilleabháin

Coimriú

Tá go leor cainte á dhéanamh agus á scríobh ar chúrsaí Gaeilge sa lá atá inniu ann agus is go minic ag trácht ar an meath agus ar an laghdú atá ag teacht ar an teanga Ghaeilge sa tír agus sa Ghaeltacht le blianta anuas. Mar chainteoir dúchais, is cúis imní é seo, más fíor an méid atá ráite sna staidéir acadúla agus sna meáin faoin teanga agus an todhchaí atá i ndán don Ghaeilge. Rinne an t-údar taighde ar sheasamh na Gaeilge ina cheantar féin agus súil aige a fháil amach an teanga bheo láidir í an Ghaeilge i gcónaí i gCois Fharraige nó an teanga í atá i mbaol.

Eochairfhocail: Gaeilge, teanga, cois fharraige, daonra, todhchaí

Réamhrá

Is í an Ghaeilge teanga dhúchais an údair seo, an teanga atá aige ón gcliabhán. Tá cónaí ar an údar seo i gceann de na ceantair Ghaeltachta is mó sa tír, i gcroílár Chonamara, ceantar Chois Fharraige in iarthar na Gaillimhe. Ba é an Ghaeilge teanga sinsir an údair chomh fada siar is eol dó agus is í a labhraíodh sa bhaile i gcónaí, le gaolta, le cairde agus le comharsana béal dorais. De bharr sin, tá áit ar leith ag an nGaeilge i saol an údair agus ba cúis mhaith an taighde seo a dhíriú ar ghné éigin maidir lena theanga dhúchais.

Léirmheas Litríochta

Séard atá i gceist ag an t-údar a phlé sa chaibidil seo a leanas ná léirmheas agus cur síos a dhéanamh ar an litríocht chuí agus na foinsí a bhain an t-údar úsáid as le linn an taighde seo. Is ábhar cainte agus is ábhar tráthúil í an Ghaeilge le déanaí anuas; tá na meáin agus tá tuarascáil foilsithe ag déanamh tuairisce ar an teanga agus an meath atá i ndán don Ghaeilge. Is cúis imní é seo do chainteoirí dúchais, údar an taighde seo san áireamh, do mhuintir na Gaeltachta agus do mhuintir na hÉireann go bhfuil teanga dhúchais na tíre i mbaol. An bhfuil cúrsaí chomh dona mar atá ráite? Sa staidéar seo, tá súil ag an údar fiosrú a dhéanamh ar chúrsaí Gaeilge ina cheantar féin, i gCois Fharraige. An bhfuil seasamh na Gaeilge láidir sa cheantar sin, sna scoileanna ansin, agus cén dearcadh agus tuairimí atá ag múinteoirí scoile faoin nGaeilge sa cheantar? Déantar scrúdú anseo ar an litríocht chuí leis na ceisteanna seo a fhiosrú agus an méid atá ráite sa litríocht faoi na ceisteanna céanna seo.

I mí Bealtaine 2015, foilsíodh an tuarascáil *Nuashonrú ar an Staidéar Cuimsitheach Teangeolaíoch ar Úsáid na Gaeilge sa Ghaeltacht: 2006-2011*; is éard atá sa taighde seo ná anailís ar staid reatha na Gaeilge sa Ghaeltacht i láthair na huaire. Cuireann údair na tuarascála sin, Conchúr Ó Giollagáin agus Martin Charlton, fianaise

agus taighde ar an nGaeilge sa Ghaeltacht os ár gcomhair agus faraor ní scéal maith atá ann do na ceantair Ghaeltachta. De réir an staidéir agus figiúirí na tuarascála sin, tá meath agus laghdú suntasach ag teacht ar úsáid agus ar labhairt na Gaeilge i nGaeltachtaí na tíre. Ní aontaíonn gach duine le cuid do thorthaí an taighde sin áfach agus go gairid tar éis sheoladh na tuarascála, dúirt Mac Con Iomaire (2015) agus Ó hÉallaithe (2015) sna meáin nach raibh an scéal chomh dona i gcás na Gaeilge sa Ghaeltacht mar atá sonraithe i dtuarascáil Uí Ghiollagáin agus Charlton.

Tá tionchar ag an athrú daonra sna Gaeltachtaí le blianta anuas agus ó aimsir an Tíogair Cheiltigh ar sheasamh na Gaeilge sna Gaeltachtaí. Déanann Seosamh Mac Donnacha ina thaighde *Staid Reatha na Scoileanna Gaeltachta: Léargas ó na Príomhoidí, na Múinteoirí agus na Tuismitheoirí* trácht ar na dúshláin a bhíonn ag scoileanna Gaeltachta le blianta anuas agus ceann suntasach acu seo ná an t-athrú daonra sna Gaeltachtaí agus an éagsúlacht chumais Gaeilge a bhíonn ag gasúir anois atá ag freastal ar scoileanna Gaeltachta de bharr an athraithe dhaonra seo.

Sa bhliain 2010, d'fhoilsigh an rialtas tuarascáil darb ainm *An Straitéis 20 Bliain Don Ghaeilge 2010 – 2030*. Tá sé sonraithe sa cháipéis sin, líon na gcainteoirí Gaeilge a mhéadú sa tír, sa Ghaeltacht agus oideachas trí Ghaeilge mar chuspóirí lárnacha na tuarascála sin. Tá roinnt dul chun cinn déanta ag an straitéis le déanaí anuas, ceann acu ná an Polasaí don Oideachas Gaeltachta a thabharfadh tacaíocht agus treoir bhreise do scoileanna Gaeltachta. Ag an am céanna agus os cionn sé bliana caite ó seoladh an cháipéis, níl an dul chun cinn suntasach déanta ag an straitéis mar shíl go leor. Chuir an Iar-Choimisinéir Teanga Seán Ó Cuirreáin laigí an rialtais i leith na Gaeilge agus easpa dul chun cinn na straitéise in iúl i dTithe an Oireachtais, mar atá le sonrú in alt nuachtáin le McGee et al. (2014).

Ón méid staidéar, fiosraithe agus plé atá déanta ag údar an tráchtais seo anois ar an litríocht chuí agus ar thaighde na n-acadóirí atá thuasluaite, is iomaí ceist a d'fhéadfaí a chur i leith na Gaeilge agus a seasamh i láthair na huaire. An bhfuil laghdú ag teacht ar úsáid agus ar labhairt na Gaeilge sa Ghaeltachta mar atá sonraithe? Céard iad na cúiseanna atá leis an laghdú seo? Cén tuairim atá ag scoileanna agus múinteoirí scoile faoin nGaeilge – an bhfeiceann siadsan athrú ar chúrsaí Ghaeilge sa cheantar? Tá sé i gceist ag údar an taighde seo roinnt do na ceisteanna thuasluaite a fhiosrú níos doimhne agus anailís a dhéanamh ar chúrsaí teanga i gceantar Chois Fharraige, agus roinnt do na pointí a pléadh thuas a fhiosrú.

Ceisteanna an Taighde
1. An bhfuil laghdú ag teacht ar labhairt agus ar úsáid na Gaeilge i gceantar Chois Fharraige?
2. Céard iad na cúiseanna atá leis an laghdú seo atá ag teacht ar úsáid agus ar labhairt na Gaeilge dar le daoine?
3. Cén ról atá ag scoileanna i dtodhchaí na Gaeilge sa cheantar?

Modheolaíocht

Is éard atá sa chaibidil seo ná plé agus cur síos ar na modheolaíochta taighde ar baineadh úsáid as le linn an staidéir. Ceann do na chéad chéimeanna eile a tógadh sa staidéar ná na modhanna taighde a bhí ag an údar chun leas a bhaint as le heolas agus sonraí a bhailiú don taighde. Maidir le go leor tionscadail taighde, bíonn dhá chatagóir taighde ann le heolas a bhailiú, is é sin an taighde príomha agus an taighde tánaisteach. Bhain an t-údar úsáid éifeachtach as an taighde tánaisteach agus é ag cur smaointe le chéile don tráchtas i dtús an taighde agus é ag bailiú eolais. Bhain an t-údar úsáid chomh maith as taighde príomha trí eolas a bhailiú agus ó agallaimh a chuir sé agus ó anailís ar chúrsaí Gaeilge ina cheantar féin.

Bhain an t-údar seo úsáid as an dá mhodheolaíocht, an taighde cainníochtúil agus an taighde cáilíochtúil sa tionscadal taighde le cuid mhór don taighde a dhéanamh agus eolas a bhailiú. Sa staidéar seo bhain an t-údar úsáid as an taighde cainníochtúil, trí scrúdú a dhéanamh ar shonraí agus staitisticí daonáirimh le heolas a fháil ar líon na gcainteoirí Gaeilge sa tír, sna Gaeltachtaí agus sonraí eile maidir leis an teanga. Taispeánann na sonraí daonáirimh a fuair an t-údar ón bPríomh Oifig-Staidrimh, torthaí agus staitisticí an-suimiúil ar fad i dtaobh na Gaeilge. De réir daonáireamh na bliana 1996, bhí 1,430,205 duine ábalta Gaeilge a labhairt in Éirinn[1]. Sa bhliain 2011, bhí 1,774,437 duine ábalta Gaeilge a labhairt de réir dhaonáireamh na bliana sin. Taispeánann na figiúirí sin go raibh ardú 344,232 ar líon na gcainteoirí sa chúig bliana déag sin. Cheapfaí go raibh an Ghaeilge i seasamh maith ó na figiúirí sin ach tá níos mó i gceist leo, má dhéantar anailís níos doimhne ar na figiúirí céanna nuair a thógtar na cainteoirí a labhraíonn Gaeilge go laethúil taobh amuigh don chóras oideachais amháin mar shampla.

Sa tionscadal taighde seo freisin, bhain an t-údar úsáid éifeachtach thairbheach as an taighde cáilíochtúil trí agallaimh a chur ar mhúinteoirí sa scoil náisiúnta áitiúil. Chuir an t-údar agallaimh ar chúigear múinteoirí le heolas agus torthaí a bhailiú don taighde. Bheadh léargas agus tuiscint mhaith ag múinteoirí na scoile ar staid na Gaeilge sa cheantar ó dhaltaí na scoile agus ó bheith i dteagmháil le tuismitheoirí an cheantair chomh maith ar bhonn laethúil. Leis na hagallaimh, sonraí daonáirimh, na staidéir acadúla agus mar chainteoir dúchais, ba cheart go mbeadh an t-údar ábalta léargas cothrom a thabhairt ar stádas nó seasamh na Gaeilge sa cheantar seo na laethanta seo agus le roinnt blianta anuas chomh maith. Déantar anailís agus scrúdú ar thorthaí na n-agallamh sna míreanna a leanas sa taighde seo.

