Context, connection, and freedoms: Conceptualising functional agency for children in the junior primary classroom

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Declaration

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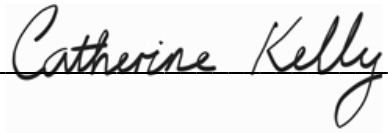
Signed: (Candidate) 

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Abstract

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In 1992 the Irish Government adopted the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and committed to promoting children's rights. This study looks at the current literature and practices regarding participation provisions in their early years at primary school. The "right to have a say" based on Article 12 of the UNCRC is an ambiguous one open to much interpretation; who decides what matters affect children and what is the "due weight" their voices should be given?

This study looks at the concept of functional agency as a means of redefining the participation of young citizens in the classroom. It encompasses the everyday actions that children engage in that promote citizenship, leadership, and agency, reconceptualising their participation. By locating contextual opportunities for agency in the classroom and facilitating robust connections with others, choice-based freedoms and functions can flourish in the junior primary classroom. To embrace this reality, adult gatekeepers are required to adopt a mindset that promotes children's capabilities and positive liberty.

An action-research model was employed over six-weeks to determine what matters were of most concern to a class of junior infant children in a North Dublin primary school. Through discussion, critical literacy, and shared action on the ecological systems in the children's lives, *family, school* and *community* other themes of *care and choice*, *play* and *nature and animals* emerged. These emergent themes were widely observed and reported by the children as the key matters affecting them.

The children's interests led the study iteratively, their knowledge and understandings influenced the cyclical research design. Children's voices are conceptualised as complex and requiring careful listening; they were captured through various listening methods, creating a *mosaic*. The children were not only contributors but assumed the roles of co-researchers. With the children's explicit assent at the outset of each lesson, they contributed data and interpreted it through cooperation with me, as teacher researcher. Having children's interests at the heart of the study and their input into analysis, ensured they were attaining and enacting agency that was meaningful to them. The actions in the study conveyed to them that they were being heard and were influencing its direction and outcomes.

How the children chose to report on these themes and how this listening environment was structured are detailed in the findings. The discussion section sees how the children's choices to assent, dissent, contribute and act, define their functional agency within the study and, by extension, within their classroom. This concept can be used to map the context, connections and freedoms in any classroom and realise the actuality and potential for functional agency.

Chapter One: Introduction

Next year will mark the 30th anniversary of Ireland's adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The UNCRC is an international agreement containing 54 articles that outline the commitment of member states to uphold the rights of children and specifies the application of these rights. This thesis explores the application of these rights in the junior primary classroom in Ireland. Ireland's commitment to the implementation of the Convention has resulted in many positive developments, such as the adoption of the Children's Act of 2001, the establishment of the National Children's Office 2001, the appointment of a Minister for Children 2005, and the establishment of the office of the Ombudsperson for Children (OCO). This commitment also paved the way for national policy that improves the lives of Irish children such as the National Children's Strategy 2000, Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020, and the National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making 2019. However, children's rights in Ireland have been described by the Ombudsperson as "an unfinished project" (OCO, 2015). In this chapter, the structural, systemic responsibilities of governments and, by extension, state agents to uphold children's rights are explored. The creation of policies and strategies by these duty-bearers and their commitment to implementing such mechanisms are also detailed.

1.1 Children's Rights, a Divergence from Human Rights?

Although children's rights are a "specific expression" (Waldron & Oberman, 2016, p. 744) of human rights that incorporate children's varying levels of maturity and developing capacities into their application, they remain human rights. Quennerstedt recognised that children's rights developed from human rights due to children being "embedded in such specific circumstances," yet she saw children's rights as a historical and contextual development of human rights generally (2010). She, amongst others - Waldron et al., 2011, Lundy, 2019 - criticised the "hamper[ing]" effect of oversimplifying the language of children's rights (p. 619). The categorisation of children's rights in narrow abbreviated terms such as "the '3 P's, provision, protection and participation" have, according to Quennerstedt (2010, p. 619), the effect of shrinking their civic, social and political scope as human rights and offer, instead, an overly-reductive - often de-politicised – reading of children's rights. Quennerstedt believed that although grouping the articles of the convention as "the 3 p's" was originally conceived as a pedagogical tool, it was an unnecessary divergence from the theoretically and conceptually complete human rights framework. She argues that this model implies a "passivity and non-

agency" among children (2010, p. 629), is insufficient in expressing the breadth of children's rights and impacts research negatively. Quennerstedt finds human rights terminology preferable in conveying and analysing the rights of children; she stresses the importance of language in avoiding hierarchical views of rights and in ensuring the equal application of rights to children and adults insofar as possible. The importance of language will be examined further in relation to children's voices and how we refer to children within research in Chapter Two; the de-politicising of children will be discussed in Chapter Six.

These differences that exist between the articulation of children's rights and the original human rights framework relating to choice, voice and decision-making, designed to foreground the specific needs of the child, can at times position the child as vulnerable or immature adults awaiting socialisation (Groundwater-Smith, Dockett, Bottrell, & Dockett, 2015, p. 5). Positioning children as dependent on adults, according to Lyle makes it easier for adults to "impose the culture of adults" on children (2014, p. 219). Proponents of children's rights argue that children should be portrayed as rights-holding citizens, that their rights are entitlements and should not be treated as a "gift" of adults to bestow, withhold, or minimise in what Lundy refers to as child rights "lite" (Lundy, 2014). Children are often unable to uphold the rights afforded to them under the UNCRC because they do not enjoy any legal means to do so. Therefore, they remain predominantly dependents on adults. For this reason, the UNCRC can be viewed more as a framework of ethical or moral rights (James & James, 2008, p. 33). Tisdall and Punch warned that the UNCRC was open to "interpretation, at best, and manipulation, at worst" (2012, p. 257). However, the rights of children as outlined in the UNCRC (1989) are the baseline of adult responsibilities to children, a minimum requirement, and in the absence of these rights, urgent action must be taken. Children's empowerment and the realisation of their rights is "especially pertinent" at this time according to McGillicuddy, as we face "an extremely challenging, and potentially unsettling, future" due to the threat she believes that climate change poses to humanity, democracy and world peace (2019).

Notwithstanding Quennerstedt's argument in relation to the reductive power of language, and the reservations expressed by theorists regarding how it positions children, the UNCRC expanded the rights of children beyond purely the provision of protection and set forward a more broad and balanced view of children that seeks to assure their participation in the world around them. The inclusion of Article 12 marked a new departure in terms of acknowledging children's right to both express their views and be listened to. It dictates that the opinion of the child ought to be given "due weight" dependent on the "age and maturity" of the child. Although Lansdown (2011) states that "governments should start from a presumption that a child has the capacity to form a view" (p. 20), this is not necessarily a lived reality. One

criticism of the article is that it is open to tokenism or "decorative" levels of employment (Lundy, 2007). In a 2005 report on children's rights in Northern Ireland, Kilkelly and Lundy found that in the school context, "not having a say in school decisions" (p. 344) was the predominant rights-related issue for children. Common practice within schools at the time suggested that educators were not implementing the totality of the UNCRC (Lundy & Kilkelly, 2006); additionally, governments had flexibility to avoid their legal commitments to these standards. In 2007, Lundy observed that one of the "ongoing obstacles" to fully realising the aims of Article 12 was "a limited awareness of the provision"; this may explain why children's rights regarding participation - guaranteed under Article 12 of the UNCRC - are realised unevenly and, to a large extent, superficially, in Irish primary schools and classrooms (Waldron, Ruane, & Oberman, 2014). This hesitancy or superficiality in upholding children's participation rights may be due to their potential to substantially alter the status-quo, since they are considered the most radical with the ability to "disrupt the traditional adult-child dynamic to a greater extent than other rights" according to Waldron and Oberman (2016, p. 745).

Adherence to Article 12 could have a "transformative" effect on all other rights (Lundy, 2007), and having children "determining the outcome of the decisions which affect them" and articulating their own experience would diminish the possibility of "egregious breaches of children's rights" (Lundy 2007, p. 940). Since upholding human rights is the obligation of the state, it is worthwhile to note Nussbaum's caution that "fundamental rights are only words unless and until they are made real by government action" (2011, p. 65). Governments therefore have the responsibility to prioritise the creation and implementation of rights-based policies. However, Starkey found that the extent to which governments uphold these responsibilities can be uneven and is often contingent on fiscal resources (2012). More recently in the UK, Bhargava and Jerome (2020) refer to government ambivalence as a factor in the low-status of citizenship education, a marker of human-rights interest.

Although the UNCRC is an imperfect tool in guaranteeing children's rights, it does outline the basic requirements of all member states. Since it is the role of government to implement these standards, it is the remit of all interested adults - on whom children depend - to lobby state departments for a more committed stance.

1.2 Children's Rights within Education

In this section, the child's right to education is taken as a legal entitlement and the focus instead is on what that education looks like in relation to rights within schools. Effective Human Rights Education (HRE) teaches about, through and for rights (UN, 2011). In this

context, the teacher is conceptualised as a "purveyor of human rights" (Harper & Dunkerly, 2009, p. 60).

1.2.1 Educators as advocates, teaching through rights.

As state agents, educators have been recognised as having a key role in the promotion of children's rights (Harper & Dunkerly, 2009; Osler & Starkey, 2006; Quinn & Owen, 2016); it is their duty to be educated in relation to the rights of the child (Osler & Starkey, 2010) and issues that may impact upon a child's enjoyment of their rights. They are centrally involved in teaching about global poverty, human rights, climate change and gender-based issues (Waldron et al., 2011), intrinsically value-driven pursuits. The idea of value-neutrality in education is inherently problematic (Irwin, 2018; Sugrue, 2004). This is even more evident in the context of the UNCRC where teachers are not neutral actors; they are both duty-bearers in relation to children's rights, and child-advocates. The role of the educator is to "advocate for the child's right to participate in educational decision-making through student voice" (Quinn & Owen, 2014, p. 193). A teacher's understanding of rights concepts such as participation and agency affect the application of rights within their educational practice (Menta, Church & Page, 2015). A study by Waldron et al. (2011), found that 97% of Irish primary teachers who participated in their study believed that children should be made aware of their rights by age 11, suggesting that the primary school was the "key context" for HRE (p. 27). However, the same study found that teachers had limited knowledge and experience of HRE in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and queried whether teachers at that time had the capacity to realise their role of promoting and respecting human rights.

Many of those who willingly or otherwise downplay or misrepresent rights do so by emphasising the responsibilities of children rather than their individual rights (Struthers, 2015), or focus on cohesion rather than "empowerment, critique and inequality" (Jerome, 2018, p. 53). An exclusive focus on "personally responsible citizenship" (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004, p. 244) is concerning. This focus on what society needs from the child or what they can offer to society rather than on the child as a rights-holder could diminish the child's sense of worth and does not encourage children to assume active roles in society. In the Irish context, attitudes towards HRE were found to be generally positive, yet their application tended towards social cohesion and responsibilities rather than transformation which would "empower individuals and encourage activism" (Waldron & Oberman, 2016, p. 746).

1.2.2 Are all educators 'for' rights?

While children's rights and the related idea of their citizenship have permeated policy, the application of children's rights in schools - one of the key state institutions children interact with - has been "fragmented" or "ad-hoc" (Waldron & Oberman, 2016, p. 744). The obligation

of state agencies to provide education about, through and for rights has been complicated by a spectrum of beliefs and opinions about the suitability and enforceability of children's rights (Tisdall & Punch, 2012; Waldron & Oberman, 2016), some believing they go too far and others believing they do not go far enough. Practitioners' beliefs are an integral aspect of HRE because teachers do not simply transmit policy (Jerome, 2018). Jerome echoed Sim (2008) who claimed that teachers were "interpreters" or "gatekeepers" and, he added, at times "obstacles" (2018, p. 52). Likewise, in the Irish context, Waldron and Oberman recognised the influence of teachers in relation to HRE provision, finding that "practice is informed by teachers' conceptualization of children as rights-holders" (2016, p. 747).

The changed and changing educational context can be challenging to navigate for teachers who hold conservative beliefs, according to Jerome (2018). He encapsulated the shift in educational provisions as moving from welfare provision to claiming a right, and thereafter from protection to "facilitating emancipation and autonomy" (2018, pp. 52-53). In advising how best to facilitate HRE, Jerome warned that true HRE is often "thwarted" through school or classroom practice and categorised the possible responses to HRE from educators as: ignorant, obstacle, conservative or hypocritical (2018). Nevertheless, he also claimed there are examples of "heroic" levels of teacher commitment to HRE that facilitate child-participation which nurture child agency, offer multiple perspectives and criticality as well as providing children with new knowledge (2018). Critical friends, conceptual tools, taking small steps and building new knowledge may help teachers to move beyond shallow or ill-informed representations of HRE (Jerome, 2018). Seeking ways to scaffold teachers as they bridge the gap between policy and classroom reality may strengthen their commitment to teaching HRE and help to bring the "unfinished project" of children's rights (OCO, 2015) nearer to completion.

1.2.3 Learning about rights

Narratives that promote "our people first" are gaining global traction (Osler & Starkey, 2018, p. 31); those struggling to preserve justice and democratic community believe that "education for human rights and cosmopolitan citizenship is more urgent than ever" (p. 31) and the need for teachers to inform themselves about children's rights is consequently greater (Fowler et al., 2016). Global Citizenship Education (GCE) promotes human rights and the interconnectedness of communities around the world. Awareness of multiple perspectives adds a necessary critical lens when considering the inalienable rights of all people. The importance of teachers and student teachers interrogating their values and connecting with communities and the wider political sphere was explored by Tarozzi and Mallon (2019) as they looked at the integration of GCE into ITE. They found multiple examples of Irish studies where

educators felt ill-equipped, under-resourced and lacking the necessary knowledge to critically engage with GCE in the classroom (2019). The Teaching Council of Ireland recommended that student teachers be taught "high-level beginning competencies" to be built on through the continuum of teacher education across a teacher's career (2017). Ensuring a sufficiently deep commitment to learning, critical reflection and adjustments across a teacher's career span may provide the necessary opportunities for addressing any gaps within ITE.

Irish educational policy has shown a commitment to citizenship, which runs parallel with HRE in many regards. The Irish Primary Curriculum sought to create "informed and critical citizens" (NCCA, 1999, p. 48) through the teaching of historical skills and content, along with "active and responsible citizenship" (p. 57) through the delivery of Social Political and Health Education (SPHE). Being an active citizen is also one of the seven key competencies in the 2020 Draft Curriculum Framework (NCCA, 2020). The vision statement in the new draft framework refers to realising children's "full potential as individuals and as members of communities and society during childhood and into the future" (NCCA, 2020, p. 7). This vision encompasses many of the aims of HRE but stops short of referring to the children as rights holders. The vision statement also refers to the agency of the teacher, but not the child.

A focus on empowering teachers both in ITE and through critical frameworks and innovative curricula may create a more consciously rights-oriented approach within education. However, underlying beliefs around whose agency counts and the dominance of cohesion-based and responsibility-led HRE may require closer examination to ensure that new policy does not become diluted by passive application.

1.3 Policy Context

Recent policy in relation to children, education and participation in Ireland has reflected the commitment to the UNCRC and to improving children's lives and experiences of childhood. However, the application of these policies has at times fallen short of the ambition they contain. In this section the aims of recent policies are compared with their lived realities.

1.3.1 A review of relevant policies

The degree to which Irish policies regarding children's participation have been realised are explored below, but the position of the CRC is unambiguous. The CRC has responded to various needs or shortcomings among member states with general comments that bolster their stance on children's rights. An evident need among nation states to develop and implement protocols specifically in relation to children's rights within early childhood gave rise to the CRC's General Comment No.7 in 2005. General Comment No.7 (GC7) was entitled *Implementing child rights in early childhood*, it defined all those under eight years of age as

being in early childhood and claimed that member states had "not given sufficient attention to young children as rights holders" (UNCRC, 2005, p. 2). This document stated that agency had traditionally been "overlooked or rejected" (p. 6) by traditional beliefs leaving young children voiceless and powerless. It referred to Article12 of the UNCRC as the "right to participation" (p. 8) which the original document had not, and it recommended that adults adopt a child-centred attitude to achieve this. The documents explored in the next section on early childhood education in Ireland were developed after the publication of this comment and may be regarded as the Irish government's response to this need. Another publication by the CRC in 2009 called General Comment No. 12 (GC12) *The right of the child to be heard* reasserted the importance of children's views being heard and outlined the legal obligations on states to ensure this was the case. It required all states and state agents to challenge existing limiting assumptions about children's capacities. It called for the "dismantling" of any cultural, social, legal, political, or economic barriers that could impede children's opportunity to be heard in all matters that affect them. General Comment No.12 was adamant in its message to member states to comply with the participatory aspects of the UNCRC. It outlined that the nature of child-participation processes be transparent and informative, voluntary, respectful, relevant to the children, supported by training of adults, safe and risk sensitive, child-friendly, inclusive, and accountable to the children that participate.

Well-being, the development of critical skills and increased supports for those who deliver education were prioritised in the Government of Ireland's *Action Plan for Education 2016-2019*. However, during that time frame, ancillary plans were also published annually and each of these had a separate focus. The initial plan described its objectives as supporting success, and providing the foundations of participation in both school and life (DES, 2016). The plans in following years, however, had varied emphases. In the 2018 plan there was an emphasis on "inward-investment" to Ireland based on educational outcomes and in 2019 there was an emphasis on developing cultural identity and cohesion as well as empowerment. Although these plans all relate to general goals, their diverse aims suggest a rapidly changing educational agenda. Rapid and ongoing change such as this may make transformational innovation impossible (Ellis, 2017) since constant change can inhibit the ability to deeply and critically engage in transformative action.

The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY), released a report in 2020 *State of the Nations' Children*, with the finding that nine years after GC12 in 2018, only 32.6% of children aged 10-17 reported that students in their school participated in making the school rules. This number had decreased between 2014 and 2018 in every age-based reporting group and this downward trend was consistent in every region of the country

except one in the south-west region (DCEDIY, 2020, p. 34). Reporting of participation in school-rulemaking also steadily decreased with the increasing age of reporters. This report contained data relating to children from pre-birth to aged 17; however, while the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HSBC) survey which contributed these figures did not offer a rationale for referencing "school-aged children" , it posed this question to children aged 10-17 only. Based on 2016 census figures, there were 353,403 school-aged children between 5 and 9 years whose views on participation in school decision-making were not represented.

Ireland's current status regarding our obligations to children's rights was outlined in the Children's Rights Alliance 13th report card (2021). This report grades the government based on their promises to children for the previous year. While the government made no specific promise about children's participation in this agenda, it makes reference to Ireland's ongoing obligations to "maximise the child's ability and opportunity to participate fully in their society" (The Children's Rights Alliance, 2021, p. 58). The report suggests that shortcomings in relation to reduced timetables and insufficient supply of appropriate special education settings are hindering Ireland's ability to meet this obligation. This finding suggests that children in Ireland may not be fully experiencing the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) which it formally ratified in 2018.

In 2015 the Department of Children and Youth Affairs published a policy that looked specifically at children's decision-making called the *National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making 2015 – 2020*. Its goal was "to ensure that children and young people will have a voice in their individual and collective everyday lives" (2015, p. 11). The implementation of this strategy would be beneficial in positioning children's views and needs at the forefront of government policy and discourse; however, the allocated time for this strategy has elapsed and although it successfully established Hub na nÓg in 2017 to promote children's participation, many of its recommendations have not yet been realised as its action-plan checklist remains sparse. The most recent development is the government's new *Participation Framework: National Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making* (DCEDIY, 2021); it re-frames the 2015-2020 participation strategy and provides a practical guide to support implementation which utilises the Lundy model of participation discussed later in this thesis. This framework promotes long-lasting structures within everyday spaces that foreground children's rights. It does not ask whether children will participate in decisions that affect them but rather it presupposes their participation and asks practitioners to consider the ways in which children will take part. Its principles echo the sentiments of GC12 on how to engage children in decision-making and it provides exemplars and tools to audit the application of the participation framework within

both statutory and non-statutory agencies. Widespread adoption of this framework could have a positive impact on children's experiences of participation across multiple contexts in their daily lives.

1.3.2 Early years education

Early Years Education in Ireland has had a significant policy overhaul in recent times. The introduction of frameworks for early education - Síolta (CECDE, 2006) and the early learning framework, Aistear (NCCA, 2009) - have resulted in improved quality standards and better coordination of early years provisions (Murphy, 2015). Since these frameworks are recommended for all children up to six years of age, they are influential developments in the junior primary classroom. In particular, the Aistear curriculum framework has altered classroom practices. An integrated, child-led, playful approach to early-years provision in Ireland is recommended in *Aistear, The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* (NCCA, 2009). The framework was introduced to inform educational work with children aged zero to six in all settings. It was designed to respond to children's interests while ensuring adequate skills were taught. The themes of Aistear are identity and belonging, well-being, communicating, exploring, and thinking, which could potentially lay the foundations for children's critical participation and agency. One of the key purposes of the Aistear framework is to promote "loving, trusting and respectful relationships" (NCCA, 2009, p. 6). The importance of relationships between children and adults relevant to the realisation of their rights and the nature of these relationships are investigated in this study; the purposes of Aistear are deemed highly compatible with the conceptualisation of agency in this context.

Aistear "endorses the importance of play" (2015, p. 295), and "encourages teachers to … sometimes follow the children's lead when planning and implementing learning experiences" (p. 295). Prior to the introduction of Aistear to schools, a 2004 OECD review criticised the implementation of the Primary School Curriculum (1999) in junior primary classrooms and claimed it was "overly didactic" with little opportunity for active learning (Murphy, 2015, p. 295). Despite this evidence that change was necessary, implementation of the framework has been slow (Murphy, 2015). The Aistear framework was found to have had little "transformative effect" in Irish Primary Schools seven years after its publication (Gray & Ryan, 2016) but rather, Gray and Ryan found that "didactic teaching approaches remain dominant, with play afforded peripheral status" (2016, p. 188). This may have been due to a lack of support for the initiative since in 2017, eight years after the framework was developed, the government's annual plan - derived from the Action Plan for Education 2016-2019 – only then recommended the delivery of curricular resources to encourage the "roll out" of Aistear as well as the first round of training for mentors (DCYA, 2017, p. 18).

Another impediment to accomplishing the ambition of Aistear was the inconsistency and uncertainty evident among early years practitioners (Leopold, 2020). Those who had personally invested in continual professional development (CPD) reported greater feelings of security and confidence in delivering its aims. Practitioners' roles were also found to be significant factors in implementation by Hayes and O'Neill (2019), suggesting a great variance of provision based on practitioner discretion and preferences. Disparity in working conditions among early years practitioners across different contexts is also an issue (Murphy, 2015). The possible causes for inconsistencies among practitioners may relate to mindset or conflicting views about care and protection, all these potential factors are explored in Chapter Two.

Much groundwork has been done on policy provisions in Ireland in relation to participation and children's enjoyment of their rights at school and in early childhood contexts. This work reflects the aims and ramifications of the UNCRC and subsequent general comments. However, there is an evident disconnect between policy and practice, either due to how children's rights are conceptualised and regarded or a lack of awareness among practitioners to whom these policies relate.

1.4 My Interest in this field

My desire to elevate the voices of children in my classroom came from years of personal experience working with young learners and a growing feeling that their voices were missing or tokenistic within the education system. I wanted to articulate the shift of mindset whereby conceptualisations of children moved from passive knowledge-receivers to decision-making citizens and social agents. This became a political drive to explicitly enshrine my values of democracy, equality and rights-based education in my everyday practice. I wanted to examine any contradictions in my practice that might negatively impact children's agency and develop new listening methods and routes for child-led action. An emergent understanding of the UNCRC, particularly Article 12, compelled me to further explore the issue and seek new ways to integrate the child's right to participate in my classroom. Children's rights and citizenship were the starting point as I explored my other ontological and epistemological values.

During my early reading about children's rights, I found that recent studies in similar contexts had focused almost exclusively on children from first class upwards (Gibbons, 2013; McGovern, 2017). It raised the question, what is it that dissuades teachers from eliciting younger voices? As a teacher working with the youngest classes in the school, I was aware of the great strengths of young children, the depth of their understanding, the power of their empathy and their capacity to engage with the world around them. This led me to examine the constructions and conceptions of childhood that permeate our society, schools and

research that have side-lined young children rather than inviting their participation. In Chapter Two I lay out the historical roots of these ideas about children and childhood. I hope to show the wealth of opportunity for both teachers and children when children's voices are heard.

1.5 In this Thesis…

The questions guiding this research are:

In relation to Article 12 of the UNCRC;

1. How do young children in the junior primary classroom view the 'matters' affecting them and how do they make these known?
2. How can reporting the 'matters that affect' them increase young children's functional agency in the classroom?
3. What structures can teachers put in place to promote greater functional agency for young children, and afford their voices 'due weight and influence'?

These will be discussed in full in Chapter Three. I worked alongside my junior infant class as co-researchers to understand how they connect with their rights, especially their right to participate. I wanted to bring the matters affecting them together in collective consciousness and action. This required careful listening and a robust framework that rooted the work in the values of my classroom; working together, taking care of one another, having a say, and co-constructing ideas. Each of these values was examined through relevant literature and built into the Conceptual Framework. The children expressed the things that mattered to them in a variety of ways, and creative opportunities for building shared understandings were put in place. The children helped to analyse their various contributions to ensure they were authentically represented.

In Chapter Two, the various conceptualisations of children in society, schools and research are articulated, as are the ways they could potentially impact children's agency. I explore the possibilities of how adults might listen to young children's voices in ways that foreground their experience, afford ownership over that experience, and offer transformative effects for children. Finally, I look at what complexities and opportunities might arise from conducting this study with young children, how their needs and opinions might alter the perspective of this work and how best to facilitate these voices. A Conceptual Framework follows which sums together the key theories used to direct the work and underpin the day-to-day approach in the study.

My ontological and epistemological views are outlined in Chapter Three. I examine how they influenced my methodology in relation to carrying out action research with young co-researchers. I explore Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model (1995, 2005) as a means of connecting with various aspects of a child's life and the matters that might affect them in various contexts. The mosaic approach of listening (Clark & Moss, 2011) which is central to data collection is also detailed there. I then reflect on my choice of grounded theory analysis. The context of the study and the participants are described in Chapter Four. I present the classroom-based practice carried out over the six-week period and outline the various pedagogic instruments used to create data as well and the data collection methods. The model of action research undertaken is depicted, as are the phases of analysis that took place. In this chapter I also look at considerations such as the validity and rigour of my methods and my commitment to ethical research.

The mosaics that were cumulatively constructed from shared interpretations are depicted and detailed in Chapter Five. In this chapter, core themes relating to aspects of the children's lives are explored and then overarching themes that permeated the study and emerged through deeper analysis are traced. Data that relate to the other research questions around reporting and teacher facilitation are also examined. Data were gathered and analysed on an ongoing basis so that the classroom-based practice remained a flexible and adaptive structure. Chapter Six reflects on the impact and applicability of the Conceptual Framework on this work. It explores the importance of these foundational concepts on teacher beliefs and attitudes and how this impacted on my research with the children. The concluding chapter deals with other emergent issues within the research such as the implications for child-led learning, the experience of working with children as co-researchers, the significance of the assent process and the limitations, implications, and recommendations of this study.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This study, though cognisant of the criticisms and limitations of Article 12, seeks paths towards its potential "transformative effect" (Lundy, 2007). These are explored through participation theories, classroom methods and research practices. In the introductory chapter, the structural systemic responsibilities of states and their agents to uphold children's rights were discussed. In this chapter, the various roles and attitudes required of individual adults, whether personal or professional, to do likewise, are explored. The origins of the dualities in teachers' beliefs regarding HRE outlined in Chapter One are examined. The views of childhood that emanate from the UNCRC and how their perceived homogeneity (Faulkner & Nyamutata, 2020; Quennerstedt, Robinson & I'Anson, 2018) can detract from voice-inclusive practices are explored, as is the potential of children to develop new freedoms within childhood should adult gatekeepers allow.

This chapter is subdivided into five main sections. In the first, ideas of childhood as both an enduring societal structure and a shifting narrative are contemplated. Latent, underlying beliefs held about children as rights holders in Irish society, and the implications these have for the realisation of children's participation rights permeate all sections. In the second section, practical consideration is given to how best to strike the balance regarding children's rights, in terms of protection, care, and achieving the best interests of the child. In the third section, theories of children's engagement are explored, namely, participation, agency and voice. They are queried to understand their potential for transformative child-action and their applicability to the context of this study. In the following section, provisions within schools that promote citizenship and democracy are examined to understand how they contribute to feelings of belonging and agency. Finally, I look at experiences of children as co-researchers in the literature and how both adults and children are conceptualised within this approach. The means by which this research foregrounds children's voices and participation is considered, specifically how younger children are represented within research. Key concepts emerging from this chapter are drawn together in the Conceptual Framework; ontological questions about knowledge production and organisation and their relevant literature are explored in Chapter Three.

2.2 Beings, Becomings and Capabilities

Children and childhood have been conceptualised in various ways that encompass how individuals or societies view the youngest members of our communities and their

contributions. In this section the idea of childhood as a narrative is explored, as is how narratives of childhood differ from children. A potential measure of how children enjoy their experience of childhood is also put forth in the "capabilities approach."

2.2.1 Childhood as a social construct

Childhood is conceptualised in the UNCRC as pertaining to all individuals under 18 years of age. However, within the content of its articles, childhood is conceptualised as more than an age bracket. The application of human rights to this age group includes contingencies on maturity, competencies, and the stewardship of others. How these contingencies affect children's enjoyment of their rights and impact on their agency are examined in this chapter. It has long been established that childhood is a narrative that is constantly reconstructed (Gerrard, 1999) to marry with the ideals of the society in which it exists. James et al., (1998) traced various characterizations of childhood from the idyllic and unblemished state of childhood conceived by Rousseau, which he credited for Western society's emphasis on protecting children, to the particularity of the child which they perceived to produce "our contemporary concern about children as individuals" (1998, p. 13).

Within the "New Sociology of Childhood", which developed throughout the late 1960s and 1970s, childhood studies became a subject of research in its own right and was seen to hold intrinsic worth in terms of research (James & James, 2008). The shift in mindset regarding children and childhood may have been in development for some time before this new paradigm emerged, however, as Tisdall and Punch refer to this revolution occurring in the "post war years" (2012) in the USA and Germany. They refer to Mayall's work (2012) which suggests that the generation of children who experienced World War II brought a new awareness of, and perspective on, childhood issues into adulthood. Likewise, James and James suggested that western societies regarded childhood differently after seeing children experience less than idyllic childhoods amid war, famine, and poverty (2008, p. 37). They argued also that the images broadcast during the Vietnam war acted as a further catalyst to the realisation that childhood was experienced unequally. This resulted in the rejection of a "global form" (2008) of childhood and consequently resulted in a shift in the childhood paradigm. Childhood was thereafter deemed more complex than previously envisaged; children's needs were more diverse and context specific. With this renewed interest in childhood came the introduction of new research methods, paradigms and understandings. Research on childhood, which had been greatly influenced by Piaget and other more traditional developmental theorists, began in time to move away from theories which set forth "universal, standardised and inevitable developmental stages" (Tisadall & Punch, 2012) and focused more on the individual child's development through childhood. Children's lived

experiences of childhood remain unequal. Although some believe technology is having an equalising effect in children's lives, this narrative fails to recognise the varied and unequal access children have to the internet or other modern resources (Gill, 2007; James, 2009; Livingston, 2006). Therefore, competence with technology is an "attribute of individual children" (James, 2009, p. 44), rather than a trait of all those currently within the structure of childhood. Waldron reminds those who work with children to remain mindful of the "intersecting influences" (2006, p. 87) that mediate various experiences of childhood and not to oversimplify the categorisation of children. The difference between children and the more general state of childhood is explored in the next section.

Contrasting perspectives on childhood amongst teachers that stem from overly generalised or outdated tropes can result in confusion about rights and their applicability. Scottish teachers, according to Struthers, often linked rights to behaviour management, sanctions and discipline (2015, p. 34) and Jerome cited numerous international examples of selective or de-politicised HRE because "prevailing cultural values and educational traditions" were viewed as "incompatible with aspects of HRE" (2018, p. 53). Similarly, in the Irish context, Waldron and Oberman found that there was "ambiguity" (2014) towards children's status as social actors. Although children are now generally considered competent social actors in the literature (Danby & Farrell, 2004; James, Jenks & Prout, 2006; Penn, 2008; Wyness 2006), other socially constructed narratives of childhood prevail and can impact conceptualisations of childhoods. Taylor recognised this as she notes that "childhood is more about adult imaginaries, and our own political and moral agendas" (Taylor, 2011, p. 420).

Curriculum as a reflection of society

The historical development of childhood in Ireland, which included efforts to normalise children within the doctrine of the Catholic Church and ideals of nationalism (Devine, 2003), indicates the complexities of childhood and children's identities even in the Irish context. Up until the 1960s, a paternalistic view permeated Irish society and education, characterised by an attitude of doing to children what was deemed necessary regardless of their opinion (Devine, 2003). After the 1960s, there was a paradigm shift in education; a greater emphasis was placed on vulnerability, protection and the individual child (2003). This was characterised by the development of Curaclam na Bunscoile produced in 1971, a "radical departure" (Walsh, 2016) from previous curricula with a more open, progressive and discovery-based approach (Sugrue, 2004). The opening chapter of this curriculum document states that education should "reflect the philosophy of a society" (Government of Ireland, 1971, p. 14) and in many ways it did.

Curaclam na Bunscoile (1971) espoused an "overarching commitment to child centred education" (Waldron et al., 2011, pp. 16-17); it was thorough and visionary (Sugrue, 2004, p. 189). However, it was not fully enacted and didactic approaches lingered as some teachers felt the "looseness" (2004, p. 189) of this curriculum too difficult to implement. In 1999 a new document, colloquially referred to as the revised curriculum, was produced. The extent of the revisions in this curriculum was debated by Sugrue (2004) but the overall child-centred approach was reiterated. The new curriculum was more "conservative" (p. 193) and gave teachers a plethora of tightened objectives; however, it may have lost what Irwin (2018) referred to as the "philosophical thrust" of the original. Irwin critiqued the child-centredness of the 1999 curriculum; he believed it was not exclusively child-centred but rather had a more eclectic, even confused educative outlook. This 1999 curriculum included both individualistic child-focused aims as well as broader Deweyan ideals of socio-political contribution. Despite its revolutionary promise as a progressive educational strategy, this confusion of ideology and indeed a fusion with theology may have been evident in the 1971 curriculum also. This is another possible explanation as to why its effects were not as transformative as had been hoped.

Education remained focused on achieving adult goals, power structures had not changed drastically, and children were still judged by adult standards of what was deemed "normal" or marginal (Devine, 2003). Children's views remained neglected in education and research and they were frequently conceptualised as being "silly" or "incapable of being taken seriously" (Sharpe, 2009, p. 100). This narrow mindset hindered children's opportunities to make decisions about their own needs even though there was no biological truth to suggest that being young equated with having nothing to say (Thomson, 2008). Within the paradigm of childhood studies and considering the UNCRC, viewing children as "innocent", "unruly", "blank slate" or "developing" (Lyle, 2014, p. 1) limits their participation in society, and fails to position them as social actors. It is therefore "unsupportive of the UNCRC" (2014, p. 1).

2.2.2 Children versus childhood

Childhood studies are further complicated by children's status generationally. Prior to what was called the New Sociology of Childhood (Alanen, 2001; James & James, 2008; Mayall, 2002; Prout & James, 1990; Prout, 2002; Sinclair, 2004, Wyness, 2006) children were traditionally viewed as "adults in the making," "lacking competencies of the adult" (Uprichard, 2008, p. 303), or "mini or incomplete adults" (Sharpe, 2009, p. 100). Developmental psychology intrinsically linked competence with age and implied the incompetence of the very young, positing children as playing "second fiddle" (Qvortrup, 2009, p. 35) to adults in society. Children were not viewed in terms of their value to society during childhood but rather,

"[they] were conceived of in terms of their futurity" (James & James, 2008, p. 120). A child's worth was seen in their potential to grow into a competent adult citizen rather than in being an active child-citizen and childhood was primarily studied only in terms of what it "revealed about adult life" (James, 2009, p. 35). Essentially, childhood was viewed as a "preparatory stage" (Mayall, 1996, p. 58) and children as "becomings" (Qvortrup, 1987, 2005).

Since the new paradigm in childhood studies recognises children as capable and competent social actors (Danby & Farrell, 2004; James et al., 2006; Penn 2008; Wyness 2006), children have been reconceptualised not as "becomings" but as "beings" (Alanen, 1992; James & Prout, 1997, Mayall, 2002; Qvortrup, 1987, 2005). However, despite the debate about beings or becomings, as Holloway put it, it was not a simple choice between biology and sociology, the "dualism between the natural and the social has always been somewhat more blurred than that" (2014, p. 379). Uprichard similarly saw that states of being and becoming are "intrinsic to childhood research" (2008, p. 303) but claimed that the reality was that these states of childhood are interwoven and "inexorably linked" (Uprichard, 2008, p. 305). She believed that the two states are concurrent as childhood is both a constant state - since there will always be children – and temporary, for those who experience it will always, hopefully, become adults. Children have – as Uprichard wrote – a "past, present and future" (2008, p. 306) and work undertaken with children should recognise the significance of the whole experience of childhood. Qvortrup also recognised childhood as a permanent segment of society while recognising the individual anticipatory development needs of a child during this *period* in their lives (2009, p. 23). This structure of childhood is a "permanent form of any generational structure" (Qvortrup, 2009, p. 23); childhood is a structure that is neither "transient" nor a "period" (p. 25) and an individual child's experience and childhood are not interchangeable terms.

If then, children are both being and becoming, how can society best provide for them in terms of what they can achieve now and in the future? Articles 5 and 12 of the UNCRC, suggest a kind of graduating scale that refers to the article's realisation being "consistent with the evolving capacities of the child" (UNCRC, Art. 5). However, there are no parameters set to establish how and when these capacities develop, thus leaving these articles open to interpretation or violation, as discussed in Chapter One. James and James (2008) argue that competence is dynamic and that it is dependent on opportunities, gaining confidence and lived experiences (p. 35). This idea of lived experience is found also in Mentha, Church and Page's (2015) assertions that children's capacities or potential for agency should reflect local circumstances, and in *General Comment no.7* (2005) where the importance of cultural influences on agency is recognised. However, children's competences have often been

underestimated according to Lansdown (2005). She maintains that children should be afforded "respect for their capacities at any given age" and believes that failure to do so means "to deny them respect and dignity as individuals" (2005, xiv). Children have been found to be "morally competent, capable of making informed and morally valid decisions" (James & James, 2008, p. 35), therefore their lack of inclusion or opportunity to participate in decision-making is unjustifiable.

2.2.3 The Capabilities Approach

One way to assess the provisions for children as both beings and becomings is through the lens of the Capabilities Approach (Nussbaum, 2011; Sen, 1985). By providing opportunities for children to speak, demonstrate agency and express their capacity in various aspects of their lives, they can enjoy more of what Sen referred to as *functionings* (1985) both within the state of childhood and as future adults. Simply put, if given the opportunity, children can do more. Sen claimed that with sufficient development, i.e., removal of "major sources of unfreedom" (1985, p. 3), people's capabilities could grow, meaning not only their current functionings but also what they can achieve. When this logic is applied to children's agency, it suggests that children's capabilities and freedoms will expand through the removal of limiting beliefs about them. These functionings are not theoretical but, as Sen put it, "real freedoms that people enjoy" (1985, p. 3). This idea of measuring human freedoms by the capabilities they afford was further explored and expanded by Nussbaum. She went further than Sen and claimed that within this *Capabilities Approach* - a means to "assess quality of life" and theorize about "basic social justice" (2011, p. 18) - there were ten central capabilities (p. 33) that, when secured, could ensure a person's human dignity. Both Sen and Nussbaum centralised the idea of choice in their theories: Sen equated functionings to freedoms and Nussbaum remarked that "[o]ptions are freedoms and freedom has intrinsic value" (2011, p. 25). Both Sen's and Nussbaum's theories about capabilities and how they can be used to assess current and future capabilities are explored in more detail in the Conceptual Framework. When seeking to realise practicable capabilities for children in the classroom and imagine what their functionings might be, Nussbaum's earlier work is of further benefit. In *Cultivating Humanity* (1997) she leaned upon the teachings of the Stoics to describe three capacities essential to becoming fully human: Socratic self-examination, world citizenship and narrative imagination (1997, pp. 9-10); each capacity promotes attitudes or behaviours that Nussbaum saw as elevating the human experience. They are applicable to children within the state of childhood and in their preparations for later life. Each of these capacities and how they might relate to the classroom are also explored in the Conceptual Framework.

2.3 Balance or Barriers?

When building a rights-based framework for child-agency, another consideration alongside how society views the roles of children, is how we view the roles of adults. This section explores how traditional roles of adults, in relation to protection and care, interact with children's rights, specifically, participation rights. Particular attention is given to how these roles support or impact upon children's participation and whether these roles create balance or barriers for children's rights.

2.3.1 Protection

Danby and Farrell (2004) outline the many protections and ethical considerations put in place to safeguard children in research including, but not limited to, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 and various national protection policies. They argue that these protections, although successful in making adults feel that children are better protected, may come at a "social cost to the child" (2004, p. 37). Protection is extremely important in ensuring that children reach adulthood and are free from mistreatment, abuse, or neglect. Yet, the misrepresentation of protection can become a barrier to children's participation and, according to Lyle, "deny children their right to seriously engage in that world" (2014, p. 1). Protection issues are a reality for all children both within society and research. Adults who strive to provide daily protection to children may need to query how much they value their perceptions of children as innocent or vulnerable and who does this benefit. For example, Smith argued that "childhood innocence may be something we can no longer afford if we're serious about protecting kids from dangerous people" (2016, n.p.). This echoes earlier work by Kirby and Woodhead who also felt that the idea of childhood innocence was "too often inconsistent with the reality of children's lives" (2003, p. 235). Over two decades ago Gerrard suggested that one factor pertaining to children's protection is an adult's need to feel needed and added that "the idea of the innocence of children is enormously alluring to adults" (1999, n.p).