Torthaí

Déantar anailís ar phríomhthorthaí ó na hagallaimh sa chaibidil seo, chomh maith leis na príomhphointí agus na téamaí coitianta a tháinig chun cinn maidir leis an nGaeilge sa cheantar i gcomhthéacs scoile agus freisin ó mhúinteoirí a rugadh agus a tógadh sa cheantar.

Ó na hagallaimh a cuireadh, tháinig pointí agus torthaí chun cinn maidir le na cúiseanna a cheapann na múinteoirí atá leis an laghdú ar labhairt agus ar úsáid na Gaeilge agus ar an taobh eile don argóint, na cúiseanna dóchais do thodhchaí na Gaeilge sa cheantar. Bheadh tuairim mhaith ag múinteoirí na scoile faoin nGaeilge agus an seasamh atá aici i láthair na huaire sa cheantar agus le blianta anuas freisin ó na daltaí a fhreastalaíonn ar an scoil agus na tuismitheoirí atá siad i dteagmháil leo ar bhonn laethúil.

Seo a leanas iad na cúiseanna is mó óna hagallaimh a bhfuil tionchair acu ar an laghdú atá ráite sna staidéir acadúla agus an dearcadh atá ann freisin ar an laghdú atá ag teacht ar labhairt agus ar úsáid na Gaeilge i gCois Fharraige:

1. An t-athrú atá tagtha ar an daonra sa cheantar le blianta anuas, daoine bogtha isteach sa cheantar ó áiteanna eile agus nach cainteoirí Gaeilge iad.
2. Bhí tionchar ag aimsir an Tíogair Cheiltigh agus an lagtrá eacnamaíochta a tháinig ina dhiaidh sin ar an gceantar. D'imigh céatadán don aos óg ar imirce ar thóir oibre thar lear de bharr an lagtrá eacnamaíochta a tharla roinnt blianta ó shin.
3. Níl i ndóthain béime á chur ag an rialtas ar chúrsaí teanga agus Gaeilge. Caithfidh siad a bheith níos gníomhaí i dtaobh na teanga ó thaobh polasaithe, infheistíocht sna ceantair Gaeltachta, agus sna scoileanna ó thaobh acmhainní, srl.
4. Tá tionchar ag an teicneolaíocht, an teilifís agus na meáin shóisialta ar an nGaeilge; is é Béarla teanga na nithe seo de ghnáth.

Seo iad na cúiseanna dóchais dar leis na múinteoirí go mbeidh todhchaí dearfach ag an nGaeilge sa cheantar agus nach bhfuil cúrsaí chomh dona mar atá sonraithe sna staidéir acadúla agus an dearcadh seo atá ann faoin laghdú suntasach atá ag teacht ar úsáid agus labhairt na Gaeilge sa cheantar:

1. Is ceantar láidir Gaeilge é Cois Fharraige fós; tá ardchaighdeán Gaeilge ag an aos óg atá ag freastal ar an scoil agus tá Gaeilge á labhairt ag formhór na ndaoine sa cheantar.
2. Tá daoine i bhfad níos coinsiasaí maidir leis an nGaeilge sa cheantar le blianta anuas. Tuigeann daoine go bhfuil an teanga i gcontúirt; mar sin, tá daoine ag tógáil seasaimh agus i bhfad níos gníomhaí leis an teanga a chur chun cinn.
3. Ba mhaith leis an gcuid is mó de na daoine a bhog isteach sa cheantar le blianta anuas, a bhfuil a gcuid gasúir ag freastal ar an scoil, go mbeadh Gaeilge ag na gasúir agus ag an gclann chomh maith; mar sin, tá siad sásta

iarracht a dhéanamh an teanga a chur chun cinn sa bhaile agus í a fhoghlaim freisin.

4. Tá ról tábhachtach lárnach ag scoileanna an cheantair an Ghaeilge a chur chun cinn. Tá obair mhór á déanamh ag na scoileanna i láthair na huaire don Ghaeilge tríd an tumoideachas a dhéantar sna ranganna naíonáin.

Anailís agus Plé

Sa chaibidil seo, déantar plé agus anailís ar phríomhphointí agus ar thorthaí a bailíodh le linn an tráchtais. Bhí na múinteoirí a cuireadh faoi agallaimh dearfach den chuid is mó faoi stádas na Gaeilge sa cheantar. Ceann do na príomhphointí a tháinig chun cinn ó na hagallaimh ná an t-athrú atá tagtha ar an daonra sa cheantar le tréimhse ama anuas, agus d'aontaigh an t-údar leis an bpointe seo.

Thug ré an Tíogair Cheiltigh postanna agus infheistíocht isteach sa cheantar. Bhí níos mó fostaíochta ar fáil do chainteoirí dúchais an cheantair agus mar sin bhí seans níos fearr ag an aos óg fanacht i gCois Fharraige agus fostaíocht a fháil. Ar an taobh eile don scéal, mar a rinneadh trácht air i roinnt do na hagallaimh, bhog go leor daoine isteach sa cheantar in aimsir an Tíogair Cheiltigh nach cainteoirí dúchais iad. Bhí tionchar aige seo ar chúrsaí teanga sa cheantar.

Is dúshlán mór mar sin don Ghaeilge agus do Chois Fharraige é an t-athrú seo atá tagtha ar an daonra le tamall anuas, ach ag an am céanna, bíonn formhór na ndaoine a bhogann isteach sa cheantar nach Gaeilgeoirí iad ag iarraidh go mbeadh Gaeilge ag a gclann, mar a dúirt na múinteoirí sna hagallaimh, agus dearfach faoin nGaeilge.

Is pointe suntasach eile a roinn múinteoirí na scoile sna hagallaimh ná an tábhacht atá leis an tumoideachas atá ar siúl sa scoil le blianta beaga anuas. Le teacht i gcabhair ar an "meascán teanga" nó an éagsúlacht cumais seo, bheartaigh an scoil an tumoideachas a chur i bhfeidhm agus de thoradh air sin, ní mhúintear aon Bhéarla sna naíonáin shóisearacha ar chor ar bith agus bíonn sé sa tríú téarma ar scoil ag na naíonáin shinsearacha nuair a mhúintear an Béarla don chéad uair. Dúirt múinteoir amháin san agallamh, de bharr an tumoideachais seo, go mbíonn bunús maith nó "bunchloch" mhaith Gaeilge ag na daltaí i mblianta tosaigh na scoile.

Is dúshlán eile a luaigh na múinteoirí sna hagallaimh ná tionchair na meán shóisialta ar an aos óg, agus is é an Béarla an teanga teagaisc a bhíonn ar na suíomhanna meán shóisialta seo de ghnáth. Tá formhór na ndaoine i dteagmháil le chéile anois tríd na meáin shóisialta seo nó ag téacsáil nó ag seoladh ríomhphost chuig a chéile; níl daoine ag labhairt le chéile chomh minic de bharr seo nó ag labhairt le chéile mar a bhíodh daoine fadó. Mar a deir an seanfhocal, agus is fíor é i gcás na Gaeilge, "Beatha teanga í a labhairt", agus is fíorbheagán de sin a dhéantar i nGaeilge ar na meáin shóisialta.

Mar fhocal scoir, is cúiseanna dóchais iad do thodhchaí an cheantair an obair atá á déanamh ag na scoileanna áitiúla le teacht i gcabhair ar an athrú daonra sa

cheantar trí úsáid a bhaint as an tumoideachas i ranganna sóisearacha na scoile. Chomh maith leis, bíonn dearcadh maith ag formhór na ndaoine a bhogann isteach sa cheantar i leith na Gaeilge dar le múinteoirí agus iad siúd a fhreastalaíonn a gclann ar an scoil. Dúirt formhór na múinteoirí chomh maith sna hagallaimh gur mó daoine atá ag labhairt Gaeilge anois sa cheantar ná le déanaí agus tá fianaise an scéil sin le feiceáil sna sonraí daonáirimh, fiú más ardú do bheagán é. Caithfidh an rialtas níos mó a dhéanamh do dhul chun cinn na teanga, le todhchaí na Gaeilge a bheith rathúil i gceantar Chois Fharraige agus ar fud na tíre chomh maith.

<u>Conclúid</u>

Tá dúshláin ar leith ann don Ghaeilge i gCois Fharraige inniu mar a rinneadh trácht air agus mar atá ráite ag cuid do na hacadóirí a pléadh. Tá an t-údar seo dóchasach, mar atá na múinteoirí chomh maith a cuireadh faoi agallamh, go bhfuil todhchaí dearfach i ndán don Ghaeilge i gCois Fharraige. Mar fhocail scoir, caithfidh na daoine iad féin, na scoileanna agus an rialtas oibriú as láimh a chéile chun an Ghaeilge a chur chun cinn agus a láidriú sna Gaeltachtaí agus ar fud na tíre sa todhchaí.

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Exploring the Impact of Parental Separation on Pupils in the Irish Primary School Classroom, by Aideen Lawlor

Biography

Aideen Lawlor was born in Athlone. She graduated from University College Galway with a BA (Hons) Degree in Geography and Sociology & Politics. She earned a Professional Master of Education (PME) in Primary Education from Hibernia College. Aideen has a firm interest in the well-being of children and passionately believes that every child deserves the opportunity to reach their full learning potential. She feels privileged to be embarking upon a career in teaching where she can make a positive impact on children's lives.

Exploring the Impact of Parental Separation on Pupils in the Irish Primary School Classroom, by Aideen Lawlor

Research supervisor: Dr Aoife M. Lynam

Abstract

The aim of the study was to deepen our understanding of the realities of parental separation in the Irish primary school classroom. Unstructured one-to-one interviews were conducted with mainstream primary school teachers (n=5) and thematic analysis was used to interpret the data. The findings demonstrated that parental separation has the potential to negatively impact on children's classroom behaviour and academic performance and places extra professional demands on teachers. The study raised concerns surrounding teachers' professional development, whole-school policies on parental separation, home-school liaison, and formal access to professional support. The findings suggested a need for further research that addresses the school as a support system for children and teachers coping with parental separation.

Keywords: Separation, parents, pupils, emotion, classroom

Introduction

Consistent with trends across western societies, the number of separated couples in Ireland has undoubtedly increased in recent decades (Connolly, 2015; Hogan, Halpenny & Greene, 2002). Parental separation has the potential to precipitate a major crisis in children's lives, and learning, which is one of the most fundamental developmental tasks for children, can be impeded (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980). Schools are charged with meeting children's cognitive needs and promoting their mental health and well-being (DES and DoH, 2015; Government of Ireland, 1999). Teachers are now facing the additional demands that parental separation brings to the academic community. Against this backdrop, the study set out to explore the impact of parental separation on children and teachers' lives in the primary school classroom.

Literature Review

Parental separation can have a profound negative impact on many children and the associated stress often pervades the school setting (Altenhofen and Biringen, 2008; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). The effect of parental separation ranges from mild to severe and from short term to long term, and is mediated by factors that include the parents' relationship, parent-child relations, the child's age/gender and the support available to children from relatives, teachers, coaches and community personnel (Berns, 2013; Click & Parker, 2012; Coon & Fine, 2012). Although children experience divorce differently and in their own time frame, there are typical divorce effects

(Altenhofen & Biringen, 2008; Fagan & Churchill, 2012). Sadness is the most striking reaction among young school-age children (Page & Page, 2003). Many children of this age exhibit anxiety, become withdrawn, have difficulties concentrating and engage in daydreaming (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). Also common are feelings of anger at the lack of control that children have over their own situation (Altenhofen & Biringen, 2008).

In interviews with teachers of 131 students of separated parents, Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) found that two-thirds of students showed some notable changes in school, with one-fifth suffering a decline in educational achievement in the months following the separation. Another teacher-focussed study reported that boys aged 10 to 12, without fathers present in their homes, were more masculine, aggressive, disobedient and independent than boys with fathers present (Santrock, 1970). Children's intellectual performance, cognitive ability and social behaviour are stimulated by the direct impact of fathers (Clarke-Stewart, 1977). Kaye (1989, cited in Ackerman, 2006) found the poor academic performance of children of separated parents lasted two to three years and the younger the child, the more likely the separation would adversely affect academic performance. A further study by Bisnair, Firestone and Rynard (1990, cited in Ackerman, 2006) suggested that access to both parents seemed to be the most protective factor by reason of its association with better academic adjustment.

Ourth and Zakarija (1982) argue that school, because of the substantial time that children spend there, becomes a setting for conducting interventions. Stolberg and Mahler (1994) found that even a school-based programme that only offered emotional support to children of separated parents produced a significant reduction in clinical symptoms. A positive teacher-child relationship can support a child's sense of security and self-esteem and provide a setting that maximises the child's efforts to cope (Spencer & Shapiro, 1993; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). Hall and Purdy (2013) recommend that children experiencing parental separation be given the opportunity to participate in non-academic activities to foster healthy relations with peers and to allow an outlet for their frustration. Teachers can help children who feel powerless over events relating to their parents' separation by allowing them to exercise control over classroom procedures and activities (Frieman, 1993; Miller, Ryan & Morrison, 1999). The potential for schools to support children, however, can only be realised if parents inform schools of the separation (Hogan et al., 2002; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980).

Weissbourd (1994) found that children's responses to parental separation are sometimes ignored as teachers find it difficult to cope because of their lack of training. According to Gold and Roth (1993), some teachers are unable to deal with the additional demands that changes in society have placed upon them. School intervention must be designed to attend to the needs not only of children but also of the class teacher (Sandoval, 2002). Teachers need to be well-informed about what to

expect from children who are experiencing parental separation (Clarke-Stewart, 1989, cited in Locke & Ciechalski, 1995). Without an understanding of the impact of parental separation on children and without developing effective supportive strategies, teacher interventions cannot work (Sandoval, 2002). Sandoval (2002) further argues that, as children need both parents, schools should open up home-school communication to encourage responsible parent-child relationships, which is particularly important in the early stages of separation when parental conflict is more acute (Altenhofen & Biringen, 2008). To assist teachers with the complexities of parent-teacher conferences and with the extra demands that parental separation brings to the classroom, school policies and guidelines are invaluable to ensure clarity across the school community (Hornby, Hall & Hall, 2003; Sandoval, 2002). Omizo and Omizo (1987) contend that counsellors are the professionals in the educational system who can help children experiencing parental separation. Similarly, Miller et al. (1999) recommend that teachers refer separation-related problems to the school's counsellor or psychologist and act on their recommendations. Therefore, based on this literature review, the research questions were:

1. What is the impact of parental separation on pupils' classroom behaviour?
2. How does parental separation affect pupil learning?
3. How does parental separation impact on the professional lives of teachers?

Methodology

The research study is concerned with individual experiences rather than broad generalities and seeks to gain a deeper understanding of the social realities of parental separation in the primary school classroom. Social constructivism, which traces the origin of knowledge, meaning and the nature of reality to processes generated within human relationships (Young & Colin, 2004) is the philosophical worldview which guides this study. Within this philosophical worldview, the goal of research is to "rely as much as possible on the participants' view of the situation being studied" (Creswell, 2014, p.8). The qualitative research method, which seeks to build a holistic and narrative description of a social or cultural phenomenon (Gall, Borg & Gall, 1996), fits this philosophical worldview and the purpose of the study. The study adopted a phenomenological approach, which is a way of describing a phenomenon that exists as an integral part of the society in which we live. Parental separation is not a single event but rather, it is a process that impacts lived experiences. This study was essentially exploratory in nature and while phenomenological research does not necessarily provide definitive explanations, it does raise awareness and increases insight about a phenomenon.

Participants (n=5) for the study were selected using criterion sampling and purposeful sampling. Criterion sampling was used to select teachers who had taught, or who were teaching, children of separated parents, where parental separation is defined as married and non-married parents, who had lived together and collectively shared parenting, living apart in separate accommodation. To ensure information-rich cases to study, purposeful sampling restricted participants to teachers who had taught, or who were teaching, children of separated parents for a period of at least three months (Patton, 2015). Data was collected through one-to-one interviews with the participants. The aim of the interviews was to focus on the participants' own classroom experiences of parental separation, and the researcher decided on an unstructured interview approach. To encourage a degree of consistency, however, an *aide memoire* was used to subtly guide the focus of the interview, without undermining the flow of the discussion. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed for analysis, providing a textual account of everything that was said. Thematic analysis, a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within data, and developing themes that represent something important about the data that relates to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006), was used to interpret the data. Themes were identified inductively, and accordingly, the themes were not theory-driven but were strongly linked to the data themselves (Dawson, 2002). Thematic analysis occurred over a six-phase process (Howitt & Cramer, 2008) – searching for meaning and patterns in the data; producing initial codes to form the basis of repeated patterns across the data; sorting the different codes into potential themes and collating the coded data extracts against these themes; reviewing and refining the themes; defining and naming the themes; and writing up an articulate, reasoned and logical account of the data.

Prior to undertaking the study, ethical approval was sought and granted by the Hibernia College Ethics Committee. The study was conducted to the highest ethical standards in line with the Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (BERA, 2011). Voluntary and informed consent was the condition under which participants agreed to participate in the study. The researcher approached the process of data analysis with commitment and integrity.

Results

The findings are presented under five headings which reflect the five major themes that emerged from the data. These are (a) Children's classroom behaviour, (b) Children's academic performance, (c) Teachers' supportive actions, (d) Teachers' professional lives and (e) Sources of support in schools. These themes will now be explored.

(a) Children's classroom behaviour
Some children displayed an adverse reaction to their parents' separation which varied in intensity and onset and ranged from a few days to two academic years. Children of high-conflict separations became withdrawn. Some children engaged in daydreaming. One child (Mary – please note, all of these names are pseudonyms) exhibited separation distress and screamed for her parents for 10-15 minutes each morning over two–three weeks. Her response was not immediate: "…fine for the first week or so...then became quite tearful". Two boys experiencing anger rebelled against the learning process. Over the academic year, Paul "was continuously in a silent rebellious mode...his efforts were at a minimum". For two academic years, John "didn't do any work...he totally rebelled against everyone".

(b) Children's academic performance
The study found that parental separation did not significantly impact on academic performance. Aside from Paul, no noticeable changes were observed in academic performance. Although John's academic engagement was substantially undermined, he continued to do well academically: "He is very bright...he was learning from listening." Paul, on the other hand, although also quite bright, was "underachieving", his grades "only improved marginally" by year end. The study also found a significant lack of parental involvement in homework.

(c) Teachers' supportive actions
Participants had been informed of the separations and their narratives identified a range of supportive actions. Mary's teacher worked with her parents to reduce Mary's distress, introduced a positive behaviour chart, addressed "feelings" through SPHE and used tough love. John's teacher brought John's mother in several times: "….in the end she [said]….to just leave him alone, so we….totally took a step back". Paul's teacher met with his parents "with limited success", placed Paul beside a "more compatible" classmate and, through consultation with the Sport's teacher, Paul was enrolled in Gaelic football, which saw an improvement in his social behaviour. Consistently evident in the narratives was the awareness and sensitivity demonstrated by the teachers. The study found that the participants' actions were largely informed by teacher intuition. Teachers' narratives indicated that they had no formal training on parental separation: "…as we went along this is what we discovered" and there were no formal procedures in place: "You are not prepared…for the anger…between two parents".

(d) Teachers' professional lives
The study found that parental separation had a negative impact on some teachers' professional lives. Mary's teacher found the experience emotionally difficult: "...it's

very, very hard, I think especially as a mother myself" and had classroom management issues: "...it is definitely hard [to] manage in a classroom when you've got 28 children". John's teacher found the experience stressful: "....you couldn't deal with him....I was very nervous about having him [again] in sixth class". One teacher spoke about difficulties with high-conflict parents: "...you could have the mother coming to you and the father coming to you and that can be difficult." Paul's teacher was worried by Paul's situation and frustrated by the lack of support from his mother. He considered contacting Paul's father but decided not to: "I knew the possibility of rekindling dissension between the couple…Paul would suffer."

(e)   Sources of support in schools
The study found that there were no formal sources of support in place for children or teachers dealing with parental separation. Teachers' narratives largely indicated an informal reliance on other staff members. Mary's teacher enlisted the help of the resource teacher and principal to settle Mary and placed her sitting near the SNA "for reassurance". Another teacher spoke of the invaluable support of learning support/resource teachers while acknowledging "it is not [their] job". Paul's teacher felt there was little else he could do: Paul "was not truculent…just not working to his ability...there was no one to refer him to." He felt the child "would have benefitted from counselling" and "home-school liaison". Mary's teacher indirectly expressed a need for a psychologist: "...if you can pinpoint what it is…you look at dealing with it...but sure that's psychology."