The various constructions of childhood have raised debates about the best way to care for children. Article 3 of the UNCRC (1989) states that the best interest of the child be considered "in all actions concerning children." The term *best interests*, or "the welfare principle" (James & James, 2008, p. 13) supports the protection of children. However, it also lends itself to an over-simplification that allows adults to readily subordinate other rights such as those relating to participation (James & James, 2008, p. 13). Even when adults do violate or subordinate rights, the enforceability of the UNCRC to protect all children's rights has also been described as "weak" (Waldron & Oberman, 2016) or "uneven" (Collins & Wolff, 2014, p. 96). As well as disagreement on best interests, the diversity of childhood experiences also complicates the

issue of protection as state and family beliefs about what constitutes the best interest of the child vary according to context. The UNCRC presents "global norms" (Tisdall & Punch, 2012, p. 254) within its articles but this document was produced with a Minority World – i.e., Global North - view of childhood and may be at odds with the lived reality of many children (Tisdall & Punch, 2012). In addition to its western outlook, there are further differences in perspective relating to protection based on age and media threats; older children are often perceived as less in need of protection and more likely to be regarded as "a risk to tranquillity and control" (Holloway, 2014, p. 381), and new threats posed by the evolution of media exposure may mean that shielding children can no longer be a sustainable model (Smith, 2016). If then, our practice of protection is insufficient, how can we ensure children's best interest? Raising children's awareness, care, action, and criticality may offer solutions.

2.3.2 Care

If paternalistic views of shielding children for their protection and acting on their behalf are unsuccessful or ideologically discordant with current conceptions of childhood, then perhaps an ideology of *care* can offer an alternative. Gilligan theorised about an *ethic of care* that recognised the power of care to offer a feminine alternative (1982) in the conversation about protection that is more mutually rewarding as it is rooted in "care and responsibility" as well as "concern and connection" for others (Gilligan, 2016, p. 5). Foundational work within the ethic of care by Gilligan (1982, 2016) and Noddings (1984, 2002) has been built upon by Bath (2013) and De Graeve (2015) who see the potential in care to develop receptive and reciprocal relationships. De Graeve's ethic of care is rooted in three main principles: recognising a concrete rather than a generalised other; the concept of the relational self whereby all individuals exist within networks of care and dependence; and challenging "traditional moral theory that solely defines moral situations in terms of rights and responsibilities" (p. 12), rather looking at such moral situations through the lens of caring relationships. She sought a contrast to "the independent and un-embedded individual of the liberal rights model" (2015, p. 12). The application of De Graeve's principles could provide the opportunity for citizens to come together to bring their concerns to what Bath described as a "public sphere" (2013, p. 369). In relation to early childhood education, Bath saw care as a "participatory forum exercised through responsive listening which then informs individual and joint decision-making" (p. 369).

However, there is a risk that the realisation of rights can become "contingent on care or subject to compromise" (Bath, 2013, p. 369). Gilligan described care as something that we are hard-wired for and speaks about people's "capacity for mutual understanding" (2011) which may underestimate the critical work needed to understand and realise human rights. The

successful adoption of an ethic of care also requires a careful balance as some who feel that care is a term viewed as "women's work" and often "self-sacrificial" (Bath, 2013, p. 367) may be hesitant in its application whereas others, if overly didactic in their application, could turn care into a state regulated enterprise (Gibbons, 2007). Gibbons' concern about the synthesis of care with education had been that *care* itself was becoming state regulated, usurping natural care; he deemed the concept of care to thus be "in ruins" (2007, p. 123). Despite this, he maintained that there was hope among the ruins for care and the framing of care as a moderating force between power and morality as well as between democracy and justice which may offer the necessary balance (Bath, 2013). It is important to note that children's rights are not simply a reference to the need for well-being (Lundy, 2019); an uncritical use of care could potentially revert to paternalistic overshadowing of children's agency, but, through the critical application of care, children can experience the necessary space and relationships to examine their own concerns. Within an ethic of care there is a desire to maintain or enhance relations with others, particularly persons in need (Noddings, 1995, p. 138). The activation of care, according to Noddings involved modelling care, listening, encouraging dialogue and praxis (2012). Bath characterised listening to young children as a "democratic care practice" (2013, p. 367). Through demonstrating care that is democratic and responsive, children can become more attuned to those around them, more aware of both their own needs and the needs of others.

2.4 Theories of Engagement

Article 12, as detailed in Chapter One, has been criticised for its broad language that is open to interpretation while still presenting great opportunity for children's engagement on the matters that affect them. The article has been interpreted as a participation right. The meaning and potential for *participation* is explored in this section. The specific forms of participation associated with children as co-researchers are explored in the final section of this chapter, but here I interrogate the forms participation might take and what it means if children do not participate. Voice is also explored as a mode of engagement; I define what constitutes voice and how children's voices are theorised. Finally, the concept of agency is explored as a key aspect of the research questions, how it differs from other forms of engagement and why differentiating these terms matters. Each of these themes is also expanded upon in the Conceptual Framework.

2.4.1 Participation

Participation can mean much more than voice alone. Participation according to Hill et al., is the "direct involvement of children in decision-making about matters that affect their lives, whether individually or collectively" (Hill, Davies, Prout & Tisdall, 2004, p. 83). Young

children's participation may relate to making daily decisions around routines or "involvement in wider decision-making processes" (Clark, 2005, p. 491). Conversely, Larkins suggested that children who do not participate may be enacting "citizenship of a different kind" (2014, p. 7). Non-participation is categorised as a "[mis]behaviour" according to Larkins and she termed such behaviours "acts of citizenship" (Larkins, 2014, p. 7, parenthesis in original); these are discussed further within the Conceptual Framework. The idea of misbehaviour, however, (though potentially an empowering act and explored within the idea of agency) suggests that participation has a structure or standardised format, a preferred performance. Globalised norms for childhood behaviours that are suggested in the UNCRC can exclude the participation of many children who live outside of them (Tisdall & Punch, 2012) such as child workers, child soldiers, those experiencing stigma around sexual orientation or ethnicity (p. 254) even persons with disabilities (Lawson, 2011). Therefore, as Reid et al. warned, a simple redrawing of the lines of power may not necessarily promote greater inclusion and equality (2008).

The term *participation* is prevalent across development and educational policies (Reid et al., 2008). Although it has many meanings, it tends to imply "the promise of empowerment and transformative development for marginal people" (Reid et al., 2008, p. 33). However, the idea of children being marginal is problematic since children represent the majority population in the Majority World (Tisdall & Punch, 2012), the Global South. The positioning of children within a minority status has the potential to limit their agency and has contributed to limiting beliefs about children's capacities. Young children are often considered less capable of making decisions. Participation rights belong to every child capable of forming any view that is their own and are not limited to children who have been deemed "mature" (Lundy, 2007), rather they are dependent "only on their ability to form a view, mature or not" (Lundy, 2007, p. 935). Young children's citizenship and rights to participation are clearly articulated in the Aistear framework (NCCA, 2009, p. 7) which was explored in Chapter One.

The rights enshrined in Article 12 have been viewed as conflicting with parental rights. For example, the decision of the United States not to ratify the CRC is primarily rooted in perceived tensions between children's participation rights and parental rights to govern family matters (Lee, 2017). Some believe the ultimate aim of participation is for children to run their lives independently of adults; however, Article 5 of the UNCRC asserts the role of parents (1989). Hart (2008), in a review of his popular "ladder" model of participation (1992) cites one common misconception, that the top rung of the ladder where "children initiate shared decisions with adults" (1992) is the "ultimate goal" at all times when working with children. Hart discounts this and explains that the appropriate rung of participation is the one that best

suits the interests of the child and the aims of a project. Hart also contests the idea that children must be emancipated from adults to fully enjoy their rights.

The Conceptual Framework continues this exploration of participation within the idea of democratic participation. It looks at ways to build community, forums, and shared spaces where the opportunity to participate is not an obligation but rather a warm invitation. Clark determined listening to be a "necessary stage in participation" (2005, p. 491), listening is the first step in defining shared goals and taking collective action.

2.4.2 Voice

Valuing one's own voice and seeing the value in the opinions of others ought to be a core objective in any education system dedicated to inclusion and embracing diversity (Lansdown, 2011, p. 13). Incorporating opportunities for students to engage in decision-making is increasingly considered to be good practice (Gillett-Swan & Sargeant, 2018; Lundy & Cook-Sather, 2015; Quinn & Owen, 2016); this reflects the influence of Article 12 which entitles children to have a say in matters affecting them and has become prominent in children's rights discourse (Fleming, 2015; Horgan, 2017; Lundy, 2007; 2012; 2018; Lundy & Cook-Sather 2015; Nolas, 2015; Waldron & Oberman, 2016). The article's scope has been critiqued (Flynn, 2017; Lundy, 2007; 2019; Tisdall & Punch, 2012), yet many of the positive, child-focused policies and developments as discussed in Chapter One have been developed as a result. In Ireland *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* (DCYA, 2014) sought to include children's voices in policy affecting them and led to the establishment of Comhairle na nÓg. While the development of this framework is promising, the lack of completed actions in its second action plan (DCYA, 2017) is somewhat disappointing. To assist in realising the full potential of Article 12, it is important to understand its complexities (Lansdown, 2011). Lundy considered abbreviations for Article 12, such as "pupil voice", to have "the potential to diminish its impact" since "they provide an imperfect summary of the full extent of the obligation" (Lundy, 2007, p. 927). She developed a model to summarise Article 12 (2007) in a way that captured its nuance and complexity, categorising space, voice, influence, and audience as the key components of the article. The Lundy model is explored in the Conceptual Framework since voice is a foundational concept within this study.

Pascal and Bertram (2008) warn against singularity in relation to voice as this could lead to a homogeneous grouping of children's voices. The view that children would be grouped as to produce singular action or agency minimises their potential for visibility and nuanced, individual agency resulting in "their relative powerlessness" (James & James, 2008, p. 11). Another factor that may disempower children as a collective is the broad categorisations of children and assumptions about their best interests "irrespective of class or culture" (James &

James, 2008, p. 30). Lansdown (2011) is explicit in her assertion that all children have a voice, both collectively and on an individual basis. Naming and grouping children's contributions have the potential to shape or even limit them. However, the terminology associated with *pupil voice* can also limit its functionality. Lundy set out a lexicon of what pupil voice was not (2019), reminding the reader to be wary of oversimplifications. Even the term *voice* has the potential to depoliticize children's participation (Nolas, 2015) if it funnels children's contributions into the narrow "institutionally defined moments" (p. 161) within which children are conceptualized as having a right to be heard. According to Biesta (2010), referring to the children as "speakers" assumes children as capable, since they can "already speak" (2010, p. 549) and are not learners or students in this regard. Conceptualising children as speakers therefore harnesses the power of careful terminology to address issues of inequality.

This issue of terminology also presents itself in the voice these speakers produce. Oswell (2009) and Nolas (2015) differentiate between *voice* and *speech*. Voice is often those "highly domesticated" forms of participation that are readily expected or encouraged from children (Oswell, 2009) but, for the realisation of powerful, agentic or functioning pupil voices, what is necessary is "speech" (Nolas, 2016). Oswell distinguished speech as a public, politicised and more organised element of voice using an Aristotelian distinction between public and private which he termed "micro" and "macro" uses (2016). Children should be given the opportunity to experiment with public speech since this was the means to making empirical claims about the world (Oswell, 2009, p. 144).

One solution may be what Nolas (2015) referred to as "childhood publics." These publics would be a space "between the state and the market in which citizens can deliberate and debate common affairs" (2015, p. 161). It may be possible to create the "participatory forums" (Bath, 2013, p. 369) discussed in the section on *Care*, and incorporate children's "common concerns" in what Nolas, Varvantakis and Aruldoss (2017) called children's "mundane activities" and "banal spaces." Those spaces can potentially be transformed from the inside. Including children's voices in as many aspects of this study as possible correlates with this need for broader opportunities for children's voices to be included. *Voice,* according to Nolas, is generally seen as occurring between family, schools, state care, or public services. However, Wyness recognises the inherent conflict between creating child-centred spaces within adults' ideals (2009, p. 395).

Language limitations also present themselves when children decide to use their voices since they are contributing to an existing discourse. The way children represent themselves and describe their experiences of the world, are summed together to create what Foucault

referred to as “discourse” (James & James, 2008, p. 107). The language used to describe childhood is dictated by adults since adults teach children language. Children must therefore use adult words in order to describe their own experiences. In this way, adult views of childhood dictate how childhood is understood even by children, and children replicate the childhood their society has articulated. This “adult-centric” perspective is captured well by Woodhouse (2003), when he argues that “those in power have defined rights for children in an adult-centric manner that ignores children’s reality and children’s lived experience” (p. 752). This adult-centric discourse also risks silencing children since they are “the most often silenced in the production of knowledge and understandings” (Pascal & Bertram, 2009, p. 252). Teachers can inadvertently silence students due to a “dominance of the teacher’s voice at the expense of students’ own meaning-making voices” (Lyle, 2014, p. 221). Effective listening may help to alleviate this adult-centric discourse, and help adults understand the peculiarities of children’s voices. Such nuanced listening could assure not only the application of the principles of the UNCRC but also the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006). Lansdown provided a guide to appropriate and alternative voice eliciting strategies available to persons with disabilities (2011). After listening, the next step in voice-activation might be demonstrating what Lundy referred to as children’s influence (2007), their agentic power.

2.4.3 Agency

Agency is a concept with varying and sometimes overlapping meanings. It can be overly theoretical and fall short of its potential. Ultimately, agency refers to “what a person is free to do and achieve in pursuit of whatever goals or values he or she regards as important” (Sen, 1985, p. 203). James cited the idea of children's agency as being “one of the most important theoretical developments in the recent history of childhood studies” (2009, p. 34). She revisited Giddens’ 1979 debate on structure and agency to trace how children’s agency was initially conceptualised (2009). According to Giddens, from the earliest experiences, the infant is an active partner in society but that primarily children accumulated conventions and learned to reproduce society (1979). Later, it was claimed that not only can children reproduce society, but they actively construct their own lives, relationships, and cultures (James & James, 1990). Mayall (2002) further argued that children were not only social actors but “agents”, which is to say that their actions could affect change and actively contribute to culture and society, therefore it can be said that children are “acting on and in the world” (Waldron, 2006, p. 88). The term *agent* suggests negotiation with others, with the effect that the interaction makes a difference (p. 21). Tisdall & Punch cited Klocker’s (2007) distinction of “thick and thin agency” and combined her idea of thick/thin agency with Ansell’s (2009)

discussion of “the limitations of children’s agency” (2012). They argued that there is a “thickness” for children to be “involved and influence many local situations,” but a “thinness” at “more macro and policy levels” (2012, p. 256). This mirrors the earlier discussion on a lack of political influence among children in the section on voice and childhood publics. One recent example of an increased political influence among children and young people is the Fridays for Future (FFF) movement. This movement, led by Greta Thunberg, began in August 2018 and has since gained traction globally, resulting in vast protest marches where children absent themselves from school to protest against state failures in environmental policy. The agency of these young people has been categorised in various ways. While some undermine their actions by referring to them as absentees or dreamers (Bergmann & Ossewaarde, 2020), others see their actions as civil disobedience (Mattheis, 2020). Depoliticising these actions has the potential to undermine their agency. Mattheis believes the actions of FFF should be taken seriously and that they have a special justification for their so-called disobedience since they are wrongly excluded from political discourses. He perceives a need for principled law-breaking such as this among child actors whether their issues are child-specific or not (2020).

While attempting to conceptualise the scope of agency, Bradbury-Jones et al. (2018) recommend Foucault’s metaphor of capillary blood; it “reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives” (Foucault, 1980, p. 39). This ontological standpoint suggests that agency is infused throughout everyday tasks, that it is something which people possess naturally, but Bradbury-Jones (2018) claims that it is “crucial” that this innate power be acted upon. Bradbury-Jones et al. also claim that it is our view of children as “powerful agents, capable of exerting political influence” (2018) that empowers them to speak. Though as Aldridge (2012, p. 56) reminds us, in the context of adults conducting research with young children, we must remain mindful that we offer only “degrees of empowerment” if general inequalities persist. Jerome echoed the voices of those who criticise hypocrisy within progressive education since the teacher is always ultimately wielding authority, under the cloak of democratic participation (2018, p. 54).

Corsaro also believed that children were capable of more than reproducing society and argued that they engage in interpretive reproduction (2005, p. 24) whereby children were “innovative” and “creative” in their interactions with society. This concept of creatively interpreting societal rules links with what Larkins (2014) termed “acts of citizenship,” forms of “[mis]behaviour” that denote an agentic divergence from typical views of participation. This idea is explored further in the discussion on citizenship in the next section. Corsaro also suggested that, in the production of “their own peer worlds and cultures” (2005, p. 24),

children work collectively. Since they do not need to be instructed on how to form these worlds and they require no preparatory stage, this idea of agency "does not demand individualizing solutions" (Kirby, 2020, p. 27); there is no need for educators to intervene and instruct on "improved pupil character" (p. 27) but rather what is required is collective action (Kirby, 2020; Oswell, 2009). This study draws on the idea of collective action to support agency and democratic participation. These ideas are explored further in the Conceptual Framework and the methods used to facilitate this action are detailed in Chapter Four.

2.5 Schools as rights-promoting communities

The vital role of schools in upholding and promoting the rights of children and preparing children and young people "to enact their rights and to participate in a critical way in society" (McGillicuddy, 2019) was explored in Chapter One. Education that supports children's agency centres around not only developing critical communication skills, but also in experiencing democracy and citizenship in action within spaces that offer them increasing levels of autonomy. Learning to "access and democratise the new public spaces" (Cremin & Faul, 2012, p. 163) is an important aspect of teaching a modern citizenship curriculum. It is not enough to simply teach children how to govern themselves in the future, they must be given practical experience in learning how to be active and "good" citizens within childhood (Cremin & Faul, 2012, p. 163). Although the SPHE curriculum in Ireland is supportive of the rights of learners, "its emphasis remains on child responsibility" (Waldron & Oberman, 2016, p. 747) rather than rights advocacy. For children to see themselves as agents of change and advocates for their own rights, they must see human rights as an ongoing political process (Jerome, 2018; Starkey, 2017) of which they can be a part.

Traditional feelings of "subservience and conformity" (Devine, 2003, p. 55) in schools can be alleviated through embedding methodologies such as "student councils, workshop education, peer support groups, circle time and cooperative learning" (p. 54). However, power balances have been found to be a "perennial issue in all forms of democratic education" as teachers "desire to cede authority whilst maintaining a measure of classroom control" (Bhargava & Jerome, 2020, p. 9). The Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended Student Councils as a means of enacting Article 12 in schools (Lundy, 2007) as did many studies since (Cremin & Faul, 2012; Devine, 2003; Jeffers & O'Connor, 2008; Lundy, 2007), yet they remain optional at primary level. Student councils can lead to feelings of "empowerment and affirmation" and develop the skills of "communication, negotiation and participation" (Cremin & Faul, 2012, p. 163). However, studies have found inconsistencies in how pupils and teachers view the effectiveness of councils, even within the same school (Cremin & Faul, 2012; Gibbons, 2016). The initiation of successful student councils may be an important element in increasing

student participation in schools and redressing the issue of power imbalances. And although the Education Act (1998) recommended the establishment of student councils to increase pupil participation at second level, there is still no statutory basis for such developments at primary level.

2.5.1 Learning citizenship or teaching citizens?

Schools have a role not only in teaching about citizenship but also in activating citizenship. To be an active citizen one must have a connection, a sense of community and the belief that real change is possible (Crang, Cloke & Goodwin, 2004). Howe and Covell (2005) found that "schools are the institutions in which children first develop their ideas about the rights and responsibilities of citizenship" (2005, p. 83).

Traditionally, children were viewed not as citizens but, "citizens in waiting" (James & James, 2008, p. 32). The dependency of children in industrialised societies and the "influence of developmental psychology" (2008, p. 32) which conceptualized children as incomplete adults (James & James, 2008, p. 32) meant that children were found lacking in the competencies of citizenship. The concept of child citizenship is strongly supported by the UNCRC (1989) and the participation rights of children endorsed by the UNCRC now enhance and assert the citizenship status of children (Lansdown, 2006).

Waldron et al., articulated teachers' difficulty in defining citizenship due to remaining tensions between empowering and subordinating models within the classroom setting (2014). The tensions emanated from underlying and unconscious questions about whether children were developing citizenship so that they may become "valuable" and "productive" citizens in the future, whether they were exercising their current emerging citizenship as full members of society, or at what point this sudden differentiation may occur (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Citizenship teaching can be viewed as a gradual transfer of power (Lansdown, 2011) and when a child's right to be heard is supported in the early years setting, this can be "integral to nurturing citizenship over the long term" (2011, p. 9). She claimed that the values of democracy could become embedded in the child's approach to life by taking this approach (2011).

2.5.2 Democracy in schools

Involving children in the everyday running and decision-making of schools, and the co-production of knowledge, can afford children a greater sense of belonging within their school, and there are also proven positive implications for teaching and learning (Flutter & Ruddock, 2004). Coming together in this way to create common understandings and a shared vision for the future is crucial to developing a Deweyan form of democracy which is more than a form of

government, rather, a "mode of associated living" (1916, p. 101). This community focus was endorsed by Jerome who stated that it is "difficult to imagine democracy without building some shared sense of political community" (2018, p. 48). The importance of school communities "where members mutually respect the dignity and entitlements of others" is also espoused by Waldron and Oberman (2016, p. 747). Such communities are well positioned to educate *for* human rights where children can recognise themselves as "advocates of their own and other rights" (p. 747).

Education "through" human rights (UN, 2011) indicates a need for not only learning about democratic ideals but also, the opportunity to practice them. Freire argued that democracy needs space to be practised (2005). As in the discussion on voice, there has been a historic dominance of teacher-talk in education that Freire called "narration sickness" (1996, p. 152). This dominance can leave little space for children's voices and the practical democratic learning. Beane and Apple (1995) recommended a set of conditions necessary for children to experience democracy in schools: respect for free-flowing ideas, critical analysis, belief in the ability of people to enact change, working towards the greater good of all, respecting the dignity of all, an organised structure, and a set of values to live by (1995, p. 4).

Democracy is a foundational concept in this study and, as such, is explored in greater detail in the Conceptual Framework. It is explored in terms of the democratisation of knowledge (Fals Borda & Moro-Osejo, 2003; Levias, 2018; Rowell & Feldman, 2019; Tandon & Hall, 2015) i.e., extending the mantle of "knowledge producers" to children (Rowell & Feldman, 2019) and in the democratic participation of children in a learning community. In this study, democracy is viewed as an ethos of interrelatedness and interdependence; it sees a community coming together to create new understandings, in a "democratizing spirit of growth and change" (Kemmis, 2010, p. 425).

2.6 Opportunities for child-voice in co-research

In this section the development of childhood and children's research is reviewed. It looks at how adults conceptualise children in research and how children might see themselves represented within the research process. Finally, I will examine the choices that have been made in my context in relation to including young children's voices in research.

2.6.1 How children are viewed within research

Since the 1970s there has been a "political drive" (Sharpe, 2009, p. 99) to align research with the recognition of children as "social actors" (Prout & James, 1990) or "active subjects" (Pascal & Bertram, 2009, p. 249). Previously children had been "muted" by adults within research (Prout & James, 1990) but since then research has viewed children in several ways: the child

as an object, a subject, a social actor or a participant (Prout, 2002). This process was characterised by Sharpe as the movement from “research on” to “research with” to “research by” children (2009, p. 99). The conflict between traditional views of childhood and more progressive ones was explored earlier in this chapter in relation to society and it applies to educational research also. Proper consideration of the purpose and outlook of research is essential, otherwise a number of these differing approaches may be present in one study (Prout, 2002; Waldron, 2006).

Empirical studies on childhood necessarily have generational relations at their core (James & James, 2008; Mayall, 2002) and have the potential for an imbalance of power (Alanen & Mayall, 2001). The asymmetry of power, between teacher and pupil as well as researcher and research subject is explored in depth in Chapter Three. Negotiating the balance of power is also addressed within the concept of knowledge democracy which is explored in the Conceptual Framework. To address the intrinsic imbalance of powers associated with children’s research and to help decipher whether research is *on, with* or *by* children (Sharpe, 2009), Waldron presents a continuum for children’s participation in research (2006). The continuum shows the role of the child from participatory to collaborative and the various stages in between and it enables the researcher to examine the degree to which they involve children in their work. The application of this model is explored in more detail in Chapter Three.

Participatory research, according to Sharpe, involves risk taking and working with young inexperienced researchers carries an “even greater risk” (2009, p. 102). Waldron and Oberman noted that children’s participation rights themselves are disruptive of traditional power balances (2016). Perhaps the implementation of these rights should be correspondingly disruptive since Sharpe recommends that to provide assistance, not control in research, the support worker – adult – should be self-aware of their approach and be willing to “[break] free from traditional ways of working” (2009, p. 104). Teacher and researcher readiness and willingness to take risks and engage in disruptive methods may be required for effective research with young children.

Many organisations and policy makers have been seen to pay “lip-service” (Woodhouse, 2003, p. 752) to the idea of listening to children’s voices but, children’s views have long been neglected (Sharpe, 2009). Waldron (2006) voiced concern in relation to children’s participation in research where she queried whether, at times, consultation and collaboration with children were treated as a luxury, too easily dismissed, or abandoned. Research with children has been regarded at times as tokenistic or decorative (Flynn, 2017; Lundy, 2007).

Indeed, Waldron and Oberman found that the realisation of participation rights themselves is "frequently characterised as tokenistic" (2016, p. 745). Lundy later interrogated the role of tokenism as perhaps affording a foundation for children's inclusion that could be viewed as a step in the right direction (2018) suggesting the importance of adult intention. However, Jerome contested that those who "appear to offer a democratic and rights-respecting education, but fall short" do so because they "do not really believe in children's capacity to engage with the process" (2018, p. 54) and this hypocrisy may be equally true of researchers as teachers.

2.6.2 Children's representation in research

In the early nineties, Sedgwick found that children within research were often confused when asked to comment on their work or develop their own questionnaires as they were so accustomed to answering in "adult-pleasing ways" (1994). This raised the questions: were children telling adult researchers what they thought adults wanted to hear? Were they providing acceptable or desirable answers to adults, rather than their genuine opinions? Sedgwick attributed this inauthenticity to once-off experiences of research. He claimed that only when children felt safe and at ease with expressing themselves could their true voices be heard (1994). Two decades later, in the Irish context, Oberman et al. (2014) found that children were still unlikely to challenge adult authority, were willing to accept the view of children being vulnerable and were accepting of "dominant discourses" (p. 63) in relation to development education. The children were similarly submissive in relation to local decision-making and global power structures (Oberman et al., 2014, p. 63). The apparent lack of consistent citizenship education and parallel lack of opportunities to exercise agency found by both Oberman et al.'s and Sedgwick's studies may have been limiting factors in the children's self-beliefs. Activating children's voices in once-off research does not provide adequate time or space for the acquisition of skills and is "futile" when children have not been given regular practice in exercising their voices (1994, p. 70). For children's participation to be meaningful, it must be a process rather than a "one off event" (CRC, 2009, p. 29). Children need to engage in decision making processes over a more sustained period (Oberman et al., 2014; Sedgwick, 1994). The full list of stipulations set out by GC12 for effective participation with children was detailed in Chapter One.

The potential pitfalls of researching with children were recognised by Oberman et al., (2014) who cited Mitra's (2001) warning that when adult researchers translate "student speak" into their own adult words, without involving children in data analysis, then the "integrity of the children's voices within the data is lost" (2014, p. 30). Children's voices in texts and research have frequently been included to illustrate some point the researcher wants to put forward

and the voice of the child has been "mediated" by that process (James & James, 2008, p. 29). The invitation to children to become co-researchers seeks to alleviate otherness, prevent undesirable mediation that might "***adult***erate" the data (Flynn, 2013, p. 75, emphasis in the original). The concept of adulteration is explored in relation to children's voices in the Conceptual Framework. As well as maintaining the authenticity of children's voices, efforts should be made to "engage children and young people in matters that you know interest them or which affect their lives" (Sharpe, 2009, p. 101). This child-led approach should be "innovative" (Sharpe, 2009, p. 99) and "creative and flexible" (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2018, p. 81) in responding to children's interests. Sharpe also recommends that research with children should not be fixed or arduous but should be kept "simple and maintain the child's involvement in everyday practice" (p. 101). These recommendations were pivotal in the design process and are explored in Chapter Four. Continual assent seeking provides children with an invitation to participate but also provides an "exit point" (Sharpe, 2009, p. 104) from the research that does not diminish the child's "self-esteem" (2009, p. 104). This form of assent is addressed in Chapter Six. The preservation of children's voices within research is demonstrated in Chapter Three.

2.6.3 Recent research within similar school contexts

In 2011, Lundy, McEvoy and Byrne found that examples of young children being engaged as co-researchers were rare (p. 714). In recent years, such studies have become more prevalent in the Irish context (Horgan, Forde, Parkes & Martin, 2015; Horgan, 2017). In this form of research, Horgan found that "overly paternalistic frameworks adopted by ethical review bodies can hamper participatory research with children" (2017, p. 245). An action research study undertaken by Gibbons (2016), situated in the Irish primary school setting, examined how working with children as co-researchers could have positive effects on participation within her school's student council. The study was undertaken with children from 1st to 6th class and was described as having democracy and citizenship as core values as enshrined in the Educate Together Charter (2005). She articulated some of the limitations associated with academic studies and the small sample size, even the difficulty in maintaining the children's focus (2016). However, the voices of younger children in the infant classes were not evident in the study. Young children in the infant classes were excluded from the student council, and the study without rationale. This may have been a practical consideration of a busy teacher working with an already large student council across multiple class groups or, it may be indicative of an attitude of Irish primary teachers towards children in the infant classes and their participation.

2.7 Conclusion

It is evident within this literature that the activities of adults whether they be members of government, teachers or researchers have the potential to greatly alter children's agency. The positioning of children as social actors has often been a theoretical position that has faltered on application. Decisions, whether conscious or otherwise, to remove or “protect” children from discourses that affect their daily lives can minimise children’s role in society and confer a minority status. The various means of engagement available to children are generally mediated by adults who can influence the level of agency children have within these spaces. While there is evidence in the literature that children need to practice participative activities, such as citizenship, democracy, and voice production, to fully realise their agency, a more general need for adults to facilitate children's agency is evident. The Conceptual Framework blends the various voice-inclusive and agency-promoting concepts in this chapter and, with them, builds a framework where adults can easily identify the provisions needed to develop a practice that marries with their espoused ideals. It is hoped that through the application of this framework, adults can strengthen their commitment to listening to children's voices and young children can gain the required experiences of a caring diplomatic child-led education. The framework is an opportunity for rights-promoting educators to offer greater participation and new functionings to young children.

Conceptual Framework

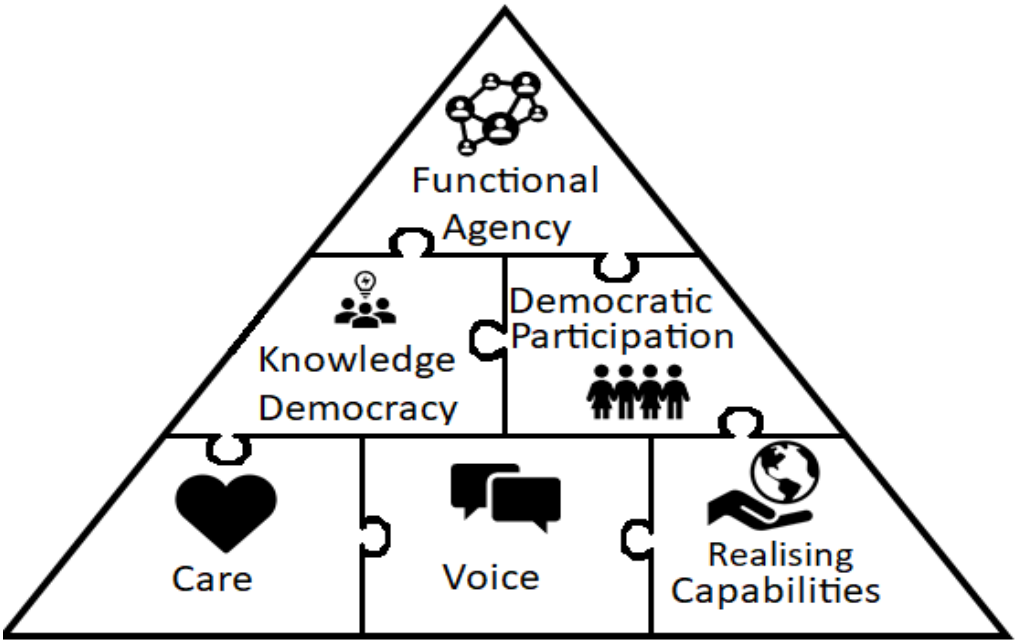


Figure CF. 1. Conceptual Framework Model

This image is representative of the core values and theories employed within this study. Its triangular shape is not a hierarchical view of these theories but rather shows where ideas are rooted and the strength of these theories when built upon one another. The bedrock theories of this study are the conceptual foundations of this work, viewing teaching and learning as an act of care, listening to the voices and communication of children and realising their capabilities in terms of what they can achieve. The theories in the centre of the pyramid come from the application of the bedrock theories. These concepts are concerned with creating space for young children to become knowledge creators and democratic participants in society. At the top of the pyramid is the concept of functional agency, it is rooted in care, voice and children's capabilities and stems from recognising children as contributors of unique knowledge within the spaces they inhabit as democratic participants. Functional agency within the context of the classroom seeks to promote children's opportunities to create knowledge and experience the practices of democratic participation and thus enacting the provisions of Article 12 in a pragmatic and functional manner. This framework is synthesised from the literature in the previous chapters.

Realising capabilities and freedoms

The evolving view of the child from capable and competent social actor to powerful agents as it relates to the New Sociology of Childhood (Alanen, 2001; James & James, 2008; Mayall, 2002; Prout & James, 1990; Prout, 2002; Sinclair, 2004) has been outlined within the literature review. Viewing children's various capacities to "do" and "be" in relation to Nussbaum's "central capabilities" and Sen's functionings were important lenses through which the study was designed, and the data were collected, treated and analysed. Martha Nussbaum's "Human Development" or "Capabilities Approach" (2011) which correlates with the work of Amartya Sen, who said that the measure of people's attainment ought to be the capabilities they *can* achieve and functionings they *do* achieve. Sen relates *functionings* to freedoms (1985) and the capacity of people to make choices about their own lives. Sen's capability approach is a moral framework proposing that social arrangements be primarily evaluated according to the extent of freedom people have to promote or achieve functionings they value (Sen, 1985). Choice is key in evaluating functionings. Thus, efforts to recognise children's functionings and build their capabilities should focus on providing opportunities that children want and value; they should offer choice, be relevant to their context and be concerned with matters in which they can engage.

Nussbaum outlines twelve "central capabilities" that all people require to attain their rights, these relate to a person's life, health, bodily integrity, senses, emotions, practical reasoning, affiliation, play, control over one's environment and concern for other species (Nussbaum, 2011, pp. 33-34). Realising a person's capabilities is a pragmatic goal, one that goes beyond merely bestowing rights; it seeks to develop personhood from a stance of "positive" liberty (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 65). Nussbaum also puts forward a theory for "cultivating humanity" (1997) that requires three essential capacities, firstly; Socratic self-examination, "the capacity for critical examination of oneself and one's traditions"; secondly, world citizenship, "to see oneself as a citizen … as human beings being bound to all other human beings by ties of recognition and concern" and, finally, narrative imagination, "the ability to think what it might be like in the shoes of someone different than oneself" (Nussbaum, 1997, pp. 9-10). These capacities relate to a person's knowledge of self and relation to the world; when combined with the "central capabilities", they encapsulate a holistic, person-centred and positive view of rights and personal freedoms. The themes in this study are explored in relation to Nussbaum's "central capabilities" (2011) and the degree to which they are cultivated. The children's emergent capacity for narrative imagination, viewing themselves as citizens and critical examination are also examined through the application of capability-extending methods and a positive, person-centred approach to data analysis.

The potential and potency of 'caring' in the classroom

In this study, caring is conceptualised as the antithesis of apathy; it is responsive to the needs of others and seeks action. The lexicon of care involves "listening," "attention" and "reciprocity" (Noddings, 2012a). Care interrupts "paternalistic discourses" common among teachers in relation to children's rights (Waldron & Oberman, 2016, p. 756) by promoting a distinctly feminine ethic. This feminine though not necessarily female ethic emerged through Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* (1982)*;* Larrabee summarised Gilligan's work as being rooted in "care and responsibility" as well as "concern and connection" for others (2016, p. 5). Care, within this framework, seeks to model and share caring relationships and promote reciprocity.

Noddings states that carer and cared-for are not mutually exclusive and "in equal relations, the parties regularly exchange positions" (2012, p. 772). Regarding teacher-pupil relations, Noddings suggests that "although these potentially caring relations are not equal, both parties contribute to the establishment and maintenance of caring" (Noddings, 2012, p. 772). Therefore, although the adoption of care is a foundational aspect of this practitioner framework, the role of carer is not exclusively that of the practitioner; rather, it is hoped that the modelling of care, listening, reciprocity and concern will promote this attitude within the children also.

Children learn the values their teacher conveys in the classroom; as Parker Palmer put it, "we teach who we are" (1997); Sugrue referred to this as part of the hidden curriculum (2004). So too should the teacher, through close listening and careful attention, learn from the children the values, understandings, and emerging capacities they bring to the classroom. Roche claims that a caring pedagogical relationship can help dissolve traditional power relationships between teachers and students (2015, p. 10). Mason and Falloon (2001) found that one determining aspect of children's agency was the level of care they perceived from the adults they interacted with. Revolution and transformation are, according to Freire, not possible without love for the world and for people (1970, p. 70). If teachers hope to teach transformative, powerful love, it stands that we must model it. Noddings believes that all teachers should aim to create a "climate in which caring relations can flourish" (2012b, p. 777). One of the four key elements of the Teaching Council of Ireland's professional code of conduct is "care" and both Roche (2015) and Noddings (1992) claim that the pedagogical relationship must be grounded in "reciprocal care and trust" (Roche, 2015, p. 10).

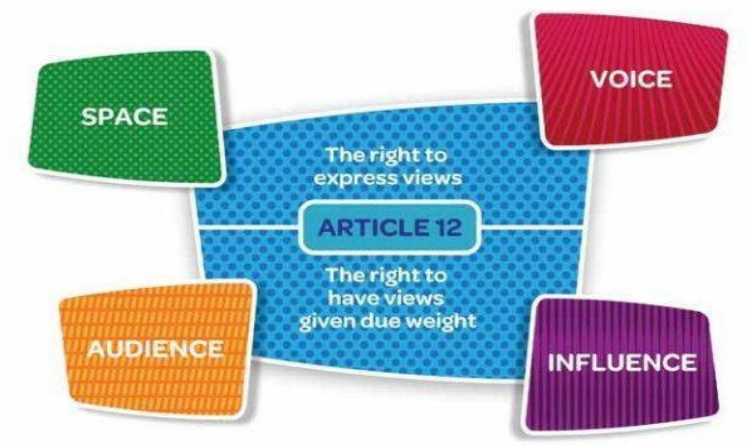
Close, caring relationships and shared values inform the analysis of the data and were essential in learning the meanings and habits of the children within this specific context. It is hoped that the care enacted through the listening and action of this project will nourish all the

co-researchers who contribute to it as well as providing adequate attention and listening to children regarding the matters affecting them. The care within the research process is embodied by the faithfulness of reporting and the articulation of these children's perspectives.

Elevating children's voices and avoiding adulteration

Pugh and Rouse Selleck state that "if we want to listen to children we must create the structures and procedures for making this happen" (1996, p. 123). This requires not only listening when children speak, but first communicating to them that they have a place to speak - creating structures that children recognise as spaces for their input and agency. Oswell distinguished *speech* as a public, politicised and more organised element of *voice* using an Aristotelian distinction between public and private which he termed "micro" and "macro" uses (2016). Oswell's complications of voice as pertaining to children's place within a complex social structure as seen in Chapter Two is akin to Lundy's description of voice – in terms of Article 12 UNCRC - as a "complex and multifaceted thing" (2007, p. 940) and this is traced through the stages of the study which span ecosystems ranging from private to public.

The methods and methodology of this study were conceived to foreground children's voices and to explore the provisions and limitations of Article 12 in the UNCRC within the junior classroom context. Article 12 and how children could represent themselves was considered in the data collection and analysis. Lundy's Student Voice Model (2007) below, was used to develop methods that could examine voice provisions. It was employed to frame the provisions of Article 12 in a way that ensured as many voices as possible were heard and given sufficient opportunity to make the study a reliable representation of those voices. Space, voice, audience, and influence were all aspects of the provisions of the study and were combined to define the term voice.



This model provides a way of conceptualising Article 12 of the UNCRC which is intended to focus educational decision-makers on the distinct, albeit interrelated, elements of the provision. The four elements have a rational chronological order:

- **SPACE:** Children must be given safe, inclusive opportunities to form and express their view
- **VOICE:** Children must be facilitated to express their view
- **AUDIENCE:** The view must be listened to.
- **INFLUENCE:** The view must be acted upon, as appropriate.

Figure CF.2. Lundy Model 2007

Asserting the importance of child-voice in the data also serves to mitigate against "***adult***eration" (Flynn, 2013, emphasis in the original) which was explored in Chapter Two. Adulteration refers to the process whereby adults overshadow the meanings and contributions children make through their adult interpretation without child-input (Cruddas, 2007; Flynn, 2013; Hughes, 2001). To avoid this, Flynn (2013) suggests that successful voice activation necessitates a "dialogical process," that includes: opportunities to check interpretations; feedback on how student-perspectives have had an impact; and the pursuit of change and transformation when appropriate (Flynn, 2017). Student voices were foregrounded in each stage of data collection as well as the initial phase of analysis to avoid once-off or tokenistic research practices that might not fully articulate children's voices due to their novelty to the children (Oberman, 2014; Sedgwick, 1994). Highlighting children's contributions both during the study and in the presentation of the research is a key methodological consideration.