Discussion
The study confirms that parental separation has a negative effect on some children in the classroom (Altenhofen & Biringen, 2008; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). The behavioural responses exhibited were typical behaviours for this cohort of children, underscoring the predictability of the responses that teachers can expect (Altenhofen & Biringen, 2008; Fagan & Churchill, 2012). The varied intensity, duration and onset of these responses demonstrates the need for teacher understanding of the protective factors that mediate children's ability to cope with parental separation (Bisnair et al., 1990, cited in Ackerman, 2006; Clarke-Stewart, 1977; Hall & Purdy, 2013; Santrock, 1970). In the present study, a child's sociability improved when his teacher strategically involved him in sport (Hall & Purdy, 2013). While behaviour and academic engagement was found to be adversely impacted, in contrast to previous research findings (Kaye, 1989, cited in Ackerman, 2006; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980), academic performance was not significantly affected. This may be due to the high degree of sensitivity demonstrated by the teachers and their supportive actions (Spencer & Shapiro, 1993; Stolberg & Mahler, 1994; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). These findings highlight the potential that exists in schools to support children of parental separation.

All participants had been advised of the separations and, accordingly, were in a position to respond supportively, highlighting the importance of this information for schools to maximise their support potential (Hogan et al., 2002; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). The study found, however, that teachers had no formal training on parental separation and relied on their intuitiveness as teachers. Two boys experiencing anger, despite the well-placed efforts of their teachers, continued their rebellious behaviour over a sustained period of time, which significantly impacted on one boy's academic performance. More effective strategies to deal with anger in boys include giving the child a sense of control in the classroom and involving the father as part of the parent-teacher team (Clarke-Stewart, 1977; Frieman, 1993; Miller et al., 1999; Santrock, 1970). This finding demonstrates the potential that exists for significant academic problems if learning is not resumed within a reasonable timeframe (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980) and underscores the need for teacher training on parental separation if teacher interventions are to work (Clarke-Stewart, 1989, cited in Locke & Ciechalski, 1995; Sandoval, 2002).

The difficulties experienced by the participants highlight the new demands that parental separation imposes on teachers' professional lives (Gold & Roth, 1993). The lack of training (Weissbourd, 1994; Frieman, 1993) and lack of school policies on parental separation to guide teachers through the additional stressors (Hornby et al., 2003; Sandoval, 2002) could account for these difficulties. Difficulties in dealing with high-conflict parents may further identify a need for more managed home-school liaison that promotes responsible parent-child relationships (Altenhofen & Biringen, 2008; Sandoval, 2002). This need is underscored by the significant lack of parental involvement in homework. In the absence of onsite professional support or channels of access to external support, there was an informal reliance by some teachers on other staff members — in particular, SNAs and learning support/resource teachers. One teacher stated that his student would have benefitted from counselling while another indirectly expressed the value of a psychologist. These findings indicate a potential need for whole-school policy planning that includes access to professional support that facilitates teacher guidance and addresses the needs of children that cannot be best supported through the structures of the school (Omizo & Omizo, 1987; Miller et al., 1999).

Conclusion

The findings of the study confirm that parental separation adversely affects some children's behaviour and academic engagement and has the potential to impact on academic performance. The study underscores the role that schools can play in mediating children's responses. The findings demonstrate that the additional stressors of parental separation can negatively impact on teachers' professional lives. The study found a lack of formal school supports to support teachers and children experiencing

parental separation. While the sample size is too small to be representative of this cohort of children and teachers, the study raises awareness and identifies a need for more extensive research focussed on whole-school planning for parental separation.

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A Qualitative Study on Including Pupils from Diverse Cultural Backgrounds: What Do Irish Primary School Teachers Do?, by Barry Cunningham

Biography

Barry graduated Hibernia College in 2016 with a Professional Master of Education (PME) in Primary Education. He also holds a BSc in Education and Training with Dublin City University. Barry's interests in social learning and the learning environment stem from a long voluntary career in Scouting Ireland. He worked with young people with the aim of helping them to work cooperatively in various settings to achieve personal and team goals despite differences such as gender, race and ethnicity.

A Qualitative Study on Including Pupils from Diverse Cultural Backgrounds: What Do Irish Primary School Teachers Do?, by Barry Cunningham

<u>Research Supervisor</u>: Ms Avril Carey

<u>Abstract</u>
Ireland has become a nation with a wealth of cultural diversity resulting in schools needing to ensure pupils from culturally diverse backgrounds feel included in the classroom. As such, using a mixed-methods approach, this study examined how primary school teachers create an inclusive physical and social learning environment. The results of the research demonstrated that books were the main physical resource used and that there was a strong tendency to use collaborative methods that were inclusive of dialogue. The recommendations of this small-scale research project are that CPD courses focus on creating culturally diverse learning environments and that online tutorials are developed advising how to develop classroom environments that are inclusive of cultural diversity.

<u>Introduction</u>
Ireland's demographics have changed in recent years resulting in a diversity of cultures living within it. As such, institutions such as schools have had to embrace and ensure that the diversity of cultures within them are recognised and respected. Furthermore, the Education Act (1998) identifies that the diversity of values, beliefs, languages and traditions in Irish society should be respected within the Irish education system. To ensure cultural diversity is recognised and respected, teachers can influence the physical and social classroom environment to be reflective of the local community and the wider nation. This small-scale research project explores how Irish primary school teachers are currently including pupils in their classroom from diverse cultural backgrounds.

<u>Literature Review</u>
Owing to the change of cultural demographics of Irish society, schools have had to adapt to ensure students from culturally diverse backgrounds feel welcomed and are encouraged to learn alongside their peers. Such positive integration can help reduce the probability of individual discrimination (UNESCO, 2006) or prejudice in the classroom, which also supports the development of social cohesion (Macionis and Plummer, 2015; NCCA, 2006). Emile Durkheim believed that education was vital in creating moral unity and understanding (Sadovnik, 2007). By drawing on Durkheim's

idea, it could be seen that schools are essential in the development of the ideals of interculturalism (Sadovnik, 2007).

Interculturalism is a term that expresses a belief that we can all engage with and experience each other's cultures and become personally enriched in doing so (NCCA, 2006). From this belief comes the idea of Intercultural Education (IE) which "respects, celebrates, and recognises the normality of diversity in all aspects of human life, promotes equality and human rights, challenges unfair discrimination, and provides the values upon which equality is built" (NCCA, 2006, p.169). The primary school classroom is an area where pupils spend most of their day socialising and, as such, the ideals of interculturalism can be accomplished by differentiating in relation to the physical and social classroom environments to reflect the cultural diversity within it. The images on the walls, the artefacts displayed, the resources used and the layout of students within groupings all convey meaning that can have either a positive or negative effect that remind the observer of his/her place within the classroom and school (NCCA, 2006). To ensure positive integration of culturally diverse pupils, Smyth, Darmody, McGinnity and Byrne (2009) indicate that when teachers are supported using differentiating practices to promote inclusiveness of cultural diversity, pupils tend to achieve higher grades as well as integrate better with their peers.

The physical environment of the classroom
Banks and McGee Banks (2009) discuss how displaying artwork or posters depicting positive role models or using calendars that represent racial, ethnic and/or religious diversity are invaluable to enforcing the normality of diversity. This coincides with using different languages to label objects, give commands or greetings (NCCA, 2006) or by displaying flags, emblems, currency, that represent the variety of nationalities within the classroom (NCCA, 2006). Use of resources such as toys depicting indigenous homes, dolls of varying skin colour and clothing or objects depicting the heritage, customs and beliefs (i.e. a crucifix or a hanukkiyah) will normalise cultural diversity (NCCA, 2006). Furthermore, the NCCA (2006) informs that such displays or resources should accurately reflect the diversity of cultures in the classroom and this can lead to discussion around similarities and differences between societies (NCCA, 2006). Additionally, books and reference materials (e.g., videos, podcasts, and newspapers) that reflect diversity within society are invaluable teaching resources that encourage democratic racial attitudes and demonstrate equality (Banks, 2009). It is therefore crucial for educators to choose books and reference materials that reflect the history, culture, beliefs, values, cultural aspirations, etc. of varying diverse cultures that exist within the classroom and wider society (UNESCO, 2004).

The social environment within the classroom

Research indicates that teachers should be aware of social learning that takes place within the school (Devine 2005; Devine, Kenny and MacNella, 2008) as interculturalism can be achieved through dialogue amongst students of cultural diversity who exchange views and opinions (Council of Europe, 2008). To aid this process, the NCCA (2006) advise that the development of an inclusive community within the classroom can result in a democratic and cohesive society. UNESCO (2006) advises that pupils working collaboratively in cohesive social groups will promote social cohesion, thus meeting the ideals of interculturalism. However, if students are unable to express their thoughts and feelings through the use of language, they are at a disadvantage and fall behind their peers academically and have difficulty socialising (Nusche, 2009; Smyth et al., 2009). Therefore, a barrier that exists to the creation of dialogue within social cohesive groups is the lack of ability to communicate effectively. This may result in a pupil feeling excluded if the ideals of interculturalism are not being met.

In taking account of the variety of languages that may exist in a primary school classroom, the NCCA (2006) notes that recognising the language of culturally diverse pupils can in fact help the students to have a positive self-image. This is also reaffirmed by Devine (2009), who points out that when a pupil's language is recognised, they will develop feelings of self-efficacy and will in turn be motivated to learn. Thus, to create a learning environment that is inclusive of diversity, there needs to be a strategy that tackles any barriers to communication. In the classroom environment, this can be accomplished by differentiating the language used when giving commands (NCCA, 2006) or by recognising and displaying existing languages used by pupils (UNESCO, 2006). Therefore, the research questions for the current research project were as follows:

1. How do primary school teachers use the physical environment to promote inclusion among diverse pupils?
2. How do primary school teachers use the social environment to promote inclusion among diverse pupils?
3. What are the needs of primary school teachers in order to promote inclusion among diverse pupils?

Methodology

The aim of this research was to identify the practices used by Irish primary school teachers to promote inclusion of pupils from diverse cultural backgrounds to ensure such pupils are and feel included in the learning experience. It further aimed to identify if there are new or novel practices used that help in this process. The research was based upon the methodological approach of "Case Study", which can be used to add additional information to current knowledge (Bell, 2010) and can give a holistic understanding to the area of study without having to go to great lengths (O'Leary, 2004). Through case study, it was anticipated that undocumented practices can be

added to existing knowledge about what works in the promotion of interculturalism. Although the study was focused on a small catchment area, which can lead to generalisation (Bell, 2010), such data can be the basis of further investigation or, as O'Leary (2004, p.116) states, it may "bring new variables to light".

Within this methodology of case study, the qualitative method of interview had been chosen as the primary method as it gives an insight into and an understanding of the practices of the participants (Smith et al., 2009). Qualitative research aims to understand the thoughts and perceptions of the participants (Bell, 2010) and, in doing so, allows the researcher to understand the rationale for participants doing what they do. Qualitative research also gives detailed information about the settings in which the study is being carried out by answering questions such as, "What is going on here?" (Scott and Morrison, 2005, p.183). This is applicable to this study as it aims to identify and understand what practices are being used within the classroom settings. Additionally, the quantitative method of questionnaires was also used as such a method can provide large amounts of data over a short period of time (Brace, 2008) that demonstrates frequencies, patterns or regularities (Scott and Morrison, 2005) that portray common practices that the participants use to promote inclusion. However, Bell (2010) points out that quantitative data can produce generalised data. Despite this possibility, the researcher was seeking to discover answers that relate to data that would indicate possibilities or frequencies of occurring incidences or to demonstrate yes/no scenarios that reflect the purpose of the topic being studied.

Based on the studies question, the majority of the questionnaire respondents and interviewees were Irish female primary school teachers working in two Catholic primary schools in the north east of Ireland, with the responsibility of ensuring that pupils (of varying cultural backgrounds) in their care are/feel included in the physical and social environments of the classroom. Thus, there were limitations to the study, such as in sampling quantity, due to the time frame allowed for the project. There were limitations to the amount of literature that could be included for the topic due to a restricted word count and limitations on the literature reviewed as it focused mainly on practices of teachers that can be or are used to promote interculturalism in the classroom environment and not the whole school. Viewing the whole school would cause the area of study to expand and therefore make it more generalised. A limit to the amount of methods to be used also exists within this study due to a time limit on data collection. Ethical approval for this research was sought and approved by the Hibernia College Ethics Committee and carried out in accordance with the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2011) guidelines.

Results

The data gathered throughout the study was presented in the themes of needs, policies and guidelines, physical learning environment and social learning environment

because a theme may identify information at an observational level and/or at a hidden level (Boyatzis, 1998). The following interconnected themes emerged from the questionnaires and interviews: (a) needs, (b) policies and guidelines, (c) physical learning environment and (d) social learning environment.

Needs
Data from both questionnaires and interviews point to the need for teachers to be cognisant of the inclusion of pupils based on their cultural backgrounds. All respondents acknowledged that they have or have had students from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Policies and Guidelines
Interviewees and questionnaire respondents indicated that policies and guidelines are seldom used and unlikely to be used by teachers to ensure that all pupils are included in the educational experience. However, participants still indicated elsewhere that they use some practices that are advised by policies and guidelines.
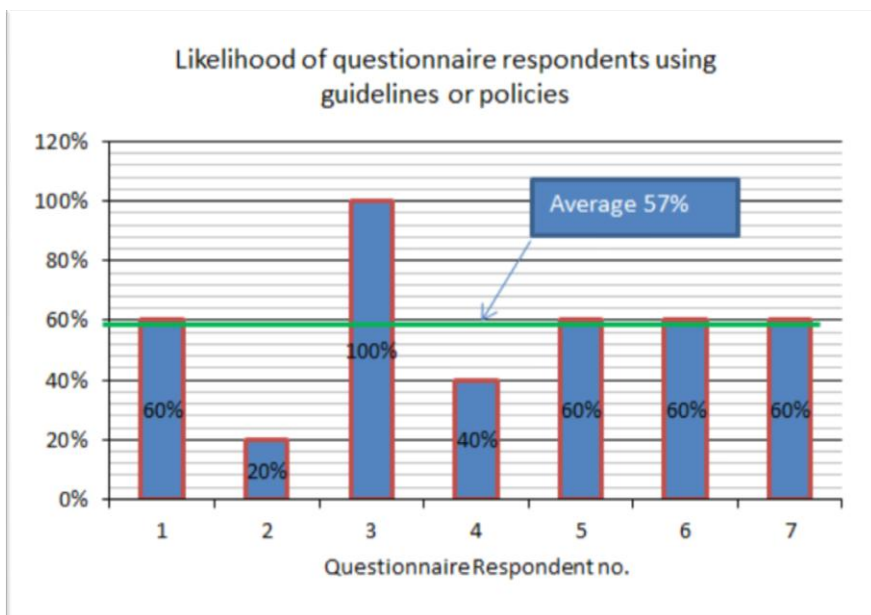

Furthermore, interviewees also indicated that they were unlikely to use guidelines or policies: "no particular guidelines, but in relation to policies, I have never seen any" (interviewee no. 1, school 1). "I don't follow any necessary policies or guidelines"

(interviewee no.1, school 1). One teacher interviewed stated that in the school, they use the NCCA guidelines and the school's equality policy as guidance to ensure inclusion of pupils of culturally diverse backgrounds. Although respondents indicated that they would not necessarily use guidelines or policies to inform their practices, they still, however, indicated that they use some practices that are advised by guidelines and policies.

Physical Learning Environment
Data collected had shown that many practices advised in guidelines are in fact used by teachers. Many respondents indicated that they would use multiple language labels to welcome people into the room, display maps, flags, emblems or currencies from around the world or display images, art work or posters that represent diversity. However, respondents indicated that they were unlikely to use objects to depict heritage customs or beliefs with some stating that the reason was due to lack of resources. Respondents did indicate that they were more likely to promote integration by highlighting bias that exists in books and using this to encourage discussion.

In this study, the respondents indicated that they would use multiple language labels to welcome people into the room: "best practice would be to use different language posters to say hello and goodbye" (interviewee no. 2, school 1). Respondents also indicated that displays used represent diversity: "In my classroom, I use displays representing people and activities which are culturally diverse. These initiate discussion and encourage pupils to reflect and comment on such matters." (questionnaire respondent no. 4)

Use displays
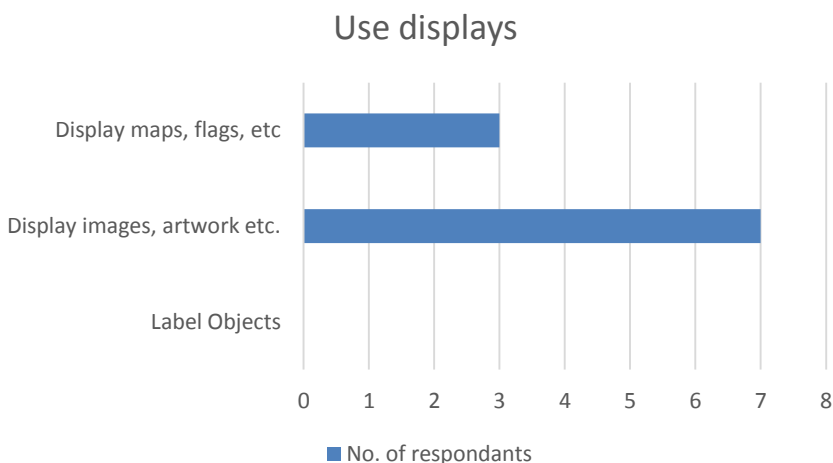
Interestingly, questionnaire respondents indicated that there were issues relating to the use and availability of physical resources: "Resources available to me don't particularly represent cultural diversity, but I try where possible" (questionnaire respondent no. 1). "It can be difficult to locate resources but if I had them, I would use them to reinforce stories" (questionnaire respondent no. 7). Additionally, only one interviewee mentioned asking pupils to take in world artefacts that could be used as teaching resources. Even though there is an indication that physical artefacts are less likely to be used in the classroom, use of books along with ICT was seen as a more common way of ensuring positive integration of pupils from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Social Learning Environment
Six of the seven questionnaire respondents (86%) indicated that they were certain to use collaborative methods to ensure positive integration whilst one showed that he/she was most likely. When asked to state the collaborative strategies used, those most mentioned by the respondents were group work, pair work and team/collaborative games. Additionally, these strategies were further mentioned several times throughout the interview stage: "I would do a project on different countries and the children would work together" (interviewee no. 1, school 1). "I would often pair students who are weak with those who are vocal or confident to give feedback to the class together because children from a diverse cultural background can initially be shy to participate, so the more confident pupils often help them integrate that way" (interviewee no. 1, school 2). Questionnaire respondents, on average, indicated that there was an average 86% chance that they would use dialogue. Respondents further stated that it would be used in conjunction with collaborative methods. Despite dialogue being referred to as being used with collaborative methods, it was otherwise seldom mentioned as a common strategy to be used. When asked to mention ways in which resources such as books, videos, etc. are used, only one respondent mentioned anything in relation to the use of dialogue: "used whenever possible to encourage discussion and make pupils feel at ease talking about their lives and customs" (questionnaire respondent no. 4). The same respondent mentioned the use of dialogue when using display: "In my classroom, I use displays representing people and activities which are culturally diverse. These initiate discussion..." One interviewee mentioned the use of dialogue twice: "I deal with this through the SPHE programme by discussing inclusion of others" and "I try hard to ensure all the children have an equal opportunity to take part in activities, oral discussion, role play, debating and the likes" (interviewee no. 1, school 2). When given the option of indicating that they use dialogue, respondents indicated that they use it. However, there is very little mention of its use otherwise.

Discussion

Findings from this study concur with the INTO (2001), the ESRI (Smyth et al., 2009) and the OECD (Taguma, Kim, Wurzburg and Kelly, 2009) and show that the respondents are aware of the need to differentiate their practices to promote inclusion of culturally diverse pupils. To support teachers implementing such practices, support has being given (Taguma et al., 2009) in the form of professional development programmes. Nevertheless, this study, in conjunction with the ESRI (Smyth et al., 2009) and OECD (Taguma et al., 2009) highlight that more can be done and that professional development programmes with a specific focus on teaching strategies that promote inclusion of culturally diverse pupils within primary school classrooms could better support teachers for the future. Such programmes could be further enhanced by providing information on the use of physical resources and books that reflect cultural diversity in the classroom because as Banks and McGee Banks (2009) point out, the use of physical resources that reflect diverse cultures can lead to discussion about cultural diversity.

To further achieve effective inclusion, pupils need to be empowered to discuss their similarities and differences (Council of Europe, 2008; NCCA, 2006). Discussing similarities and differences enables those involved to become more aware of each other, which can in turn lead to better understanding, tolerance and acceptance of each other (Council of Europe, 2008). The benefits of this can potentially provide understanding, tolerance and acceptance of cultural diversity within wider society.