Knowledge democracy

This study acknowledges the inequalities and power dynamics at play between adults and children and similarly between researchers and those they research. Rowell and Feldman recognise these divides but argue that knowledge-democratising practices can be a way to bring communities together, recognising and validating differences of perspective and redefining "what knowledge counts" and who owns this knowledge (2019) within

communities. This commitment to shared knowledge production and equitable distribution of knowledge avoids "intellectual colonialism" (Fals Borda & Moro-Osejo, 2003) and "co-option and commodification" (Rowell & Feldman, 2019) of knowledge. This study sees a community coming together to create new understandings, in a "democratizing spirit of growth and change" (Kemmis, 2010, p. 425).

According to Rowell and Feldman (2019), key contributors to the idea of knowledge democracy include Fals Borda and Moro-Osejo (2003), and Hall and Tandon (2015). Hall and Tandon presented three phenomena that intersect to create knowledge democracy: acceptance of multiple epistemologies, affirmation that knowledge is created and represented in multiple forms and understanding that knowledge is a tool that supports social justice, a healthy world and deepening democracy (2015).

Leivas (2018) recommends that children be educated to become "active subjects" in the "production of knowledge" (p. 3). Extending the mantle of knowledge producers enables children to view themselves as "responsible members of their society and of the global community" (Rowell & Feldman, 2019, p. 3). Children, who are traditionally viewed as outsiders regarding knowledge and power can, through this recognition, engage in dialogue on all the aspects of society that they experience. Children can, through knowledge democracies "be linked with knowledge mobilization to enact social change" (Rowell & Feldman, 2019, p. 3). Creating a knowledge democracy in and through this study is defined as having brought about Hall and Tandon's three phenomena (2015) as outlined above and having the children view themselves as knowledge-producing members of their community (Leivas, 2018; Rowell &Feldman, 2019). The data created in this study are to be viewed as knowledge co-produced by children, the children are recognised as owners of this knowledge and the myriad ways in which children produce knowledge is affirmed.

Democratic participation

Democratic participation will be considered in broad terms; assent to co-create data will not be the only determining factor. Factors contributing to democratic participation include engagement with resources, teaching methods, group tasks and field observations. Understandings of participation have been widely discussed in the literature (Clark & Moss, 2011; McNeish, 1999; Pugh & Rouse-Selleck, 1996; Reid & Nikel, 2008; Veale, 2005) but in this study, participation is taken to mean a commitment to common goals whether they be knowledge production, class projects or global endeavours. This view of democratic and community minded participation holds true to Deweyan ideals of participation as the "mechanism" through which education occurs. Learning to create knowledge and engage in

social change (Leivas, 2018) as discussed previously first requires children to be a part of this mechanism.

Children need to be grounded in democratic principles and gain necessary knowledge and skills (Saracho, 2012, p. 115) to engage successfully in democratic practices. Learning opportunities for children to engage in democratic practices in the classroom are vast (Beane & Apple, 1995; Flutter & Ruddock, 2004). Some such learning opportunities are provided within this study and analysed in relation to increased agency and community-minded action. Dewey referred to democracy as "associated living" (Dewey, 1916, p. 87) and data are analysed with this objective in mind, to listen to individual voices but to seek collaboration between them and evaluate if democratic goals of community minded participation are met. Democratic participation is achieved through child-led decision-making and developing a collaborative community; this takes the form of shared dialogue, goals and action. Like Sen's functionings or freedoms (1985), the participation in this study is dependent on choice and providing opportunities that are meaningful and practicable to the children.

Functional agency

The functionality of agency is conceptualised in this study as applicability to local contexts, connection to other people and links to the functionings or freedoms defined by Sen (1985). It seeks opportunities for children within their familiar contexts and relationships to demonstrate their functionings and expand their capabilities. It is rooted in care (the antithesis of apathy), listening, realising potential capabilities, democratising knowledge and democratic participation. The term functional agency was conceived within this study to describe both a mindset and a set of actions. In terms of mindset, *functional agency* goes beyond recognising children as social actors; children are powerful agents that actively contribute to culture and society (James, 2009; Mayall, 2002). It is also any set of actions that children regularly undertake to demonstrate this agency, actions that are a testament to their planning, leadership, ingenuity, decision-making and overall citizenship. Children possess innate and emerging capacities; they can create knowledge, reciprocate care, and engage in Dewey's associated living.

The purpose of defining Functional Agency in this study is to both understand and expand the agentic powers of children in the everyday life of the classroom. In General Comment No.7 (GC7) the importance of local and cultural considerations in children's participation is outlined; therefore, our classroom context and culture is a defining element in measuring the functionality of the children's agency. This study did not set out to radically transform the classroom but rather to recognise the contributions children currently make and to imagine

ways to further infuse agentic practices into daily experiences. This study recognises that although bound by its limited timeframe, strict ethics, and the national curriculum, there are countless ways to embed greater agency for children within the classroom. Children's agentic experiences and competences within these boundaries are explored through observing various methodologies employed in the classroom. The children's connection to others is also explored throughout this study and directly relates to the idea of democratic participation explored earlier. Functional Agency seeks to provide desirable opportunities for children to demonstrate freedoms and expand their capabilities.

The potential functions of children's agency may also be intertwined with the will of adults within their social systems and how those adults conceptualise children's rights. Mindset of both children and those with whom they associate could be integral to children experiencing their own agency. The democratising processes that support democratic knowledge can also be an asset to children in recognising that not only are they knowledge creators but also agents of change. Just as Rowell and Feldman (2019) insisted that children's knowledge counts, so too do their actions.

Conclusion

The application of each of these concepts is evident throughout this study; they are the lens through which all action was taken, how the data were collected and analysed. The view of children as capable actors within our world, undertaking functional acts of agency supported by adults and peers who value democratic participation and knowledge creation is a key contextual element of this study. Acting through care and in support of children's voices and in pursuit of their potential capabilities to ensure they experience the choice and "freedoms" (Sen, 1985) that are within their rights to have is the driving force behind this action research.

This framework is reflected upon in Chapter Six to analyse the provisions and findings within this study and the extent to which each of these concepts was applied and developed over the course of the study from inception to final analysis.

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the various elements of my methodology, how they relate to one another and are infused throughout this study. The foundation of the study rests upon my desire to co-create knowledge with the children in my class in a way that is mutually beneficial. Key ideas in conceptualising the study were to increase their participation within both classroom-based knowledge production and the research process, to deepen my understanding of their capacity for criticality as well as to evaluate teaching and listening methods. The methods used are discussed in the next chapter. Here I discuss the connections between methods; the pursuit of new knowledge through co-constructing, dialogical means; the building of criticality; the development of rights-respecting practices across contexts; and my commitment to elevating children's level of agency and participation along Waldron's participation continuum (Waldron, 2006).

At the outset of this chapter, I make clear my ontological and epistemological stance as well as explicitly outlining my values as both a teacher and researcher. I detail my research questions and then describe each component of the research design. Each element of my design was chosen with the purpose of creating new, democratised knowledge, eliciting children's experiences, and foregrounding their voices. I outline the qualitative approach taken and the rationale for choosing an action research model. I examine the practice of co-research with young children and how this can increase both children's criticality and representation within research. I demonstrate how the design of this study draws upon Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model to explore and connect children's various contexts. This model radiates outward from the children's personal experiences, to those within the classroom, the wider world influenced by societal structures and generational experiences; it offers the opportunity to critically examine each context and how they act upon one another. I succinctly describe the general theories underpinning my data collection methods; here I describe the "mosaic" approach (Clark & Moss, 2011) to listening and the benefits of critical literacy. Finally, I illustrate the key points of grounded theory data analysis which was used to unpick and explore the data using "multiple levels of extraction" (Robson, 2002) to allow ongoing and in-depth analysis of the data throughout the study.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

In this section I outline the ontological and epistemological beliefs that permeate my work and theories. They summarise my outlook on the world, how knowledge is formed and how I articulate the world around me.

3.2.1 Ontological stance

Methodological considerations position the learner as either passive or interactive (Roche, 2015); within this study I firmly position the learner as active, naming and building meaning in the world around them. I also take a realist standpoint and acknowledge that the world is broader than human interactions. As stewards of a living environment, all people ought to be mindful of their impact. The existence of our ecosystems depends on humans taking responsibility for the reality of our world, and rather than renaming it, endeavour to revise ourselves and any damaging actions. I align myself with a critical realist ontology (Bhaskar, 2013; Collier, 1994) affirming that there are objective realities within our world but that we have agency in relation to them and can redesign many existent structures. There are certain truths within our world, but we must engage with the world critically to reach them - "truth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world" (Crotty, 1998, p. 8).

I also hold pragmatic views as I believe that criticality without critical action is redundant. Pragmatism has both philosophical and practical applications (Morgan, 2014). Communication is at the heart of pragmatism (Biesta, 2010) since it is only in communication with others that we can understand the realities of our world. Pragmatic ideals are embodied in the Deweyan idea of acquiring the mind in communication with others as he said "If we had not talked with others and they with us, we should never talk to and with ourselves" (Dewey, 1929, p. 187). Pragmatism puts "participation, collective meaning making and communication, centre stage" (Biesta, 2010, p. 711) and concerns itself primarily with "communicative action" (Biesta, 2010a, 2010b). The primary concern in this research was to understand the reality of my young co-researchers and to create with them a reality where their voices were raised up and given space, audience and, crucially, the influence to create new knowledge and create change within their environment (Lundy, 2007).

3.2.2 Epistemological stance

I align my epistemology with social constructivist ideas of knowledge creation. Knowledge is constantly changing based on experience and dialogue (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) and is therefore subject to interpretation and contextually specific understandings. Dewey saw education as a social process that required interaction for human development (1963). Recent

theorists have also found that learning and knowledge creation occur in "dialogic communities" (Alexander, 2006, 2010; Mercer 2000; Murphy, 2004; Roche 2007, 2011, 2015).

My epistemological views correlate with Vygotskian beliefs of social constructivism as conceptualised by Bruner insofar as knowledge acquisition is "process not product" (1966, p. 72). My personal philosophy is an interpretivist one wherein our knowledge and understanding of this world is constantly shifting and evolving through our interactions with others. My view of the co-constructed and dialogical nature of perceived realities finds a home within the aforementioned pragmatic philosophies. Human experiences are built and understood collectively through interpretation and conversation; thus, within this study, my co-researchers and I piece together a breadth of data and co-define its meaning. Knowledge is derived through shared interpretation of events (Robson, 2002); social constructivism seeks to validate and amplify the importance of these local and specific understandings and demands that multiple perspectives be accounted for as people collectively read and understand the world around them. Dewey (1929) heralded the importance of this kind of communicated understanding, stating that "of all affairs, communication is the most wonderful" (1929). This, like much of Dewey's work in pragmatic philosophy, centralises the role of communication in learning but also provides the opportunity to consider wonderment.

Wonder is a central component of developing ideas, communication and ultimately learning. Through asking questions and communicating with others about new ideas, new meanings and opinions can be formed. Creating space for questions to be pondered and wondered about is an important part of any learning process as it allows for the communication and formation of ideas with that community. Dewey said, "[i]t is certainly as futile to expect a child to evolve a universe out of his own mind as it is for a philosopher to attempt that task" (Dewey, 1902, p. 18). By creating open opportunities to visualise, wonder and reimagine our world, I hope to offer the children in this study the space to wonder, and through wonder create both hope and new meaning.

The idea of knowledge democracy as outlined within the Conceptual Framework was a determining factor in the research design. I wanted to reflect and celebrate the idea that children can be conceptualised as experts in their own lives. Affording weight and influence to their thinking and socially constructed understandings was necessary to articulate the validity of their knowledge contributions. Children's conceptualisation of themselves as being powerful and having voices capable and worthy of being listened to was paramount. The children's role in creating and analysing data and directing changes within our world is rooted in my belief that knowledge is co-created through shared participation. Their role as

knowledgeable experts was essential in framing my epistemological stance. This influenced all aspects of this study. It is particularly evident in the research design section of this chapter wherein I outline the qualitative paradigm and the opportunity for praxis created through action research. I also employ a constructivist grounded theory approach to data analysis; this is also outlined at the end of this chapter.

3.3 Values informing research

Interrogating ourselves (Feldman & Bradley, 2018) as researchers is a vital aspect of aligning our work with our values. This self-examination allows the practitioner to locate any "living contradictions" (Whitehead, 1989; 2008) within their practice and to bring values and theory together.

3.3.1 My values as a teacher

My values as an educationalist are evident in the design of this study. The learner-centred educationalist (Bassey, 1998) is one who prioritises the holistic development of the individual and looks towards innovative methods that are supported by evidence, experience, and logic; they are "constructivist, democratic and collaborative" (p. 89). The "environmental educationalist" (Bassey, 1998) is all of these and also incorporates a "green perspective" (p. 89). I endeavour to espouse these ideals through my practice.

My experiences in the classroom are a shifting lens through which I view the world. When I became a teacher at the age of twenty-one, I had unbridled energy and enthusiasm for my new role. My understanding of the role involved organisation, best practices and the latest phonics programmes. I enjoyed the variety that teaching provided and became prompt and efficient. I made beautiful classroom displays and I knew the curriculum in detail. I honed my craft and I was content in my work. I cared about the children in my classes and they seemed happy to be there. I did not believe the children in my class were missing out on anything. As I became more confident in my abilities, worked with the same class range over a number of years and with the introduction of the Aistear framework, my perspective began to shift. All the learning I did in my earliest years as a teacher stands to me today but as my perspective changed, I focused less on what I could do, and more on what the children could do. I became less focused on curriculum objectives, being familiar with how I could achieve them through integrated play-based activities and I focused more on what these children were capable of, how their language and insight exceeded curriculum expectations, how strong their sense of identity and individuality was and how deeply they cared about issues in the world around them.

This new perspective drove my desire to put child-centredness into practice. To me, child-centredness had previously meant that the children would engage in group activities, and active learning methodologies, that they had the opportunity to talk amongst themselves. These approaches are beneficial to children and can be the site of much learning but an attitude of child-centredness can go much further. I sought to do better in valuing children's contributions and being more inclusive of their input into our classroom. As I became more attuned to the children's capacities, I realised that there needed to be more space for children's voices. Their work, not mine, adorns our classroom walls, our decisions are more democratic, our play is increasingly child-led and I undertook this project to see where within my current context I can develop the children's critical voices further, providing space, audience and influence for them.

3.3.2 My values as a researcher

Embarking on a new role as researcher brought many new challenges to navigate theoretically. I sought to maintain both my close relationship with the children and my academic rigour. I was cognisant of the potential struggles inherent in trying to scaffold and encourage children while adhering to the strict ethical boundaries of research. The ethical standards of this study are detailed within Chapter Four; however, here I state the values that directed this work. Further discussion of my aims in this research are detailed later in this chapter.

I recognised the need to strike a balance between conducting carefully planned research and being led by my young co-researchers. I also wanted to focus my work in the area where the children participating could feel the immediate benefits of the work. This required the development of a robust yet flexible plan that draws on various models of action research. This allowed me to focus the emphasis of the research in areas the children deemed most important, thus providing opportunities to empower them and communicate to them the validity of their participation. This necessitated conducting a small-scale study where participants had time and space to have their agency recognised and expanded.

The relationship between the practitioner-researcher and the research group is a complex one that can go by many names such as teacher - pupil, practitioner - participant and co-researchers. As explored throughout the literature review, attitudinal beliefs of the important adults in children's lives are key to their positionality in relation to power and agency. Therefore, as a researcher, foregrounding conceptual beliefs such as those of Nussbaum regarding the functionings and potential capabilities of children as well as those within the Lundy model (2007) regarding the need to scaffold and give audience etc. to children's voices was paramount. The stance of the practitioner was key in this methodology, giving weight and

agency to the critical contributions of the children. This was my deliberate disposition as practitioner – researcher, extending expert authority to the research group. Waldron's model of participation for children in research guided my efforts to position children as co-researchers and experts in their experiences rather than simply as data sources or research subjects (2006).

3.4 Research Questions

My research questions emerged as I encountered the need within my classroom to elevate the position of children's voices and agency. I sought a means to articulate what the children were already capable of doing and to create structures that could scaffold their functionings and capabilities further. I hoped to empower the children to demonstrate their capacity for engaging in local and global issues through reporting the matters affecting them and collaborating to create positive change. I hoped to create these structures not only for the children within this cohort, but for the children I would work with in the future too. In this way I hoped the outcomes of this study to be both specific and transferable.

My questions were thus:

In relation to Article 12 of the UNCRC;

4. How do young children in the junior primary classroom view the 'matters' affecting them and how do they make these known?
5. How can reporting the 'matters that affect' them increase young children's functional agency in the classroom?
6. What structures can teachers put in place to promote greater functional agency for young children, and afford their voices 'due weight and influence'?

3.5 Research Design

My commitment to constructivism led me to undertake qualitative design wherein I could gather many narratives and, together with my co-researchers, build new knowledge about our shared experiences. The importance of participation along with shared action and interpretation determined my choice to undertake action research. Within this section, I explore the qualitative paradigm as well as action research as key design elements, my rationale for engaging in co-research and the significance of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model in the design of this study.

3.5.1 Qualitative paradigm

Qualitative research is an umbrella term for a multitude of research methods; it is the study of the natural world around us. Employing a qualitative paradigm correlates with my

epistemological views insofar as I believe “there are many worlds and many ways of investigating them” (Cohen & Manion, 2011, p. 219).

Qualitative research practices can provide deep, rich understandings. Narrative descriptions of context-specific situations and experiences help us to understand the world around us. Qualitative research is well-disposed to capturing the voices of those at the heart of an issue by allowing them to tell their story. Through the collection of complex and holistic data and its distillation into theory, qualitative research seeks to understand the motivations behind a phenomenon, the lived experiences and driving factors that create our world. The qualitative nature of this research is essential to hearing the voices of both the teacher and the children within the study. Having the voices of community members at the heart of this study democratises power and allows this community to create dialogical, transformative action and change. This qualitative study takes the form of action research which contributes to the creation of a knowledge democracy and puts the power and rigour of academic research in the lap of the practitioner (Wood, McAteer & Whitehead, 2018; Leitch, & Day, 2000). This is detailed in the next section.

3.5.2 Action research

Action research was defined by Kurt Lewin as “research which will help the practitioner” (Lewin, 1946, p. 34). Lewin was concerned with improving the lives of the community within which the practitioner worked. His work was inherently political and was aimed at “solving social problems” (Noffke & Somekh, 2009, p. 9). Lewin outlined his “5 C’s of action research” - commitment, concern, consideration, collaboration and change. Although there have been many iterations of action research in the seventy-five years since Lewin wrote about it, these tenets of deep engagement with the data set and a drive towards reflexivity and change have remained the same. In the 1970s when Lawrence Stenhouse popularised the idea of the teacher-researcher action research, it became critical in building capacity among teachers (Leitch & Day, 2000). According to Zuber-Skerrit (1991), there are four key themes of action research: the empowerment of participants, collaboration through participation, the acquisition of knowledge and social change.

Action research examines the complexities of practice (McAteer, 2013, p. 21) and concerns itself with practitioners questioning what they do and why (Bridges, 2003). Praxis is the synthesis of theory and practice (2013) and it requires interpretation and open deliberation about practice in action. Praxis is a key feature of action research as it seeks to “[theorise] practice in context” (p. 23). McAteer also made clear the distinction between action research and everyday reflective practice; she stressed the importance of systematic planning, data collection and analysis, and of the research being made public and open to scrutiny from

scholars and practitioners. McAteer rearticulates Stenhouse's beliefs about the importance of practitioner development and how this answers methodological questions (2013). Elliott believed that the practitioner was "the person best suited to generate his or her own expert knowledge" (Elliott, 1985). Designing research that answers questions specific to one's own practice in ways that benefit that everyday practice seemed like a natural fit.

My study incorporates elements of what McNiff referred to as interpretive and self-study action research models (1988). Interpretive action researchers, Kemmis and Carr, view the aims of action research as the improvement of a practice, the improvement of the understanding of the practice by its practitioners and the improvement of the situation in which the practice takes place (1986, p. 165). Improving practice as well as experiences were key objectives in this study. While there is an element of practitioner inquiry (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Carr & Kemmis, 2009; McNiff & Whitehead, 2009) within this research, I have not positioned myself at the centre of the research cycles and therefore it can more accurately be described as participatory. I sought involvement from the community that included them in the process as co-researchers, co-directing the course of the study. The extent to which the role of co-researcher is extended in this study and the rationale for this choice is detailed in the next section.

What sets action research apart from other methodologies is the focus on action. The context specific nature of this study required a deep narrative understanding of this context, "only through action is legitimate understanding possible; theory without practice is not theory but speculation" (Bradbury-Huang, 2010, pp. 93-94). Engaging the children in critical, dialogical action was the purpose of this project. If this work were purely theoretical, it would have missed the opportunity to show the young co-researchers their capacity for action and change. Facilitating agency necessitates having opportunities to engage in agentic actions and affect change; this was key to my concepts of participation and functional agency outlined in the Conceptual Framework; action research upholds this commitment to action. Action research also has a "democratic impulse" (Noffke, 1997, p. 319) and the inclusion of participants as co-researchers can have a social activist impact. It was important for me not only to imagine what could improve my practice but to put those ideas into action, take some educated risks and create space to try, fail and re-evaluate (Parker, 1997).

Action research affords researchers the opportunity to respond to context specific problems, "issues you can realistically do something about" (McNiff, 1993) and to engage with the community on achieving shared aims. Making this work beneficial to the children co-researchers was another key consideration. My desire was to generate a theory of our lived

experiences in the classroom and, through the phases of research, to actively respond to emergent needs. This emergent need is met by "the community and researcher together produc[e]ing critical knowledge aimed at social transformation" and then "the results of research are immediately applied to a concrete situation" (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 17 citing DeSchutter & Yopo, 1981). It is a pragmatic approach that recognises the realities of the community as ever changing as we encounter new ideas and challenges. Action research was best suited to answering my research questions as it allowed for ongoing analysis of findings that could inform and direct the work that the children and I did collaboratively during the project. This approach is also valuable in communicating the influence of the co-researchers since their feelings of agency and efficacy were paramount.

Models

Action research is an approach wherein a series of planned actions are undertaken to solve a problem or to facilitate reflection within a community. The phases of research, of which there are often more than two, are cyclical and, although following a pattern and plan, they are often open-ended models that allow for the knowledge created within the process to determine the end goals. The format of this research is referred to as a "spiral of action" (Zuber-Skerrit, 1991, p. 2). This spiral generally consists of phrases of "planning, acting, observing and reflecting" (p. 2).

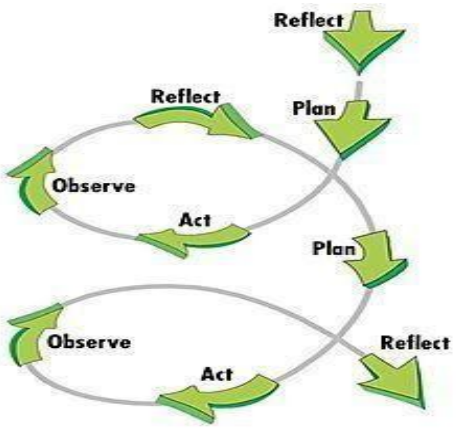


Figure 3.1. Action Research model by Palermo, Marr and Oriel, 2012.

Lewin's original model for action research had a more detailed design and consisted of six stages. These stages included analysis, fact finding, conceptualisation, planning, implementation of action and evaluation. These stages were not a linear pattern but were to be acted upon in a "spiral of steps" (Lewin, 1946). Below is a demonstration of how this spiral of steps contributed cumulatively to the research design with each phase informing the next.

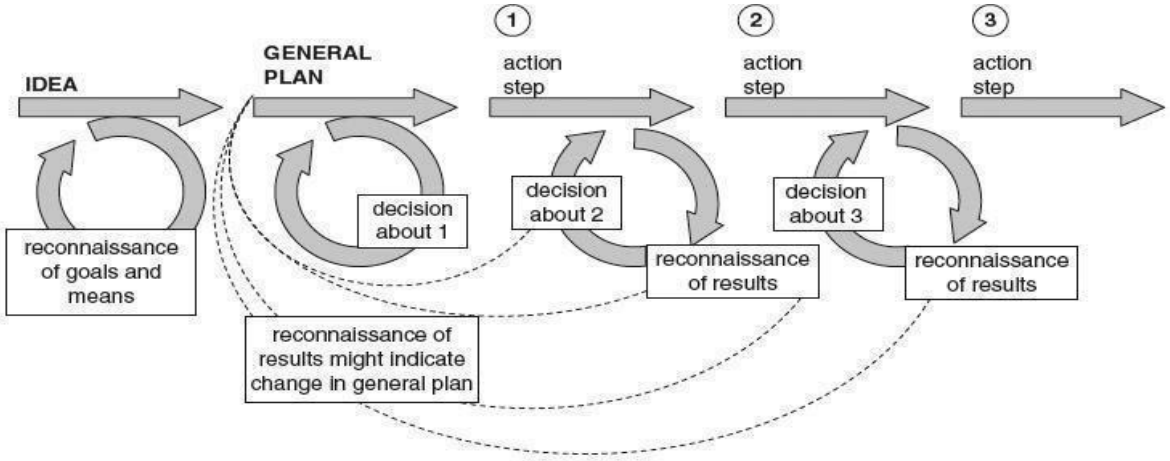


Figure 3.2. Lewin's Model of Action Research by Lewin, 1946.

This spiral model has been reconceptualised and redrawn many times but the criteria of cyclical phases and the format of planning, decision-making, acting, interpreting and reviewing remain virtually unchanged. My Lewinian-style model of action research is illustrated in Chapter Four -Methods.

Herr and Anderson (2015) characterised action research as "designing the plane while flying it" (p. 83), demonstrating the level of complex manoeuvring required to constantly build and evaluate the model as it is in progress. Likewise, Simonsen (2009) summarised the challenges and uncertainties associated with an action research project thus, it "must be initiated, established and carried out before you have the empirical data for your research" (p. 112). However, the porous and adaptive nature of an action research plan allows for community input and designed within it are opportunities for new emerging knowledge to guide the study. Being overly didactic in action research would limit its potential for development and transformative change as well as limiting the autonomy of practitioners (Elliott & Adelman, 1973, in O'Hanlon, 1996, p. 15). Elliott and Adelman were insistent that teachers ought not rely on the easy option of predetermined outcomes and rather they were open to the limitless possibilities of the classroom (1973 in O'Hanlon, 1996, p. 13).

3.5.3 Co-research

A commitment to shared knowledge creation has been demonstrated throughout this chapter; it is exemplified here by the choice to engage the support and expertise of the young child-participants as co-researchers. Providing a space for children to articulate themselves and contribute to interpretation and analysis foregrounds their voices in the narration of their own story. This correlates with the aims of this study to eschew "the indignity of speaking for others" (Foucault & Deleuze, 1980), offering those directly concerned the chance to speak "in a practical way on their own behalf" (1980).

Within the social constructivist paradigm, collaborative work is vital (Bertrand, 2003 cited in Travers, 2018). Lansdown (2005, p. 15) outlined participation as being in a position to identify relevant questions, have an input into methods used, take on the role of researcher and engage in evaluation through discussing and interpreting the results. Children's active participation was woven through each aspect of this study. This kind of dialogic action requires active involvement by the participants. Moving participatory processes beyond consultation by involving children and young people in the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation phases of a project (Groundwater-Smith et al., 2015) raises the profile of young voices. The initial proposal and design of this study was carried out by the teacher-researcher; this aspect of the process was outside of the participants' decision-making opportunity given the parameters of academic research and time constraints. Thereafter the teacher-researcher sought to elevate the children's position on the model at each stage of participation, moving away from "research subject" and towards "co-researcher" as often as possible. The Waldron model (2006) maps the potential roles for children and adults in research and categorises the forms of research that can be achieved through the adoption of each paired role.

Figure 3.3. Waldron model of children's participation.

Source: Waldron, 2006, p. 96

Participatory research promotes the sustainability of children's agency by embedding participatory methods (Sinclair, 2004) into everyday work with children as opposed to once-off research activities. Having the children practice and experience new methods and evaluate these methods makes them more likely to have lasting effects and benefits than once off activities in a research project disconnected from daily routines. Participation among young children requires nurturing and development over time.

The role of the lead researcher - in this instance the teacher-researcher - is not to unnecessarily intervene in the lives of the participants but rather to "[stand] together in the construction of dialogues" (Pascal & Bertram, 2009, p. 254). They can achieve this through communicating "mutual respect, active participation and the negotiation and co-construction of meaning" (p. 254) to their participants. Throughout our study the intention was to employ "careful design features [that] can ensure that the voices of young people can be solicited, evaluated and found trustworthy" (Scott, 2008, as cited by Groundwater-Smith et al., 2015).

3.5.4 Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model

In the next chapter, I illustrate my action research model, the design of which is based on the nested structure of Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model (1992, 2005, 2006). Bronfenbrenner's model describes how interconnected systems within a person's life causes them to learn and develop as they do. It is used here to examine where children's agency develops and how it functions in various contexts, across time and how people near and far affect this process. The four key elements that define the application of this model are "process, person, context and time"; "synergistic interdependence among these components" is crucial to understanding its application (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 801). These elements work throughout the various nested and shifting spheres within the model: the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem and the chronosystem.

The innermost system is the microsystem, this is the location in which the young developing child spends the majority of their time and is the location of their most substantive learning. The microsystem as illustrated in the model below consists of "proximal processes" carried out alone or in groups, sharing skills, understandings, caring for others, problem-solving and performing other complex tasks (2006, p.797). These are the most influential processes in the early life and development of the young child. The child learns first about that which is proximal to them then moving outwards towards more global learning over time through interaction and experience with familiar persons with whom they forge developmentally significant relationships. Bronfenbrenner's theory suggests that learning occurs through the interaction of the child's microsystem with wider social structures, as their experience of new contexts radiates outward. Mutually beneficial connections and relationships with, and as a result of, persons from outer systems permeate the microsystem and promote learning and the child's social development. These next layers of interaction and society are called the mesosystem and the exosystem. The interactions and experience of those within or adjacent to the microsystem are referred to as the mesosystem. How a child's experience of their microsystem is enacted and has influenced their development is made evident within the mesosystem which also acts upon these proximal processes reciprocally. The exosystem is the

next, more distant, environment within which the child learns, develops, and interacts. The developmental impact of societal influence is referred to as the macrosystem and the continual effects of shifting time and circumstance is referred to as the chronosystem. Bronfenbrenner's systems radiate outward from those processes and people closest to the child to those in their wider society, culture, and context. However, these are not linear transactions and each of the systems continually shape one another and provide new context and experience in the development of the child.

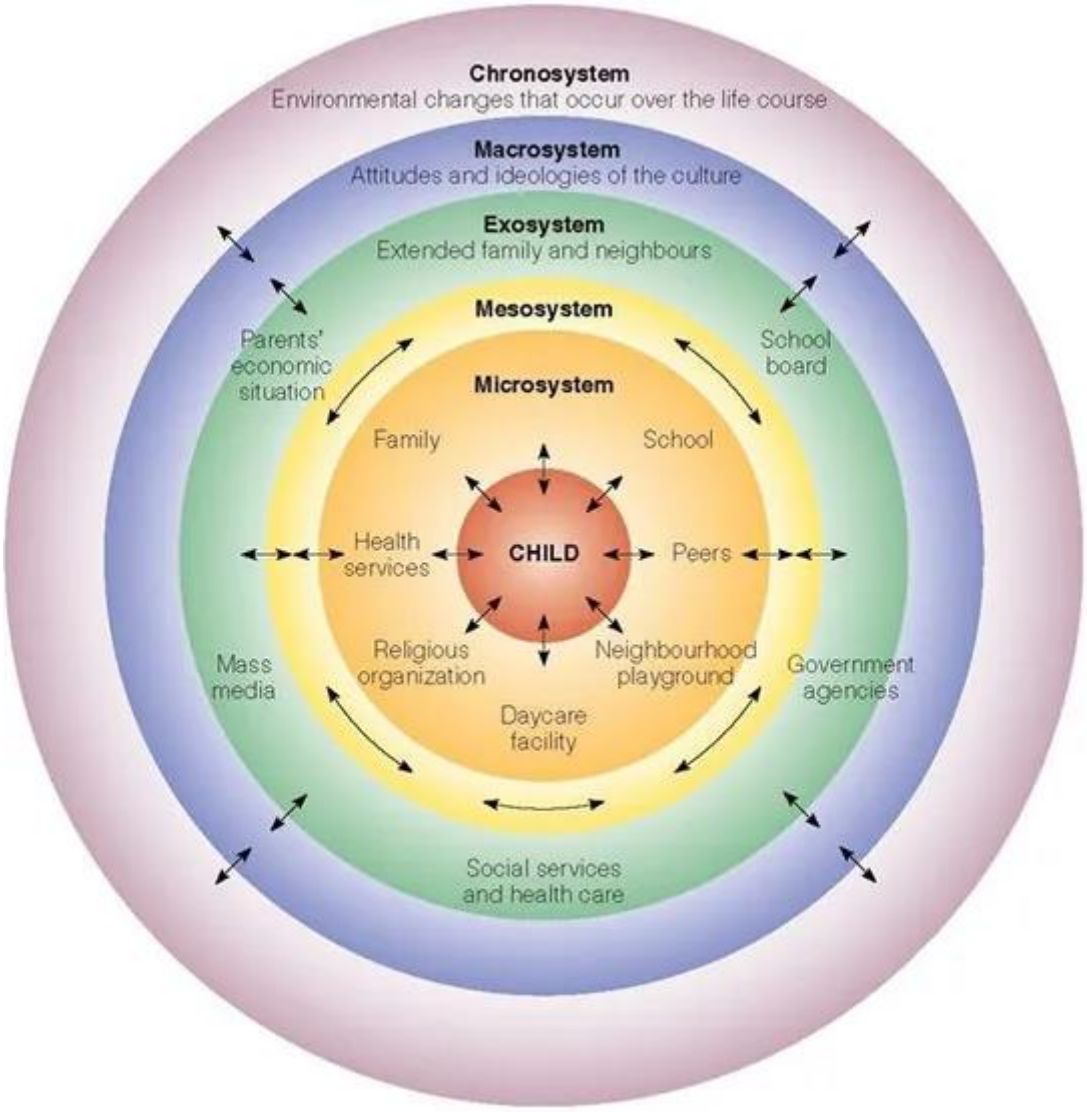


Figure 3.4. Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model

Source: https://www.simplypsychology.org/Bronfenbrenner.html

The model above, though it gives a clear indication of how the various systems within the model relate to one another, does not convey the dynamic interaction of these systems in actuality. The macrosystem and chronosystem can influence and alter each of the other systems profoundly, yet independently, and in both predictable and unpredictable ways.

Moving from one culture to another (Paat, 2013) or experiencing a significant change in personal circumstances (Guy-Evans, 2020) can alter the processes within all levels of this model. It is for this reason and for the purposes of establishing pragmatic and functional agentic practices in the classroom that this study is focused on the three innermost systems of the model to identify spaces for direct and measurable influence. Although the children's actions and experiences within this study would inevitably intersect with aspects of the macro and chrono systems, the micro, meso and exo systems are the three contexts being explored. When discussing the more "mature form" (Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield & Karnik, 2009, p. 198) of Bronfenbrenner's model which evolved from his earlier works, Bronfenbrenner noted the importance of focusing on the individuals' development rather than their environment (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006); therefore, these contexts are used as locations to identify the child's development and processes rather than exploring the merits of each context.

The first stage within the research design is focused on the immediate environment of the child and that with which they are most familiar. Since the children in the study are very young, this innermost "microsystem" relates to themselves, their family context and their understandings of what they need and what their rights are: issues of care, safety and, importantly, representation. The next stage of research linked to mesosystem is related to the school setting and how it is interrelated with their sense of self and their rights. Although the model in Figure 3.4 suggests that school is within children's microsystem, in this study, it was conceptualised that these young children experiencing their first year of formal education would interact with school at the mesosystem. The emergent relationships and interactions occurring between the child's innermost relational sphere and this next environment is how this study defines school as being within the young developing child's mesosystem. The educators act as mediators of the mesosystem and have a role in both exposing children to external realities and filtering their experiences. The roles we ascribe to people within each system can have a "magiclike power to alter how a person is treated, how she acts, what she does, and thereby even what she thinks and feels" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 25); conceptualising the roles of children as competent social actors within these systems was an important consideration in the research design. The third stage of research relates to the exosystem of Bronfenbrenner's framework and looks at the relation of the child to community spaces and systems, some of which they may not yet have personally engaged with.

Gradually extending the outlook from self to school and then to the wider community, this research seeks to understanding the positionality of children's rights, the matters affecting their microsystems that may have originated in the meso-, exo- macro- or chrono- systems and how they might articulate their views to such a widening audience. The chronosystem

presents itself naturally throughout this process through children's consideration of past and future events and how their interaction with the themes of the study may change and adapt over their lifespans. The context, time and personal specificity of the research are paramount and align Bronfenbrenner's work with Kurt Lewin's interpretivist stance. The importance of studying the environmental and structural context of the participants in order to understand their development in relation to the various systems with which they interact and which act upon them is crucial in order to avoid making generalised arguments based on specific findings. Thus, classroom-based research into both personal and ultimately global issues benefits from the practitioner-researcher having a deep understanding of the cultural landscape of the participants.

3.6 Theories underpinning data collection

Data collection was influenced by the constructivist, interpretivist approach undertaken. The data gathered were a broad range of responses and contributions from myself and the young co-researchers through verbal and visual means, including observed actions and continuous reflection and interpretation. The two main ideas informing data collection were the importance of criticality in interpreting both the themes within the study and the research process itself and the collation of many forms of data through the mosaic approach.

3.6.1 Mosaic approach

The "mosaic approach" (Clark & Moss, 2011) is a guide to listening to children that "nicely blurs the boundaries" between pedagogy and research (Carr, 2011, v). The approach elevates young children's voices by recognising and scrutinising the many ways that children express themselves and piecing them together in a way that dutifully conveys the breadth of their experiences and contributions. It combines verbal and visual representations made by children and attempts to faithfully interpret them. In this study, this piecing together took place throughout the cycles of action research; it was an ongoing process of meaning-making with the children, thus linking this approach to the overarching social-constructivist methodology. Participatory methods such as these must be respectful not only of children's utterances but also of their silences (Clark & Moss, 2011, p. 9). The decisions the children made around reporting within this study and their various representations of participation and citizenship are discussed in Chapter Six and relate to these meaningful silences. Mosaic is a multi-method approach which provides each child with the opportunity to engage in the research using informal methods that "they might choose to communicate with family and friends" (2011, p. 5) and collates these insights. The listening methods employed in this study are detailed in Chapter Four. Based on the suggested methods in Clark and Moss's guide (2011), they interacted with the child in familiar contexts to counterbalance the Hawthorne

effect. The mosaics are illustrated, and the theories that emerged from them are explored in Chapter Five – Findings.

The purpose of this form of qualitative context-specific research is concerned less with triangulation of data or achieving "a single neat answer" (Clark & Moss, 2011, p. 6) but rather with revealing the complexities of the children's lived experiences. By gathering multiple responses from each participant, a more comprehensive view of their experiences emerges. Bronfenbrenner described human nature not as a singular noun but rather as "plural and pluralistic" (1979, p. 14); so too does the mosaic approach offer the opportunity to present children's experiences as varied, rich and complex. Co-constructing knowledge through building this mosaic is not an effort to extract knowledge from children but, rather, to appreciate the knowledge created, through listening to them (Clark & Moss, 2011). One of the key purposes of the mosaic approach is that it challenges "dominant discourses about whose knowledge counts" (2011, p. 5); this relates directly to the previously explored concept of knowledge democracy. Within the mosaic approach, the active engagement of the listener is at the heart of the process, similar to the "pedagogy of listening" explored by Rinaldi (1999, 2006). The previously knowledgeable adult is "freed" (Clark & Moss, 2011) from having to know all the answers and, comforted by the knowledge that answers are collectively forged, can devote time to active listening. The mosaic approach allows us to look at the world of children from their vantage point and recognise that they are experts in their own lives (Clark & Moss, 2011; Langsted, 1994).

3.6.3 Critical literacy

Criticality was a crucial lens through which all aspects of this study were examined. From the ontological outset, the ability to critically assess our world and our roles in it has been paramount. Criticality emerges through shared exploration and meaning making. Throughout the various stages of this study criticality was continuously employed to ensure that the best decisions were made both in regard to the emergent design of the study and its analysis. The importance of this criticality and the goal of learning to read the world (Freire, 1970) was conveyed to the children through critical literacy. The use of picture-books to elicit criticality is explored in Chapter Four but here I seek to define critical literacy and its role within the study.

Critical literacy strives to create open dialogue within which children and indeed teachers can go beyond textual analysis and ponder greater questions about social order through the texts they encounter. Critical literacy does not have a singular definition (Oberman et al., 2014) but it does have a number of key considerations. It subverts power structures by revealing or examining the truth about power relations (Comber, 2001a, 2001b in Oberman et al, 2014, p.

14). It involves the deeper reading and comprehension of texts which is an essential element of a balanced effective literacy program (Comber & Nixon, 2011; Harrison, 2007; Taylor, Pressley & Pearson, 2000). Criticality is also a key skill in global citizenship education (GCE) (Oberman et al, 2014, p. 7) as it has the potential to develop many of the necessary skills for GCE such as self-reflection, questioning, perspective consciousness and analysis (p. 9). It also promotes attitudes such as commitment to equality, democracy, human rights and sustainability (Oberman et al., 2014, p. 9 citing Krause, 2010; Bryan, 2008; Fielder et al., 2008; Davies, 2006; Regan, 2006; Andreotti, 2006) which also relate to GCE. All these elements together create a deeper understanding of what it means not only to live within a collective, but to navigate the structures of that collective community.

As outlined in my ontological discussion, I position the learner as interactive in building their understandings (Roche, 2015), therefore I value an active learning methodology. Active learning affords the children greater opportunity for "interthinking" (Littleton & Mercer, 2013; Roche, 2015). Reading skills that do not stimulate open-ended responses or reasoning are individualistic in nature and do not bring children together as thinkers. Learning should not consist of simply "banking" education as described by Freire (1993) and reiterated by Apple (2000); rather, students should actively and socially construct meaning (Apple, 2000, p. 191). Research into teacher and pupil experiences of critical literacy found disagreement between children and their teachers (Arizpe, Farrell & McAdam, 2013) . Teachers reported confidence that children were learning about themselves and others through critical literacy (2013, p. 250); however, pupils reported that despite being introduced to new ideas they had not learned about themselves and others (p. 250). Arizpe, Farrell and McAdam (2013) among others (Cremin et al., 2009; O'Sullivan & McGonigle, 2010), suggest that further research ought to be done to examine these opposing reported outcomes; they may have been due to a failure to adequately share the learning aims with the pupils or not sufficiently relating the learning to the lived experiences of the children.