In this study, respondents tended to focus on pupils working together but very rarely indicated allowing them time to discuss their similarities and/or differences. Collaborative methods such as team games and group/pair work were commonly cited as strategies used and these are strategies that are said to enhance inclusion (NCCA, 2006). However, these findings show a possible contradiction between the understanding of collaboration to enhance inclusion of cultural diversity and collaboration to be inclusive of dialogue that promotes inclusion. Panitz (1999) gives an understanding of collaborative learning as "a philosophy of interaction and personal lifestyle where individuals are responsible for their actions, including learning and respecting the abilities and contributions of their peers" (Panitz, 1993, p.3). Whilst collaboration in the above sense does, over time, promote inclusion (NCCA, 2006), it must ensure that pupils are given the opportunity to discuss their similarities and differences for inclusion of cultural diversity to work. This means that if teachers wish for their pupils to learn about and understand each other's cultural differences, they should possibly create an environment whereby pupils openly discuss themselves and their cultures rather than simply work cooperatively. This indicates that the end goal of the teacher should possibly be to encourage pupils to discuss their similarities and/or differences and this was not indicated by many of the respondents. This does not

suggest that the respondents are not trying to provide for inclusion but rather that their end goal may be misaligned with the intentions of promoting inclusion of cultural differences through the use of collaboration and dialogue simultaneously. Such use of collaboration and dialogue can be used within many areas of the curriculum. Examples of such could be the promotion of oral language that focuses the end goal of pupils learning about the cultural diversity within their school community or possibly within SESE where pupils could discuss the similarities and differences of the local and wider community. Such strategies could again be easily incorporated into CPD courses that focus on the promotion of cultural diversity through specific teaching methods that fit into multiple areas of the curriculum.

Conclusion

Irish society is evolving culturally, and teachers are at the forefront of forming societal views (Brown, 2006). This research, in line with research from OECD (2009), ESRI (2009) and comments from Devine (2005) and the INTO (2001), highlighted how there is still a need for teacher CPD that focuses on the improvement of practices/skills/methods that enhance integration of pupils from culturally diverse backgrounds. Such CPD could focus on ensuring awareness of the need for both the physical and social environment of the classrooms to reflect current Irish society with the use of physical resources, books and reference materials or via collaboration and dialogue that are used for the purpose of inclusion of diverse cultures within various curriculum areas.

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Inclusion of Pupils from the Travelling Community in Primary Schools in Ireland: Teachers' Perspectives and Experiences, by Clodagh Burke

Biography

Clodagh Burke completed the Professional Master of Education (PME) in Primary Education at Hibernia College. She has always been interested in education and is passionate about equality and inclusion. Historically, the travelling community have not had much success in the education system in Ireland, with low levels progressing to third-level education. This prompted Clodagh to question why this is the case — are the travelling community not included or provided for in Irish schools?   Much discussion has taken place over the years about discrimination of the travelling community; therefore, she decided to complete her dissertation in this area and focussed on teachers' perspectives of teaching pupils from the travelling community at primary school level.

Inclusion of Pupils from the Travelling Community in Primary Schools in Ireland: Teachers' Perspectives and Experiences, by Clodagh Burke

Research Supervisor: Ms Avril Carey

Abstract

This small-scale qualitative research project examined teachers' perspectives of inclusion of Travellers in the primary school classroom. It explored the challenges they face (if any) and the supports available for teachers and pupils from the travelling community in order to provide an inclusive environment which respects Traveller culture. This research indicated that absenteeism is a major challenge. Also highlighted was a need for more resources and training in the area of Traveller education. The travelling community still have absences well above their peers and, regrettably, have lower levels of academic attainment. This poses the question, "What can be done to ensure that the travelling community enjoy full and equal participation in the education system?"

Introduction

This paper summarises the findings of a small-scale research project about the experiences of teachers in providing an inclusive education for the travelling community. This paper will give an overview of the literature and government policy in Ireland for Traveller education. It will then outline the data collection methods, ethics and possible limitations. A summary of the results which prompted consideration of further questions will be provided and discussed in relation to the relevant literature. To conclude, recommendations for inclusion of Traveller children and further research in the area will be presented.

Literature Review

This section will review and discuss the literature and policy in relation to inclusion of Traveller children in the Irish education system. It will give a definition of the travelling community, review government policy and their education historically before examining teachers' attitudes, culture in the curriculum and resources. Finally, Traveller's views will be discussed along with discrimination, absenteeism and parental relations. The Equal Status Act 2000 defines the travelling community as a "community of people who are commonly called the travelling community and who are identified (both by themselves and others) as people with a shared history, culture and traditions, including, historically, a nomadic way of life on the island of Ireland" (Lalor and Share, 2013, p.310). The travelling community, many of whom received little

education, are widely recognised as being a marginalised group in our society. Historically, when the travelling community were educated, it was in segregated special classes or special schools for the travelling community (Lalor and Share, 2013, p.319).

Government Policy
The "Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy" (Department of Education and Science [DES], 2006) recommended a move away from segregated education provision to an integrated education in an inclusive mainstream setting which focuses on an intercultural approach to promoting diversity and equality. Furthermore, it recommended a review of the Visiting Teacher for the travelling community and that future provision of resources will focus on "individual educational need" rather than "Traveller identity" (DES, 2006). As part of Budget 2011, the Department of Education and Skills discontinued the Resource Teacher Service and Visiting Teacher Service for the travelling community. Their aim is to enhance educational outcomes for all, including the travelling community. Responding, the Irish Traveller Movement (ITM), the National Traveller Women's Forum and Pavee Point Traveller's Centre (2011) stated that such cuts will undo previous good work at improving educational outcomes for Traveller children.

Teachers' attitudes
Some teachers found that Traveller children have a "mob mentality" (Bhopal, 2011, p.474) suggesting they are disruptive and lack respect for authority. Ryan (1998, p.167), however, found that teachers generally held "favourable views" towards Traveller children and those who had specific in-service training are more accepting of the travelling community. Hegarty (2013) found that some teachers ignored Traveller children and excluded them in classroom activities.

Culture in the Curriculum
The guidelines on Traveller education (2002, p.17) by the Department of Education and Science (now Department of Education and Skills) stressed the importance of "Interculturalism within the school" suggesting that diversity must be appreciated and that inequality must be challenged. However, the report (Ireland, Department of Education and Science Inspectorate, 2005) found mixed views from the travelling community about including their culture in the curriculum with some fearing "it would lead to segregation of children into Traveller children and non-traveller children". According to Wilding (2008), both Liegeois (1998) and Derrington (2004) state that Traveller children may deal with conflict by "passing" or hiding their cultural identity.

Resources
Knipe, Montgomery and Reynolds (2005) noted some teachers use relevant resources while others did not know what was available or did not want to offend pupils from the travelling community. Bhopal (2011) added that giving Traveller children extra resources can be seen as "favouritism" and highlights a difference. The government provides resources such as extra capitation grants for schools with Traveller children, the Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) and School Completion Programme (SCP) schemes (*Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy*, 2006). Homework clubs may also support Traveller children, especially if their parents are illiterate or unable to assist with homework.

Discrimination
The travelling community experience discrimination on a daily basis (Watson et al., 2012, cited in Lalor and Share, 2013, p.313) along with racism and exclusion. Bhopal (2011) highlighted hostility from some teachers towards Traveller children although many claim they treat the travelling community the same as those from a settled community (Knipe, Montgomery and Reynolds, 2005). Lloyd and Norris (1998) conclude that while many teachers have good intentions towards the education of the travelling community, conflict does exist.

Absenteeism
Ryan (1998) found that pupils from the travelling community had poor school attendance, with children absent frequently to attend family events such as funerals, weddings and going to fairs. Such absenteeism may prevent them from achieving the same as their non-Traveller peers (Knipe, Montgomery and Reynolds, 2005).

Parental Relations
Trust and positive relationships between teachers and Traveller parents is important (Bhopal, 2011). In contrast, one partipicpant in research conducted by Hegarty (2013, p.136) suggested that the teacher was not interested in teaching her child because they thought he would probably "end up on the dole". The National Education Welfare Board (NEWB) suggests parental involvement is important if Traveller children are to have a sense of belonging in the school (NEWB, 2011, p.12). However, teachers reported that Traveller parents did not attend parent-teacher meetings or school events (Knipe, Montgomery and Reynolds, 2005).

Research shows that Travellers have not had much success in the Education system in Ireland, with low levels progressing to Third Level education. This small scale research project will examine the teachers' perspective of inclusion of Traveller in the Primary School Classroom.

1. It will explore the challenges teachers face (if any) and how they provide an inclusive environment which respects Traveller culture.
2. It will examine the supports available for Traveller children within the school setting.
3. In addition, it will explore the supports available for teachers in supporting Traveller children in their classroom.

Methodology

This chapter will discuss the methodology of data collection in order to present the findings of the study. It will highlight ethical considerations, validity of the research and potential limitations and give a brief overview of the sample of participants.

Methodological Approach

The researcher decided against quantitative methods which can provide a more generalised view. This study lent itself to qualitative methods as it was more appropriate to gain an in-depth view of the experiences of participants. As stated by Patten (1990, cited in Glenn, 2010, p.101), qualitative data is "detailed descriptions of situations, events, people, interactions, observed behaviours, direct quotations from people about their experiences, attitudes, beliefs, and thoughts and excerpts or entire passages from documents, correspondence, records, and case histories."
Interviews were chosen for data collection as they provided participants with an opportunity to share their experiences. They allow the researcher to probe further, clarify responses and observe non-verbal communication, which allows the researcher to interpret and take meaning from the responses. Although, they are time consuming and require the researcher to plan questions, code and transcribe (Bell and Waters, 2014). Initially, the researcher had proposed to conduct the research using a mixed-method approach of questionnaires and interviews. According to Denscombe (2010, p.133) mixed-method approaches can corroborate findings. However, it was not feasible due to time constraints.

Sample and Participants

Convenience sampling techniques were used to recruit participants who had experience in teaching Traveller children. Teachers in rural and urban schools, disadvantaged (DEIS) and non-disadvantaged schools were invited to participate as the researcher wanted to obtain a variety of experiences. Disappointingly, the researcher only secured five participants — two males and three females.

Data Analysis

Interviews were recorded with prior permission from the participants although some declined. Bell and Waters (2014) recommend recording interviews so the interviewer can engage fully with the interviewee during the interview. Recording also ensures

that the data recorded is accurate and allows the researcher to listen back for clarity. Thematic analysis of the data, where emerging themes were highlighted and coded, was carried out manually as the researcher deemed there would be no extra benefit of using software such as NVivo for this small-scale study. The researcher adapted questions which were used in a similar study by Knipe, Montgomery and Reynolds (2005). This was also deemed by the researcher to validate the findings of that study.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was granted by the Ethics Committee of Hibernia College. Research was carried out in accordance with the British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2011). Informed consent was granted by participants prior to beginning the study. Furthermore, participants were guaranteed confidentiality, anonymity and that data would be stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998). Pseudonyms were used and identifying data was removed from the transcripts.

Results

Following on from the previous chapter where methodology was discussed, this section will present the results of the study. The following themes emerged: (a) absenteeism, (b) parental relations and relationships, (c) curriculum, learning and attainment and (d) teachers' attitudes and training. These will now be discussed.

It was found that teachers experienced high levels of absenteeism by Traveller pupils despite the introduction of the Education Welfare Board, whose aim is to improve attendance by all children. In most cases, homework is not completed by Traveller children, except for those attending a homework club. Only the urban schools offered homework clubs but it was suggested that Traveller children do not attend as they "have to pay for it". This research indicates that expectations and motivation from Traveller pupils, parents and their community are not the same as that of non-traveller pupils. Responses indicated that parental fear of the system exists. While some Traveller parents attend parent-teacher meetings and other school functions such as concerts, they are not inclined to get involved in other school events.

It became apparent throughout this research that an element of prejudice exists between the travelling community and the non-traveller community with almost all participants citing that Traveller children tend to stick together. One respondent witnessed Traveller children being racist towards other minority groups. All participants reported good relationships with Traveller pupils, and they thought that Traveller pupils got on well with one another. Another noted that, in school, Traveller children's relationship with non-Traveller children is good but she was "not sure if this respect carried outside of school". Moreover, they are not involved in activities such as team sports outside of school with their non-Traveller peers. Some teachers experienced "far worse" behaviour with Traveller children, with some diagnosed as

having "social and cultural" behavioural difficulties. Others suggested they do not have behavioural issues that are specific to the travelling community.

All participants said they treated Traveller and non-Traveller children the same although some claim they are more lenient with Traveller children for issues such as non-completion of homework as they "are aware of problems at home", for example "poor literacy and numeracy skills". Some teachers said they do not use resources specific to the travelling community suggesting "it seems to create a sense of tension or uneasiness". Moreover, some children "have a desire to hide" their Traveller identity. By contrast, others share experiences of trips to Knock Shrine in Co. Mayo with their peers. This research suggests that funding cutbacks have affected some schools. One teacher commented that the Home School Liaison post is necessary while another stated that they had lost the Resource Teacher for the travelling community. One school gets additional capitation funding and uses this to buy books for the children as parents will not buy them.

Responses indicated that Traveller children's attainment is "below average" when compared with their non-Traveller peers, noting the highest level being Transition Year in secondary school. This research indicates that teachers display a positive attitude towards Traveller children and they try to involve parents in their children's education by inviting them into the school at every opportunity. Just one participant received training, having completed a course where Traveller education was a module. Two out of the five participants felt there was no need for training.

Discussion

The finding that all participants cited absenteeism as an issue concurs with Ryan (1998) and (Knipe, Montgomery and Reynolds, 2005) who found that the travelling community had poor school attendance. In some cases though, teachers reported that attendance is improving. This research found that, in most cases, homework is not completed by Traveller children, with the exception of some attending a homework club. Otherwise, parents "won't help them with it". Some Traveller parents attend parent-teacher meetings and other events, which does not concur with findings by Knipe, Montgomery and Reynolds (2005), who assert that they do not.

When asked for suggestions as to what can be done to help with the process of integration and social inclusion of Traveller children, one participant responded: "programmes to tackle community prejudices….because in my experience and I've taught abroad in many countries as well, the most prevalent and the worst prejudice I have encountered in my teaching career has been against the travelling community". This finding supports the views of the *Guidelines for Traveller Education* (2002, p.17) issued by the Department of Education and Science (now Department of Education and Skills) that "diversity must be appreciated and that inequality must be challenged". This research does not support the view that Traveller children have a "mob mentality"

(Bhopal, 2001, p.474) but acknowledges that it depends on the child and the situation. One teacher commented that "when the rules are clear…they respond to it".

In relation to the curriculum and learning, all teachers claim to treat members of the travelling community the same as non-Traveller children, which concurs with Knipe, Montgomery and Reynolds (2005). Albeit, teachers in this current research said they are more lenient with Traveller children especially in cases where homework is not completed, arguably a practice which highlights a "difference" (Bhopal, 2011). Teachers were also afraid to focus on Traveller resources as they found it causes "tension". This highlights the need for training in order that teachers can effectively incorporate Traveller culture into lessons. Having reviewed the findings, there is no doubt that cutbacks have affected schools. When asked if there should be extra supports for Traveller children, one teacher pointed out: "I think we should be resourced to a point where we can provide an equal amount of attainment for all children".

With regard to academic attainment, the finding that pupils from the travelling community achieve results below average indicates a need to improve their educational outcomes. However, since at least the 1980s, additional supports have been provided, but it is clear these have not been successful. In relation to teacher attitudes, the researcher observed non-verbal communication during interviews and found teachers in disadvantaged schools and non-disadvantaged schools had positive attitudes about the travelling community. This disagrees with Ryan (1998, p.167) that teachers in disadvantaged schools had less-favourable views about the travelling community. Overall, it is evident that teachers do not receive specific training on Traveller education during their Initial Teacher Training (ITE), something which Pavee Point (2014) have called for.

Conclusion

This paper examined teachers' perspectives of inclusion of Travellers in primary school classrooms, exploring challenges and supports available. Considering the data collated, the researcher holds the view that parental involvement is vital and absenteeism must be reduced. A further question emerged: Is absenteeism impacting on the children's ability to form positive relations with their non-Traveller peers and their ability to learn? Teachers highlighted the need for more resources, more programmes to tackle prejudice and more supports to allow for full participation of Traveller children.

The findings in this small-scale study may not represent the general experiences of all teachers. In addition, it is noted that participants may be more honest completing a questionnaire than during interviews. Researcher bias was reduced as the researcher was not on familiar terms with any of the participants. Having examined all the evidence, the researcher concludes that further research of a larger scale in the area of Traveller education is needed.

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Infant Teacher Perspectives on School Readiness and Transitions for Children between Pre-School and Primary School since the Advent of the Free Pre-School Year, by Caitríona Breslin

Biography

Caitríona Breslin graduated with a B.A. International from NUI Galway in 1998. She subsequently qualified as a solicitor and spent time working in Germany and the European Parliament, Brussels. Caitríona returned to her native Donegal, where she worked in General Practice, primarily in the areas of Family Law and Litigation. In 2014, Caitriona returned to education to undertake a Professional Master of Education Degree in Primary Education with Hibernia College. She graduated in November 2016. As part of the PMEP programme, Caitríona completed her dissertation on 'Infant Teacher perspectives on School Readiness and Transitions for children between Pre-school and Primary school since the advent of the free pre-school.' Caitríona is currently teaching in a school for special needs in Donegal.

Infant Teacher perspectives on School Readiness and Transitions for children between Pre-school and Primary school since the advent of the free pre-school year, by Caitríona Breslin

Research supervisor: Ms. Sheila Cronin

Abstract

The research sought to explore infant teachers' perspectives on school readiness and transitions since the introduction of the free pre-school year in Ireland.   Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six participant infant teachers using five primary schools in the northwest of Ireland. These teachers were purposively selected for a phenomenological study investigating perspectives on the questions of school readiness and the transition process. The participants were qualified primary-school teachers all of whom had experience teaching before and after the introduction of the free pre-school year. The study was qualitative in nature and employed thematic analysis. The findings identified a disconnect between the expectations and understanding of the requirements of Aistear and concept of school readiness between pre-school educators and primary school teachers. The researcher outlined four recommendations which might effect some positive change to the lives of children in their on-going learning and development.

Introduction

This study sought to explore infant teacher perspectives in relation to school readiness and transition practices and provided recommendations on how the processes involved in these key areas for children's ongoing development might be improved. The research objectives were to: (a) Determine the level of understanding amongst infant primary school teachers about the concept of school readiness, transitioning and transition statements and the value placed on these statements where they are currently in use; and (b) examine whether transition statements are being used for all children or only in the case of children with special educational needs. The aim is that the data collected will allow the researcher to provide recommendations relating to improved information sharing between the two settings and understanding of school readiness between the two settings.

Literature Review

Until relatively recently, there had been little research undertaken in an Irish context on the subject of transition. The Irish National Teacher's Organisation (INTO) commissioned research in 2006 to look at international best practice which, in turn,

referenced the Swedish model where "pre-school provision is identified as the first step in the life-long learning process and conscious efforts are made to ensure a smooth transition from pre-school to formal schooling" (INTO, 2006, p.39). Research was also, subsequently, undertaken by O'Kane (2007, p.iii), and her "Building Bridges" paper highlighted that the transition from pre-school to primary school "is an adaptive process for children and their families and that all stakeholders should be involved in communication about the process". O'Kane's (2007) study was the first formal study into this area in Ireland. According to O'Kane (2007, p.125), transition means "the process of movement from one educational setting to another".   Transitions should be viewed as a "process rather than an event" (National Foundation for Educational Research [NFER], 2005, p.2), so that instead of focusing on the first day at big school, the transition process should begin months before the child starts school and continue until the child has settled into the new environment.   The use of "Transition Statements" has become popular since the introduction of the free pre-school year in 2010. These Statements comprise "information gathered about the child's learning throughout the pre-school year in a variety of learning contexts through day-to-day activities, conversations, observations and interactions" (Donegal Childcare Committee Ltd., p.2). This provides an opportunity for children, their families, early years' educators and other professionals working with them to provide relevant information, (Donegal Childcare Committee Ltd. p.3) that will assist the primary school in identifying and supporting the learning needs of young children in the infant classroom.

The concept of "school readiness" or whether a child is ready to begin formal schooling is one that is closely linked to the early transition process. School readiness as a concept, is gaining currency around the globe (The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2012), but O'Kane notes that the issue of defining whether a child is ready or not for school is complex and can even be construed as contentious (O'Kane, 2007). In the Irish context, where early education and pre-schooling is still relatively in its infancy, it could also be presumed that a disconnect between the expectations of teachers and pre-school educators might also exist. Both the Síolta and Aistear frameworks set out the aspirations for "supportive and smooth transitions in early childhood" and recognise that "good relationships are key to ensuring all transitions happen as smoothly as possible" in their respective "Standards" on the "Rights of the Child" and "Transitions" and guidelines for "Building Partnerships between Parents and Practitioners" (NCCA, 2016). A new NCCA resource entitled "An Action Planning Template: Supporting Transitions (Birth - 6 years)" suggests a more focused and targeted effort to embed and implement these key aspects of the Síolta and Aistear frameworks (NCCA, 2015). Another recently developed NCCA resource, the Aistear-Síolta Practice Guide, designed to support transitions, outlines "the importance of sensitive management of transitions, continuity of care, relationships and experiences for children" (NCCA, 2015).