Critical literacy needs to be at the "core of the curriculum in order for transformative or social action to be possible" (Souto-Manning, 2009, cited by Arizpe, Farrell & McAdam, 2013, p. 250). The process not only of reading but as Freire put it, "reading the world" (1985, p. 18), is the role of every critical thinker; they are learning to decode and understand the world they live in through critical discussion with others. This concept relies heavily on interpretivism, linking understandings about one's own life with texts and, through interpreting those texts, coming to know their own world better. This is evocative of the potential magic that Bronfenbrenner (1979) spoke of when adopting new roles. Positioning children as the "more knowledgeable other" can transform their discussions both with one another and with their

teacher. This correlates with Clark and Moss's thinking about the child as an expert in the mosaic approach also (2011). Critical literacy posits children as "complex social actors in classroom worlds" (Dyson, 1993, p. 20), and, through practicing these specific cognitive skills and the use of "diverse sorts of cultural materials" (1993, p. 20), they can read the world with greater clarity.

3.7 Data Analysis

The means by which the data were treated and analysed aligned with the constructivist approach demonstrated in each aspect of this design. Grounded theory provided the opportunity to become immersed in the data and through this immersion to synthesise new understandings.

3.7.1 Grounded theory

Grounded theory is an iterative process that consists of gathering data and coding it to tease out emergent categories. It requires theoretical sampling: applying these codes to the data to see if they fit before continuing with data gathering and analysing (Gibbs, 2010; 2015). The open codes or nodes are created and then categories are formed (Creswell, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Some proponents, including Charmaz (2014) recommend line-by-line coding as a quick, spontaneous and active method of engaging with the data and drawing out basic analysis to begin categorising. (Gibbs, 2015). This method allows the researcher to move progressively from descriptive accounts to theoretical and analytical findings quite quickly. After open coding, Strauss and Corbin recommend axial and selective coding to first create connections between categories, and then identify the key codes needed to develop theory. Charmaz advocates only one step here which she refers to as focus coding. Each stage is concerned with moving the analysis from the descriptive to the more analytical and theoretical.

Kathy Charmaz' (2014) grounded theory approach is referred to as "constructivist". In constructivist grounded theory, as in more traditional grounded theory, data collection and analysis are simultaneous with codes and categories that emerge in early work guiding and informing further research. However, in constructivist grounded theory the creation of these nodes happens through a process of co-construction and comes from a deeper understanding of the effects of the researcher on the data that is collected and the effects of the collection process. Charmaz reiterates the importance of the researcher establishing their own role and position within the research, arguing that if "we start with the assumption that social reality is multiple, processual, and constructed, then we must take the researcher's position, privileges, perspective, and interactions into account as an inherent part of the research reality" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 13). Constructivist grounded theory epitomises my epistemological

standpoint that we, the researchers, are co-constructors of knowledge, that the theory we have produced is based on our understandings of the phenomenon we encountered and that by engaging with the naming and framing of it, we have created this reality. The constructivist paradigm within grounded theory, according to Charmaz, "shreds notions of a neutral observer" (2014, p. 13). Maintaining perspective of how the children viewed me in my dual role as practitioner-researcher and how they communicated their own roles in the classroom kept the obvious power-imbalances in our relationship in check to some extent. As before, I foregrounded my conceptual and theoretical framework, remaining mindful of how I was implicit in the meaning-making and how my interpretive method would affect the data.

Another important aspect of achieving co-constructed understandings was in learning the language of the world of the participants. The meanings made within a group can often be very specific to that group. Through co-constructing meaning from data with the participants I hoped to gain a much richer understanding of their experiences. Enlisting children to assist in deciphering their peers' meanings can be most beneficial as it maintains their perspective (Christensen & Prout, 2002, p. 483). In this study, the theory generated was constructed through conferencing with the children and synthesising the mosaic of their input. The children, as co-researchers, were involved in the development of these emergent nodes, some of which were *in vivo* codes, whereby the language the children used to describe a phenomenon became the early name of that code. The children were also interpreting these nodes so that they could become categories. The co-researchers added crucial perspective to the analysis of these codes. These codes were then further interrogated, analysed, and synthesised in order to reveal their deeper theoretical meaning and, in this way, they were implicitly influenced by the researcher. These processes are explored further in Chapter Four.

Constructivist grounded theory, like action research, is rooted in the pragmatic ideals of value in action. The meanings created through this study and the analysis of such have come about with the intention of creating practical action. Charmaz (2014) pointed to this comfortable coupling of method and theory, rooted deep in Deweyan ideals of pragmatic value and a universe in the making. The continual analysis of data within constructivist grounded theory afforded ongoing opportunities for the teacher-researcher to respond to emergent needs presented by the data, thus providing the necessary opportunities for the children co-researchers to experience agentic and communal responses to their participation. The broad nature of early theories (Charmaz, 2014) in constructivist grounded theory is also in keeping with the open-ended nature of action research and its often non-specified objectives.

The various phases of data analysis are explored within Chapter Four - the processes of memo-writing and journal keeping, open and focused coding, analysing, synthesising and theorising which were essential in tracing the development of categories, the links and connections between them and the theory evolving from them. A coding paradigm was also developed to categorise data coherently and consistently, so that theory could be generated to describe each phenomenon. Grounded theory is a constant comparative approach where at all stages data is being collected and compared, codes being developed and compared and categories and theories emerging then compared back to the data. This constant checking and comparing was a process that sought to achieve saturation wherein every possible theoretical concept linking these codes was established and the abductive process of developing broader categories could begin. After developing categories I revisited the literature and studied in more detail some of the issues arising from them. Theoretical sampling based on the early leads found in the data led me to new perspectives and avenues that I had not considered.

3.8 Conclusion

The methodology outlined in this chapter is a robust exploration of my foundational beliefs. The importance of collaboration, meaning-making and shared interpretation is infused through every aspect of this work. The role of the child is central throughout as child-centredness is an inherent aspect of modern education and foregrounding their voices and agency is a key aim of this study. I included an exploration of my personal values within this chapter as I believe that criticality in relation to one's own motivations is crucial and this commitment to criticality is also evident in the rationale for critical literacy playing a key role in data generation and collection. The adoption of an action research approach was explored in depth due to the porous and flexible nature of the format; this requires it be deep-rooted in methodological reasoning so that the plan, though open to change, does not deviate from its overall aims of collaboration, action, empowerment, and social justice.

The research questions raised here are each answered in turn in Chapter Five. The research design methodologies explored here are evident within my own research models in Chapter Four, wherein the role of the action cycles and Bronfenbrenner's model are brought together. The data collected is evidenced in Chapter Five alongside representations of the mosaics from which themes and new knowledge emerged. The methods involved in the grounded theory processes are detailed in the next chapter and the values and theoretical underpinnings discussed here permeate throughout all the actions undertaken.

Chapter Four: Methods

4.1 Introduction

Each method within this chapter is directed at answering the research questions: how to determine the matters affecting children and, through this process, increase their sense of functional agency. Each of the methods interconnect to first elicit children's voices and then act upon them. Action is integral to each stage of the study, as is dialogue. These methods are designed to capture the multitude of ways that children express their agency and the active roles they hold within the school community. In this chapter I first outline the context of the school setting as this relates to my current practice. I then introduce my co-researchers, the pupils, and discuss why their demographic sets this work apart. Next is the staged design of this action project, then how it was mapped onto the classroom-based practice. This includes the resources used, the pilot lessons and the methods that were collated to build the mosaics of listening that were conceptualised in Chapter Three. I summarise each of my data collection and analysis methods and, finally, I focus on the many ethical considerations of this study.

4.2 Context

Context is an important consideration in interpretivist research. Understanding the values and motivations of all those involved in meaning making with research provides a greater sense of cohesion and rigour. My personal values were outlined within Chapter Three; here I briefly describe the backgrounds of the other actors.

School setting

This classroom-based practice took place in Dublin City in a primary school under the patronage of Educate Together. The school has been rapidly developing for twenty years and its community are eagerly awaiting a new permanent school building nearby. At the time of the study, the previous principal had recently retired, and the community welcomed an existing member of staff to this role. Overall, there was a sense that the school was in a period of optimistic transition. Possibilities for transformative child-centred action were keenly supported. The school Board of Management and the parents were enthusiastic about the research process.

The study took place in my junior infant classroom, a bright, spacious room in a two-storey prefabricated building. The children and I felt very comfortable and familiar with one another having shared this space for seven months in a very favourable teacher-pupil ratio of 1:20. The children faced one another at small hexagonal tables for group work, eating lunch or doing written tasks and gathered in the open, carpeted space at the front of the room during story

time or for discussions. Around the walls were numerous special interest areas for reading, writing and explorative play. Large windows spanning one wall were strung with an ever-changing collection of children's works that they pegged along washing lines. Toys, craft supplies, and books were located on low shelves and baskets around the room so that the children could be self-directed and independent in sourcing what they needed.

Participants

The participants were children aged between four and six years. They lived locally and were pre-enrolled since infancy as the school had a long waiting list. This early commitment indicated a strong inclination among parents towards the ethos of the school. Ethos is an important factor in the school day and classroom management. At the beginning of each year children co-develop classroom contracts for behaviour based on the principles of Educate Together. The decision to work with the youngest cohort of school-going children was twofold; it was the group I had the most consistent and natural contact with as their class teacher, and it was the most underrepresented school-based group in research into voice and agency as was discussed in Chapter Two. The classroom was generally busy with group learning activities and the children engaged daily in child-led play.

4.3 Action Research

As illustrated by the Lewinian models in the previous chapter, action research generally consists of cycles of planning and action. The model designed for this study is detailed below, as are the aims and purposes of each cycle.

4.3.1 Action research model

The study was situated within the children's natural context, the children were positioned as active agents of change in their environment. This action research project sought to elicit the voices of the young children and enable them to recognise their influence. This recognition of existing capacities was an important factor in developing functional agency. The content in the research was not based purely on curriculum learning objectives but rather it developed through emergent ideas from the children. In positioning the children's ideas at the forefront in this way, it was hoped that they would view themselves as experts in their context, the knowledgeable other co-constructing meaning with the teacher-researcher.

Action research correlates with the pragmatic approach described in the previous chapter, recognising that realities are ever-changing as we encounter new ideas and challenges in communication with others and seek praxis and action in response. Action research is an iterative dialogical process wherein new knowledge from each cycle can contribute to building more robust and learner-centred lessons in consecutive cycles. The data co-created through cycles of action research build upon one another and inform the ongoing process. In this

study, these cycles of action research happened throughout the study, as reflection, observation, planning, and action were an element of every stage in the study. The three main stages of the study are described in the classroom-based practice section. The diagram below outlines the action research model and how the cycles would build upon one another.

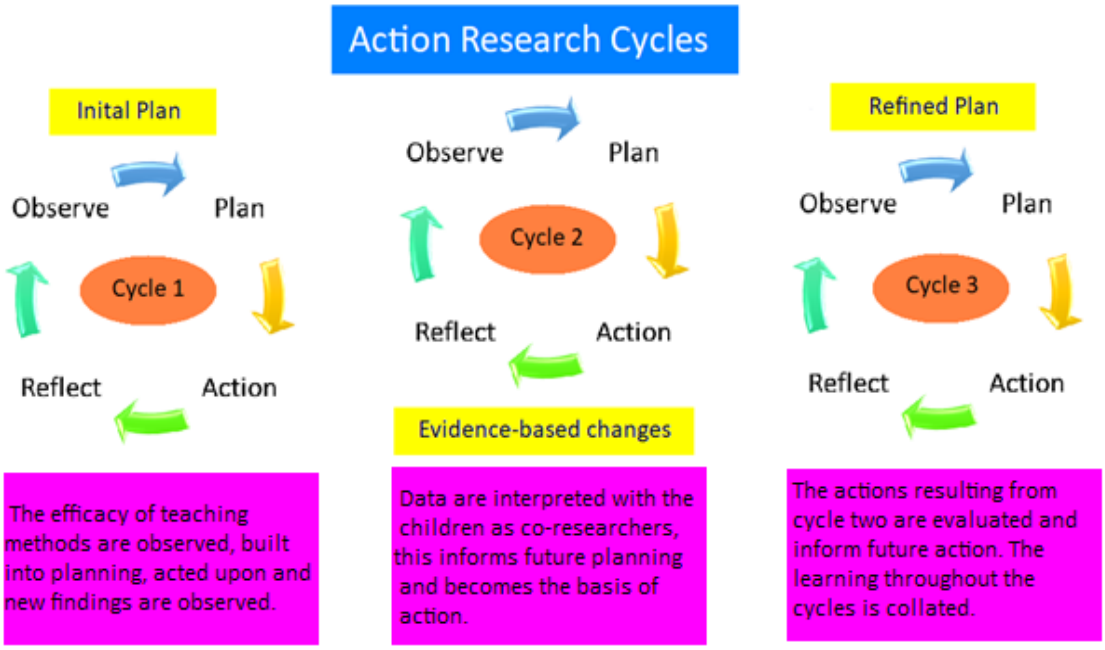


Figure 4.1. Action Research Model

This diagram shows the processes of reflecting, observing, planning and action that took place during the action project and how they were employed in each cycle of the study to gain deeper understanding of the children's experiences and to communicate the agentic powers the children had in determining the course of the study. The classroom-based practice evolved over the course of these cycles from an initial outline to a more refined plan based on the observations and reflections undertaken throughout.

Cycle One

The first cycle reflected on the new and familiar methods being employed to ensure the children were challenged yet comfortable with the process. The content in this cycle was focused on personal rights and activating children's voices. The children were observed answering questions, the level of their responses was gauged to determine whether they were sufficiently stimulated and, during feedback activities, the appropriateness of the tasks was observed and recorded. The suitability of each task was factored into planning for each subsequent lesson. Data gathered in this cycle were used to improve the research experience; improving questioning techniques, determining the children's level of critical engagement, interpreting their interaction with the assent process and learning how research practices impacted on classroom relationships and behavioural management. Data were analysed and synthesised into adjusted planning for the second cycle.

Cycle Two

In the second cycle the children took on more explicit roles in creating and analysing data, interpreting what ways they saw themselves as decision-makers and recognising their influence on the direction of the study. Findings from the first cycle shaped interactions in this cycle and necessary adjustments to the outset plan were made. Children were observed developing and applying critical skills to a variety of themes related to school, community, and their rights. The children made images and practised their communication skills by interpreting this data. Based on this data, efforts were made to install greater listening opportunities within the next cycle and themes emerged that would become locations for learning in Cycle Three.

Cycle Three

In the final cycle, children's learning and co-constructed understandings were collated and analysed for major themes. The most dominant themes from the previous cycle became the focus of new learning. The topics that proved to be of most interest to the children determined the books we read together, the direction of discussions we had and became the basis of shared action. Reflections and observations from the cycles were noted and are explored further in the discussion and conclusion chapters of this study so that they can inform future work with similar demographics.

4.4 Classroom-based practice

The classroom-based practice centred around providing diverse opportunities for children to use their voice within their families, their classroom and school, and then the wider community and globally. The focus within each stage was based on Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model which was explored in detail in Chapter Three. This systems model suggested that learning occurs in natural settings within nested environments with learning about the self at the innermost location then expanding outwards towards wider contexts, becoming more global over time. This occurs with scaffolding from familiar adults with whom they forge long-lasting relationships. Therefore, each stage of the study, detailed in the tables below relates to one of the contexts described earlier. At each stage, the children were challenged to think critically about who makes decisions at these levels, why they make decisions the way they do and what decisions they would make in that position. As detailed earlier, the three stages relate to systems within which the children can have the most identifiable influence. Like action research itself, the plan for this classroom-based practice was flexible and open to reflection and review.

4.4.1 Resources

High-quality picture books were sourced for the critical literacy elements of the study, a list of which can be found at Appendix C. Another picture book was teacher-made, and designed to familiarise the children with their rights through an abstracted fictional lens. Response sheets were made to ensure they mirrored language used in class and were pitched at appropriate literacy levels; these included story response sheets, future thinking prompts, rating scales and opportunities to draw and dictate their thoughts. School tablets were used to capture images and the school twinkl.com membership was used to download and print a set of teaching prompts on children's rights.

4.4.2 The pilot study

The pilot study for this research was carried out shortly before the action study began, the main purpose of which was to develop classroom routines for the classroom-based practice and to evaluate the appropriate level of questioning and anticipated response. The findings from the pilot study informed the design of the practice, helped develop an appropriate lexicon for sharing global themes and instilled an awareness of the time needed to complete such open activities.

4.4.3 Structure of the classroom-based practice

The classroom practice consisted of three stages and was implemented in twelve lessons over six weeks. Premised on Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model, Stage One focused on discussions around rights and voice within the children's microsystems of family and self. Stage Two expanded into the mesosystem of school life, much of which they have not yet experienced, as the children's early learning was enacted and their innermost ecosystems converged. And finally, Stage Three radiated its focus outward into wider concerns for the local community and environment, the exosystem. The children's emergent interests guided shared actions throughout. A detailed lesson scheme from the outset of the project is located in Appendix D and the updated and completed scheme is in Appendix E.

Stage One

Personal experiences of rights, particularly voice activation, were sought. Responses relating to children's understanding of rights were elicited through story prompting and how and where children perceive themselves being listened to were transcribed. The children reflected on stories of individual action and community enhancement and were asked what or who they would most like to help and finally they were posed with role play scenarios where children's rights were being impacted and their responses to these dilemmas were recorded.

Table 4.1

Classroom-based practice, lessons 1-4

Lesson	Key Questions	Children's Role	Data Collected*	Resources
1	What are children's rights? "Look at Teddy, come and see, can you tell me what he needs?	Children compose the narrative within Teddy's book of rights and illustrate his needs.	Audio recording of discussion 'Here is Teddy' response sheet	Teacher-made book Response Sheet
2	How do we use our voice? Where do we use our voices? Who listens to us? How does it feel to be listened to?	Children were given time to reflect on the story and respond to each of the questions.	Feedback form	"The Very Quiet Cricket" by Eric Carle Children's Rights prompts from twinkl.com
3	What extraordinary things can you to? What is extra-ordinarily important to you?	Children listened and discussed. Children illustrated responses and interpreted them.	Response pages with teacher annotations	"Extra-ordinary Mary's Extra-ordinary deed" by Emily Parson
4	How does this link with our ideas of rights or voice?	Children worked in pairs to problem-solve each dilemma using toy characters and recounted this to the teacher.	Audio clips of children recounting their problem-solving.	Dilemma scenario cards Figurines and toys Digital dictaphone

*Observations in the reflective journal and data associated with assent was also collected during every lesson.

Stage Two

The children looked at who makes decisions within the school community and how to affect change. The children mapped locations within the classroom where they see themselves as decision-makers. The importance of having one's voice heard and how the school could be improved as a place of listening were discussed and reflected upon. Finally, the children analysed data together so that they could share their collective understandings and interpretations of how school was being viewed in terms of agency and decision-making.

Table 4.2

Classroom-based practice, lessons 5-8

Lesson	Key Questions	Children's Role	Data Collected*	Resources
5	Who helps us at school? If we want to change something, who do we ask, what can we do?	Children dictates their experiences of people who help at school and how to access decision-making.	Images and transcription of collaborative writing from discussion.	'The Invisible Boy' by Trudy Ledwig Whiteboard and markers
6	What decisions can we make at school? Take pictures of three decisions you make for yourself and three you make for others.	Children took photographs in pairs and interpreted their photographs for the teacher.	Digital Photographs Audio recordings	'Think for myself at school' by Kristy Hammill Tablets Digital dictaphone
7	Why do we need to listen to others? How can our school become better at listening?	Children reflected on the story and the need to listen to the concerns of others. Children worked individually in flexible seating and contemplated the 'listening school', drew responses and interpreted them with the teacher.	Response sheets with annotations.	'Our Listening School' response sheet. Clipboards and markers 'The Day the Crayons Quit' by Oliver Jeffers
8	What do these pictures say about how and where we make decisions? What could our future decisions on this topic look like? Do you enjoy voting in class?	Children viewed the images created in lesson six and categorised them, coding each one using a tally system and 'in vivo' codes to decipher the most common themes. Children made pictures based on future decision about the most popular theme. Children cast votes to assign new a new play theme and rated their level of satisfaction with this process.	Photographs and transcription of tally, Future mapping responses, Ballot results, Rating scales.	Images from lesson 6 Whiteboard and markers Future mapping prompt sheets, tokens, ballot boxes, rating scale pages

*Observations in the reflective journal and data associated with assent was also collected during every lesson.

Stage Three

The children considered community, acting on behalf of others and where they could collectively invest their agency and action. Imagined futures were created to connect a sense of hope and wonder to the shared action. Books based on the themes most widely discussed in Stage Two were read. An action project was co-created to be carried forward from this study as a shared ambition.

Table 4.3

Classroom-based practice, lessons 9 and 10

Lesson	Key Questions	Children's Role	Data Collected*	Resources
9	How does it feel to be part of a community? How are we all connected?	Children were invited to play a co-operative game throwing balls of wool to people they share connections with i.e. same interests, same rights until a web is created. Children then discuss feeling of inclusion, isolation from a group etc.	Image of class web, collaborative writing notes from discussion, key words for display	'We all Sing with One Voice' by Philip Miller, Wool, Whiteboard and markers
10	How can we use our voices to help others?	Children listened to and considered the story and were asked to reflect on what or whom they would use their voices to protect. The children then discussed their thoughts using the 'snowball' method ensuring that every voice was heard, and ideas shared and connected.	Recordings were made of the snowball discussion and the summary recount at the end.	'The Boy and the Jaguar' by Alan Rabinowitz Digital dictaphone

Table 4.4

Classroom-based practice, lessons 11 and 12

11	How can children make a difference in our world? What matters most to our community?	Children sang the song and identified the themes. Children listened to a poem written about community using their language from lesson 9. They listened to and discussed the actions in the storybook and related them to their own experiences, families and communities. Children voted on the course of action we should take collectively and rated the experience.	Ballot results Rating scales	'Planet Patrol' by Mick Manning and Brita Granström Tokens and ballot boxes Gauging satisfaction rating scales 'This land is your land' by Pete Seeger Poem written using data from Lesson 9
12	What decisions can we make at home, in school and in our communities that benefit our planet? How can children make a difference to our environment?	The breadth of decisions made each day was discussed in relation to the stories. Children took turns to use a wishing wand to conjure images of a better world through their action and then drew future maps of how their decision to act for change could improve the world. The children then dictated decisions for change at home, school and in the community which the teacher transcribed onto the planning poster.	Future maps annotated with children's interpretations Planning poster for future action to display within the classroom	'Today' by Julie Morstad '26 Big Things Small Hands Can Do' by Coleen Paratore Future mapping page, Wishing wands, Pyramid planning resource adapted from 'Creating Futures' Lesson 8 (Education for a Just World Initiative DCU)

*Observations in the reflective journal and data associated with assent was also collected during every lesson.

4.4.4 The mosaic

The mosaics were built on findings from each stage of the study; therefore, each mosaic refers to a corresponding stage in the classroom-based practice. These findings are explored in depth in Chapter Five. Here, I describe the methods employed in each mosaic to collect data, each individual method is explored in the next section. There are three steps in compiling a mosaic - gathering evidence, creating an understanding of it and determining action based on it (Clark & Moss, 2011) – these steps took place during each of the three stages of the study. This was how all information was pieced together. The emphasis of this method was on articulating multiple perspectives and employing methods that put children at their ease.

Stage One

In Stage One, the children's learning was scaffolded to ensure they felt secure. The methods employed were conferencing, picture making, storybook discussions, observations, circle-time responses, role-play, and photomapping. These methods produced many forms of data, a rich tapestry to decipher.

Stage Two

Stage Two saw the co-construction of knowledge as participants pieced together information from stories, discussions, pictures and photographs. The children looked at images they and others had created; they gave and listened to feedback from early findings to verify interpretation.

Stage Three

In Stage Three the children engaged in greater levels of data analysis. They determined topics and themes for investigation and the lesson plan was adapted accordingly to reflect growing interest in certain areas as well as the activities and data-gathering techniques they found most effective.

4.6 Data Collection Methods

The data collection methods were tailored to the context and participants of this study. They were evaluated on an ongoing basis through reflection and critical appraisal. The choice of methods was dependent on creating enjoyable, natural opportunities for children to participate.

4.6.1 Picture-making

Picture-making was a key method for communicating with this demographic. Children responded creatively to stories and discussions. This provided an audience for children whose preference was not talk and discussion. It also provided space and time for children to distil the complex issues being discussed and express their views. Visual methods are useful in working with young children (Horgan, 2017); they foreground two key elements in the elicitation of young voices: "making the process more enjoyable" and "offering a different way

of revealing experiences and perspectives" (p. 9). This method also positions children as producers of knowledge (Horgan, 2017). Another benefit of this method is that "information is understood more easily visually than through narrative" (p. 9); Horgan also notes that children find images a fun and relaxing way to participate since they are a part of children's everyday lives. Interpretation of images was vital to knowledge production and the concept of knowledge democracy. Each image was discussed and interpreted with the child before it became part of the overall data set to avoid adulteration of the work. Anonymised images were also analysed with the children during the study; this was done by displaying the digital image on the interactive whiteboard in the classroom so that we could collaboratively determine what themes emerged from the images.

4.6.2 Children's literature

Reading story books was used as a method of connecting children to the world around them. It is one of the most recommended activities for supporting children's language and literacy development (Beck & McKeown, 2001). Children can access the stories of others in ways that can be striking, affective and effective. Adults can build on the learning within books through many strategies: book-talk, "sustained shared thinking" (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2008), dialogic reading and inquiry (Lever & Sénéchal, 2011; Reznitskaya, 2012), and critical literacy (Freire, 1970; Luke, 2012; Roche, 2011). These strategies not only improve children's reading and decoding skills, they also introduce them to other worlds and their own. Freire suggested we must learn to "read the world" and these opportunities for scaffolded discussion improve children's ability to narrate their world, a key capability according to Nussbaum (2011).

The development of children's oral language skills was critical to their capacity to give voice to and articulate their functional agency. Rights-based language was a focus throughout the study so that the children could engage in rights-discourse and recontextualise the language of rights to apply it to their own experiences. High-quality picture books that focused on issues of local and global importance were used, a list of which are contained in Appendix C. Each book was first discussed at a comprehension level, then looked at more critically with methodical questioning of the motivations, consequences and potential in each book. Abstraction, simplification and compression (Mar & Oatley, 2008) of social themes such as community, action, fairness and rights were sought through these fictional texts. Vitally, the children were then given "thinking time" (Roche, 2015, p. 15) whereby they could connect the stories to their lived experiences. Another method used to scaffold and expand children's responses to literature is the snowball activity. The children discuss a theme in pairs, each pair then joins another, and the groups merge once again until the children have experienced

peer-to-peer discussions building from two participants to eight. This allows children to practice oral language and build upon the ideas of others.

4.6.3 Photomapping

Photomapping is a method adapted from "transect walks" (Hart, 1997) that are used in Participatory Rural Appraisal, a form of action research used in community-based research in projects and development contexts. The children had the opportunity to detail their relationship to the space and locations for decision-making in the classroom. Photomapping is another visual method chosen for its appeal to children and its ability to convey ideas and experiences that children may not otherwise articulate. The use of digital devices, namely tablets, to record this data was in line with the National Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020 (DES, 2015). The ability of children to interact with digital media and the potential this creates in terms of their rights and responsibilities (Livingstone & Helsper, 2014) must be balanced, but its appeal and advantages cannot be overlooked. Photomapping reinforced the view of children as experts in their own lives by mapping the classroom with understandings of the space that only they possess. Clark and Moss pointed to the potential of the mosaic approach for increasing children's confidence, the pleasure of developing new skills e.g., photography and becoming more active participants (2011, pp. 63-64).

4.6.4 Voting

Casting votes as a method for choosing themes, activities or representatives was a practice familiar to the children. Voting has been used as a tool to demonstrate the potential for democratic practices and promote a community-minded approach to agency in the classroom. The voting process was a simple one whereby we discussed potential options to ballot and narrowed them to four. Choosing play areas was the main purpose of the vote, a secondary purpose was to gauge the children's satisfaction with this ongoing practice. The children cast tokens into ballot boxes labelled with images of potential play themes. In the first such vote the children each received one token and cast them in turn. In a subsequent vote on a theme for the action project each child got two tokens, one large and one small so that they could indicate a first and second preference.

4.6.5 Gauging satisfaction

Gauging satisfaction with the voting process consisted of conferencing with the children individually after the voting process and having them fill out a rating scale. The scale was a simple one consisting of three beanstalks, small, medium, and large. The children coloured in one beanstalk that indicated the level to which they enjoyed the voting process. The children also indicated, through colouring the appropriate option, whether their choice had won the vote; this would be used to investigate whether having their choice win the vote equated with

the child's enjoyment of the process. Ensuring that children enjoy the processes that increase their agency is important - it relates to Sen's (1985) concept of functionings in that the provision of opportunities should be based on whether these opportunities are desirable and within reach of those being afforded them.

4.6.6 Reflective journal

Field notes and observations were collated in a reflective journal; they tracked the course of the study and mapped its reflexivity. Extracts from the journal are contained in Appendix F. The journal mapped the journey towards shared decisions, noting the levels of engagement throughout and evaluating my own practice. Self-reflection (Marshall, 2016) and examining contradictions in my practice (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006) were aspects of this project which were linked to self-study. The journal was also used to appraise methods and the quality of interactions. This reflection was synthesised into new knowledge and action in each progressive stage of the study. Context and extenuating circumstances, the mood of the children and how the study spilled into other aspects of the school day were all captured in this journal. Each lesson was evaluated and reflected upon; this gave rise to many of the adaptations within the iterative cycles of research. The journal took note of the factors influencing the children's agency within the classroom as well as capturing pivotal moments where children expressed agency.

4.7 Data Analysis Methods

Ethical processes are outlined in detail in the next section of this chapter. However, it is important to note here that the first step in treating all data was to anonymise them to protect the privacy and identity of the young participants. These processes are essential, but not without their complexities which are explored in the final section. All verbal data contributions were transcribed. This was laborious as there were contributions across numerous lessons from all 20 co-researchers and myself, often with multiple speakers. However, this process greatly benefitted this study since familiarity with the data is vital to constructivist grounded theory. This process also centralised the children's voices and the complexities, variety and joy associated with their voices were made evident.

With help from a critical friend, I organised my data within an NVivo database to file data sources and create nodes. NVivo was an invaluable tool in coding the data, it worked across audio, written and pictorial sources to pinpoint patterns and intersections in the data. Coding and re-coding the data took time, but it led to invaluable synthesis of the data and literature. Images of this database can be found in Appendix G.

4.7.1 Co-analysis with children and in vivo codes

Each stage of the classroom practice contained elements of co-analysis with the children. They aided in the interpretation of drawings, photographs, and stories. The children collaborated to categorise images from the photomapping activity. Some of the language they used were colloquial terms for areas in the classroom and were adopted as *in vivo* codes which are "categories that crystallize participants' experience" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 133). These in vivo codes were initial nodes during the open-coding phase, incorporating children's language as part of "symbolic interactionism" (Charmaz, 2014). As explored previously, there is power in re-naming; according to Dewey it changes our relationship to that thing. To avoid **adult**eration (Flynn, 2017) and because "language and symbols play a crucial role in forming and sharing our meanings and actions" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 262), the children's own language was used in these in vivo codes, thus centralising their experiences. In vivo codes are "a useful analytic point of departure" (2014, p. 124). They were used as broad codes to encapsulate as much as possible of the children's meaning, both literally and symbolically.

4.7.2 Grounded theory

The rationale for choosing constructivist grounded theory was outlined in Chapter Three, here I detail the methods involved in the three phases of analysis. Analysis of the study took much the same course as the data gathering process, layering reflections, new understandings, criticality, and analysis continually until the sum emerged as a whole.

Phase One – coding and memos

Initial data analysis was carried out to restore order to the data and view them from a more neutral standpoint. The reflective journal, the annotated lesson outlines and the data were brought together within the NVivo software to create a comprehensive recount of the work. Substantive coding (Bryant, Charmaz & Holton, 2012) was undertaken with the data; they were coded openly and broadly using the in vivo codes and digital memos were made to indicate important themes emerging or to provide context. Colour coding differentiated between in vivo codes and outliers or emerging themes in Phase One. Memos became another essential data source in later stages of the process. Line by line and image by image coding of the data identified recurrent themes and their links to earlier nodes. Coding "forces you to think about the data in new ways that may differ from your research participants' interpretations" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 133), therefore careful memo writing that tracked thought processes and assumptions were essential in ensuring the validity of the findings herein.

Phase Two - developing my understandings

After initial codes were theoretically saturated, secondary codes based on additional interpretations emerged. Each unit of data was again mapped and coded to the emerging themes. Recognising commonality and patterns within the children's classroom experiences was key to developing theory. The wider context of the classroom, the sum of the children's experiences in class to date, functional factors within which we operated and children's awareness of these were drawn together to create new understandings of the data.

Phase Three - conceptualising the data

The third phase involved more abstracted theoretical coding. Analytical and theoretical categories were developed to create what Charmaz called the "bigger story" (2014). After rigorously determining and checking my understandings against the data through a process of abduction, the strongest links between categories became a hypothesis. During this phase I synthesised the children's experiences within their micro- meso- and exo- systems from each of the three stages. The overarching themes discussed in Chapter Five derived from this process and the roles and modes of reporting by the children became more apparent. The knowledge created within this process is the product of partnership with the children as co-researchers and as such they are co-contributors to it; the findings will be disseminated in ways that can be appropriately communicated with them.

4.8 Ethics

Ethics were a crucial element in ensuring access and maintaining the privacy and dignity of the young co-researchers. The methods for ensuring ethical research are laid out here, a discussion on the effects of these systems on the research is contained in Chapter Six.

4.8.1 Assent and consent

Before each research lesson, assent was actively sought from each participant, to disallow passive or involuntary participation by children in the process. This was a methodological choice with clear ethical ties. Bradbury-Jones (2014) argued that children should have a good knowledge of what was involved in the process before they began as well as having the option to engage in continued assent throughout the study. It was made clear that the lessons would look and feel like other schoolwork but because they would be recorded and written about, they had the option to take part or not, and alternative arrangements were discussed. It was also made clear that they could change their mind at any point without any adverse effects. The means of acquiring informed consent in studies with young children can impact the children's perception of the study and is further complicated by an educational context (David, Edwards & Alldred, 2001). David, Edwards, and Allred referred to the enmeshing of informed consent with pedagogical practice as "educated" consent (2001); insofar as possible

I tried to avoid the privileges of the educational context. The informed consent process was carried out informally like a classroom discussion with the children gathered on the carpet where stories were typically read. This process took place under the supervision of another familiar adult, their class support teacher, with whom they could also discuss any issues or concerns. The children used their self-registration names at the start of each data collecting lesson and placed them in boxes indicating assent or non-assent indicated by green or red labels.

As the study was situated within my own classroom, locating the participants was simple but efforts were then redoubled to ensure that participation in the study did not feel mandatory or assumed. The plain-language statement to all parties was clear that this would be an opt-in rather than an opt-out study and that my position as teacher in the school should not impact their decision to participate or not. The study took place in a school with young children, therefore consent from management and parents was also imperative. The plain language statements and consent forms used produced for the school and parents are in Appendices A to B.

4.8.2 Ethical processes

At the outset of this study all necessary permissions were sought from the Research Ethics Committee at DCU and the standards of the committee were upheld diligently throughout. The decision was made not to video-record or photograph children's faces as part of this study and all audio clips were transcribed to ensure anonymity. Throughout the data gathering process it was of utmost importance to ensure the privacy of the pupils who were engaging in the research process; therefore, anonymising data using pseudonyms occurred at each stage of data gathering.

Confidentiality was conveyed to the participants, in that, though they were not secret, their responses were for the purposes of this study only and should not be used negatively between them or contribute to any form of ridicule. Emphasising that the work was not secretive was important as this correlated with child protection guidelines that discourage children from keeping secrets about their interactions with adults or others.

Subjectivity in the research was counterbalanced by conscientious note-taking and open-minded, comprehensive observations and coding. All voices and opinions within the room were regarded as equally as possible to ensure multiple perspectives were represented and space within the knowledge democracy afforded to all. Every effort was made to minimise the power imbalance I held as teacher and researcher and to alleviate any sense of obligation on

children or parents. At all times I was honest, fair, objective, open and trustworthy in my presentation of evidence.

4.8.3 Data storage

Hard copies of data were kept in a locked cabinet and electronic copies of data were always under password protection. I altered each piece of data so that hard copies of the work bore only the pseudonym of the child or children that created them. I then uploaded each one of these images to my database; in this way, no images were ever digitised containing a child's actual name. No images were created that visibly identified children. All the files were given names based on the type of data they contained, the date it was collected and the lesson it was part of and filed accordingly.

4.9 Validity, Rigour and Generalisability

The strength of this research lies in its attention to context, close listening, and faithful relaying of the children's experiences. The validity, rigour and generalisability of this research are rooted in the forms of research undertaken, and each of these ethical and practical concerns are discussed below.

4.9.1 Generalisability

Whitehead and Lomax believed the generalisability of living educational theory and other forms of action research as being reliant on the "public conversations of those involved in its creation" (1987). It lies within the shared dialogue of the action research community, the values they espouse, their commitment to "the systematic form of action/reflection cycle" (Whitehead & Lomax, 1987) and the "shared assumptions" of the community. The connection to this community dictates the generalisability of the work as it relates not only to their own practice but the relationship between their practice and their account of it (1987).

4.9.2 Validity and rigour

Replicability is not an applicable term within action research (Sullivan, 2006) due to the significance of context. Rather the aim was to ensure that solid evidence be provided to make valid claims that stand up to rigorous personal and academic standards. The aim of this work was not to make generalisable theory but rather to add to the democracy of knowledge and experience in this context as one among many to help create the wider mosaic of the lives of children today, and their opportunities to express and enact functional agency. Clearly outlining the processes whereby claims of new knowledge have been produced and demonstrating evidence for these claims (Shipman, 1985) determines the reliability and rigour of this study. These processes were consistent and systematic. The literature review drew upon systematised review techniques for literature saturation. The action research model was consistent with previous iterations demonstrated in Chapter Three. The values, conceptual

framework and methodology logically permeated all the methods employed and the coding and analysis was methodical, extensive, and supported by coding software. Clear evidence is used to demonstrate each of the findings and a high degree of criticality has been adopted throughout. In addition to this, and in accordance with Habermas' view on claims to validity through social validation (1976), the processes and findings of this study were shared and discussed with critical friends to ensure a triangulation of the logical processes. This study communicates a faithful and truthful account of this work and presents its claim to new knowledge conscientiously.

4.10 Conclusion

This chapter laid out the particulars of the participants and the efforts made to adapt the methods to their specific needs. Designing a model for the classroom-based practice required methods that foregrounded children's voices, actions, and enjoyment. Methods that would feel empowering and naturally occurring within the classroom were essential to a research project that centralised children's lived experiences. The methods were also designed to be rigorous and methodical since creating robust and valuable knowledge contributions elevates the work of both myself as practitioner and the co-researching children.

The data collected and analysed through these methods was used to iteratively build a deeper understanding of not only what matters affect children as suggested in the UNCRC but how children conceptualise and report these matters as well as what teachers can do to support them. These findings are detailed within Chapter Five and further discussion on how these methods contributed to the new understandings of children's agency, voice and participation are discussed in Chapter Six.

Chapter Five: Findings

5.1 Introduction

The findings in this chapter relay the matters affecting the children in the study, and how they reported them. I sought the perspectives of children as "agents and contributors" rather than "service users" (Alderson, 2011, p. 88) with a view to establishing a culture of participation and agency within our classroom, thus, realising the provisions in Article 12, based on a positive view of the children's capabilities (Nussbaum, 2011) outlined in Chapter Two. Generating a culture of participation and functionings or freedoms (Sen, 1985) was dependent on fostering choice amongst children and encouraging agentic decision-making; this required seeking children's perspective on matters currently affecting them to gain a broader understanding of what matters affected this cohort generally. Through creating this new knowledge and participating in this study, experiencing care, choice, voice, democracy, and their capabilities in action, it is hoped that the children would recognise their functional agency within the classroom.

The three stages of the study correlate to the nested systems of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model (1995, 2005) explored in detail in Chapter Three; the child is situated within concentric systems that relate to various relationships and power structures that act upon their lives: their microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem. Stage One of this study related to family, and corresponds to the innermost system in Bronfenbrenner's model, the microsystem. In this stage, the child's personal relationships, rights and capacities were explored; this also related to Nussbaum's "Socratic self-examination" (1997, p. 272). The second stage explored matters relating to school, the child's and their microsystems' interactions with this next layer of society - the mesosystem. The children used "narrative imagination" (Nussbaum, 1997, p. 277) to discuss changes they would or could make at school. Finally, Stage Three corresponded to the exosystem, concerned with how these children viewed and interacted with the wider world. This gave a broader landscape to the matters affecting these children as world citizens, another of Nussbaum's (1997) necessities for cultivating humanity. The macrosystem and chronosystem, though essential elements of Bronfenbrenner's dynamic model that identify the interrelated societal and chronological elements within the life of a developing child, are not explored in explicit stages since their influence permeates every stage. The evolving design across the three stages allowed the children to gain confidence in voice activation and knowledge creation, first in contexts they were most familiar with, then expanding their skills as they

engaged in dialogue and action within wider systems. The overarching themes that emerged were *care and choice*, *nature and animals* and *play*. The outset plan for this classroom-based practice can be found in Appendix D.

Recognising the matters that affect children in various contexts was the first step in determining the contexts in which children practised or could practise functional agency; next was understanding how they choose to convey and act upon these matters. Engaging and meaningful opportunities for children to create knowledge and experience democratic participation could then be established, thus enacting the provisions of Article 12 in a pragmatic and functional manner. Employing children's interests to increase their participation and learning is the essence of child-led education; this is explored in Chapter Seven. This study merged both the matters affecting children, and the modes by which they made them known, to observe and embed functional agentic practices in the classroom. Issues relating to children's agency such as negotiations, non-compliance and assent are explored later in this chapter.

Finally, findings relating to the third research question regarding teachers' facilitation of functional agency are detailed. These findings relate to methods introduced in Chapter Four as well as the development of "space, voice, influence and audience" (Lundy, 2007) for children to enact their agency. These key practices combined to convey the weight and influence due to children's voices; space for action, careful listening, evolving questioning and representing children as powerful actors. Locations and relationships are paramount in this study as the children's agency directly corresponds to how they function in the classroom in agentic ways with their peers and how this can be expanded.

5.2 Interpreting the Mosaics

The data collected were pieced together in the Clark and Moss (2011) mosaic approach explored in Chapter Four. This aided in constructing a comprehensive view of the children's interactions. This approach formalised the day-to -day listening and observation in the classroom, centralised and amplified the myriad ways young children communicate. Building these mosaic pictures over six weeks demonstrated the children's various functions: data creation, co-analysis, interpretation, attitudes, and preferences. They show how the children interacted with various segments of society and enacted their agency to various degrees of functionality. The data collected during each stage are around the outside of the squares and the themes that evolved from the data are interlocking puzzle pieces within each mosaic.

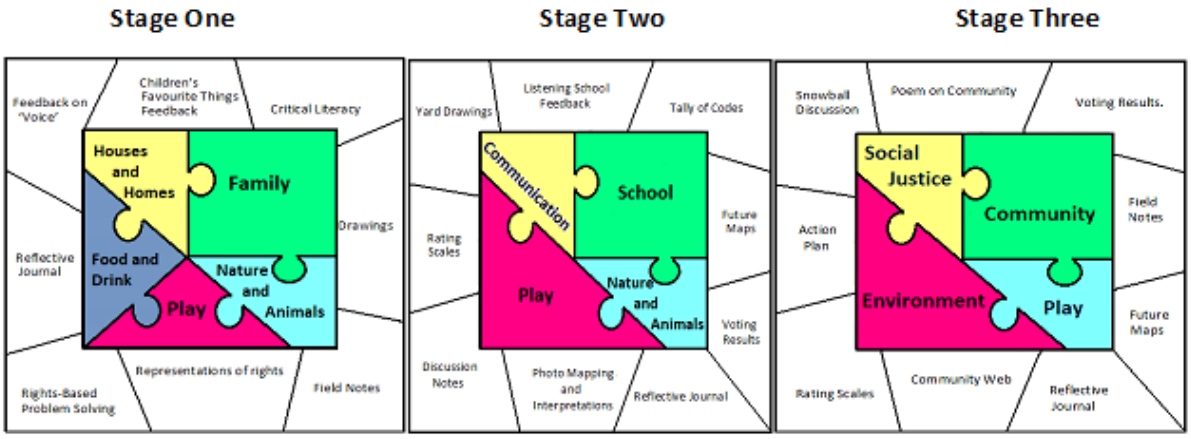


Figure 5.1. The Three Mosaics

The core themes, *family, school,* and *community* were the intended focus for each stage. They each occupy the mosaic's cornerstone space as they were the themes planned for exploration during the classroom-based practice and were therefore most frequently discussed and referenced in the data. The children's treatment of these themes is important as their perception of these spaces suggest how they conceptualise their agency and functionality in different contexts.

There was a cumulative effect of matters being identified and then amplified through a responsive increase in resources. These provisions consisted of tailored literature, discussions and actions based on emergent themes. This reflexive response conveyed to the children that they were being listened to and subsequently led to increased coding to that theme. The themes of *family, school* and *community* are explored in the section on core themes and the other matters that arose during the study are explored in the subsequent section on overarching themes.

The first mosaic

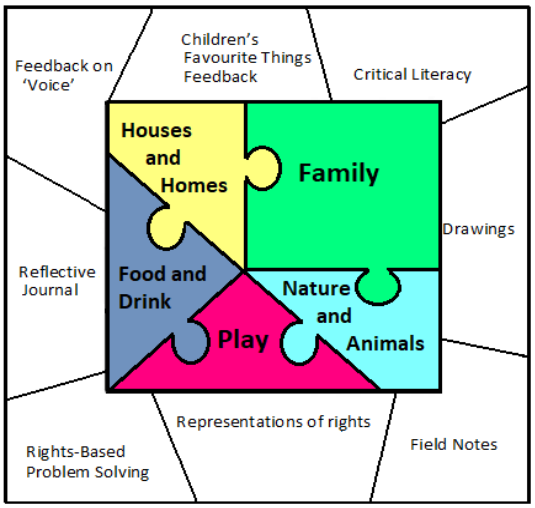


Figure 5.2. The first mosaic

In this first stage, the children's own rights and voices were observed and developed. This innermost functioning of society, the self and the close family relate to the microsystem. The completed lessons can be found in Appendix E. The cornerstone theme was *family,* and several other important themes arose; *nature and animals* which would persist throughout the study and become a focus for action; *play* which would also become an overarching theme present throughout the various aspects of the children's lives and a motivator for agentic expression. Two other themes: *houses and homes* and *food and drink* were also identified which would later be interpreted broadly as experiences and expressions of *care and choice*.

The second mosaic

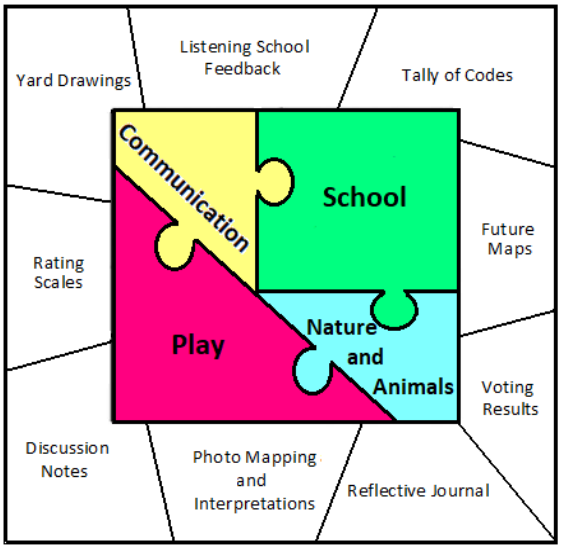


Figure 5.3. The second mosaic

In this second stage, the children explored how their inner lives connect outward to a wider system; school, or the mesosystem. Again, the completed lessons can be found in Appendix E.

The cornerstone theme in this stage was *school. Play* reappeared as a more dominant theme, due to it being both a learning framework and of keen interest to this demographic. *Communication* was frequently coded in this stage as the children demonstrated the desire to connect the various systems in their lives and ensure they were being heard, cared for and afforded choice. Each of these themes is discussed later in relation to overarching themes. *Nature and animals* was again an important theme and the language of *care and choice* was evident in it also. The themes which would later be analysed under the term *care and choice* are depicted here under their initial interpretations to trace their identification and synthesis.

The third mosaic

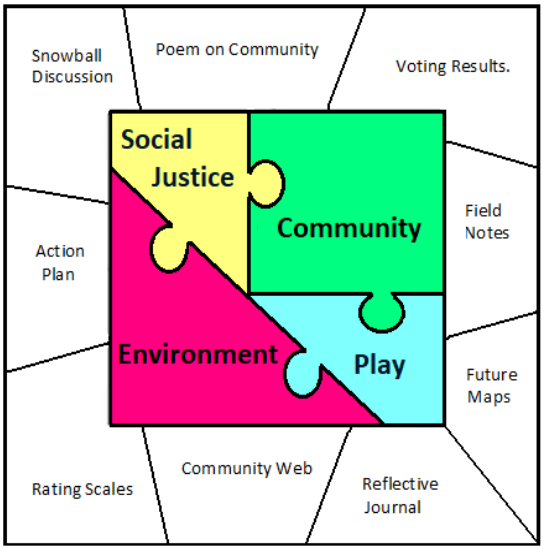


Figure 5.4. The third mosaic

In this final mosaic, the focus turned towards the children's exosystem and their current and potential roles within their wider sphere; *community* was the cornerstone theme. These completed lessons can be found in Appendix E also. The overarching theme of *nature and animals* is represented more generally by the term *environment*. This was to demonstrate the evolving nature of the relationship between the children and this theme. The children's initial interest in animals, nature and their well-being developed into determination to promote environmental awareness and action. This, in turn, led to the emergence of *social justice* as a theme. It is explored later as an expression of the overarching theme, *care and choice*. Again, *play* was an important theme and methodology as the project strove towards fusing the matters that affect children and how they could become engaged, agentic actors.

5.3 Exploring Core Themes

Each core theme explored below is linked to one of the three distinct stages of the study. As was detailed previously, they each link to evolving systems within Bronfenbrenner's model, *family* representing the microsystem, *school* representing the mesosystem, and *community*

representing the exoystem. The exploration of these themes helped identify important matters affecting the children and how the children view themselves within their world.

Core theme: Family

Family was depicted as the largest puzzle piece in the first mosaic due to its prevalence in coding. In the first lesson, families were portrayed as rights defenders; children linked *family* to the right to a home and other basic provision such as food and drink. These were coded separately but are explored under the theme of *care and choice* in the next section. In the second lesson families were identified as people who listened. The children named "family", "parents", "grandparents", and "siblings" as people who listened to their voices. It was evident that the children had experience of being heard, no child claimed that no one listened to them. In the third lesson families were described as the "most important things" by some children and concerns for family happiness and pleasing families were evident. Seeing their families happy was a primary concern to the children; "I wanna make my brother and sister happier," "my family to be happier." They wanted to contribute to their families' happiness. This implies cooperative and altruistic tendencies among the children.

Finally, during lesson 4, the children depicted parents as problem-solvers. One pairing suggested that their parents could "call the guards" to ask disruptive older children to make way for younger children to play in a playground. In another role-play scenario within this lesson, while discussing what to do about a torn teddy, one child commented: **"**instead of crying, if you want to cry you don't have to cry because your mum can fix it." The children's reliance on caregivers to listen to their needs is explored later in relation to *care and choice*, it is also discussed further in Chapter Six.

Core theme: School

School, as a key component of the child's microsystem, was the focus of Stage Two. Through discussion and photomapping, children were asked what elements of school were most conducive to decision-making and child agency. Sample collages of the children's photomaps can be seen in Appendix H*. Play* and *nature and animals* were the two themes most frequently associated with the children's enjoyment of school; they were the most photographed and most widely discussed. The references to *play* were made in relation to the school yard and classroom play areas. Both themes became the subject of ballots during the study. Some school activities the children enjoyed were making art, playing with friends, stories, and planting. The children, through their photographs in lesson 6, located open-ended activities such as role-play and small world as sites for decision-making. This correlates with the aims of these methods as they pertain to child-led play. The frequency with which these

spaces were recognised as sites for decision-making is evidenced by Figure 5.7 in the section on *play*.

Core theme: Community

Community was the cornerstone theme in the final stage, exploring the children's exosystem. After recognising their shared interests during coding and analysis in lesson 8, the children showed determination for shared action. This was evident in their ideas for balloting, and in the future maps they created. In lesson 9 the children discussed feelings associated with community by collectively weaving a web; the language recorded was used to compose a poem on community that acted as both feedback and an ongoing reminder about including others. This poem along with photographs of the web and flash cards can be found at Appendix I. The responses the children gave regarding how exclusion might make someone feel, were empathetic and demonstrated compassion and understanding: "sad and sorry," "not nice," "not fair," "annoying and sad and a bit angry." These emotional responses suggest concern for others and capacity for compassionate citizenship. Concern for others within the community was evident in earlier stages and is explored in the overarching theme *care and choice*. There was further evidence of concern for others in the future maps where positive actions for the global community were discussed and the wellbeing of the environment, for all to enjoy, was paramount. This ability to demonstrate concern for others links with Nussbaum's central capabilities and emerged as foundational in how the children demonstrated functional agency; this is elaborated on in Chapter Six.

5.4 Determining Overarching Themes

New emergent themes became evident through the processes of grounded theory discussed in Chapter Four. These themes were developed throughout the study and show the matters the children reported as most important to them. Unlike the core themes which were designed and contained in the outset plan, and can be found in Appendix D, the overarching themes found in this section are the accumulation of the children's responses, attitudes and values that evolved iteratively and were co-interpreted. The earliest iterations of these themes were subsumed into the design of subsequent stages. The plan for my classroom-based practice was inherently flexible to allow for this crucial input from the co-researcher children. The findings on each theme explored in this section relay the data it emerged from and how it was interpreted to develop both the study and classroom practices.

The theme of *care and choice* ran throughout the study but was not named as such by the children; it was the synthesis of other previously unlinked themes in each stage. *Nature and animals* became an in vivo code in lesson 8 but had been evident throughout; it became the children's primary interest as they led the study into the final stage. *Play* was also evident

throughout as a methodology, a right and a motivating concern through which the children could explore democratic practices.

5.4.1 Care and choice

This overarching theme collated earlier themes which were originally interpreted individually and later merged. The themes of *houses and homes, food and drink, communication* and *social justice* were reinterpreted and reconceptualised as relating to issues of *care and choice*. The exploration of children's rights in the first stage prompted discussions about how the children were cared for and those who care for them. The children connected most readily with the rights to shelter and adequate food; *houses and homes* and *food and drink*; these are now conceptualised as their experiences of *care and choice*. *Communication* was a concern in the second stage of the study, this generally related to communicating with caregivers, sharing experiences of school, or having their opinions heard and listened to. In the final stage *social justice* emerged as a concern, the children wanted to ensure that not only their own needs were being met but also the needs of others. This was later interpreted as the children's expression of *care and choice*.

Care and choice, Stage One

In lesson 1 a teacher-researcher-made picture book was used to explore children's rights; Teddy's various needs were depicted through images of him lacking, e.g., cold, excluded from school, kept in dirty or dangerous places. Of the thirteen responses to this book submitted into data, eight related to Teddy's right to have a house, home, bed or sleep e.g., "go to bed," "Teddy has the right to go to sleep." One child dictated that Teddy had the right to "have a home" and elsewhere on the image wrote the word "Haous," an approximated spelling of the word house, indicating that he felt these terms were interchangeable. Sample responses can be seen in Appendix J. The children's concerns were for Teddy's immediate safety and care. Similarly, the children demonstrated their experience of care and their desire to extend this commodity to others in lesson 3. One child outlined how the most important thing in the world to her was "to be nice to people and help people… to be kind to people, to have lots of friends and help them". This suggests that for these children, providing care and catering for basic needs are positioned ahead of many other concerns.

Another early theme was the right to food e.g., "eat and drink," and "eat pizza…," initially it was understood as another familiar and relatable need and linked to experiences of care. However, from lesson 2 this appeared not only to be a familiar connector to children's rights but also as a site where children recognised themselves as decision-makers and exercised their agency. This suggests these children have experienced choice, have demonstrated ability to make decisions and recognise their capacity to bring about action.

Where do you use your voice?

Johnathan – Bel Cibo [Restaurant], you get pizza and spaghetti Bolognese you get to choose what you like
Dara – McDonalds, you always have… get food and order it and say how much money you're going to give them for the food.
Kevin – For shops, even in different kinds of shops.
Tadgh – The shop, Tesco.

Figure 5.5. Extract from lesson 2

Above are sample responses to the question "Where do we use our voices?" in lesson 2. Of the twelve responses, four related to restaurants and shops. Children report the opportunity to choose food outside the home. Two of these responses make clear statements about food-outlets being sites for choice or decision-making, and they link choices and causation. This implies that the children understood *voice* in terms of choices and interpreted ordering food as an opportunity for agency and exerting influence within their daily lives. This desire to make decisions about the food they eat relates to Sen's theory of functionings and the essential role of choice when determining a person's capabilities and level of opportunity. This experience supports the concept of these young children having the capacity to make decisions and demonstrate functional agency.

Care and choice, Stage Two

During early analysis, *communication* was identified as a key theme in this stage. Previously, communication with caregivers was interwoven with the core theme of *family*, seeking help from parents to problem-solve, uphold their rights or help them find a toilet or snack. In the second stage however, this pattern of young children asking caregivers for what they needed became a distinct theme.

The children communicated with caregivers by directly asking for what they wanted or needed. This was true both in the family setting during Stage One and again in the school setting in Stage Two. The children reported easy communication with adults in school. When seeking increased play provisions, the children believed they only needed to ask the principal when she would visit them. When asked who listens to them at school, they included the teacher, the principal, the school secretary, and caretaker (each by name), along with their friends. This suggests that the children experienced a high level of interaction and care from those they interacted with at school and that communicating their needs was generally easy and successful in this context.

Although these experiences of being listened to by caregivers are positive, some ambiguity existed elsewhere. In lesson 2, a few children suggested that "everyone" listened to them, one

child suggested “everyone I like” listened to him. There appeared to be a distinction between named adult caregivers as “people who listen” and other unnamed adults as less likely to listen. Adults referred to by name are cited as people who listen, whereas obscure adults known as “they” could not be depended on to listen. In lesson 4 some children query what would happen if their attempts to communicate their needs to adults are not heard.

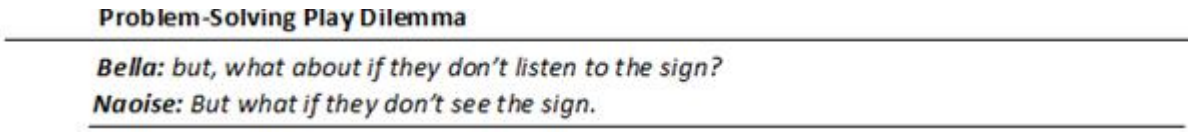


Figure 5.6. Extract from lesson 4

These responses relating to how the children wanted to keep a local beach clean, may suggest children’s perceived limitations of their literacy, an inability to predict adult behaviour or perhaps experiences of adult apathy. Other environmental concerns the children articulated such as deforestation, loss of habitats and factory pollution as explored in the third stage, are all adult-led activities affecting the children. It raises questions about what can be done about children not feeling heard by adults in relation to their concerns, about the extent to which Article 12 has been realised in this mesosystem and it supports an increase of functional agency among children so that they might enjoy greater capacity to make decisions affecting their own lives. These factors are discussed in Chapter Six in relation to voice.

Choice was evident during the “Listening school” activity in lesson 7, the children asked to repeat activities they had already experienced and enjoyed at school; they requested to draw with chalk on the yard again, have more small-world play or in one instance to “make it[school] longer.” This suggests that the children enjoyed these activities, and they were ones they would choose for themselves, again supporting Sen’s focus on choice as a determining factor in functionings. It also demonstrates that when afforded choice, these children made choices conducive to rights realisation as they mention education, play, creative self-expression and environmental preservation.

Care and choice, Stage Three

In the final stage, *care and choice* were evident through the emergent theme of *social justice*. In the mosaic of the third stage, *social justice* was the term used to encapsulate the children’s shift from caring for friends and family towards seeking just-action more generally. In lesson 6 one child recognised the importance of shared play spaces, “Well, because everybody plays with the animals” and articulated a desire to use the class chatter corner to express and extend care; “because I want to help somebody else… because if they have a problem, fixing it”.

In the third stage of the study, critical engagement with the theme of *community* resulted in prolonged periods of scaffolded peer-to-peer discussions exploring the exosystem of their society. The children made multiple references to actions relating to social justice that can also be conceptualised as expressions of care. The children were concerned with sharing and fair treatment of others, they were also committed to emergent ideas of climate justice which are explored in subsequent sections. One child, during the future mapping activity in lesson 12 claimed that they want to "make life better" in the future while another child claimed that their wish was "that there's no factories because it makes people cough". The children cited examples from family members regarding how to act towards common goals such as reducing waste and caring for habitats. These references were generally connected to critical literacy; the children linked actions they had experienced in the home with positive examples from storybooks. During the previous stage, the children sought to ensure that their peers were enjoying fair access to art and play areas and in this stage, the children were desirous of their wider community having access to an unpolluted and safe environment. "Sunny," "shiny," "clean" and "happy" are words that the children used to describe the future they envisaged. The children translated their witness of care into their own caring acts thus demonstrating both choice and care as important matters. The form of care the children employed is called "motivational displacement" and is explored in Chapter Six. The use of imagined futures is also explored further in Chapter Six as a practical means of building children's functional agency.

5.4.2 Play

Play was a recurring theme throughout the three stages. In the first stage the right to play is explored as are the ways in which play might facilitate children using their voices to establish agency. In the second stage *play* is explored as a key methodology and as a means by which the children can engage in democratic practices. Finally, in the third stage *play* is used to demonstrate the importance of community and playful methods are employed to encourage narrative imagination and creative approaches to social problems. As with each of the overarching themes, the children's interest in this topic led to its expanding role within the study; children's discussion of *play* as a matter affecting them was met with a corresponding increase in the employment of play as a motivator for participation.

Play, Stage One

During the first lesson, it was suggested that "Teddy" in our book on rights needed a swimming pool, this caused great amusement to the children who, although appearing to otherwise understand the distinction between needs and wants from previous discussions, maintained that Teddy "needed" a swimming pool and had a right to it. The children's

multiple references to this swimming pool could be read as children maintaining a shared narrative or it could be representative of Teddy's need for fun and the right to play. Similarly, children included answers of a fantasy nature to other questions and these responses were linked to the need for playful interactions. The methodological decision was made to recognise the playfulness and appropriateness of these responses and the children's authentic desire to engage with the project in a creative manner rather than seek more standard answers. Such responses include having the right to "sharp teeth and a tail" and having a right to "a house and the house has legs." In lesson 4 the children were given miniature dolls to facilitate role play when navigating their rights-based problem scenarios. The transcripts from this lesson were playful and shared the element of fantasy noted in other lessons; they referenced penguins playing house and the desire to "just play."

In lesson 3, while locating where and when children use their voices at school, our toy-bear talking-prompt was mentioned; "when it's our turn with Paddington Bear." The bear is taken home by a child each weekend; its inclusion suggests that their weekly presentations about playing with the bear at home are significant and that speaking in front of the class in this way is an important participation event. Children stand in front of the class to present artwork in a similar format, but this discussion of imaginative play and home is evidently more impactful. The playground was also mentioned as a site where children used their voices to have basic needs met, "at the playground if you're hungry or if you're little and you need the toilet." *Play*, like these basic needs, is a constant in the lives of these children and play opportunities were clearly linked with voice opportunities.

Play, Stage Two

The children undertook more prominent roles as co-researchers during Stage Two. They contributed to the interpretation of the data gathered during each lesson, and they engaged in picture analysis and early coding. One of the most significant activities in this stage of the study took place during lesson 8 when the children reviewed photographs taken during the lesson 6 photomapping activity and coded the photographs based on their interpretations. Below is a graph showing the number of photographs tallied by the children to each of their themes. The themes are identified by in vivo codes the children attributed to them. Although *nature and animals* had the highest tally, cumulatively, it was play areas that were photographed most frequently. *Role-play*, *small-world* and *junk art* on the graph all relate to play areas that the children engage with on a daily basis in child-led play. The commitment to a playful approach to teaching and learning permeated the classroom-based practice.

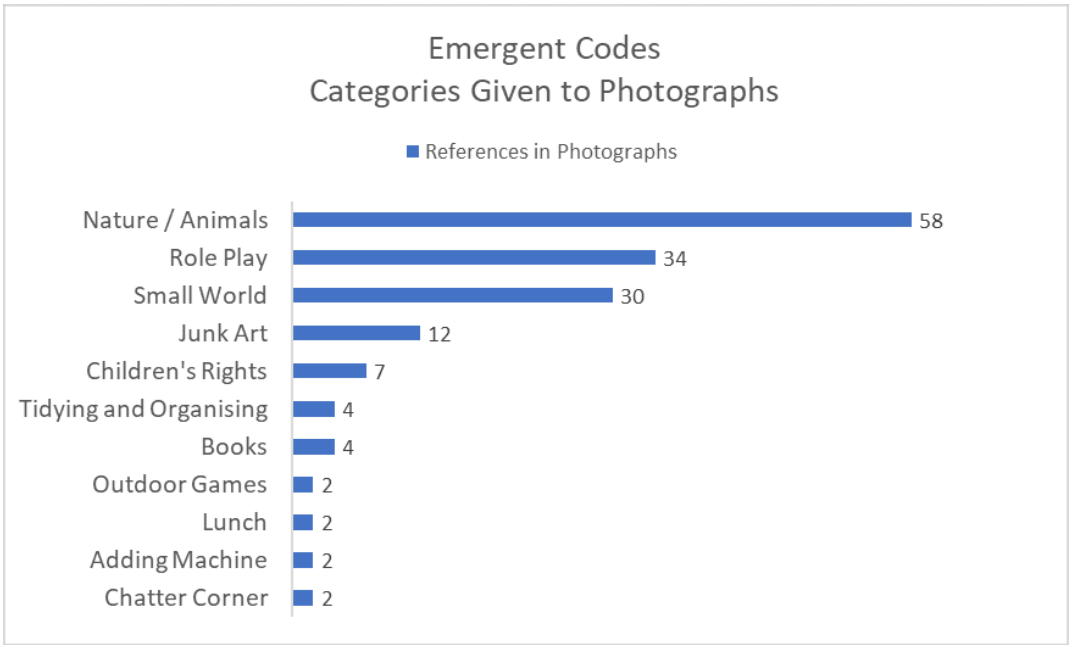


Figure 5.7. Tally of codes relating to photomapping images

Play has the highest cumulative number of photographs according to the graph above. All the participating children captured images of play areas. This recognition of play areas as a favourite part of the room was articulated by a number of the children during conferencing on their photomaps; "because it's a play area… and it's one of my favourites." The children were asked where they made decisions for others and play-based activities were the most frequently mentioned "for everyone to be allowed to play in junk art," "yeah because I think a lot of people like it."

In lesson 5, the children discussed changes they could make at school and the changes they requested predominantly related to play facilities. Their perception of inadequate outdoor play options led to the decision to design and create temporary games on the school yard using chalk. Images of these yard drawings can be seen in Appendix K. This was the first explicit action resulting from the children's discussions and it was followed by a subsequent increase in levels of assent. The assent process is further explored in Chapter Six. This lesson also demonstrated comprehension of previous discussions about needs and wants as the more extravagant suggestions for school improvement were tempered by other children when requests tapered from a "fake Ferrari" to "a ramp."

In lesson 7 the discussion of *play* continued and once again reflected the children's desire to make decisions relating to play provision. During the "Listening school" activity greater outdoor and indoor play was a focus of the children's drawings:

Danielle: *Really curly slide. A wood and stick house to climb on. Bird feeder, tunnel, hill, slide, treehouse with bedroom, stove and pretend tap.*

Quentin: *I would change small world to more insect. It was the best one.*

Figure 5.8. Listening School Responses

These drawings demonstrate what the children believe school might look like if they had greater input into running it. They reflect recurring ideas, including increased play, and connection with nature. The first image shows green grass, trees and daisies in the centre surrounded by outdoor toys, a "really curly slide" to the left, a "tunnel" and a "treehouse." The second image shows a collection of "insect[s]" sticks and leaves drawn to denote the small world area. Other drawings suggested that children wanted to repeat activities they had taken part in previously in the study such as "more drawing with chalk" and "more small-world." More samples of listening school responses are available in Appendix L.

Finally, in lesson 8, the significance of *play* led to it being used to motivate interest in democratic practices. The class was familiar with discussing and choosing the new theme for our play areas; as one child remembered: "get it by choosing them, everybody chooses them." The high levels of interest in these areas indicated that it would draw a high level of

participation in a ballot. The levels of assent at various points of the study are explored later as a measure of their participation and engagement, however, there was full assent in this lesson. This was taken as a positive indicator that play offered a rich context for promoting democratic practices amongst the children. Below is a graph showing the rating the children gave this balloting process.

Figure 5.9. Rating Scale from Lesson 8

The combination of the ballot process and its subject matter, the choice of new play theme, resulted in the vast majority of the children reporting this as a very enjoyable activity. The rating scale used is contained in Appendix M.

Play, Stage Three

Play was employed as an impetus for discussing inclusion in lesson 9; the children imagined belonging to a community in terms of being part of a communal game. Passing and throwing a ball of wool to each child in turn to show their connection to themes and one another was a compelling activity in which every child in the class chose to participate. The web of wool created a visual for the children indicating how they were linked to each other. Afterward it was pinned to the wall and interspersed with the children's language about community. Other play-based methods were subsequently employed such as snowball discussions in lesson 10 and the use of wishing wands to aid future mapping in lesson 12. Experiential learning is akin to play and is developmentally appropriate for children of this age, such experiential learning took the forms of watering plants, feeding fish etc.

5.4.3 Nature and animals

Nature and Animals was the most consistently occurring theme across all stages of the study, presenting itself spontaneously in the children's talk and pictures. This theme spanned from care for family pets and desire to play outside, to shared action that increased outdoor learning for schoolmates, to imagining an end to climate change. As children's interest persisted and grew, I scaffolded their ideas, encouraged them to discuss this topic and share

their collective knowledge. The children displayed greater agency around this topic than in any other aspect of the study.

Nature and animals, Stage One

The children showed an interest in a range of animals in lesson 3: "I like my pet cat and she's called Brush," "fish. snakes, reptiles and lizards." Some children referenced a desire to protect and preserve nature: "this place to be cleaner and Ireland to be cleaner", "cleaning the world, so fishes don't die." Of the thirteen children who assented to co-research in lesson 3, eight mentioned animals or nature as one of the things that matter most to them in the world. The popularity of *nature and animals* as a matter concerning the children in this early stage led learning and shared action during later stages of the study.

The desire to help family and others detailed in the earlier section on care was also extended to animals. In both lessons 3 and 4 children expressed their interest in animals and nature and they intertwined their desire to help animals with their desire to help people. The children's commitment to creating positive change for both animals and people may suggest that their acts of care have no expectation of reciprocity.

Nature and animals, Stage Two

The codes tallied by the children in Figure 5.7 showed *nature and animal*s as the most frequently photographed theme in lesson 6. However, the in vivo codes were broad terms, and most *nature and animals* coded images were also coded to various play areas. Minibeasts and bugs were the focus of our class play areas during this classroom-based study. They featured strongly in the children's photographs; however, these areas may have been of equal interest under a different theme. There was a great deal of overlap between *play* codes and the *nature and animals* code; many of the images created in lesson 6 were coded for both. In the conferences about the photomaps, animals and nature were discussed in relation to artwork and storybooks also. The children insisted that it was not only toy animals that they were concerned with but real ones; "It's just that I really like nature and I like helping nature… helping real life nature."

Nature and animals became the stimulus for shared action based on the children's sustained interest. The children wanted to spend more time learning outside. The themes of *play* and *nature and animals* overlapped as previously discussed when they drew playground games for their schoolmates in lesson 5. The children began to water the school plants, planted strawberries and mangetout. The Ecosia search engine was downloaded and regularly checked for the number of trees being planted by the Ecosia project. The focus of the study was thereafter led by this key issue, and further literature relating to nature and the

environment was added to the reading list. Having coded and tallied the photographs, the children themselves were aware of the dominance of this theme and witnessed their shared interests and commonality, this appeared to have a cohesive effect on the group and increased levels of assent were observed in lessons after this one.

Environment, Stage Three

In the third mosaic, this theme was termed *environment* to reflect the fact that the children's thinking had become more focused on environmental preservation. The children continued to pursue this theme and sought greater opportunities to share their knowledge of it and formulate potential actions relating to it. As reporting on the importance of the *environment* grew, so too did teaching and learning on the topic increase in response.

In lesson 10 the children wanted to help owls, geckos, jaguars and wolves. The children consistently focused their advocacy on animals and the natural world. As the children often viewed their decision-making powers in relation to helping animals, the onus was on the teacher to frequently remind the children to consider their own rights and the rights of other children. This raises questions about how children view themselves as social actors, perhaps they felt more capable of agency in relation to animals than other people. The responses reflect some of Nussbaum's central capabilities such as "control over one's environment" and "concern for" other species (2011).

In lesson 11 the children had the opportunity to vote on themes for their final action plan. The children voted to focus on water sources. The final future map and action plan were based on this ballot. Below is the breakdown of the ballots and a photograph of the ballot boxes, the action plan is in Appendix N.

Table 5.1

Ballot on collective action in lesson 12

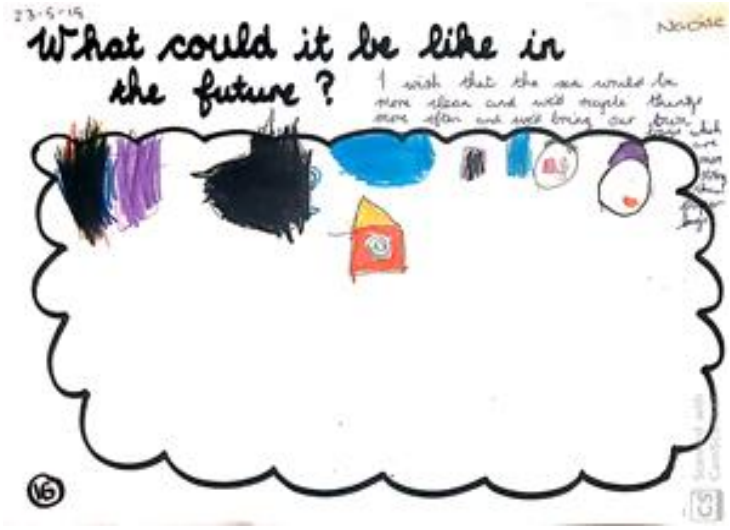
Lesson 12	**Ballot to decide the focus for our action plan.**			
Theme	Clean Water	Saving Trees	Litter	Animals and Bees
Overall Number of Votes	12	10	3	11

Figure 5.10. Ballot boxes

The suggested topics were *clean water, saving trees, reducing litter,* and h*elping animals and bees*. They received a total of twelve, ten, three and eleven votes respectively. This vote differed from the previous ballot as it gave children a first and second preference vote. “Clean water” won both the most first preference votes and the most overall votes.

Below are samples of the future mapping activity in lesson 12 where the children imagined the world their action plan would create. The images reflect how care and action were coupled together in the children’s desire to protect the natural world. These future maps were the most detailed and identifiable images created during this study, again demonstrating an expression of the children’s care.

Naoise: I wish that the sea would be more clean and we'd recycle things more often and we'd bring our own bags which are more strong than paper bags.



Bella: To make life better with a poster saying don't throw rubbish in the water and then we won't swim in dirty water.

Figure 5.11. Future Maps from Lesson 12

The images focused on individual actions that have potential for widespread positive change. The first image encourages people to recycle and reuse bags so that litter does not pollute water sources. The second image suggests making posters to remind others not to "throw rubbish in the water" so that everyone can enjoy clean swimming spots. The maps link the themes of *community*, *environment, social justice* and even *play*. These future maps were detailed, imaginative and hopeful; they are revisited in the section on *Evolving questioning* in this chapter. The action plan created in lesson 12 outlined potential acts of environmental protection within the three systems explored in each of the three stages: the microsystem,

the mesosystem, and the exosystem. This plan brought together the various systems within the child's society and connected them through a shared goal of water conservation.

5.5 Children's Choices in Reporting

The children were continuously extended the offer to participate in this study, their reporting was never taken for granted. Therefore, the decision to act as a co-researcher within each lesson was an opportunity for the children to exercise their decision-making powers. This extended the boundaries of the child's agency in the classroom as it is not typical of everyday lessons. It also had the potential to result in data loss that could limit the children's voice. Although this practice shifted the study somewhat outside the everyday experience of the classroom, it was valuable in exploring not only how the children might engage in agentic classroom practices, but why.

5.5.1 Children's assent

Continual assent-seeking was a methodological prerequisite as it foregrounded the children's choice to participate. Active participation was conceptualised as more than assent alone; it sought critical engagement with topics, contributing to a knowledge democracy and commitment to shared goals and actions. Assent had originally been conceptualised as only the first indicator in children's participation, but it took on an unexpected level of significance. Levels of assent fluctuated throughout the study. The assent procedure was important as it communicated the children's perceptions of activities, the social capital associated with participation or whether the topics were interesting and engaging. The numbers of children assenting in each lesson became an important data source. The graph at Figure 5.12 shows the number of children who assented to engage in co-research during each lesson. The overall trend indicates greater participation as the study progressed.

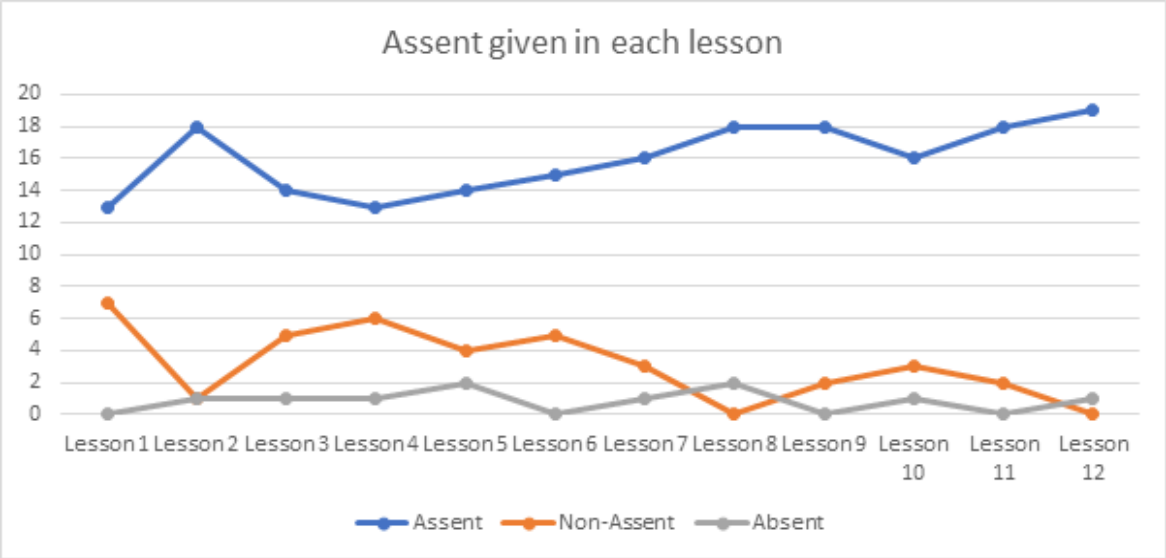


Figure 5.12. Levels of Assent

The graph above shows that in lesson 1 there were seven children not assenting to participate as co-researchers and thirteen who assented. The trend in this graph shows that levels of assent generally rose throughout the study and levels of non-assent fell. Contributing factors to this trend may have included an initial sense of novelty in the option of non-assent, a growing familiarity or trust within the research processes or a greater level of interest among the children in the themes being explored. The children, although familiar with child-led methodologies, do not generally have the option of curriculum negotiation or non-participation in discrete lessons. The idea of being asked to take part or not in a class lesson was a great novelty to the children. It is possible that the children utilised the assent process to explore new boundaries within their classroom space.

5.5.2 Negotiation, a demonstration of agency

The places that children name as sites where they feel heard during lesson 2 are ones where they can obtain immediate tangible action results such as in a restaurant ordering food, having something bought for them in a shop, communicating urgent needs at the playground, home, or school. These sites suggest receptive audiences for children. These are the places where the children learned to negotiate. In lesson 5 in a discussion about improving our school the children began negotiating what play provisions could be made outside; they started with a “fake Ferrari” or a “treehouse” and settled on creating games with chalk. They worked within the confines of the resources available yet still exercised choice and engaged in democratic participation with one another. There was a focus on reciprocal action in this study so that children felt their voices were being given due weight and influence and they experienced the gratifying nature of reciprocity.

In lesson 6, the objective was to photograph locations for decision-making in the classroom. The children demonstrated preferences for various areas of the classroom. Many cited the shared nature of these spaces as their reason for preferring them; "*Because it's a play area and it's one of my favourites and, em, everybody goes there."* The children generally took photographs because they liked something in the image rather than linking it to decision-making, which had been the objective. However, during the audio commentary many tried to negotiate why their image linked to the task; "*Yeah because I think a lot of people like it."* This revision of the activity showed the children's ability to adapt and reframe their work, their reporting of the activity changed according to their audience.

Small-world is a site of daily child-led play and was referred to as "*the best one"* during conferencing on the photomaps. The ballot planned for lesson 8 was based on small-world themes due to the high interest it garnered in the photomaps tallied at Figure 5.7; this drew full assent from the children. The themes suggested were seaside, rainforest, army camp, and underwater. The votes for each were twelve votes, one vote, five votes and no votes, respectively.

Table 5.2

Ballot on new small-world theme lesson 8

Lesson 8	**Ballot to decide the next theme in our play spaces.**			
Theme	Seaside	Rainforest	Army Camp	Underwater
Overall Number of Votes	12	1	5	0

Each child was given a token to cast into one of four ballot boxes. The most popular theme was seaside; this became the new focus of our child-led play areas. The high level of assent in this lesson and the sustained interest in *play* demonstrates the potential for children to experience participation and empowerment through high-interest, age-appropriate activities. The importance of negotiation in functional agency is explored further in Chapter Six.

5.5.3 Acts of non-compliance, expressions of agentic citizenship.

Low levels of assent and the loss of data at the outset of the study were perplexing. However, in retrospect, the children's decisions to enact newfound powers and agency were quite positive. Non-compliance with school norms such as enforced participation or handing up valuable products from a lesson e.g., drawings, express the children's security within their class environment and criticality towards everyday practices. Children who chose not to submit their work or to only observe a lesson did so in the knowledge that it would not affect our relationship and that they as creators of this knowledge could choose to share it or not.

Acts of citizenship (Larkins, 2014) as explored in Chapter Two wherein children engage in "[mis]behaviour" or "transgression" of boundaries were evident in response to the assent process. The fluctuating proportion of children who opted out of various lessons suggest an act of citizenship. These acts of noncompliance are more prevalent in the earlier stages of the study. The children did not feel compelled to participate in this school activity and many took the opportunity to deviate from the norm and experience the novelty of non-conformity. Acts of non-compliance move the children's participation away from passivity towards transformation (Fielding, 2004); they suggest a move away from educational and social conformity towards "empowerment" (Waldron & Oberman, 2016, p. 746).

5.6 Teacher Facilitation of Functional Agency.

The findings relating to the third research question about teacher's facilitation of agentic practices are addressed here. These findings evaluate the methods within this study and explore how to incorporate space and opportunity for children's functional agency in the junior classroom. There were four main strategies found most successful in promoting functional agency. One strategy was demonstrating children's potential for effecting change, and providing a space for them to do so. Another involved close listening to the issues that children wanted to act upon. A third was developing questions encouraging the children to feel confident, yet challenged within the class context. The final strategy was showing children the impact they can and are having on the world around them using critical literacy techniques. Together, these strategies created a scaffold for children from familiar interactions to imagined leadership and action and then exploring their functional agency within the classroom and beyond.