Legislation has also played a substantial role in the Irish educational context over the past twenty years in terms of making "inclusion" central to schools and educational settings and in turn the transition process. The Education Act (1998) and the White Paper on Early Education prioritise "addressing the needs of the disadvantaged….in order to promote equality of opportunity". Another key piece of legislation dealing with inclusion is the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act (Ireland, 2004). With the Individual Education Plan at its core, the EPSEN Act represents an excellent model of transition planning. It ensures that the parents of a child with Special Educational Needs (SEN) are central to the planning process by being "informed of their child's needs and how these needs are being met", (EPSEN ACT, 2004, p.19) and it also states that "special education and related services" are to be provided to the child "to enable the child to effectively make the transition from pre-school education to primary school education" (Ireland, 2004, p. 14). Whilst the principles set down in the EPSEN Act are laudable, it is startling to note that many sections of the EPSEN Act have yet to be implemented, despite being recommended by a United Nations Committee in July 2015.   In 2016, the Department of Education and Skills produced a "Guide to Early-years Education-focused Inspection (EYEI) in Early-years Settings Participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme" (Ireland, DES, 2016). This framework identifies "that transitions into, from and within the settings should be managed effectively to support children's learning and development" (ibid, p.10) and that information should be: - *"gathered from parents, families and other settings on children's prior experiences and used to ensure continuity of experiences and progression in learning for children".* Notwithstanding the fact that some pre-schools and primary schools have embraced the values of the transition process, the current approach to transitions needs to be examined. It is the intention of the researcher to explore infant teacher perspectives on transitions and provide recommendations on how this crucial area in the lives of children might be improved.

Following the brief review of the literature, the emerging research questions for the current research dissertation are:

1. What level of understanding do infant primary school teachers have about the concept of school readiness, transitioning and transition statements?
2. To what extent is information currently being transferred from pre-school to primary school?
3. What potential barriers inhibit the transfer of information between pre-schools and primary schools and other key stakeholders supporting the child in the transition process?

Methodology

The study was qualitative in nature and employed thematic analysis. The researcher used semi-structured interviews, which provided opportunities to "probe" the participant interviewees for answers, adding "significance and depth" (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2007, p.315) to the data obtained.   The research was conducted using five primary schools in the northwest of Ireland and involved six participant infant teachers, all of whom had experience teaching before and after the introduction of the free pre-school year. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity and ensure anonymity of the participants throughout.

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2013), the validity of a research project refers to its "accuracy, meaningfulness and credibility" (p.101). External Validity is the "extent to which the results of a research study can be applied to situations beyond the study" (ibid, p.103). One of the strategies used to enhance the external validity of a study is by using a representative sample and the researcher adopted this strategy of using a representative sample of infant primary school teachers who had experience of transitions since the introduction of the pre-school year. A pilot study was conducted to test the instrument prior to commencement of the study and small changes were subsequently introduced to ensure a better flow to the interview questions.   In all interviews, all of the questions were asked, albeit the order of the questions varied, depending on replies to previous questions with promising lines of inquiry followed up with subsidiary questions.

The process of analysis involved listening to the recorded interviews a number of times, together with several readings of the hand-written notes to familiarise the researcher with the data. Verbal data from the recorded interviews was, subsequently, transcribed "in order to conduct a thematic analysis" (Braun and Clarke, 2008, p.87).   A theme-based approach was considered useful as it allowed a focus on:

1. Common elements in the participants' experiences;
2. Aspects of transitions that are likely to be of interest to the participant teachers.
3. The following limitations were acknowledged:-
4. Small scale dissertation, completed within a relatively short timeframe and using only small sample size of six participants.
5. Research related to five primary schools in the northwest of Ireland using both rural and urban schools. The findings cannot be generalised to a whole population, but it may certainly provide some insights into areas of transition, which could be further explored.
6. Transition Statements are not a legal requirement in Ireland; therefore, there is no onus on pre-schools or indeed infant primary teachers to use such transition reports. Whilst all infant teachers interviewed did have varying experiences in using these statements, any lack of consistency cannot be construed negatively given that there is no statutory requirement currently pertaining.

7. The study may have benefitted from a mixed methods approach using both qualitative and quantitative data to allow for wider data sources, collections and triangulation of data. The researcher deemed this approach to be beyond the scope of this study.

Results and Discussion

Four major themes emerged from an analysis of the interview transcripts: (a) school readiness; (b) continuity of curriculum – the Aistear and Síolta framewords; (c) information sharing between pre-school and primary school; and (d) communication. These will now be discussed.

Theme One: School Readiness

All interviewees displayed an understanding of the concept of school readiness. The teacher participants highlighted the functional skills of social skills, self-care and motor development as being part and parcel of the skill-set required for "school readiness", which reflect the skills identified as being of importance to children starting formal school in O'Kane's research (O'Kane, 2007).

Theme Two: Continuity of Curriculum – The Aistear and Síolta Frameworks

Infant teacher perspectives on whether the above frameworks reflected and/or complemented the objectives of the primary school curriculum with regard to continuity of learning were quite varied. One teacher stated that the frameworks did reflect the curriculum; however, two teachers disagreed with this statement. Notwithstanding this, five out of six interviewees all used Aistear and there was general consensus that Aistear was of "huge benefit" to the child's learning and development. One of the factors impacting smooth transitions is the lack of continuity of learning between the two educational settings. O'Kane (2007) identified this lack of communication between the two educational settings in her studies six and nine years ago respectively. The researcher noted that despite the introduction of the Síolta and Aistear Frameworks, the issue of lack of continuity in learning still remained an issue for the majority of the infant teachers.

Theme Three: Information sharing between Pre-School and Primary School

The experiences of the infant teachers with regard to transition practices in their schools varied widely with two schools having developed very comprehensive transition programmes to others having just an enrolment day.

Transition statements from preschool to primary school are not a legal requirement in Ireland; however, best practice does encourage their use to ensure a continuity of the transition process. All of the infant teachers interviewed stated that they had no experience of transition statements from pre-schools prior to the free pre-

school year. These reports or "transition statements" have only been in circulation since the advent of the free pre-school year. All of the infant teachers interviewed were not satisfied with the content of the transition statements and opinions varied as to the content.

Some felt content was "loose and quite vague" and "contradictory on many occasions", others felt there was "too much information there". All interviewees agreed that transition statements would be effective if they were standardised, avoiding verbiage and fudging. They fully agreed that there should be a standardised document that should be made compulsory, so that everyone would know exactly what information is there.

All of the interviewees agreed that being fully informed regarding children with SEN from pre-school, well in advance of them starting school would hugely benefit the child in terms of resourcing additional support on time, as the issue of delay in securing additional support was highlighted in the findings as a real challenge. In cases where transition statements were forthcoming, the unfortunate reality, however, was that pre-schools were very careful in their language and that sufficient information about a child's needs was not forthcoming, due to a reluctance to write information that may have consequences for pre-school practitioners.

As stated above, there is currently no statutory requirement for a transition statement, from pre-school to primary school. Nevertheless, the effective sharing of information is promoted as best practice and recommended in almost all of the literature reviewed (Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (2014), Department of Education (2016), National Council for Special Education (2016). The findings of the current research suggested that the processes involved in information transfer were, at best, haphazard with varying degrees of quality in terms of approach and practice.

The reluctance on the part of pre-school educators to document emerging difficulties for a child was acknowledged and understood by the interviewees, given that "most pre-school practitioners are not specialists" in the area of SEN. This lack of expertise was also acknowledged by Early Childhood Ireland that there is a fundamental weakness in the system which does not provide supports, training and mentoring for those working directly with children with additional needs and their families (Early Childhood Ireland, 2015). All of the participants were in agreement that there should be a standardised document for transition to primary school and that this should be made compulsory. This resonates with the findings gathered by the INTO in their research, where it was suggested that a "NCCA report card template" would help in a move towards a more formal system of information-transfer nationally (INTO, 2008). Similar difficulties were encountered and overcome in the development of what is now a compulsory "education passport" for pupils moving from primary school to the post-primary setting (NCCA, 2016).

Theme Four: Communication

All teachers admitted that communication between pre-schools and primary schools was generally quite poor.   Four of the interviewees indicated that they had no contact with pre-schools, whilst two of the interviewees had fostered positive relationships with their feeder pre-schools, but this appeared to be exception rather than the rule. Due to the poor uptake in some feeder pre-schools sending transition statements to primary schools, the problem was highlighted that infant teachers would not have any knowledge of some of the children coming into the class, apart from information on enrolment forms.

Some also thought parents had a vital input and could do more to prepare the child for the infant class (Molly, Kate and Jessica) and that their approach to disclosing information about their children left a lot to be desired.   Most interviewees did acknowledge that, generally parents do have the child's best interests at heart and are eager and willing to share information.

There was also broad agreement amongst the interviewees with regard to the lack of communication with external agencies upon transition also. The importance of information sharing with early intervention teams, speech and language, and other agencies involved with a child was viewed as critical to facilitate a smooth transition. The Aistear documents and, indeed, the new Guidelines issued by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills underline the importance of fostering good communication channels between parents, other educational settings and professionals that may be involved in supporting a child with additional learning needs (NCCA, 2009; DES, 2016).   Some of the findings from the research in this respect were very stark with four of the participants indicating that they had absolutely no contact whatsoever with pre-schools in the catchment area. The findings recognised that parents can, at times, be reluctant to divulge information to teachers and that this may be due to fear or lack of knowledge. However, it is incumbent upon the schools to nurture relationships with parents that espouse clear and transparent channels of communication. As previously cited, the EPSEN Act prioritises the positioning of the parents of children with SEN at the centre of the planning process in order "to enable the child to effectively make the transition from pre-school education to primary school education" (EPSEN Act, 2004).

Conclusion

This study set out to explore Infant Teachers' perspectives on school readiness and the transfer of information between pre-school and primary school since the advent of the free pre-school year. The researcher reviewed the literature on policy, legislation and best practice on school readiness through a critical lens. It was identified in the research that further efforts to formalise the processes around transitions and to build communicative links between all stakeholders in the transition process is required.

The following recommendations were outlined:

1. Guidelines on a transition programme similar to that used for post-primary schools to smooth the transition process for junior infant children, together with the possible mandatory requirement for a standardised transition statement.
2. Guidelines should include best practice in terms of planning and review for children with SEN and meetings between parents and stakeholders.
3. Training to reinforce appropriate developmental teaching, in terms of school readiness in Early Education Centres.
4. Joint training on the Aistear Framework for primary teachers and early school educators.

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