5.6.1 Creating space for action, demonstrating cause and effect

As previously discussed, play areas and opportunities to connect with nature were reported as spaces where children felt they could or wanted to make decisions. Once highly incentivised locations were discovered, the question became how best to utilise this knowledge.

To convey the value of the children's contributions, literature that connected with their reported interests was added to subsequent lessons; as a result, children made more frequent contributions. Children's input increased from one-word responses in the first lessons to detailed descriptions of personal experiences and proposed actions during the final lessons. This further increased their leadership within the study. This structured yet child-led space was achieved through offering expanding opportunities to speak about both personal and community issues. Activities were designed around high interest issues and carefully selected

listening techniques that promoted peer-to-peer dialogue were used. These methods which were outlined in Chapter Four resulted in more autonomous decision-making by the children and a positive set of long-lasting classroom protocols.

The future was another important agentic space. Opportunities for "imaginative engagement with the future" (Kirby, 2020, p. 19), in what Kirby called "projectivity" helped to promote children's functional agency. It offered them the chance to engage in open-ended problem-solving and positioned the future, not as a space where they could enact future citizenship, but as a space of which they could take ownership now. Children imagined what was possible if they engaged in action and could instigate change. This was done through discussions about what was possible if they were leaders at school, if they could help others, and through the "future mapping" activity adapted from *Creating Futures* (Oberman et al., 2016, Lesson 8) used in lessons 8 and 12. The importance of this lesson to the children can be seen in the detailed drawings they created of their imagined futures. These images are represented in Appendix O. Through this imagining, the children set goals for themselves at home, school and in the community and then planned necessary actions.

Another way that I facilitated the children's agency was by creating spaces within the classroom where the children could lead learning, punctuating the classroom environment with areas for child-led conversation, play and discovery learning. Such spaces included a chatter corner which was referenced in the photomapping activity in lesson 6, child-led play areas and, during the study, I employed elements of Boomer's (2005) curriculum negotiation. As was found in lessons 5 and 8, negotiating play resources and themes was an area of high interest and motivation to the children. This provided opportunities for the children to assume leadership and decision-making roles. The time given to choosing class themes, photomapping, and auditing school provisions may seem like an indulgent use of time; however, the enthusiasm and buy-in it created amongst children demonstrated by their rising assent could easily compensate for time lost to classroom management when teaching content of lower interest.

The degree to which these spaces contributed to functional agency is discussed in Chapter Six. Although this study was carried out within my classroom and is a close approximation of the children's typical experience there are some differences in the degree of functionality they experienced. This and the extent to which the children led learning are explored further in Chapter Seven.

5.6.2 Careful, multi-modal listening

A variety of listening techniques were pieced together using the multi-modal mosaic approach of listening detailed in Chapter Three (Clark & Moss, 2011). Recognising the children's modes of communication required deep, careful listening, looking for physical and verbal cues, recognising when children were most engaged and interpreting their various forms of voice. Mood, interest levels, utterances and symbolic gestures were noted and considered. Cyclical reflection and planning through the stages of the study incorporated this data. Below are extracts demonstrating how this form of data was listened to and recorded.

> The children enjoyed the diversity of responses Lily had, her reasoning for doing things and the way that they could not guess what she would say next. Through their body language and attention, it was clear that the children enjoyed the story. They enjoyed how creative Lily was and possibly that she sometimes did things that they think she should not like taking cookies from the jar.

Figure 5.13. Extract from field notes, lesson 4

These field notes capture the children's non-verbal communication and informal discussion. These informal listening methods gathered and assessed data daily in the classroom; they became formalised through this research process and contributed to the mosaics. This listening demonstrated the care and voice elevation within the Conceptual Framework. This level of nuanced listening underpins the care and connection with others required for functional agency to be experienced within classroom practices.

Transcripts of the photomapping conferences during lesson 6 lack the nuance of the conversations shared. The smiles and prideful tones of the children's voices observed and recorded in field notes pointed to the need for multi-modal listening. It also suggested that the children needed more practice in articulating their thoughts. This prompted me to incorporate more peer-to-peer interactions and build their capacities regarding voice. In lesson 10, the snowball method was used; the children discussed open-ended questions relating to the book *The Boy and the Jaguar*. Some of the children's responses were demonstrative of the most considered and engaged language contributed at any point in the study.

Danielle: Some people eat fish.
Teacher: They do, some people eat fish. Do you eat fish?
Bella: I eat fish.
Naoise: I eat fish.
Tara: I eat fish.
Éabha: There's danger for fish.
Naoise: But I don't eat, but I don't eat fish from the sea.
Teacher: You don't eat fish from the sea?
Naoise: I just eat fish which is made.
Teacher: Ah! OK!
Bella: I only eat fish that is dead, like from the good fish shop.

Figure 5.14. Extract from transcription of snowball 2, lesson 10

In this extract, the children are more interactive with one another than they previously had been, they made connections with one another's responses and showed a greater range of topical vocabulary. The children did not wait for teacher moderation or leadership. This denotes an increased level of self-confidence in their ability to lead and sustain conversations. The listening methods used were designed to elicit actionable responses, therefore making children aware of their influence and role in causation. It was found that, as children contributed more as they recognised the influence of their contributions. Lesson 5 resulted in drawing playground games and lessons 8 and 11 balloted the children about future class activities, each of these lessons produced actions clearly linked to the children's decisions, and assent to participate in the study rose after each of these lessons.

5.6.3 Evolving questioning, time to adopt and adapt

During the initial stage, closed questioning with reassuringly simple answers was predominantly used within lessons to build children's confidence. Later, the questions became more open-ended, wait-time was increased to give children more time to reflect or elaborate on their ideas. Both forms of questioning had merit but fulfilled a different function; they were based on Bloom's revised taxonomy (Anderson et al., 2001). The closed questions in the initial stage were often based on storybooks or familiar settings such as "Who listens to your voices at home?" These questions assured children of their abilities; alleviating the fears expressed by one child during reading of the plain language statement that she would have nothing to say. The first step in conveying functional agency was ensuring that all children knew they had valuable contributions to make.

Revisiting previously asked questions proved beneficial, knowing the format of the questions and response pages provided the necessary time and reassurance for children to expand on their thinking since it was first asked; children were more confident, and their answers were

more detailed. Below are the responses from a second future mapping activity in lesson 12 using the same question and response page as that in lesson 8.

Naoise: I wish that the sea would be more clean and we'd recycle things more often and we'd bring our own bags which are more strong than paper bags.
Tadhg: No cans and rubbish in the mud and on the land for the crocodiles and turtles.
Tara: All the sea clean and not dirty and no rubbish in the sea and then it will be really happy for me and for other children and for fish and for turtles and I want them to be happy.

Figure 5.15. Extract from 'future mapping' activity annotations, lesson 12

These future maps are included in Appendix O and show a dedication to the theme of environmental action that evolved through the children's sustained interest. This demonstrates the benefits of revising activities so that children can gain familiarity with agentic processes and voice activation. New vocabulary became generalised throughout the school day as the themes of the study were integrated across the curriculum. The use of language developed during the study applied to other contexts was captured in the field notes. Below is an observation indicating that the children are generalising their learning from lesson 9:

Later, the children made collaborative drawing and colouring responses to the story "We all sing with one voice" and they were observed voting on what to draw, which ideas to pick and using language from the lesson such as "now we are all attached on our idea".

Figure 5.16. Extract from field notes, lesson 9

The word "attached" was a word used to describe community during lesson 9 and would not have previously been used in this context. Although the word is not grammatically correct in this sentence, its use demonstrates an understanding of community and people joining together on ideas and projects. The voting within this group was also undirected and showed that the children had adopted this practice and applied it to tasks of a similar theme outside the research process. This time to assimilate learning into thought and action allowed the children to integrate their learning about democracy into their interactions with one another.

5.6.4 Representations in literature

Through guided interaction with high-quality picture-books, the children explored their rights and the rights of others. This kind of critical literacy is a "key skill in global citizenship education" (Oberman et al., 2014) and was explored in Chapter Four. The books predominantly featured children engaging in social-justice actions and recognised either the power of the individual child or the power of the collective. They demonstrated the agentic potential of children. The content of each book targeted a specific context as per

Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model: firstly, the self, then the school environment and further outward into addressing global issues. In this way the children were presented with representations of what they were capable of in various areas of their lives. These picture books also relayed some of the effects the macrosystem and chronosystem may have in the child's life and increased their awareness of these more abstract yet ever-present influences on their lives. The effectiveness of picture-books in conveying global themes was in accordance with the literature in Chapter Four. The children were engaged in thoughtful discussion and forged links between the story content and their own lives as well as wider issues as evidenced in the extract below:

> During the story we had a discussion on plastic as the 'R' page was about recycling and the children began to chime in in turn that 'I do that too' one after another. They mentioned how mums used the same bag every time they went to the shop, one set of grandparents shop in a shop where the fruit and vegetables had no plastic and you 'just use your own bag'. I reminded the children that they used the same water bottles in school every day and that people used to throw away their bottles when they were finished but they didn't, so they were already planet patrollers helping our planet.

Figure 5.17. Extract from field notes, lesson 12

Through engaging with books such as *26 Big Things Small Hands Can Do* as discussed in the extract above and the *I Think for Myself* range, the children experienced the potential of children as social actors and creative decision-makers, and by extension, began to see themselves in this way also.

5.7 Conclusion

The findings in this chapter are broad and varied. They relate to the matters affecting many areas of their lives. *Family, school* and *community* were core themes, but new themes emerged from the data and were then drawn together into overarching themes; *care and choice, play* and *nature and animals*. These matters, as reported by the children are significant since the definition of what matters to children is reported by adults.

This study does not claim to represent an extensive or exhaustive list of all matters affecting children since some matters affecting them may not yet be known to children or may relate to macrosystems or chronosystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1995, 2005) they have not yet experienced, or may not yet comprehend. This is important given the diversity of childhoods that children experience, the societal limits on what children can experience, the innumerable variables of persons, processes, contexts and time in a child's development. Rather, this study gave children the opportunity to report and research the matters affecting them, and in so

doing, develop the concept of functional agency. This term was explored in the Conceptual Framework and is reflected upon further in light of these findings in Chapter Six.

Chapter Six: Discussion

6.1 Introduction

The matters affecting children were outlined within the mosaics in the previous chapter as were the ways they chose to make these matters known. Through the action-research cycles of the study, many of the matters affecting this cohort of children were acted upon. The children were made aware of the importance of their contributions through our shared actions. The practical methods and structures that practitioners can implement to elicit children's views on the matters affecting them were also documented throughout Chapters Four and Five. In the concluding chapter, Chapter Seven, I assess the impact of employing children as co-researchers and the contribution that this work could make to research within this area. I also explore the implications of functional agency on child-led learning. Aspects of the findings, however, have cast new light on the Conceptual Framework and the roles of each concept in supporting functional agency. In this chapter the Conceptual Framework is revisited to analyse how each concept contributes to developing and defining functional agency.

The Conceptual Framework represented emotional and intellectual groundwork necessary for a practitioner to undertake the task of facilitating functional agency in the classroom. The visibility of functional agency increased throughout the study as was evidenced by the actions and dialogue discussed in Chapter Five. Although the children demonstrated increasing levels of agency throughout the study it may only indicate that their agency became more evident. The concepts of realising capability, voice recognition, care, democratic participation, and a knowledge democracy may not have specifically altered the children's agency. However, through the adoption and implementation of the Conceptual Framework, children were afforded greater opportunities for choice, structured opportunities for democratic participation, voice-recognition and care-ful listening. The concepts within the framework represent changes in mindset and provision that increase the visibility and functionality of the children's agency rather than necessarily conferring upon them a greater agency. The first concepts to examine are the conceptual foundations of capability building, voice and care and how they influenced the study. Next, the goals of democratising knowledge and democratic participation are analysed to understand to what degree the practical application of these concepts were realised and impacted the concept of functional agency. I argue that by embracing context specific opportunities for children's agentic engagement and through supporting robust relationships and connections with others, teachers can witness the

functions children perform, and through this acknowledgement, functional agency can flourish.

6.2 Conceptual Foundations

The foundations of the Conceptual Framework which was illustrated in Figure CF.1 on page 34 were realising capabilities, voice and care. The realisation of capabilities necessarily involves the recognition and practise of everyday functionings; the deeper understandings of this and the other foundational concepts of voice provision and care, are explored in this section in light of the findings.

6.2.1 Recognising functionings and realising capabilities

Within the Conceptual Framework the importance of recognising children's various capacities was a foundational imperative in determining and realising their potential capabilities. Through the course of the study the relationship between recognising capacities and functions and realising capabilities became more complicated. The findings showed that the children were engaging in more agentic activities. This might suggest that the children were expressing a new level of agentic capacity, or that new capabilities had been somewhat realised over the course of the study. Equally however, it may suggest that my perception and behaviours had changed in relation to recognising children's prior capabilities. The *doings* that the children were capable of achieving had perhaps not previously been given the requisite real and substantive opportunities (Sen, 1985). Having offered more choice, greater space and time for children to assume leadership roles, these increased functionings I witnessed may have been latent, or indeed stymied by me.

Towards the later stages of the study, there were greater levels of child-talk that were more focused on child-led issues, and discourse was more focused on child agency and the children's autonomy. The children were given greater opportunities to demonstrate their agency as child-researchers and may have developed a greater sense of self efficacy based on being afforded these opportunities, resulting in discourse rooted in child-action as opposed to children seeking adult action. Again however, the findings in this study do not necessarily suggest that children's functional agency emerged or evolved more rapidly as a result of this study but my ability as practitioner-researcher to allow children to lead, initiate action and *speak* (Oswell, 2016), did evolve. At the outset it was believed that this study could support children as they became more agentic; however, focus shifted towards building structures wherein I, as a practitioner could feel scaffolded and allow children's agency to take centre stage.

Within the Conceptual Framework, the importance of choice in Sen's (1985) writing was critical. Therefore, to realise capabilities I also needed to recognise the role of choice. This study initially set out to increase children's agentic powers within the classroom; one aspect of this is to support and scaffold children learning appropriate skills to advocate for themselves and engage in democratic practices. As the process evolved it became evident that the children were being afforded more opportunities for choice in their everyday experience. These opportunities spanned the design of elements of the classroom-based practice, choices regarding non-participation which are explored later in this chapter and more emerged through unplanned decisions and actions within the classroom space during this time period.

As I engaged with the study, my mindset became more open to the children's capacity to make agentic decisions. Some of the key choices that children made were in relation to play, control over their environment and concern for other species; these are all aspects of "central capacities" according to Nussbaum (2011). Again, children's capacities increasingly came to the fore and developed, but this does not mean that children necessarily became more capable, rather their "central capacities" (Nussbaum, 2011) were being given greater witness. Although the children may have become more capable, the predominant change was the increased functionality of existing agency. This study recognized the children's developing "personhood" and provided explicit space for "cultivating humanity" (Nussbaum, 1997, p. 1). In the first stage of the study the children engaged in Socratic self-examination (Nussbaum, 1997, p. 9) by looking at their experiences and traditions of voice and family, in the third stage the children explored world citizenship (p. 9) as they connected with the needs of their wider community and engaged in future mapping. Finally, the children used narrative imagination (p. 10) throughout as they critically engaged with picture books and the stories of young leaders. Certainly, providing these spaces and opportunities was a demonstration of recognition that children were "beings" rather than "becomings" (Qvortrup, 1987; 2005; Alanen, 1992; James & Prout, 1997). This recognition of their complete "personhood" sought to afford them their full rights within the positive, holistic, person-centred view Nussbaum envisioned (1997; 2011) but these assertions show greater evolution of the practitioner than the child. The recognition of functionings and the realisation of capabilities were essential components in re-conceptualising children's agency, though they themselves may not have materially altered the children's agency. These concepts primarily repositioned me.

6.2.2 Voice provisions

The recognition of voice as a foundational element of this study within the Conceptual Framework was the basis of my sustained efforts to locate and act upon children's voices.

These efforts to promote and elevate children's voices sought to communicate to children the importance of their voices and their experiences. The role of the educator in promoting Article 12 is one that may, according to Lundy, be "counter to the instinct" (2007, p. 940) of some who still show "reluctance" (Oberman, O'Shea, Hickey et al., 2014) towards it. Research relating to Irish educators and their attitudes towards teaching children's right to a voice, a term which does not fully encompass the provisions of Article12, found they were doing so with an ad-hoc approach (Waldron & Oberman, 2016, p. 744). In the Conceptual Framework it was asserted that provisions needed to be put in place to create clear structures for voice elevation and that was achieved through the methods detailed and evaluated within Chapters Four and Five respectively. Unlike the concept of realising capabilities, the inclusion of this concept within the framework was a deliberate statement about my practitioner mindset. Rather than imagining the children's voices growing louder or naturally becoming more powerful during this study, children's voices were viewed as a constant and the aim was to better equip the practitioner to hear them.

The model for voice provision by Lundy (2007) was depicted in the Conceptual Framework. It synthesized the complexities of Article12 into the four elements of space, voice, audience and influence; this was elaborated on by Flynn (2017). Flynn's model sought to ensure children were involved in a "dialogical process" that provided "opportunities to check interpretation," that feedback on the impact of their perspectives be provided so that where appropriate, "co-constructed change and development" could occur (2017, p. 30). These models were necessary to ensure active and effective implementation of the provisions of Article 12 as well contributing to the rigour of the research. The complexity of the roles children's voices play within society (Oswell, 2016; Lundy, 2007) lies in the relation of young people and children with the world around them. In familial and school-based discourse there is a tendency to promote "social conformity" (Waldron & Oberman, 2016) to encourage children's "micro" (Oswell, 2016) presentations of voice and participation. Yet, within the New Sociology of Childhood (Prout, 2002; James & James, 2008; Lansdown, 2005) children are posited as rights holders and social actors and the focus ought therefore to shift towards "empowerment" (Waldron & Oberman, 2016) and "macro" presentations of voice (Oswell, 2016). Since rights and citizenship are inherently political, macro voice contributions such as the "speech" advocated by Oswell (2016) which was more public, organised or even political, is appropriate. The role of children's voices shifted through the various ecosystems in the study. In the first stage, children's aspirations for their families within their micro-system were reported; then other, more political representations were seen in the society-mirroring democratic practices of balloting and the dynamic, organised, shared action of the final lessons.

Consideration was given to the need to avoid **adult**eration (Flynn, 2017, emphasis in the original), the potential shortcomings (Oberman, 2014; Sedgwick, 1994; Hart, 1992) - or compromises (Lundy, 2018) - associated with tokenism, "oversimplification" and "manipulation" (Bron, 2019, p. 52) of children's voices whereby children's voices or purposes can be co-opted by adults. The iterative design of the study was built with an awareness of these pitfalls and included shared interpretation and creative feedback. The breadth of the data collected, the variety of themes collected within each mosaic in Chapter Five and the consistent twin emphasis on child-led action and analysis demonstrate the efforts and effects of implementing these models.

There was however another key element which impacted on voice provision within the findings. Similar to how the children positively responded to knowing that their voices had an audience and impact, they responded positively to being offered choices. Levels of assent rose as the children engaged in actions of their choosing. Children were more willing to participate in acts of voice production when they experienced what Sen referred to as "functionings" or freedoms. This choice and enjoyment of new experiences may have constituted increased capabilities and may have impacted on their self-belief relating to voice. Having been offered choices may have changed children's views about the impact of their voice or it may have simply meant that the children could discuss topics they preferred or were more familiar with. In either case, choice appears to have been a contributing factor in the voice contributions the children made within this study.

The children also made choices regarding the ways they reported their experiences during the study; non-compliance and negotiation as were detailed in Chapter Five were clear expressions of voice or agency, yet they have no clear place within the aforementioned models. Article12 of the UNCRC states that a child has the right "to freely express her or his views," thus non-compliance would be a legitimate expression of such a view; yet it appears to be an outlier in relation to current models of participation. The concept of democratic participation and its role in recognising and facilitating citizenship is re-explored within this chapter. Participation is often paralleled with decision-making (Hart, 1992; Lundy, 2012). Choice, however, blurs the lines (Larkins, 2014, p. 18) regarding citizenship, as making the decision not to participate is both an act of citizenship and of non-compliance/ non-participation. Larkins suggests that children's freedoms to enact citizenship even in the absence of adult provisions can cause tensions and challenges to "dominant understandings of childhood and citizenship" (2014). Negotiating the terms of their citizenship empowers children as "independent citizens" (2014); therefore, it could be argued that it is not whether children are given particular resources that makes them successful citizens but rather their

willingness to speak to what they want, ask for it, negotiate and engage. Despite the potential for tension and perhaps what Freire referred to as the “awkwardness of relearning” (1987, p. 53) in front of our students, providing choice - not only in terms of decision-making but within and without voice provisions - seems most in-keeping with the view of children as powerful agents.

Issues of representation and ownership were also found in the children’s responses during phases of reflection. Just as Bron (2019) cautioned about the perils of singularity, there was potential for the stages of research to become too narrow in their focus as they sought to follow the children’s lead. Efforts were made to keep discussions and options open in relation to the direction the work would take. To avoid adulteration of the children’s meaning, the findings about what matters affected the children in each of the stages were summarised for the children to check the interpretation. After the children developed in-vivo codes in lesson 8, there were further opportunities to reinterpret or redirect the trajectory of the study. This sought to ensure that children did not feel as though they were being confined to a majority ruling but were satisfied to work towards common goals. Balloting, picture-making and small group conferencing were used to ensure that the multiplicity of children’s voices was captured and that all children had equal opportunity to contribute. The diverse listening methods detailed in Chapter Four afforded opportunities for those who may not have felt confident in larger discussion groups to voice their opinions.

The children demonstrated pride in their ownership of the products made during the study. This was found in the initial stage when levels of assent to hand over pictures for retention as data were low. In the final stages the children were offered copies of their products to keep so that their pictures could be used as data. The number of children who submitted their products to the data set then increased. To assert the children’s ownership of their work and to avoid co-opting their work product, their language was used to describe their own work. This was done through transcribing captions and using in vivo codes during the initial phases of coding throughout. The children’s descriptions of images were transcribed onto the original documents to maintain the links between their words and their creative product. The children were also eager to claim ownership of the images they made in the photomapping activity, identifying which images they had taken as opposed to their partner. One child questioned why her real name would not appear alongside her contributions and appeared disheartened that she would not be identified. These actions suggest that the children, whose identities are confidential for their protection, may have preferred that they be named as co-researchers. The implications of ethics standards on co-research and the degree to which this study achieved its aims in co-research are explored in the concluding chapter. This issue highlights

the enduring need to balance protection with participation rights particularly regarding young children (Bradbury-Jones, 2014; Alderson, 2008, 2000; Lundy, 2007).

6.2.3 Care

Attention and listening were foregrounded throughout this study in accordance with Noddings' ethic of care wherein she outlined the need for the "carer" and the "cared for" to engage in engrossing dialogue to understand the expressed needs – not the assumed needs and motivations of the child who is initially the cared for (Noddings, 2012b, p. 772). The listening methods outlined in Chapter Four and evaluated in Chapter Five demonstrated the degree to which this care-ful listening took place. The effects of this listening and attention were demonstrated in the increasing action and engagement shown by the child co-researchers. It was evident that the children engaged in various acts of citizenship including non-compliance and negotiation; however, I would argue that no child demonstrated apathy. Since caring is conceptualized within this study as the antithesis of apathy, this would suggest the ethic of care had been applied appropriately. Each child took the opportunity at some point in the study to suggest people, animals, or places that they cared about or would like to help. Their expressions of care ranged from the wider, more vague responses of "all the world" and "everyone" to their own pets, specific lizards, fish, wildcats, owls, trees felled in their local woods, friends, and family members.

The importance of caring relations outside of the classroom was also demonstrated. The care that these children experienced from their families, friends, wider families, school community etc. appeared to contribute towards their self-image, their agency and their empathy. In the first stage of the study the children reported experiencing care within their families; they demonstrated reciprocity by wishing to make their families happier. In the second and third stages the children demonstrated empathy towards those affected by climate and pollution issues and sought creative solutions whereby they could play agentic roles. Through care and attention these children became more aware of their agency, and their agency was perceived as more functional since it was linked to their context and connected them with others. In demonstrating care towards others, the children experienced "motivational displacement" (Noddings, 2012b, p. 772) as they took on the role of carer and began to think and act on behalf of those for whom they cared. This would appear to challenge Kohlberg's stance on the self-centred nature of young children and suggests that some clarification or modification is needed (1981, p. 96).

Care was an essential element for the practitioner researcher in the conception of this listening-oriented design. Caring for the children and their development as well as the realisation of their rights was necessary to initiate this study and the modelling of care may

have encouraged children to use their agency; however, this does not equate to care having necessarily conveyed greater agency to them. In their noncompliance the children were agentic, and in writing and partaking in their action plan they were equally agentic. What care contributed was a functional connection with context and others; caring drove the children to realise their agentic powers through shared caring action.

The drive towards acting out an expression of care or empathy may come about through attention to the needs of others or may come from lived experience, witnessing direct need for care and action. Thus, as Noddings remarked, empathy can come before attention, depending on personal circumstance (2012b). In this study, the children collectively drew together what they cared about from lived experiences, engagement with critical literature and through discourse, and then they acted. Caring, collaborative and robust relationships with others and the world around them relates to Nussbaum's central capabilities (2011) and is key to witnessing functional agency.

6.3 Application of Practical Concepts

The two concepts in the centre of the Conceptual Framework related to practical strategies for the realisation of functional agency. Knowledge democracy and democratic participation provide the structure for how the foundational concepts of voice, care and capabilities can be translated into agency-recognising and promoting action. These practical concepts outline how to increase awareness of children's rights and capacities as citizens and social actors.

6.3.1 Knowledge democracy

Communicating to children the importance of their contributions to a knowledge democracy and the value of their perspective was a continuous aim throughout the study. The cyclical design of the action-research process was implemented to ensure frequent opportunities to review the work being done with the children, to review the new understanding we had unearthed and to plan together the elements which should be brought into the next phase. One of the ways in which children were made aware of the importance of their contribution was through their positioning as co-researchers. The importance of language and how we refer to learners was outlined in Chapter Two (Pascal & Bertram, 2009; Biesta, 2010; Cook-Sather, 2018). By naming the children as co-researchers and asserting their role, I hope to avoid the pitfalls of "intellectual colonialism" (Fals Borda & Mora-Osejo, 2003, p. 35) and facilitate a "diffusion" of knowledge (p. 29). Further detail on the experience of working with children as co-researchers can be found in the concluding chapter.

Just as Fals Borda and Mora-Osejo (2003) issued an invitation to educators to contribute to their knowledge democracy, so too were the children in this study continually invited to

contribute through the assent process. This invitation to join the knowledge community was reflective of the importance given to functionings and freedoms discussed earlier. To evaluate the realisation of knowledge democracy, consideration is given to Hall and Tandon's three phenomena of a knowledge democracy (2015) outlined in the Conceptual Framework as well as the production and dissemination of knowledge (Rowell & Feldman, 2019).

The first of Hall and Tandon's phenomena related to the acceptance of multiple epistemologies; the focus on discourse, listening and critical literature ensured that all opinions were considered, listened to and noted. There was no hierarchy given to differing viewpoints. Regarding the second phenomenon, relating to forms of knowledge, the mosaic approach (Clark & Moss, 2011) ensured that both the multiplicity of children's voices and ways they used their voices were evident. Children's knowledge was produced in many forms, pictorial, conversational, explanatory, imaginative, dialogical action, the creation of in vivo codes and interpretation. The third phenomenon sought to link knowledge and action. Hall and Tandon asserted that "knowledge is dynamic, active, engaged and linked to social, political, cultural or sustainable changes" (2015). Action was foregrounded throughout the study and evidence from Chapter Five suggested that this action led to increased levels of assent and willingness to engage with knowledge production. Acting in pursuit of a more sustainable and just world was also linked to the children's demonstrations of care. The children, through democratising their knowledge and that which they cared about began to work together and demonstrate their agency, increasing its functionality within the classroom context. This illustrates the interwoven and compounding nature of the concepts in the Conceptual Framework.

Knowledge of the children's lived experiences in their various ecosystems was constructed and captured through dialogue which had an increasing focus on peer-to-peer interactions. The children were "protagonists and active subjects" (Leivas, 2018, p. 54) in the production of knowledge as they engaged in critical literature, dialogical action and data analysis. The means of knowledge production were explored in the previous chapter under the sections *Care-ful listening* and *Evolving questioning*. The importance of children's perspective and the validity of their knowledge were communicated to them through the careful transcription of their words, checking interpretations of their words, demonstrating to them the influence of their words on our shared actions, displaying their words and images around the room and through the dedication of six weeks of field study to hearing them and preserving their knowledge within research. The children's words and images woven throughout in the data and the cycles of interpretation and analysis carried out demonstrate the place of their knowledge

within this democracy. The children's role in creating new knowledge and directing our work is explored further in Chapter Seven in relation to child-led learning.

6.3.2 Democratic participation

Democratic participation, as outlined within the Conceptual Framework, required more than simply assent to participation, it required participants to listen, activate their voices and act. Clark states that "listening is a necessary stage in participation" (2005, p. 491). The children may participate "individually or collectively" (Hill, Davis, Prout & Tisdall, 2004, p. 83) but as Miller (2003) suggested, participation should involve a "sharing of power" and go beyond consultation. The children demonstrated listening as they collectively engaged in critical literacy, shared the matters affecting them and began to care about mutually decided themes and experience motivational displacement as a result of their peer-to-peer shared dialogue and action. The children also engaged in compromise; they listened to one another and negotiated practical solutions to their queries. For instance, when the children wanted to increase outdoor play opportunities by putting a "fake Ferrari" in the school yard, they discussed the issue among themselves and decided chalk games were a more manageable solution. This form of democratic negotiation may be an example of what Dewey called "associated living" (1916).

Although the individual rights of every child were supported and agentic action on one's own behalf as well as on behalf of others was promoted, community and co-constructed ideas of care and social justice brought the cohort together. Whilst individual voices were still represented, the development of public speech (Oswell, 2009) was also encouraged to increase the potential contextual applications of children's agency in the classroom. As affirmed within the Conceptual Framework, this study did not set out to alter the children's voices within this classroom but rather to recognise their many forms and elevate the status of children's knowledge and contributions. Kirby (2020) commented on this conception of agency and affirmed that "an emphasis on pupil agency does not demand individualizing solutions, such as improved pupil character, but calls for collective action" (Kirby, 2020, p. 11). The children's voices, though many and varied through discourse that was both critical and caring, indicated that play and environmental issues were overall those that were of greatest interest to them. The children used the many formats of voice expression detailed earlier in the chapter to make this known.

Participation is not the same as citizenship as was evidenced through previous discussion on non-compliance. The agency of children who choose not to participate is not less than those who join in but taking part does affect a participant's level of ability to have an influence on an

activity. The number of children who chose to assent in each lesson represents the number who chose to engage in the action of that lesson. As shared action such as creating play resources, balloting, writing an action plan, tending to plants etc. increased, so too did the assent and the democratic participation. As the children saw the influence their words and actions were having in the classroom and around our school, they developed a greater sense of ownership over the study and, in action, they saw the value of participating. Seeing the current and potential impact of their voices and actions within the classroom context became an essential to children experiencing functional agency.

6.4 Functional Agency

The term *functional agency* was devised to encompass both mindset and action. It supported context specific, connected and choice-driven actions by children and a practitioner mindset that facilitated this agency in the classroom. Functional agency, as used in this study, focuses on everyday practices or doings within a community. As a concept, it is beneficial to practitioners conceptually as it positions agency as already within children's grasps as it relates to their functionings (Sen, 1985) and potential capabilities (Nussbaum, 2011). It is not an addition to overcrowded curricula but a lens through which to see children's actions in the classroom. It is also not a set of skills that children must learn or a set of defined goals to achieve, it is a mindset. It is the sum of children's actions and can be supported by committed adults who give due weight and influence to their words. Each element of the Conceptual Framework needed to be in place to build this conceptualisation of functional agency. The aforementioned concepts were the building blocks underpinning this ideological concept. However, these concepts did not create functional agency, they merely facilitated its expression. The foundational elements supported the necessary practitioner mindset and atop them were practical tools for children to experience the potential of their agency as social actors.

Functional agency applies to this context in which children are already viewed as competent social actors and through the application of functional agency their voices (Lundy, 2007) or speech (Oswell 2016) are given their rightful places at the centre of a child-led curriculum such as that within the Irish Primary context (NCCA, 1999; 2019). Children's agency can function outside these parameters, but this structure gives practitioners the tools to create the space necessary for children to have influence and to become the receptive audience they need to be to allow children's voices to be heard.

The various meanings attributed to agency were explored in Chapter Two, as was the importance of viewing children as agentic during childhood as opposed to future agentic

adults. This study looks to push forward the application of agentic practices, and children's conscious experience of their own functional agency. This structure relates to the everyday relations and actions within the classroom. It works parallel to other children's voice initiatives such as student councils whereby student representatives work alongside adult facilitators on behalf of other children. This structure sees the engagement of all children at the degree to which they choose to participate and posits their actions within a community rooted in voice, care and realising capabilities. Whether tending plants or imagining utopian future maps, these children contributed to a knowledge democracy and were given opportunities to experience their own agency within the classroom but also in relation to their other ecosystems.

The functionality of this agency also refers to the fact that it is a practical and pragmatic approach to agency, recognising the impact children have within their context and relationships. Kirby recently observed that without action and the ability to create change, "authenticity and voice" are not enough (Kirby, 2020). Functional agency seeks applications that are enjoyable, context based, that connect children with others and that link to the freedoms in Sen's theory of functionings. Functional agency is necessarily context specific as it operates within the confines of existing structures and seeks new understandings and opportunities within them. This framework does not seek to radically alter children's contexts or confer new transformative skills. Rather it aspires to alter practitioner mindset about what younger children are already capable of and in turn communicate this to the young children with whom they work.

6.5 Conclusion

The application of each of the concepts above contributed to developing agency in the classroom that was both everyday and functional. Each one helped the practitioner to align practice with methodology and purpose. Engendering functional agency within a classroom required recognising the agency in the pupils' everyday actions and knowledge contributions and subsequently communicating to the learners the impact and potency of their agency. This outlook positions agency not only in the realm of overt political acts. It was recognised that young children are agentic and knowledgeable even in the absence of these structures; this framework is a pragmatic tool for scaffolding practitioners to extend the functionality of children within the confines of the classroom. Functional agency does not seek to adulterate children's actions by assigning them adult meanings but rather engage with them to create actions on matters that affect them. Expressing agency over matters that they find meaningful correlates with Sen's provision that functionings must relate to freedoms one would choose for themselves.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

This study originated with a desire to better understand the provisions of Article 12 of the UNCRC in relation to classroom practice particularly with young children. It investigated the article's realisation not only in terms of school leadership and councils but in the day-to-day experiences in the classroom. The emergence of student councils at primary school level, while a welcome addition, is an incomplete process as they do not necessarily convey greater agency upon pupils outside the council. There are inconsistencies with how effective councils are (Alderson, 2000) and they are not an approach implemented by every school. This study sought to create a space for agency in the classroom focusing on what could be achieved by these children, affording them what Nussbaum called "positive liberty" (2011). The research questions related to the term functional agency. This term was used to denote the kind of accessible, inclusive, context-based agency framework I was hoping to implement. The foundational concepts that I drew upon to articulate functional agency were defined within the Conceptual Framework but ultimately it required facilitating a classroom space and a teacher mindset that provided children with valuable opportunities within the classroom context to exercise their agency. The idea of Sen's functionings within society were drawn upon while framing and evaluating the provisions within the classroom. Opportunities for young children to be agents of change in their classroom were explored. The children experienced democratic practices, their agency was foregrounded, and what they can achieve in the classroom in terms of agency was made known to them. This was done in tandem with children's rights education; framing participation within broader rights-based learning was important as again, it promoted a positive view of freedoms, protecting and realising the rights of all people.

In this final chapter, I briefly describe my research journey, the findings, analysis, and discussion. I also explore some of the implications of this study for future research, how this work contributed to the field of child-led learning and to the development of co-research practices with young children. The influence of ethical standards in research of this nature is also examined in light of my findings around assent. Finally, I scrutinise the limitations of this study and make recommendations for future research.

A summary

This study sought - through partnership with the young participants - to understand the matters affecting them in their daily lives and to use this knowledge to identify practical applications of child-agency. An iterative action-research model was built to allow utmost flexibility within its design to incorporate children's direction. Children, as experts in their own experience, added their invaluable perspectives and located motivating factors that increased their participation not only within the study but in the functionings of the classroom. The most prevalent themes were: *play, animals and nature* and *care and choice*, these themes dominated the discourse throughout the three stages of the study. Each theme emerged and evolved through the collation and analysis of data mosaics. These mosaics were explored in detail in Chapter Five. They were the issues that the children were most concerned with, that motivated them to act and negotiate, that inspired hope. Through the cycles of planning, evaluating, reflecting, and acting, each of these themes was explored and interpreted with the children and, crucially, they were acted upon.

The children's reported agenda was met with action, making causation clear and tangible. The children's recognition of and preference for actions linked to their input was evident from the correlation between action and assent within lessons. Child-initiated action conveyed the pragmatic view of children as social actors and agents to the other members of their ecosystems and to the children themselves. Exploring various bioecological systems the children inhabited - which were based on Bronfenbrenner's model in Chapter Three - allowed them to pinpoint areas of agency in each and connect their opportunities for agency in different landscapes. The interconnectedness of children's systems was highlighted by their final action plan linking home, school and community and the positive civic action they could undertake in each.

The means by which the children reported these matters also influenced the theory of functional agency. Modes of expressing choice were found within the study such as negotiation and non-assent; Larkins' (2014) "acts of citizenship" were used to define how some of the children chose to exercise their agency. These raised questions about whether every child doing what is expected of them in a normative environment is reflective of an ethos of agency and choice. Citizenship and agency were recognised as distinct from participation as they are not dependent on active participation. Citizenship was a constant within this classroom context and the children's agency was not impacted by assent or non-assent but harnessing agentic power and engaging in participation affected the level of functionality that these young citizens had.

The third research question was directed at the practical implementation of functional agency. I sought to understand what a classroom space that promotes capabilities, amplifies multiple voices and supports multiple ontologies might look like. Consideration was given to the idea of space for children's voices and actions and how it could be facilitated within existing structures. This required understanding the matters of greatest importance to the children and providing opportunities for participation that are valuable to them. This is possible through nuanced and continual listening to the many forms of children's voices. Another important factor in facilitation was asking evolving questions, providing the children with ever-broadening opportunities to collaborate. Finally, representation was a necessary feature of this capability-focus classroom, wherein children could witness the influence of other children's agency as well as their own.

The discussion in Chapter Six focused on the realisation and evolution of the Conceptual Framework. Initially, children's capacities were conceptualised as steadily emerging, and it was imagined that their capabilities in the classroom would expand and be realised in parallel. However, this was re-evaluated in light of the findings: children's agentic functionings did become more evident over the course of the study but this was primarily due to their agency being given greater witness and afforded greater functionality. The discussion centred around how children's capacities may have grown somewhat during the study but ultimately, it was the reorientation of my mindset that removed potentially limiting factors and centralised functionings. Regarding the concept of voice, Chapter Six outlined that the potential influence of teacher mindset was a known factor from the outset. However, the forms of voice production and the choices children made regarding voice inclusion shifted the focus of this concept. Among the questions that arose for me were: what forms of student voices do we elicit? Do we seek the voices that reaffirm societal norms and tell us that children are learning about the world around them, or is there space for empowered children to critique our systems and enact their full citizenship? The findings of this study suggest that through offering children choice in when or how they use their voices and in assuring them both representation and ownership, perhaps we can create those spaces.

Evidence was found that care had successfully been woven into the workings of the study as the children demonstrated empathy, reciprocity, and resisted apathy as they reported many and varied causes for care and demonstrated "motivational displacement" (Noddings, 2012b, p. 772). This finding contradicted Kohlberg's (1981) stance on the nature of young children and suggested that their capacity for altruism is greater than he regarded. These experiences of caring were considered and collated and became shared knowledge. The desire to

democratise knowledge and have children envisage themselves as knowledge creators was actualised through the many forms of listening and the preservation of their insights within the study. It will continue through the dissemination of this research. Democratic participation was redefined as listening, voice activation and action in pursuit of socially constructed goals. Children's various contributions and their demonstrations of compromise showed their inclination towards democratic practices. Growing levels of participation both in terms of assent and critical engagement indicated their investment in shared action. It was this action that characterised functional agency. Both the children's available actions - that is their functionings (Sen, 1985) - and how these actions are viewed as agentic ones by full citizens, revealed functional agency. It was found that offering valuable, rights-based, choice-affording opportunities to children extended their capabilities in the classroom and to achieve this, I needed to shift my mindset as practitioner towards inclusivity, capability and positive liberty (Nussbaum, 2011).

7.2 Child-led Learning

Through engaging with child-led learning approaches and embracing the ideals of co-construction, these children contributed to a knowledge democracy. The knowledge democracy did not seek to have children imitate adult knowledge about issues such as climate but rather to know what they know and to build curriculum around their existing knowledge and interests.

The literature reviewed in Chapter Two of this thesis clearly outlined that within the New Sociology of Childhood - and numerous inquiries since - the concept of children as capable social actors has long been articulated; there now appears to be an impasse in relation to what to do with this knowledge. Challenges experienced in the application of child-agency theories in all their many complex forms have rendered them a "scrambled" (Raithelhuber, 2016) and "troubled" (Oswell, 2009) idea, perhaps even "paralysing" (Hartung, 2017) their practical use. This study recognised the complexities of agency particularly in relation to young children and within the teacher-pupil relationship. The research process was found to be complex and ethically demanding (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2018, p. 81) yet, ultimately, of great benefit as I sought to "recalibrate" (p. 80) opportunities for children's participation. The complex ethics at play were explored in Chapter Four and are discussed again later in this chapter, but the opportunities that were presented for children to assume leadership of their learning far out-weigh the challenges to the practitioner.

In a 2020 UK study, Kirby found that "the Year One classroom does not connect with the children's everyday concerns" (p. 18); she claimed that they do not sufficiently advance what children want and do not use what they know to create something unique (Kirby, 2020). She claimed that for child-agency work to be effective, it required "areas of relevance to their lives," "engaging methods and supportive relationships" (2020, p. 11). The iterative nature of this study and its care-ful listening ensured that it was continually linked to areas of relevance; the engaging methods were detailed in the *Teacher facilitation* section of Chapter Five and employing an ethic of care supported reciprocal supportive relationships. The consistent adaptation of the study content and corresponding curricula through the action research model allowed the children to experience their own abilities to affect change. They witnessed their input having an effect on our daily activities. Nolas' (2015) idea of "childhood publics" saw the connections between speech and action as essential for children to have a functional voice or agentic capacity within childhood as opposed to learning agency for later in life; their words must be shown to have influence.

The topics discussed within the study of *family, school* and *community* led to new, child-led themes. These emergent themes represented the children's perspectives on what matters were important to them, where they wanted to focus their social engagement and action; they were: *care and choice, play* and *animals and nature.* The establishment of these matters affecting children in this context signified the most likely areas in which the young co-researchers would want to participate. Founding classroom activities in these areas of interest saw increased contributions and motivation from the children as a result of greater time spent on issues of importance to them. Structuring the classroom in this way may also create a sense of belonging and identity that aids the holistic development of the child (NCCA, 2009). The planned discussion topics related to the three innermost systems in Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model discussed in Chapter Three. While outside the scope of this study, it may be worth considering in future research the degree to which the themes that emerged were influenced knowingly or unknowingly by the wider systems in this model. The influence of caregivers, friends and the society in which they live as well as the various stages and changes of life they are experiencing through their macro and chrono systems may also affect how the children lead their learning. In particular, the focus on the environment, social justice and care are core values within the children's broader environment of Educate Together, suggesting the influence of wider cultural values over time.

Play was central to this study, as any work with children of this age would be. Play was an important method of communication with and among the children. It was through play that the children explored and reported their connection to their rights in lesson 4 and how they practised the language of community after lesson 9. *Play* was coded and interpreted in many ways during the photo-mapping activity in lesson 6 and it was the motivation behind the first ballot held. Observing the children in play allowed for greater understanding of how the children interact with their classroom and their peers; actively seeking their collaboration in how that play can or should take place elevates their voices in new ways. It validates both play itself - which is at times contested (Breathnach, 2017) - and the voices of children as capable of acting on their own behalf on matters affecting them. Child-led learning that is based on assessments of children's attainment or past habits without the child articulating their opinion is a missed opportunity. A model that incorporates more explicit collaboration with children could evoke a greater sense of efficacy among children and focus more on offering opportunities to achieve functionings they value.

The children's keen interest in *animals and nature* made it key content within our lessons in the final stage of the study. Storybooks, songs, and activities were chosen for our final lessons based on the children's leadership in this area. The children were given regular opportunities to shift or reaffirm the focus so that the researcher did not overplay this theme or extend it beyond their level of interest. They maintained that this was the area of most interest to them through feedback and balloting. Facilitating children's interest in and learning about the natural environment and, in particular, what they can do to help preserve it was recommended in the 2018 report by the special rapporteur to the Human Rights Council in which it is stated that: "In particular, the views of children should be taken into account with respect to long-term environmental challenges, such as climate change and the loss of biodiversity, that will shape the world in which they will spend their lives" (Knox, 2018, p. 13). This recommendation suggests that in achieving the provisions of Article 12 of the UNCRC, forging links to environmental change that will affect children's lives is appropriate and necessary. Matters of environmental protection were clear to these children; not all the matters that affect the various aspects of a child's life may always be visible to them. Therefore, child-led learning should be both open to the reported matters affecting children and invite children to consider new topics that they might not yet have considered.

Care and choice were also pervasive themes; they were evident in the ways children reported the matters affecting them and their demonstrations of care. The increased motivation and

subsequent rise in levels of assent brought about through care and action also ensured that more children actively engaged with the study. This increased engagement with the various listening methods, discussions etc meant more children's voices were heard, again ensuring that their voices remained "a complex and multifaceted thing" (Lundy, 2007, p. 940). Including as many voices as possible - in formats as accessible as possible - allows for not just child-led but children-led learning, a collaboratively constructed voice akin to Oswell's idea of speech that ensures equality in access, education and participation.

The action plan developed in the final lesson illustrated the children's hopes and aspirations for the change they can create in the natural world. It linked the everyday actions that they have agency over and bolstered the children's view of themselves as social actors capable of creating tangible change. It linked to the chronosystem impacting these children's lives as they became aware of the passage of time, potential for action in the future and linked their current actions with their future selves as a means of progressing their own development. The importance of this lesson to the children can be seen in the detailed drawings they created of their imagined futures and in their commitment to enacting changes throughout their lives for the betterment of their world. The children in the study were not only observed, and changes made on their behalf, they actively drove the direction of the learning. The themes the children discussed, the plans they made, the decisions and contributions to teaching methods not only determined the course of the learning over this six-week period but also contributed unique shared knowledge to a growing democracy wherein knowledge belongs to all those who wish to engage in making it.

7.3 Children as Co-Researchers

This study offers an example of "supportive strategies" (Lundy, McEvoy & Byrne, 2011, p. 714) that engage children as co-researchers in a meaningful way. The experiences in this thesis offer a guide to practitioner-researchers regarding practices that encourage the voices of young children in their many forms. Engaging with children from a rights-based, child-centred viewpoint governed every aspect of the study, from its iterative design, the use of the child centric Bronfenbrenner model in the topics discussed, the assent process which determined what data was available, interpretation of data by the children and subsequently the coding and analysis of this data by these young co-researchers. The children having influence on the course of this intervention was of utmost importance regarding the realisation of the aims of Article 12 (UNCRC, 1989). The design of this study foregrounded children's knowledge as it began with topics the children were most familiar with then as the children became more

confident, the study extended into their wider social worlds. This empowered them to contribute allaying early concerns from one young researcher that she would have “nothing to say.”

The children’s role in the research went beyond research subjects or contributors towards a regard for them as participants and even co-researchers. Co-design, shared interpretation, dialogical action and co-analysis brought the children’s level of participation further along the Waldron Model of Participation (2006). This ensured as accurate a representation of the matters affecting children as possible. Understandings from the data were triangulated by interpretations by the children. Moving research further along the Waldron model (2006) (as shown in Chapter Three, Figure 3.3) required both the roles of the child and researcher to evolve in parallel. Changes to mindset were essential in shifting both children and the researcher upwards on this model, as detailed in Chapter Six. Faithfulness to the concepts within the Conceptual Framework facilitated this mindset shift as well as providing pragmatic means of employing children’s agency. In this study the children were conceptualised and identified as co-researchers; this shifted the conversation about children's rights away from an adult-centric position towards a more child-centred alternative. Biesta (2010) spoke of the importance of “the way we refer to those we teach” and the weight of language in determining roles and relationships. Positioning children in this way was a deliberate act of confidence in the capacities of the children and a commitment to the co-construction of knowledge.

These opportunities to critically engage with the research process afforded the children a greater level of functionality. The children voiced and demonstrated their relationship with research, their modes of participation, how satisfied they were with listening methods and their interpretation of the data. As co-researchers the children could see the substantive impact of their words and actions; their ideas led the design, discussions and social action. The children could see that the critical discussions they had and the images they created were being pieced together to understand a bigger picture of how children might like to be involved in making decisions and turning ideas into actions within their classroom. The opportunity to piece this data together and say why things might be connected or how we could connect them broadened the scope of what these young children are generally asked to do in either the classroom or research. This approach acknowledged their capacity for criticality and knowledge creation.

The combination of constructivist grounded theory and an action-research model allowed for a porous research process which was continually open to new understandings and responsive

to evolving interpretations. Some of the limitations of this study which are explored in a subsequent section, such as the parameters of academic research, and classroom management did impact on the extent to which the children were enabled to become co-researchers. However, the small-scale nature of this study, the close relationships I had with the child co-researchers and relative length and breadth of the fieldwork allowed a great deal of reflexivity and opportunity to engage deeply. The application of the Conceptual Framework was benefited by our close reciprocal relationship. This relationship recognised the inherent imbalances between us but included regular communication of positive beliefs about the children's capacities and foregrounded an ethic of care. In this way, I was attuned to the children's input as co-researchers, more adaptive to their emergent themes, concerns, and understandings.

7.4 Assent as invitation and guide

The design of this study and the manner in which it was carried out foregrounded children's rights and positioned children as active agents rather than a passive audience. The integrity of this study rests in the assurances it gave children that they had the opportunity to assent to participate in the process or not.

Analysis of the assent process was one of the most unexpected aspects of the study. At the outset, the assent process was envisaged as simply an opportunity for the children to continuously reiterate their desire to participate in the study, thus ensuring that the children were not passive in their engagement with the study or participating under any form of duress. However, interpretation of the roles the assent process took on became more complex. It became a means by which the children could comment on their enjoyment of the study, engage in expressions of solidarity with their peers or demonstrate whether they felt that the study was representative of their input. Although children who chose not to assent were not questioned in relation to their decision - to avoid bias or coercion - observations suggested that children refused assent when they found the subject matter uninteresting or when they had the opportunity to sit out of lessons with their friends.

The assent process within this study led to several practical demands and tensions such as classroom management, time constraints and the loss of valuable data; however, it was ultimately both rewarding and necessary. Seeking children's assent to participate communicated to them that not only were their voices valued but that they were capable of making decisions which would be respected. This respect lay in the commitment not to coerce the children into taking part. The assent process removed this study somewhat from the everyday norms of expectation to participate that the children were familiar with.

Interestingly, although various children chose to withhold their assent during certain lessons, this novel opportunity for non-participation did not see widespread withdrawal, and the levels of assent-based participation in fact grew throughout the study. Levels of assent rose after each action-based response such as yard drawings after lesson 5 and in lessons where ballots were taken regarding important classroom decisions. This clearly indicated that the children regarded the study as more interesting or appealing when they could trace their agency to direct action.

Although engaging in ongoing assent procedures before each lesson would be a tedious and unnecessary addition to every lesson, this study suggests that if motivation for learning is high enough and the children are aware of their own agency in the classroom, affording children the opportunity to opt in or out of certain aspects of the daily routine may positively impact their self-efficacy and help them to articulate the capabilities they find most valuable.

7.5 Limitations of this study

As were referenced above in relation to the assent process, time and classroom management were practical challenges in this study. Great commitment was required and was at times difficult to maintain in a busy, fast-paced classroom environment. Listening to the many voices and modes of expression required a substantial amount of time and created a vast bank of data. Ensuring that children's views were faithfully captured, not simply reduced to a single unit was a constant concern. Despite the challenges, however, it was a worthwhile endeavour. The functionality that the children demonstrated in expressing themselves and creating positive action over the course of the study affirmed all the effort. As a practitioner, I learned how to listen more effectively, not adulterating the children's words but rather allowing them to occupy their own space and be given due weight and influence. The perspective obtained through this listening process is unique to these children; however, my improved skill for careful listening will be employed hereafter with each new cohort of young learners I teach.

From a researcher perspective, designing an iterative, open-ended action model such as this was quite daunting. Being unable to forecast precisely which direction the research would take was an uncomfortable position. A considerable degree of trust was needed, both in the strength of the research design and in the children's ability to lead us towards new insights and ultimately, shared action. This form of research moves practitioners away from "sage on the stage" methodologies in the classroom and towards becoming "meddlers in the middle" McWilliam, (2012), as cited by Travers (2018). As a class teacher this feels like a

natural way to interact with young children, to have them lead you by the hand into experiencing the world as they do; as a researcher, with fledgling ideas about how theory is generated, this was much more challenging.

My role as a teacher also limited the extent of what could be achieved during this study. I was obliged to ensure that the children remained in the school context, limited to the structures of the school day, the national curriculum, and the school code of behaviour. I perpetuated the institutional limits placed upon them and kept them in a "children's space" (Wyness, 2009). Wyness saw this conflict between creating child-centred spaces within adults' ideals of what and where that space might be (2009, p. 395). Although this project, due to the rigours, time restraints and procedures of both my university and workplace rendered a child-initiated process impossible, I encouraged the children to design and lead the action in the study insofar as possible. And although every effort was made to represent the children's voices, images and interpretations in the study, I remain an *other* and my control over the research process shows a common imbalance of power.

The findings of this study are not generalisable due to the small size of the data set and their very personal unique insights. Research of this nature is necessarily context specific, understanding the matters affecting these young children and seeking their functionality within their classroom. It is not suggested that these themes would be reported by children universally. Rather, it is an exercise in listening, eliciting key concerns and applying a framework built to promote context-specific agency on matters affecting any group of young children. Through doing so it is hoped to progress a general goal of realising the provisions of Article 12 or perhaps even expanding them.

7.6 Implications and Recommendations

Although it is accepted that the findings of this research are not broadly generalisable due to the specificity of the matters affecting these children, there are lessons learned that will have more wide-reaching implications. The ethic of care, listening and action developed in this study and now embedded in my practice will hopefully be of benefit to others who seek to instill rights and capabilities-based beliefs into their everyday actions. Consultations currently underway on a new draft curriculum framework (NCCA, 2020) also show some promise in fostering functional agency among pupils as it lists among the children's desired competencies that they be active citizens and develop "capacity to make choices" (p. 12) and take action against injustice. However, only teachers are referred to as "agentic" in this document and it focuses on children developing skills and using knowledge rather than on any necessary

pedagogy or prerequisites from teachers (NCCA, p. 23). It is hoped that some of the new understandings in this study about the teacher's role in children's functionings could inform this new framework.

The opportunities and applications for research into child-led learning are infinite since every group of children will create their own knowledge and engage in their own action. However, in extending the invitation to contribute to a knowledge democracy to young children, I hope to extend the mantle of knowledge creators to practitioners also. I would entreat more practitioners to see the value of structured and rigorous research within their practice, offering them new insights and an opportunity to take time for self-reflection; I would also entreat them to acknowledge the contribution to knowledge they make and pursue new understandings.

The capacity of these young children to express themselves and their concerns for the wider community suggests that they have greater connection to themes of global citizenship than was previously suggested by Kohlberg (1981) and by the scarcity of research literature pertaining to children of this age and their agency. The right of children to express their views in Article 12 is not limited by age or maturity but the due weight afforded to these views based on age and stage of development may be unduly restrictive. I believe further research is warranted to decipher how and perhaps why these stipulations are enacted in terms of educational provision. Is this based on an adherence to other rights or is it an arbitrary measure rooted in outdated conceptualisations of childhood?

Research opportunities wherein children could be involved in the initial design phase would provide an opportunity to develop and express the macro presentation of voice that Oswell suggested. Giving that space and appropriate influence to children would demonstrate a commitment to the ideology of the new sociology of childhood and empower children beyond micro contributions of voice. I believe this study can offer a platform towards providing greater opportunities for children to collaborate on such a study to influence policy and practice through their invaluable insights.

7.7 A final thought

This research journey has increased my connection with issues of global citizenship and connected me with passionate practitioners and thinkers. It has afforded me an opportunity to engage in structured, systematic, scholarly research with young children and witness both the presence and potential of their power in the classroom. I am more aware of the support available to teachers who wish to engage in reflective and replenished practice and my

interest has been piqued regarding ongoing dialogues around children's rights, agency and inclusivity. Engaging in this process has galvanised my desire to instil the spirit of Article 12 within my everyday practice; however, I am also more critical of the structures currently governing children's participation. These structures are exclusively adult-conceived and predominantly adult-directed and as such must be continually examined and if possible, reconstructed with children as key stakeholders.

At the outset of this study, I thought that by devising a set of classroom practices I could enable children to become more agentic in the classroom. However, through engagement with literature, critical discussion and most importantly, generating theory with young children, I now understand the level of agency that these children already possess and understand that one of the main determining factors for their agency was in fact my own attitude towards it. Collaborating with children to understand the matters that affected them and the manner in which they made them known helped me to reimagine childhood and the potential of the social actors who assume that space. The criticality I have gained through exploring and analysing both the work of other researchers and the work of the children in this study has altered both my attitude and practice. I now recognise the potential for shared and multiple ontologies and the space for both practitioners and learners to add to the knowledge democracy. Through creating practice-led knowledge such as this, derived from lived experiences, practical steps can be taken to facilitate and elevate children's agency in the classroom. By reimagining the relationship between children and their choices, by recognising them as powerful agents and collaborating with them on the matters they care most about, we can aid the progress of children's rights becoming a lived and valuable reality to children.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Plain language statements

Plain Language Statement for the Principal

Introduction

I, Catherine Kelly, wish to undertake an action-research project within my junior infant class to develop a living theory of pupil-participation within our classroom. I am an M.Ed. by Research student within the school of STEM innovation and global studies in DCU and I am working within the Centre for Human Rights and Citizenship Education (CHRCE).

Details of what participant involvement in the Research Study will require

It is my intention to improve my practice around children's rights education and pupil-participation by enlisting experts in classroom experience – the children. The project will follow a six-week series of lessons that explore the topics of children's rights, children's voices and community action and; through action, reflection, observation and planning we can develop a theory of what it looks and feels like for children to have increased participation in their classroom.

What will the research involve?

The research will consist of a suite of two pilot lessons and two lessons per week for six weeks thereafter. The lessons will elicit children's emergent understanding of children's rights, their right to participation in particular. The data recorded will include teacher observations, work samples and photographs of the children's visual responses such as sorting and sequencing, playing with figurines and picture making. Children's faces will not be photographed. Audio recordings will be made of group discussions and group play. An important aspect of the research will be to record how the children perceive their level of participation and enjoyment in the classroom; tallies and visual props such as a 'beanstalk' poster will be used to gauge levels of enjoyment and these responses will also be photographed.

All data will be destroyed 5 years after the completion of the research. The researcher will carry this out. Paper data will be shredded, and insofar as possible all electronic traces will be wiped from the secure laptop.

Who can take part? Why have I been asked?

This research will take place with my own junior infant class in our own classroom. The setting has been selected because it is natural and familiar to the children and lessons will mirror our usual classroom activities to minimise disruption.

Do participants have to take part?

Participation in this study by individual children is on a voluntary basis. They are free to choose whether or not to participate. Parents will be provided with plain language statements and consent forms. Children will also have opportunities to assent and withdraw at any time. Children who do not participate may remain in the class for lessons without any data being recorded or may work through these lessons with a support teacher at these times.

In completing the consent form you are indicating your willingness for your school to participate in this study. If you require any further information or wish to withdraw your school from the study at any time, you can do so by contacting the researcher at catherine.kelly73@mail.dcu.ie.

Will the research data be anonymous?

Confidentiality will be respected at all times, within the limitations of the law. Your school will not be named in any publication but as the teacher /researcher's name will be published and that person is directly linked to your school, there is the possibility of your school being recognised as that in the study. However, no individual child will be identifiable in any report or publication arising from the research. The small scale of this research does have some implications for anonymity, but this should be mitigated by collating all of the children's responses. All recordings will be confidential in that they will be identified by a reference number and accessed only by the researcher. All data from the study will be kept in a secure password-protected file, accessible only to the researcher, for a period of five years, and then it will be destroyed.

What are the benefits / risks of taking part?

The children will participate in enriching and interesting learning activities which are consistent with Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework. The children and the teacher will work cooperatively to improve practice and experience within the classroom.

I enjoy a great working relationship with all of the children in the class, participation, non-participation or findings from this study will not impact on this in any way.

What will be done with the results of the study?

The findings of the research will be discussed with participants and with the principal before the research report is written. The report will be disseminated to a wider audience through my dissertation. A summary of the findings and any other publication resulting from the study will be sent to your school.

Personal Data – GDPR Compliance

No personal data referring to participants will be gathered for the purposes of this study

If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact:

The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o Research and Innovation Support, Dublin City University, Dublin 9. Tel 01-7008000, e-mail rec@dcu.ie

Plain Language Statement for Parents

Introduction

I, Catherine Kelly, wish to undertake an action-research project within my junior infant class to develop a living theory of pupil-participation within our classroom. I am an M.Ed. by Research student within the school of STEM innovation and global studies in DCU and I am being funded by the Centre for Human Rights and Citizenship Education.

Details of what participant involvement in the Research Study will require

It is my intention to improve my practice around children's rights education and pupil-participation by enlisting experts in classroom experience – the children. The project will follow a six-week series of lessons that explore the topics of children's rights, children's voices and community action and through action, reflection, observation and planning we can develop a theory of what it looks and feels like for children to have increased participation in their classroom.

What will the research involve?

The research will consist of two pilot lessons and two lessons per week for six weeks thereafter. The lessons will elicit children's emergent understanding of children's rights, their right to participation in particular. The data recorded will include teacher observations, work samples and photographs of the children's visual responses such as sorting and sequencing, playing with figurines and picture making. Children's faces will not be photographed. Audio recordings will be made of group discussions and group play. An important aspect of the research will be to record how the children perceive their level of participation and enjoyment in the classroom; tallies and visual props such as a 'beanstalk' poster will be used to gauge levels of enjoyment and these responses will also be photographed.

All data will be destroyed 5 years after the completion of the research. The researcher will carry this out. Paper data will be shredded, and insofar as possible all electronic traces will be wiped from the secure laptop.

Who can take part? Why has my child been asked?

This research will be undertaken in our infant classroom with our class group so that together we can build an understanding of the children's experience of participation and decision-making in their context. The setting has been selected because it is natural and familiar to the children and lessons will mirror our usual classroom activities to minimise disruption.

Does my child have to take part?

Participation in this study by individual children is on a voluntary basis. They are free to choose whether or not to participate. Children will have opportunities to assent to participate and withdraw at any time. Children who do not participate may remain in the class for lessons without any data being recorded or may work on these lessons with a support teacher in another room at these times.

In completing the consent form you are indicating your willingness for your child to take part in the study. If you wish to withdraw from the study at any time, you can do so by informing the teacher at catherine.kelly73@mail.dcu.ie.

Will the research data be anonymous?

Confidentiality will be respected at all times, within the limitations of the law. Responses will be collated with others. All recordings will be confidential in that it will be identified by a reference number accessed only by the researcher. Neither the school nor any individual child will be identifiable in any report or publication arising from the

research. The teacher / researcher will be identified in the publication however and the small scale of this research does have some implications for anonymity, but this should be mitigated by collating children's responses. All data from the study will be kept in a secure password-protected file, accessible only to the researcher, for a period of five years, and then it will be destroyed.

What are the benefits / risks of taking part?

The children will participate in enriching and interesting learning activities which are consistent with Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework. The children and the teacher will work cooperatively to improve practice and experience within the classroom.

I enjoy a great working relationship with all of the children in the class, participation, non-participation or findings from this study will not impact on this in any way.

What will be done with the results of the study?

The findings of the research will be discussed with participants before the research report is written. The report will be disseminated to a wider audience through my dissertation. A summary of the findings and any other publication resulting from the study will be sent to your school.

Personal Data – GDPR Compliance

No personal data referring to participants will be gathered for the purposes of this study

If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact:

The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o Research and Innovation Support, Dublin City University, Dublin 9. Tel 01-7008000, e-mail rec@dcu.ie

Plain Language Statement for Participant Children *

*Read aloud by teacher in the presence of another trusted independent adult, the learning support teacher.

I want to find out what the class thinks about activities and stories about children using their voices and helping to make decisions. This will help me to make our classroom a fairer place where people have their voices heard more. I would also like to tell other people about what children think of and learn from doing these activities. I will be recording our class as we talk and as we do some activities, such as looking at pictures, playing with puppets and making art. I would also like to take some photographs of the work we do.

I will listen to what you say and look at your work but I will not tell people who said what. When I am talking or writing about what you think, I won't mention the name of the school, or any of your names. I will only tell someone what a particular child says if I have to because the law says I must. For example, if one of you said that someone had hurt a child, then I would have to talk about that with people who could help. But otherwise I will not use your names or tell and write who said what.

I will let you know as we go along what things I find out so that you can help me to decide if I have understood the things you say properly and you will have lots of chances to help me come up with new ideas to try and new ways of thinking about things.

If you do not want to take part that is fine and you can do some different activities. If you think you want to take part and then later change your mind and do not want to take part that is also fine. You can tell me at anytime if you do not want to take part anymore.

You all have a piece of paper with your name on it. I have a box here. I am going to walk around with my box. If you would like to take part you can put the piece of paper with your name on it in my box. [Support Teacher] also has a box. She is going to walk around. If you do not want to take part you can put the piece of paper with your name on it in her box.

*Read aloud by teacher-researcher in the presence of another trusted independent

adult, the learning support teacher.

Appendix B – Informed consent forms

Informed Consent Form for Principal

Dear Principal,
Please read this form and then complete the final two sections of the form.

Research Project

This research project is being undertaken as part of a Masters by Research dissertation within the school of STEM innovation and global studies in DCU and is funded by the Centre for Human Rights and Citizenship Education. It is an action research study of ongoing and developing work by a practitioner researcher working with young children in the infant classroom of an Irish Primary Classroom.

The Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this research is to explore the lived experiences of children in the classroom regarding their participation in school. It is framed within a children's rights framework and has been designed with the needs and interests of the young participants in mind. The activities in the plan are designed to support the Aistear curriculum in a way that is interesting and appealing to young children.

What the Research Entails

The project will follow a six-week series of lessons that explore the topics of children's rights, children's voices and community action and through action, reflection, observation and planning we can develop a theory of what it looks and feels like for children to have increased participation in their classroom.
The study will build towards a spiral of research that moves through 4 stages of research, each one building on the last and radiating the focus outward from the child towards society and global issues.
The children's responses to the lessons, their preferences and levels of enjoyment will be recorded. Three group activities will be audio recorded. Some of the work produced by the children will be photographed and kept as part of the research data, some drawings will be used also.

Confidentiality

The contributions of the children will be recorded in a journal using pseudonyms and kept in a locked drawer and on audio tape and will not be used for broadcast or in any other form. The audio recordings will be stored securely on a password-protected laptop and will be transcribed into documents which will also be stored securely and confidentially, subject to legal limitations. The actual names of the school, or any child will not be used in any published document arising from the research.

Participation is Voluntary

Participation in this study is on a voluntary basis. You are free to choose whether or not your school participates. In completing the consent form you are indicating your willingness for the teacher in your school to take part in the study. If you wish your school to withdraw from the study at any time, you can do so by informing the researcher.
It is intended that the results of the researcher to develop their practice within your school and that it would be beneficial both for the professional development of the teacher and the learning experiences of the children. We would very much welcome any queries or questions and invite you to sign the attached consent form.

Please complete the following (Circle Yes or No for each question)

I have read the Plain Language Statement and the cover letter for this form

Yes/No

I understand the information provided

Yes/No

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study

Yes/No

I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions

Yes/No

I am aware that my school may withdraw from the Research at any point.

Yes/No

I have read and understood the information in this form. My questions and concerns have been answered by the researchers, and I have a copy of this consent form.

I consent to teacher and their class in my school taking part in this research project

Yes/No

I consent to children aged four to six from my school taking part in this research project

Yes/No

Principal's' Signature: _____

Name in Block Capitals: _____

Witness: _____

Date: _____

Informed Consent Form for Parents

Dear Parents,

Please read this form and then complete the final two section of the form.

Your child's class teacher is planning on carrying out action research within your child's classroom. The project will be carried out as part of an M.Ed. by research with DCU and The Centre for Human Rights and Citizenship Education (CHRCE). The lessons in the study have been developed by your child's teacher and explore the topics of children's rights, children's voices and community action and through action, reflection, observation and planning I hope to learn from the children and develop a theory of what it looks and feels like for children to have increased participation in their classroom.

The children's responses to the lessons, their preferences and levels of enjoyment will be recorded. Three group activities will be audio recorded. Some of the work produced by the children will be photographed and kept as part of the research data, some drawings will be used also.

Participating schools, teachers and children will be given pseudonyms which will be used in all documents, published and unpublished, arising out of the research. A key which links the pseudonyms to the original names will be kept in a secure file accessible only to the teacher /researcher. All documents will be stored confidentially and will be accessed only by the teacher /researcher, subject to legal limitations.

As a parent/guardian, I am aware that if I agree to my child participating in this study, he/she can be withdrawn by me at any stage.

If you are willing to allow your child to participate, please complete the following:

(please circle yes/no):

I have read the Plain Language Statement or had it read to me *Yes/No*

I understand the information provided *Yes/No*

I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions *Yes/No*

Signature:

I have read and understood the information in this form. The teacher/researcher has answered my questions and concerns, and I have a copy of this consent form. Therefore, I consent to have my child take part in this research project

Parent/Guardian's Signature: _____

Parent/Guardian's Name in Block Capitals: _____

Child's Name in Block Capitals: _____

Date: _____

Informed Consent Procedure for child participants

Each child will be given a piece of paper with their name on it. The following statement will be read to the children by their teacher. An independent adult in the school (the support teacher) will witness the consent process and help in collecting responses.

I want to find out what the class thinks about activities and stories about children using their voices and helping to make decisions. This will help me to make our classroom a fairer place where people have their voices heard more. I would also like to tell other people about what children think of and learn from doing these activities. I will be recording our class as we talk and as we do some activities, such as looking at pictures, playing with puppets and making art. I would also like to take some photographs of the work we do.

I will listen to what you say and look at your work but I will not tell people who said what. When I am talking or writing about what you think, I won't mention the name of the school, or any of your names. I will only tell someone what a particular child says if I have to because the law says I must. For example, if one of you said that someone had hurt a child, then I would have to talk about that with people who could help. But otherwise I will not use your names or tell and write who said what.

I will let you know as we go along what things I find out so that you can help me to decide if I have understood the things you say properly and you will have lots of chances to help me come up with new ideas to try and new ways of thinking about things.

If you do not want to take part that is fine and you can do some different activities. If you think you want to take part and then later change your mind and do not want to take part that is also fine. You can tell me at anytime if you do not want to take part anymore.

You all have a piece of paper with your name on it. I have a box here. I am going to walk around with my box. If you would like to take part you can put the piece of paper with your name on it in my box. [Support Teacher] also has a box. She is going to walk around. If you do not want to take part you can put the piece of paper with your name on it in her box.

Appendix C

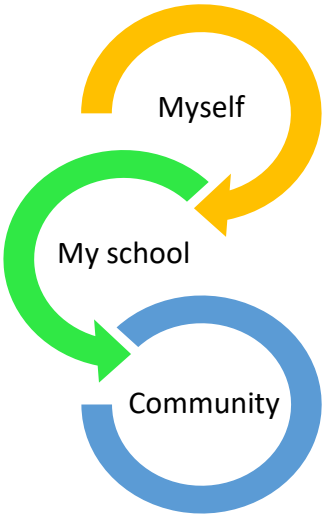
Picture books used in classroom-based practice

List of Picture Books

- Farmer Duck by Martin Waddell
- Ordinary Mary's Extraordinary Deed by Emily Pearson
- The Boy and the Jaguar by Alan Rabinowitz
- The Invisible Boy by Trudy Ledwig
- The Name Jar by Yangsook Choi
- The Very Quiet Cricket by Eric Carle
- Think for Myself at School by Kristy Hammill
- Think for Myself by Kristy Hammill
- Today by Julie Morstad
- We all Sing with One Voice by J. Philip Miller
- We Are What We Think by Kristy Hammill
- Only One You by
- Planet Patrol by
- 10 Things I Can Do To Help My World by Melanie Walsh
- The Day the Crayons Quit by Oliver Jeffers
- 26 Big Things Small Hands Can Do by

Appendix D

Outset plan for classroom-based practice



- Suite of 14 lessons over 7 weeks, initial two lessons will form the pilot and thereafter there will be 2 lessons per week for 6weeks.
- This is a spiral of research that moves through 4 stages of research, each one building on the last and radiating the focus outward from the child towards society and global issues.
- A reflective journal will be kept throughout this period and will be used to capture related instances where these issues emerge informally in the classroom, through other lessons, relating to other stories or in the socio-dramatic play areas.
- Opportunities that emerge from the lessons to focus on areas specific to the children or to introduce literature brought into the class by the children will change the course of the study but I hope to cover the focus of each lesson at some point in the study and feel that unless otherwise led by my co-researchers, this would be the sequence.
- Other important questions posed will be accounted for in the field notes and ample space will be afforded in all the recording documents to allow for emergent themes and responses.

Original Plan for Classroom-based Practice						
Lesson No	Focus	Lesson Stimulus	Teaching Methods	Data recording	Analysis/ Reflection	Resulting action
PILOT 1	Critical literacy, higher level questioning, discussing the work of others in a sensitive way, recording techniques	Farmer Duck	Teacher will explore the possibilities of book talk. Recording equipment will be trialled.	Notes and Audio clips		
PILOT 2	Focus group facilitation, making field notes, vocabulary building.	Voice matching activity	Classroom management will be trialled. Children's engagement with themes will be gauged	Notes and Audio clips		
1	Identifying children's rights	Teddy Bear Comic Strip created by teacher researcher.	Reading the story and examining what Teddy's concerns are at each stage of the story i.e. hungry, cold, voiceless. Relating Teddy's needs to children's needs and rights. Children will each choose a picture from the story to recreate wherein teddy's needs have been met and they will be displayed with the right they represent as their title.	Children's discussion of Teddy's story will be recorded and the language they use to describe needs, rights and provisions will be noted.	Discussion will be analysed to determine the children's initial understandings of their rights or any misconceptions that may need to be addressed.	Work will be displayed and referred to later in the study. Children's language will be used in following lessons to ensure that they can link new learning to previous conceptions of the topic.
2	Feeling Heard	The very quiet cricket https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YdiGEj_z5b0Q	Have you ever felt like the cricket? Was there something you wanted to say but didn't know how? Do you know any other stories where someone was trying to be seen or heard? How can we use our voices? Where do we use our voices? Who listens to our voices? How do we know that they are listening? How does it feel to be listened to?	Field notes recorded in a grid under each question. Empathy with characters Also recorded.	Notes from this lesson may point to information gaps that need to be acted upon or responses may indicate anomalies that need to be addressed.	Teacher will summarise responses so that her under-standing of them can be assessed at the beginning of the next lesson
3	My opinion	Ordinary Mary's Extraordinary deed https://www.youtube.com/watch	Reflecting on ways we use our voice and how it makes us feel etc. Story - What extraordinary thing did Mary do? Why did she do it? Talk with your partner;	Teacher will conference with partners and take note of special interests of each child and	A compre-hensive list will be drawn up of what areas of interest	Themes will be presented to children in the next lesson. Pictures will

		?v=CKVEvM9Mj6g	What things do you think are that important? If you could make one wish, what would it be? Make a picture where you have done something wonderful, just like Mary did. Draw something that is special to you.	what changes children would like to make. Pictures will be collected.	the children have. Themes will be generated from both pictures and list using NVIVO software.	be anonymised and used to assess teacher's understanding of themes.
4	Making connections	Think for myself	Themes relating to what matters affect us most will be revisited, children will look at images to assess if the themes are truly reflective of what is represented in the pictures and children can add additional themes that they believe affect their lives. We will also look at the images displayed in the room relating to our rights. Are there connections to be made? How can we apply what we know about voices to the matters that affect us? Think for myself story. Children will divide into groups of 4 and will be given a selection of figures from the small world area. They will be asked to choose a theme card and devise a way their characters could tackle the issue e.g. big kids in the playground, not wanting to do homework.	Teacher will navigate amongst the groups asking probing questions, such as what is the problem, who can solve it, who is in charge, can you help? Children will report at the end or will demonstrate their problem-solving role-play.	Audio of conferencing and reporting will be transcribed. Gaps in learning and ability to connect rights-learning with voice theory will be noted.	Children's attitudes to conflict, confidence, independence and ability to ask for help will inform future learning.
5	Our rights at school	The Invisible Boy https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fvK_GicGueA	Was the invisible boy really invisible? Why did he feel invisible? Which one of his rights did this boy not get to enjoy at the start of the story? How do you think it made him feel? How were the other children's voices described? How does Justin make Brian feel seen? What does Brian use to express himself? Do we have the chance to use our voices at school? Do you ever feel like that little boy when you are at school? Does our school have any ways for children to have their say about things? Talk to your partner;	Children's recommendations will be written on poster paper so that they can see that their ideas have been noted.	Recommendations will be transcribed.	Recommendations will be used in lesson 8 as children investigate how to incorporate decision-making processes into school-life.

			How could children be given new ways to be heard at school?			
6	Making decisions	Think for myself at school Images from 1st day at school and a mirror	Story- Think for myself at school. We all make little decisions every day, putting on our socks, eating our breakfast, choosing our toys but some things are decided for us by other people. Why are some decisions made by others? Children will sort images relating to decision they can make and decisions made for them. Are there some decisions we can make for ourselves now that we are getting older? Look at the picture of yourself from September and then into the mirror, what decision can you make now that you didn't make then? Are there things at school you can make decisions about now?	Children's picture sorting will be photographed. Children's assertions about decisions they can make will be noted.	Photographs will be analysed to determine commonality of experience	Actions that we could take at school will be presented alongside how we may make our voices heard for lesson 8.
7	Making a decision – our new play areas	The Epic Eco-inventions, Class Play Areas	Story In the story the inventor made a big decision about what mattered to them most and they decided to make a change. We are going to make decisions as a group, we will decide what to make our next play area into. We will make a list of our ideas and then we will vote like we do in an election to pick our favourite. How does it feel if the one you liked is chosen? How does it feel if the one you liked isn't chosen? Is this a fair way to make decisions?	Notes relating to attitudes and disposition will be taken. Results on the vote will be recorded. Reporting of how the process felt will be audio recorded.	Audio will be transcribed and linked to observed attitudes to gauge the full experience of emotion.	Feelings related to this experience will be reflected upon in lessons 8 and 11.
8	The listening school	Pictures of school activities, beanstalk climbing activity	Images of school activities we enjoy or do not enjoy e.g. playing on yard and reading in the library will be used alongside previously reported sites for participation from lessons 5, 6 and 7 so that the children can express how they feel about each activity. The activities will be represented by images and will be situated within bean-pod picture frames. They children will stick the images to a beanstalk to show their level of enjoyment/preference for each	Photographs will be taken of each child's beanstalk. Any associated conferencing will be recorded in the filed notes. Children's pictures will be collected.	The beanstalk will be graded using the lowest marker by any child as the number 1 and the highest marker as 10 and regular intervals between	The highest scoring activities will be calculated and this information will be brought to the co-researchers for analysis.

			with the top of the beanstalk being the highest level of satisfaction. This activity will be done in small groups as part of our weekly "stations" rotation with support teacher undertaking classroom management with the other three groups in the room. While each child completes the activity, the others are asked to draw a school that is designed to be good at listening. What might a 'listening school' look like? Support teacher will assist by annotating drawings.		thereafter. A score for each activity will then be generated by looking at each child's response. Drawings will undergo thematic analysis.	
9	Equal rights	We all sing with one voice	Story- we all sing with one voice As a class, we scored _____ as our favourite activities. It is good to like different things and to use your voice to share them and sometimes it can be powerful to group our voices together and work together to solve a very big issue. Ball of wool exercise, if you think ____ is important put up your hand and wait for the ball to be thrown to you. Wow, what a big web we have. If you think _____ is important put up your hand and wait for the next ball of wool to come to you. Repeat until all children are connected in a rainbow web. When we work together we can do things that we never could alone. How did you feel to be part of the web? Is it OK to be outside the web?	Children's responses about how is feels to be part of a group and how it might feel to be outside a group will be recoded. A photograph of the woollen web will be taken.	Data will be fed into NVIVO software so that themes may be found and the group experience can be surmised.	Children will be shown the photograph of the web at the outset of the next number of lessons to reinforce our focus on community action.
10	Community	The boy and the jaguar	What happened when the little boy tried to speak? Why did the boy keep trying to speak? How did the boy help the jaguar? How did the boy's life get better? Are there times when we need help? Who in our community help us? What people in our community do we help? How can we help ourselves? Talk to your partner; The little boy in the story loved the jaguar so much that he felt he had to do something. Does anything make you feel that way?	Snowball groups will report what issues they feel most strongly about. This will be audio recorded. Drawings will be displayed.	Recordings will be transcribed. Drawings will be analysed.	Drawings will be grouped if possible and displayed.

			Snowball activity – partners come together and share the things that they feel strongly about. Did anyone in your group feel strongly about the same things as you? Draw a picture of one thing you love as much as the boy loved the jaguar.			
11	What matters to our community?	My World, Your world	Story- my world, your world How are children's rights shown in this story? Who protects our rights? Which rights do we feel we could or should act upon either for ourselves or others? Each child will be given 3 beads and will cast them into ballot boxes paired with various rights-related images. Children will count votes and discuss what could be done regarding this issue. Our feelings around fairness in decision-making from lesson 7 will be revisited.	Notes will be taken about how children feel their rights are protected. Children's voting and the feelings they report will be noted.	Data from rights chosen will be mapped against other recorded data of children's preferences and interests to triangulate common themes.	The rights issue chosen for action will be reflected on by both children and teacher so that ideas can be brought forward in the next lesson.
12	Planning an action project	Today, Project outline template on poster paper. Beanstalk climbing activity	Story – Today Focusing on the possibilities brought to us by each new day. Exploring the possibilities related to tackling our chosen rights issue. When we chose our play area we decided _____, therefore when we decide that we will _____. Children will decide on answers to questions such as who we can help, what we can do, what do we need, when will we do it etc. and the teacher will act as scribe to the children's social justice project plan Children will place bean-pods on the beanstalk to represent how they enjoyed this activity and the results will be recorded as numbers out of 10 as before.	Children's responses regarding the action plan will be transcribed. Children's satisfaction levels will be recorded using the beanstalk activity.	Children's enjoyment statistics will be added to other satisfaction data from lesson 8. Project plan will become the plan for continued action.	Children and teacher will carry out their action plan based on the rights issue they discussed and decided upon. Dialogue around participation in school will continue

Appendix E

Completed classroom-based practice

LESSON	Lesson Stimulus **(L/S)** Concepts / Skills / Dispositions **(C/S/D)**	**Lesson Outline**	**Data Collected**	**Rationale for lesson Outcomes, Assessments or Evaluations**
P1	**L/S** Farmer Duck by Martin Waddell **C/D/S** Exploring book talk Questioning Testing recording equipment Vocabulary building	I will gather the children into their usual story-time area, and I will read aloud the book Farmer Duck. I explain to the children that I am recording them so that I can listen back to their answers later. I will engage in book talk as we go through each page, asking the children to take notes of various aspects in the pictures and asking them to give imagined explanations for why the characters act as they do, "why do you think the farmer is not doing any work?" "How do you think the duck feels?", "Why are the other animals upset?". "What does the duck need?" "What can the duck do?" At the end of the lesson we will summarise the story, remark on some of the injustices and give possible solutions for other ways the conflict could have been resolved.	Audio Recording of whole class discussion REC.27-3-19.P1	To explore the capabilities of whole-class audio-recording. To evaluate the effectiveness of my questioning. To introduce the children to my audio recording device so that it will become familiar and unobtrusive to them. I hope that some of the language of needs and rights is grasped by the children and will be carried forward into the next lesson.
P2	**L/S** Farmer Duck by Martin Waddell **C/D/S** Classroom management and group facilitation in class with support teacher Vocabulary building	I will begin this lesson by going through the assent procedure in collaboration with my learning support teacher. I will read the assent statement to the children and they will use their self-registration names to show their assent or lack of it by placing their names in either green or red labelled baskets. The children will then be divided in 4 groups with any children who do not assent grouped together. Over the course of four days, when the learning support teacher is timetabled to be in the room, I will work with one group for approximately 15 minutes while the others three groups do other literacy stations at their tables and each day the groups will rotate to a new activity. In this way I can work with each small group over the course of the four days. The learning support teacher will facilitate this by working at another station and taking responsibility for whole-class management in the room. Any group of children who do not assent will be taught the same material, but their responses will not be recorded for research purposes. We will retell the story of farmer duck and discuss the feelings of the duck, whether a	Audio recording of small group discussions REC.1-4-19.P2 REC.2-4-19.P2 REC.3-4-19.P2 REC.4-4-19.P2 Transcriptions from each small group TRAN.1-4-19.P2 TRAN.2-4-19.P2 TRAN.3-4-19.P2 TRAN.4-4-19.P2 Field Notes from each small group	To ensure the assent process is completed as openly and as thoroughly as possible. To familiarise my new learning support teacher with the in-class station setup as I will be working with a newly appointed teacher who is involved in a job-sharing arrangement. As the lesson happens over 4 days, I would expect the language to evolve as the children in the room become more aware of the topic of voice and after the first lesson in phase 1 has been taught. I would also expect my questioning to evolve and become more succinct in exploring issues of children's rights and participation. I will assess the children's understanding of the assent process and its effectiveness through observation and reflection in my reflective journal.

		child could be asked to do the work the duck did and what other rights a child might have. Finally, the children will be asked to give voice to the duck, "What could the duck have said other than 'Quack'?"		
1	**L/S** Teddy Bear read along picture book created by Teacher-Researcher **C/D/S** Awareness of rights, Empathy towards Teddy	I will carry out the assent process with the children once again. I will explain to the children that those who give their assent will read a story with me about what Teddy needs and the others will be permitted to read books quietly in their seats. I will assure them that they can give or withdraw their assent at any point. The children will gather for the story and will read along with the teacher. On each page the children will hear and read "Look at Teddy, come and see, can you tell me what he needs?" On each page the children will see a teddy bear and will discuss what his needs are i.e. a hungry bear, a bear needing shelter, healthcare etc. We will discuss how Teddy's needs are the same as our needs and how children have rights to ensure that their needs are met, After the story the children will draw pictures of Teddy enjoying one of his rights and I will conference with them individually to ensure I understand each picture and can ascertain their meaning.	Number of children who give their assent. Discussion on what Teddy needs will be recorded. REC.4-4-19.L1 Children's pictures of Teddy enjoying his rights and their comments PIC1-20.4-4-19.L1	I will examine the children's language to decipher the language most appropriate to discuss children's rights. I will assess the children's grasp on what their rights are through conferencing with them about their drawings. I will assess the children's understanding of their rights and the effectiveness of this lesson through observation and reflection in my reflective journal.
2	**L/S** The Very Quiet Cricket by Eric Carle **C/D/S** Feeling heard	I will again carry out the assent procedure asking the children to put their names in either a green or red labelled basket. I will again assure the children that they can give or withdraw their assent at any time. I will also outline the lesson to them. I will explain that we will all listen to a story; they can all answer questions and I will only take note of their answers if they give their assent. I will model for them the difference between mimicking others and forming one's own opinion, explain some of the reasons a person may mimic instead of being reflective and encourage them to develop answers of their own to the answers after our story. I will then read the questions aloud so that they have time to think about these things and consider their answers. We will then watch a YouTube video of the story as it creates a beautiful atmospheric rendering of the story and let's the insects various noises and voices take centre stage in the story. After the story I will ask the children the following and note their answers. How do we use our voices? Where do we use our voices? Who listens to our voices? How do we know that they are listening?	Number of children who give their assent Children's responses will be recorded on a questionnaire grid FEED.9-4-19.L2	How does it feel when you are being listened to? I hope to explore the feelings children associate with being heard and to identify the places and people with whom they associate good listening. I hope this will inform about me whether or not children feel listened to at school and perhaps about more specific times or locations where they feel heard. After I implement some of their ideas about the listening school I will ask these same questions and decipher whether or not they associate school more as a place where they are listened to. At the beginning of phase 2 I will present them with the data from this questionnaire in order to further explore and question what listening is and how our school can be better at listening. We will also explore the feelings of others in phase 3 when we discuss the equal rights we share with others.

		How does it feel to be listened to?		The use of a feedback form will be assessed as a listening tool through the use of the reflective journal.
3	**L/S** Ordinary Mary's Extra-ordinary Deed by Emily Pearson **C/D/S** Forming an opinion	I will begin the lesson by going through our assent procedure. I will outline the lesson and explain that all children will sit and listen to the story, all children will complete the consolidation activity and only those who give their assent will have their pictures annotated and collected for research. I will read the story of Ordinary Mary and as a class we will discuss how her simple action changed the world for the better. We will discuss what simple acts of kindness we could do to make our world a better place and we will think about what things are most important to us. I will ask the children to draw one extra-ordinary deed they could do to make the world a better place. **Meanwhile I will move around the children one by one and write down those things that they believe are the most important to them.** I will do this so that the children will be less influenced by the larger discussion group and can have time to form their own opinions on what matters to them.	Number of children who give their assent Children's pictures with teacher comments written on them PIC1-20.9-4-19.L3	I hope to instil in the children the idea of small changes and particularly those of children being able to create great change in the world so that they see how fruitful their actions and desire for change can be. Time for the child to consider what matters to them personally. The data from this conferencing will be collated and presented to the children pictorially under the heading "We care" to remind the children of the things that matter most to them and that they can work towards caring for, protecting or acting in favour of. This will be displayed throughout phase 2 so that it becomes familiar and at the forefront of the children's minds when we consider our action project in phase 3. This data will also be used to create scenario cards for the next lesson. The making and discussion of pictures will be assessed as a listening tool through the use of the reflective journal.
4	**L/S** Think for Myself by Kristy Hammill **C/D/S** Making connections Children's attitudes to conflict, confidence, independence and ability to ask for help will inform	Again, we will engage in the assent process. Children will be informed that they will still get to learn about Teddy and join in with our small world fun, but again, any child who does not give their assent will not have their ideas 'written down for research'. I will begin by reintroducing the Teddy bear comic from Lesson 1 and asking the children to identify any needs that Teddy has and following up their answer by stating the corresponding right he has. I will then bring out our large class Teddy and ask them to help sing them a song about Teddy and how he needs some things that the children all have a right to i.e. a name, a voice, people to care for him, food and healthcare. I will sing the first verse 'My Teddy bear has no name, no name, no name, my Teddy bear has no name, won't	Number of children who give their assent. Recordings of the feedback that the children give at the end of the play session REC1-5.30-4-19.L4 Field notes written as the	The purpose of this lesson is to link the children's thinking about what they care about and their rights to positive action. The activity cards will relate to areas they have claimed they care deeply about in lesson 3 and will encourage the children to act in the best interest of those they care about whilst being rights respecting. This lesson also hopes to reinforce the children's learning about rights in an engaging and child-centred way. The recordings will demonstrate the children's ability to link thinking about rights with action and will

	future teaching.	you name my Teddy bear' and wait for the children to offer responses. I will repeat this method with each verse until we have revise some of Teddy's rights and the children are all engaged. I will then read the story of Lily a girl who can think by herself and remind the children how important it is to form an opinion of their own. I will also remind them to look at how the people around Lily feel, are they upset by the things she does? Does she ever decide she will hurt someone else? After reading the story the children will break into groups. These groups will be pre-decided for the purpose of having an able reader in each group who can read the scenario cards. Children will be given a selection of familiar character toys from their small world area and a dilemma card that relates to something the class care deeply about from lesson 3. The groups will be given 7-10 minutes to play out or talk out what the characters could do and then will be asked to feedback to the class what they have decided to do or what their thought process was. **How could these characters solve this problem or what might they do to help?**	teacher navigates the class during the play session FN.30-4-19.L4	provide insight into the language children use to describe both rights and action. Gaps in learning and ability to connect rights-learning with voice theory will be noted. An image of Teddy bear will be created with words such as "voice" "name" "family" "home" "healthcare" displayed around him for children to remember both the song and their basic rights. The use of role-play as a method of connecting ideas and action will be assessed as a learning tool through the use of the reflective journal.
5	**L/S** The Invisible Boy by Trudy Ledwig **C/D/S** Our Rights at School How best to express our voices Respect for the voices of others	We will begin with the assent process, again the children will all participate fully, those with their names in the red basket will not have their ideas 'written down for research'. We will begin this lesson sitting in a circle with a game of 'Simon says', we will recall the story of the Very Quiet Cricket and each of the things 'Simon says' will include …like a … and an animal or mini-beast e.g. "Simon says chirp like a cricket". After the children have activated their voices and are engaged, I will open the front page of our book and without reading it I will name the characters. I will remind them that we are only talking about the children in the picture, not about any children in our own class, I will ask them to tell me from the picture which child they think makes the biggest noise, the next biggest noise and the smallest noise etc. With each one I will ask them to give an example of an animal that makes that much noise. I will ask them **which child they would most like to be like. Which child would it easiest to hear? Which child would it be easiest to listen to? What's the difference?** I will then read the story to the children and at the end ask the following questions: Was the invisible boy really invisible? Why did he feel invisible?	Number of children who give their assent. Poster outlining children's responses FEED.1-5-19.L5 Field notes FN.1-5-19.L5	The children will begin to situate their rights amongst the rights of others at school, i.e. we have the right to voice but not the right to silence others. I hope this lesson will also evoke empathy and the desire to include others as part of a shared community. I also hope to determine some alternative ways that children might express themselves like the child in the story did and that this could be incorporated into the listening methods of the study. Recommendations will be used in lesson 8 as children investigate how to incorporate decision-making processes into school-life. The responses the children give about how to have their voices heard will be displayed alongside the image of Teddy from phase 1 L4. The collaborative writing method will be assessed as a

		Which one of his rights did this boy not get to enjoy at the start of the story? How do you think it made him feel? How were the other children's voices described? How does Justin make Brian feel seen? What does Brian use to express himself? **How do you like to express yourself?** **Do we have the chance to use our voices at school?** Do you ever feel like that little boy when you are at school? Does our school have any ways for children to have their say about things? Talk to your partner; **How could children be given new ways to be heard at school?** I will take note of their answers on a poster and make an audio recording purely for the purpose of writing field notes.		listening tool through the use of the reflective journal.
6	**L/S** Think for myself at school by Kristy Hammill **C/D/S** Making decisions Developing a sense of growing agency and autonomy and the need for adult guidance.	We will go through the assent process and the children will be assured that they can take part in all aspects of the lesson but that their sorting cards will not be photographed if they do not give their assent. We will begin by watching and listening to the following song on growing up. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z7UnM3dyYy8 or https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F5DVGXBosIA or https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CSg3gsuLm3o We will sit in a circle; I will read the story "Think for myself at school" and emphasise again the importance of being true to oneself whilst respecting others. We will then discuss all the little decisions we make every day, putting on our socks, choosing the colours we use, eating our breakfast, choosing our toys and the fact that some things are decided for us by other people. **Why are some decisions made by others?** Children will discuss images relating to decision they can make, and decisions made for them. **Are there some decisions we can make for ourselves now that we are getting older?** Look at the picture of yourself as a baby and then into the mirror, what decision can you make now that you didn't make then? Are there things at school you can make decisions about now? The children will then break into pairs with small replicas of the images we previously	Number of children who give their assent Children's picture sorting will be photographed. PHO1-10.3-5-19.L6 Children's assertions about decisions they can make will be noted. FN.3-5-19.L6 Feedback to highlighted questions will be complied FEED.3-5-19.L6	Photographs will be analysed to determine commonality of experience Poem "I can" will be collaboratively written in an English lesson using the assertions of the children and displayed in the classroom to create a sense of affirmation and empowerment. Children will help to a articulate and analyse the data in this way. Feedback on decisions made by others and those the children feel that they could or would like to make themselves will be presented alongside how we may make our voices heard for lesson 8. The sorting and ranking tool will be assessed as a learning tool through the use of the reflective journal. Children's photographs will be displayed under the heading "Look what we can do now"- this display will work towards empowering the children.

		looked at and divide them into decisions we made as babies, decisions we can make now and decisions other people make for us. **Are there any other decisions you can make now or would like to?** Children can work in pairs to take photographs of things they can do now that they could not as babies. They will use school tablets and will be asked not to take pictures of any children's faces.	PHO1-?3-5-19L6	
7	**L/S** The Epic Eco-Inventions by Jona David Class Play areas **C/D/S** Making decisions	We will begin with the assent process. The children will all have the opportunity to vote but if they do not wish to be part of the research I will not include their feedback sheet or audio-record them. I will review the story of the epic eco-inventions from our previous English lesson. In the story the inventor made a big decision about what mattered to them most and they decided to make a change. In school we make changes based on what the majority of the group decide. Can you think of any decisions we have made as a class? We are going to make another decision as a group, we will decide what our next role play theme will be. We will make a list of our ideas and then we will vote like we do in an election to pick our favourite. Children will focus on their feelings about the voting process by colouring in a beanstalk to show how much they enjoyed voting or not. They will also indicate if their idea was the overall winner or not. **How does it feel if the one you liked is chosen?** **How does it feel if the one you liked isn't chosen?** **Is this a fair way to make decisions?** Children who assented in this lesson will be audio-recoded as they play in their play to see whether or not they integrate any of their learning around rights into their play and whether or not they speak about their enjoyment of the voting process or employ democratic techniques. This will be done over the course of 4 play times.	Number of children who give their assent Notes relating to attitudes and disposition will be taken Results on the vote will be recorded. Reporting of how the process felt will be audio recorded. REC.8-5-19.L7 Colouring sheets will be analysed FEED1-20.8-5-19.L7 Children at play will be recorded REC.12/13/14/15-5-19.L7	Audio will be transcribed and linked to observed attitudes to gauge the full experience of emotion. The feedback sheets will be analysed to determine whether the experience of voting was an enjoyable experience for the children or not and therefore whether or not it should used in further phases or not. Any mitigating circumstances such as upset amongst the class or any arising incidents may require me to conference with children separately about their experience or may require the feedback sheets to be given again at after another vote such as one we might commonly do on a song to learn etc. Feelings related to this experience will be reflected upon in lessons 8 and 11 on how to create a listening school and how to work in the best interests of the community. The democratic ballot and its effect on the children's happiness and self-esteem will be assessed as a learning tool through the use of the reflective journal. Recordings will be listened to and any reference to rights or democratic processed will be transcribed.
8	**L/S** Pictures of Classroom activities, beanstalk assessment tool	We will take part in the assent process. Images of school activities we enjoy or do not enjoy e.g. playing on yard and reading in the library will be used alongside previously reported sites for participation from lessons 5, 6 and 7 so that the children can rate how they feel about each activity.	Number of children who give their assent Photograp hs will be	The beanstalk will be graded using the lowest marker by any child as the number 1 and the highest marker as 10 and regular intervals between thereafter. A score for each activity will then be generated

	C/D/S The Listening School	The activities will be represented by images and will be situated within bean-pod picture frames. The children will stick the images to a beanstalk to show their level of enjoyment/preference for each with the top of the beanstalk being the highest level of satisfaction. Each child who has given their assent will have their beanstalk photographed. While each child completes the activity, the others in the group are asked to draw a school that is designed to be good at listening. **What might a 'listening school' look like?** Whose voices would be heard? What activities would you do? Drawings will be annotated by teacher. This activity will be done in small groups as part of our weekly "stations" rotation with support teacher undertaking classroom management with the other three groups in the room. Support teacher will assist by overseeing classroom management and teaching another literacy station during the 20minute lesson.	taken of each child's beanstalk. PHO1-20.9/10/13/14-5-19.L8 Any associated conferencing will be recorded in the filed notes. FN.9/10/13/14-5-19.L8 Children's pictures will be collected. PIC1-20.9/10/13/14-5-19.L8	by looking at each child's response. Drawings will undergo thematic analysis. The highest scoring activities and most common features of a listening school will be calculated and this information will be brought to the co-researchers for analysis. In this way I hope to have triangulated all previous information about where our most desired areas of participation in school lie. The beanstalk rating resource will be assessed as a listening tool through the use of the reflective journal.
9	**L/S** We all sing with one voice by J. Philip Miller **C/D/S** Equal Rights To develop a sense of community and common purpose. To create a language of inclusion.	We will carry out the assent process. I will read the story "We all sing with one voice" "As a class, we scored ___ [data from L8] ___ as our favourite activities. It is good to like different things and to use your voice to share them and sometimes it can be powerful to group our voices together and work together to solve a very big issue". Ball of wool exercise, if you think___ [data from L8] ___ is important put up your hand and wait for the ball to be thrown to you. Wow, what a big web we have. If you think___ [data from L8] ___ is important put up your hand and wait for the next ball of wool to come to you. Repeat until all children are connected in a rainbow web. When we work together, we can do things that we never could alone. If the web is dense enough we can hopefully bounce a ball on it. **How did you feel to be part of the web?** **Is it OK to be outside the web?** Can you name any times in life or in stories when a group of people joined together to make a change? Together we will listen to and sing the song "This land is your land, this land is my land" by Pete Seeger.	Number of children who give their assent Children's responses about how it feels to be part of a group and how it might feel to be outside a group will be recorded as feedback FEED.17-5-19.L9 A photograph of the woollen web will be taken.	Children's feelings of inclusion or exclusion will be recorded and their language will be used to create a display of the benefits of community. This language will be used to remind the children of their common and individual experiences, that we all have an individual contribution to make but that our focus should be on common goals. Children will be shown the photograph of the web at the outset of the next number of lessons to reinforce our focus on community action. The web co-operative game will be assessed as a learning tool through the use of the reflective journal.
10	**L/S** The Boy and the Jaguar	We will engage in the assent procedure. Any child who does not give their assent will not participate in the snowball activity and their	Number of children who give	Snowball group feedback and drawings will hopefully give us

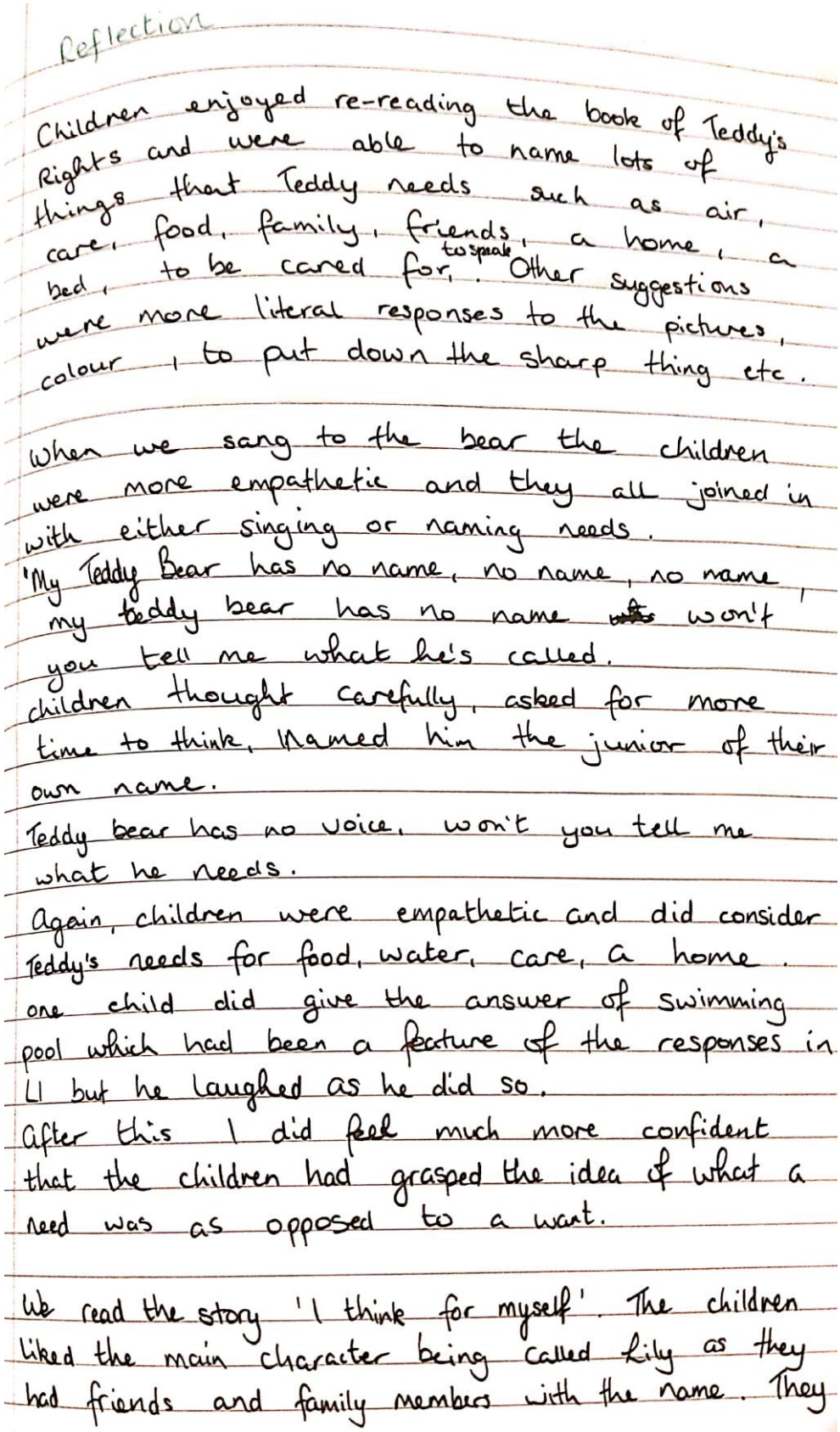
	by Alan Rabinowitz **C/D/S** Community Developing an attitude of per-severance Recognising the other people in our communities who help us to assert our rights and achieve our goals.	drawing will not be collected for research purposes. We will remind ourselves of our previous lesson and our feelings about being part of the group. These feelings will be displayed with the photograph of the woollen web from L9 and the feelings will be projected onto the teddy bear image from phase 1 L4 and phase 2 L5. We will sing the song "This land is your land, this land is my land" by Pete Seeger. We will then read the story "The boy and the Jaguar" What happened when the little boy tried to speak? Why did the boy keep trying to speak? How did the boy help the jaguar? How did the boy's life get better? **Are there times when we need help?** **Who in our community helps us?** **What people in our community do we help?** **How can we help ourselves?** Talk to your partner; The little boy in the story loved the jaguar so much that he felt he had to do something. Who in your community do you feel you could help? Snowball activity – partners come together and share the ways that they feel they could help their community. Children can make pictures individually or in small groups to represent changes they would like to make.	their assent Snowball groups will report what issues they feel most strongly about. This will be audio recorded and filled into template REC.22-5-19.L10 FEED.22-5-19.L10 Drawings will be analysed and displayed. PIC1-20 22-5-19.L10	ideas for a community action project. The action project will be determined during the following lessons using either a ballot style decision as carried out in L7 or through another method deemed fairer based on feedback from L7, debate or random selection. People who help us may become a discreet class lesson based on the responses during this lesson and the snowball method will be assessed as a learning tool through the use of the reflective journal.
11	**L/S** We are what we think by Kristy Hammill **C/D/S** What matters to our community	We will engage in the assent process. The children will be informed that they are welcome to engage in all the discussions but those who do not assent will not have their ideas written down and they will not be asked to vote (If there is a vote). Children will be reminded again of the areas of change they suggested in L8 and distilled in L10 as well as the feelings they had around creating change in L9. I will read the story of "We are what we think" and we will discuss what it means to have a positive mindset. I will show the children images of young people who have a positive mindset about change and their own power to make change such as "if all the little people make a little change" and words by Greta Thunberg. I will then present images relating to each possible area for change and action to the children, framed as rights issues. We will review our data around how it feels to make choices. Based on information regarding the children's enjoyment of	Number of children who give their assent Notes will be taken about children's mindset in relation to action and agency. FN.23-5-19.L11 The result of the ballot will be noted as well as any feelings the children	Data from L7 will be synthesised both by the way in which this decision is made and feelings around the democratic process shown in the colouring pages and will either be verified or contradicted. Children's discussion about mindset will be recorded for the purposes of transcription. Children's mindset about change will be used as a measure of the efficacy of the lessons in promoting agency and the scope of their interests will be contrasted against L3 in which the children were asked which things were most important to them. If the children have developed a greater awareness of global issues or indeed a greater empathy towards a wider range of issues the lessons will be

		democratic voting from L7 we will either carry out a similar vote whereby children can each be given 3 beads and will cast them into ballot boxes paired with the images. If the data from L7 suggests that this was upsetting or not enjoyable for the children, we may choose through discussion, random selection or modelled reasoning-based selection by the teacher. Children will colour in the same beanstalk colouring page from L7 to show how much they enjoyed this form of decision-making. Children will discuss what could be done regarding this issue. We will set the following day as our date to decide our action and we will finish the lesson by singing "This land is our land"	express about our method of selection through the beanstalk colouring pages FEED1-20.23-5-19, if the feelings remained the same as L7 or if they changed.	deemed as having had an impact on their egalitarian mindset. The rights issue chosen for action will be reflected on by both children and teacher so that ideas can be brought forward in the next lesson. Children's enjoyment of the democratic processes will be reflected upon in the reflective journal to determine if this is best classroom practice for this group or not.
12	**L/S** Today by Julie Morstad. Pyramid poster based on resource from Creating Futures lesson 8 Beanstalk assessment tool **C/D/S** Planning an action project	We will engage in the assent process. Children will be informed that they will be included in all discussion but those who do not assent will not have their ideas written down and will not have photographs taken of their beanstalks. We will remind ourselves of the story "Today" from our previous literacy lesson. We will focus on the possibilities brought to us by each new day and the many choices we made, none of which are wrong but each lead us to new opportunities. We will explore the possibilities related to tackling our chosen rights issue. Children will draw pictures of a world in which the problem we have focused on will be solved. We will then collaboratively fill in our pyramid poster on what we can do personally, at home, at school and in our community to work towards solving this issue. Children will decide on answers to question such as who we can help, what we can do, what do we need, when will we do it etc. and the teacher will act as scribe to the children's social justice project plan whereby each section will be filled using the most commonly held view. The plan will then be displayed in the classroom. Children will be asked to how much they enjoyed the process of making this decision using either beanstalk colouring pages from L7 and L11 or by placing a bean pod on beanstalk ranking frame. We will finish the lesson with the song we have been learning in music lessons "Best day of my life" by American Authors.	Number of children who give their assent Children's futures drawings PIC1-20.24-5-19.L12 Children's responses regarding the action plan will be collaboratively written on poster paper. Children's satisfaction levels will be recorded using the beanstalk activity FEED1-20.24-5-19.L12	Children's enjoyment statistics will be added to other satisfaction data from lessons 7 and 11. Children's futures drawings will increase their affective desire for change. Children's attitudes towards the action plan and towards those they intend to help will be noted in the reflective journal. Children and teacher will carry out their action plan based on the rights issue they discussed and decided upon. Our action plan will be used over the coming weeks to inform our classwork. Dialogue around participation in school will continue and methodologies enjoyed by the children will be enshrined in daily practice within the classroom.

Appendix F

Extracts from reflective journal

Extract from Lesson 4 reflection



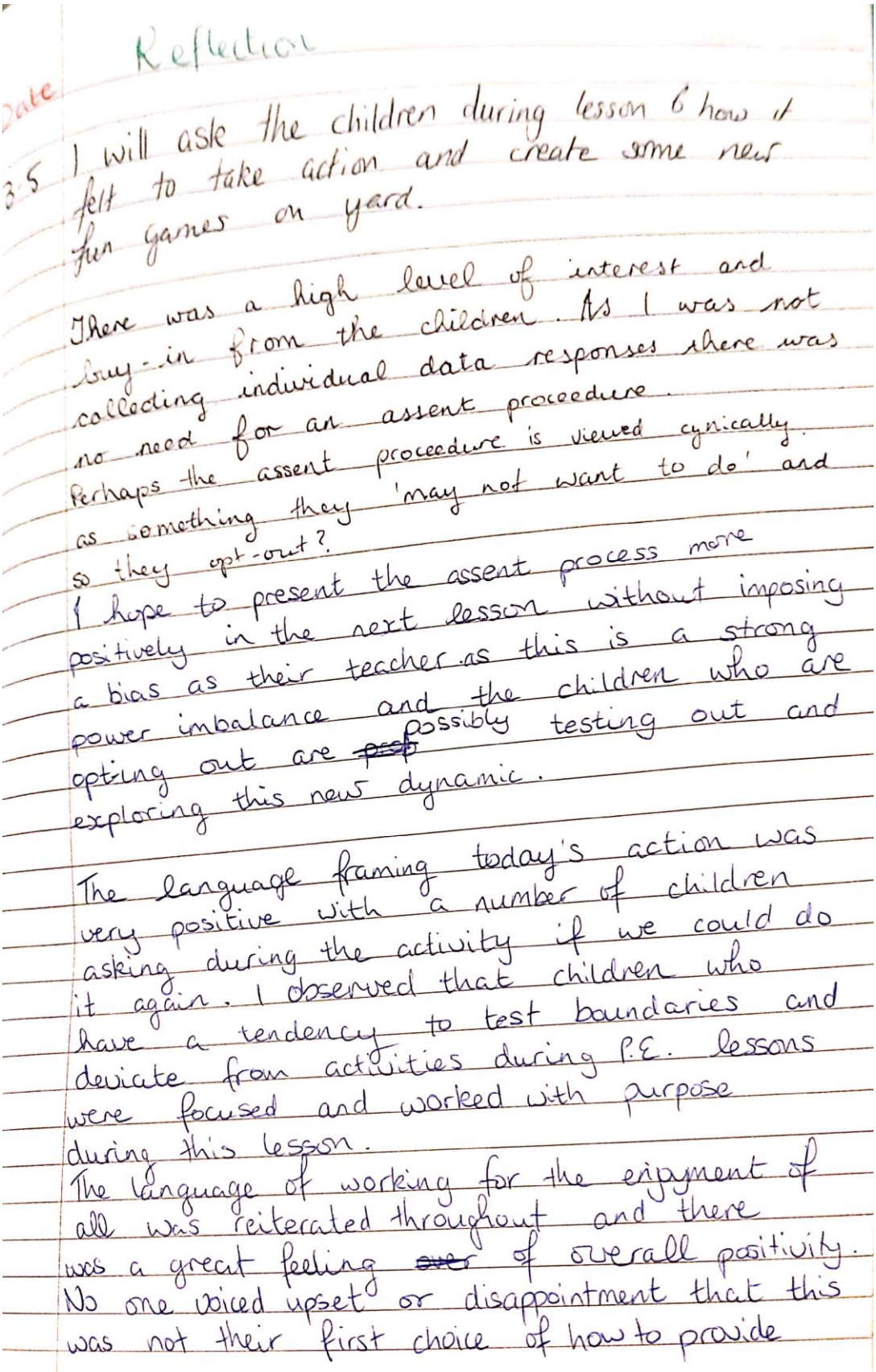
Reflection

Children enjoyed re-reading the book of Teddy's Rights and were able to name lots of things that Teddy needs such as air, care, food, family, friends, a home, a bed, to be cared for, to speak. Other suggestions were more literal responses to the pictures, colour, to put down the sharp thing etc.

When we sang to the bear the children were more empathetic and they all joined in with either singing or naming needs.
'My Teddy Bear has no name, no name, no name, my teddy bear has no name ~~wh~~ won't you tell me what he's called.
children thought carefully, asked for more time to think, named him the junior of their own name.
Teddy bear has no voice, won't you tell me what he needs.
Again, children were empathetic and did consider Teddy's needs for food, water, care, a home. one child did give the answer of swimming pool which had been a feature of the responses in LI but he laughed as he did so.
After this I did feel much more confident that the children had grasped the idea of what a need was as opposed to a want.

We read the story 'I think for myself'. The children liked the main character being called Lily as they had friends and family members with the name. They

Extract from Lesson 5 reflection



Reflection

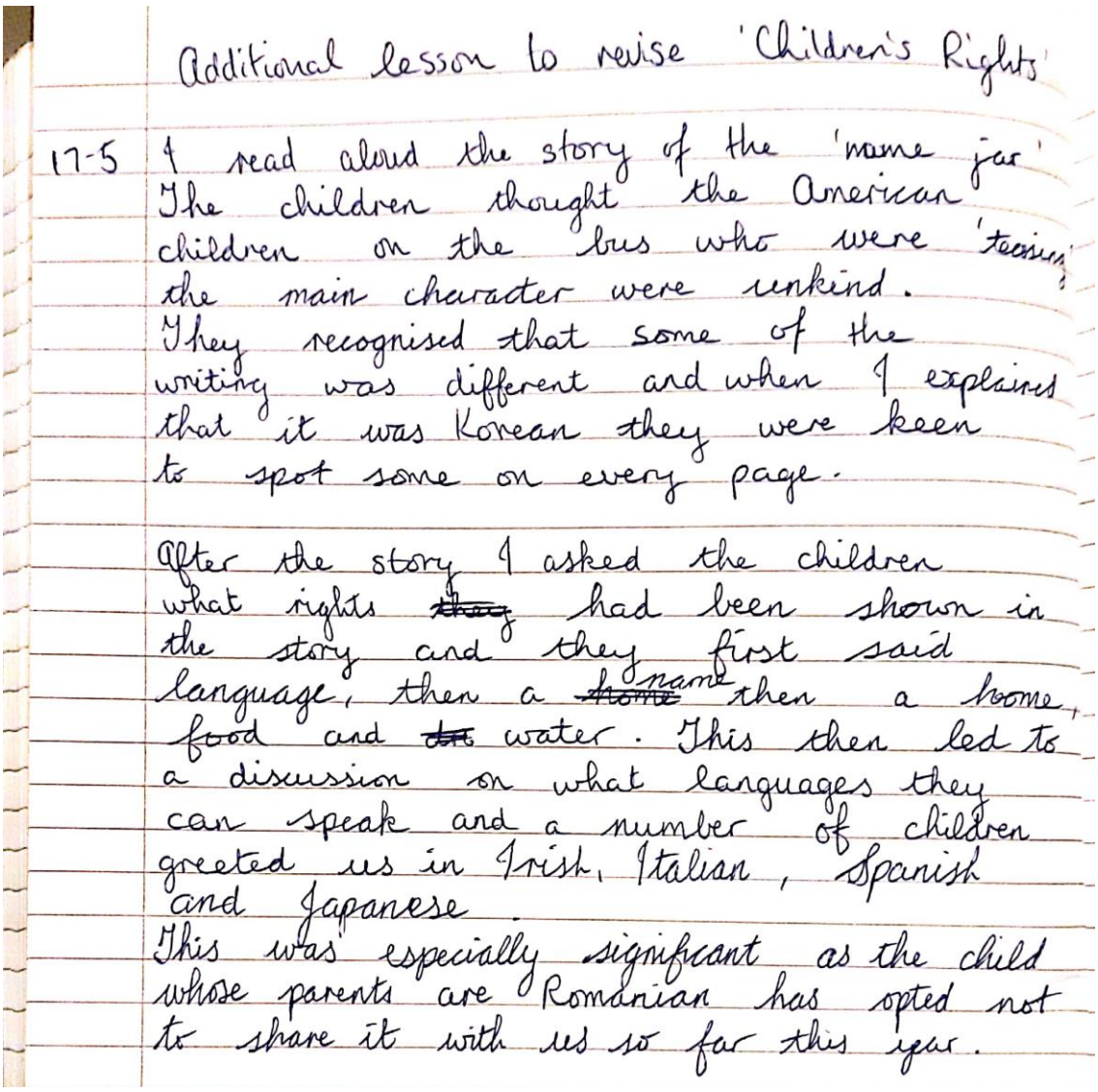
Date

3.5 I will ask the children during lesson 6 how it felt to take action and create some new fun games on yard.

There was a high level of interest and buy-in from the children. As I was not collecting individual data responses there was no need for an assent procedure. Perhaps the assent procedure is viewed cynically as something they 'may not want to do' and so they opt-out?
I hope to present the assent process more positively in the next lesson without imposing a bias as their teacher as this is a strong power imbalance and the children who are opting out are ~~prob~~ possibly testing out and exploring this new dynamic.

The language framing today's action was very positive with a number of children asking during the activity if we could do it again. I observed that children who have a tendency to test boundaries and deviate from activities during P.E. lessons were focused and worked with purpose during this lesson.
The language of working for the enjoyment of all was reiterated throughout and there was a great feeling ~~over~~ of overall positivity. No one voiced upset or disappointment that this was not their first choice of how to provide

Extract from Lesson 9.1 reflection

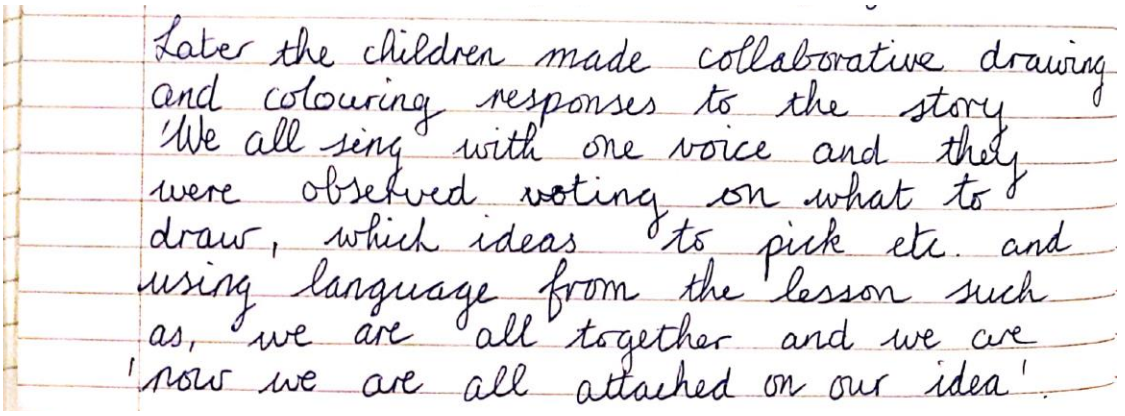


Additional lesson to revise 'Children's Rights'

17-5 I read aloud the story of the 'name jar'. The children thought the American children on the bus who were 'teasing' the main character were unkind. They recognised that some of the writing was different and when I explained that it was Korean they were keen to spot some on every page.

After the story I asked the children what rights ~~they~~ had been shown in the story and they first said language, then a ~~home~~ name then a home, food and ~~drs~~ water. This then led to a discussion on what languages they can speak and a number of children greeted us in Irish, Italian, Spanish and Japanese.
This was especially significant as the child whose parents are Romanian has opted not to share it with us so far this year.

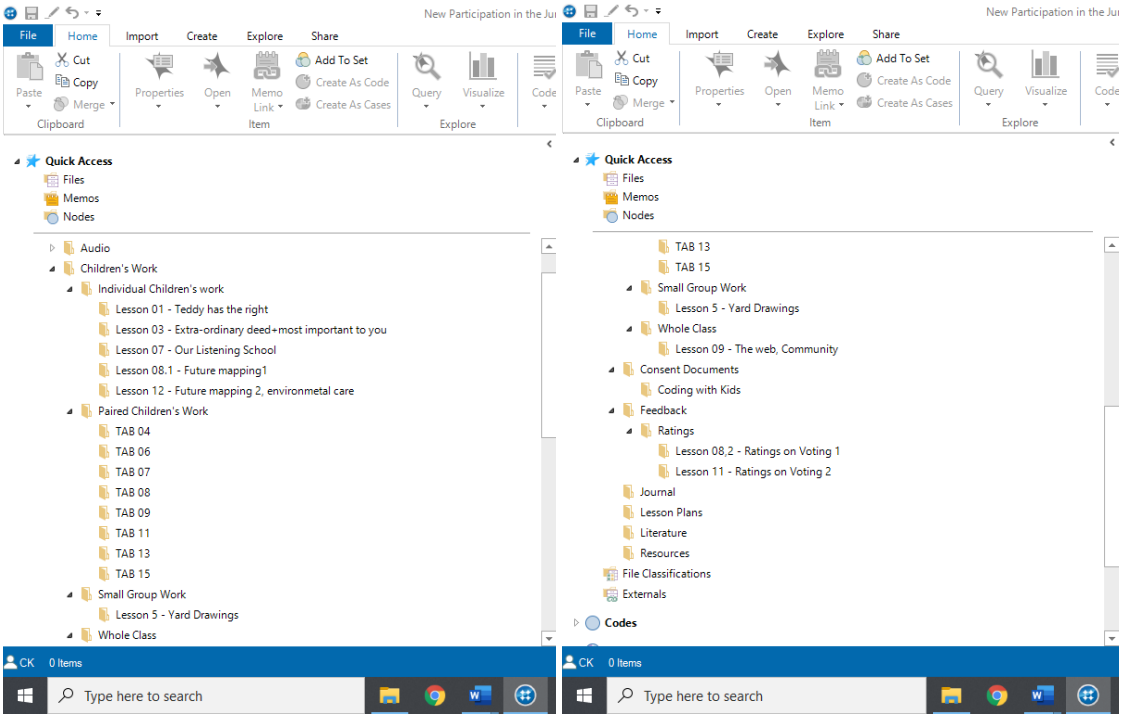
Extract from Lesson 9 reflection



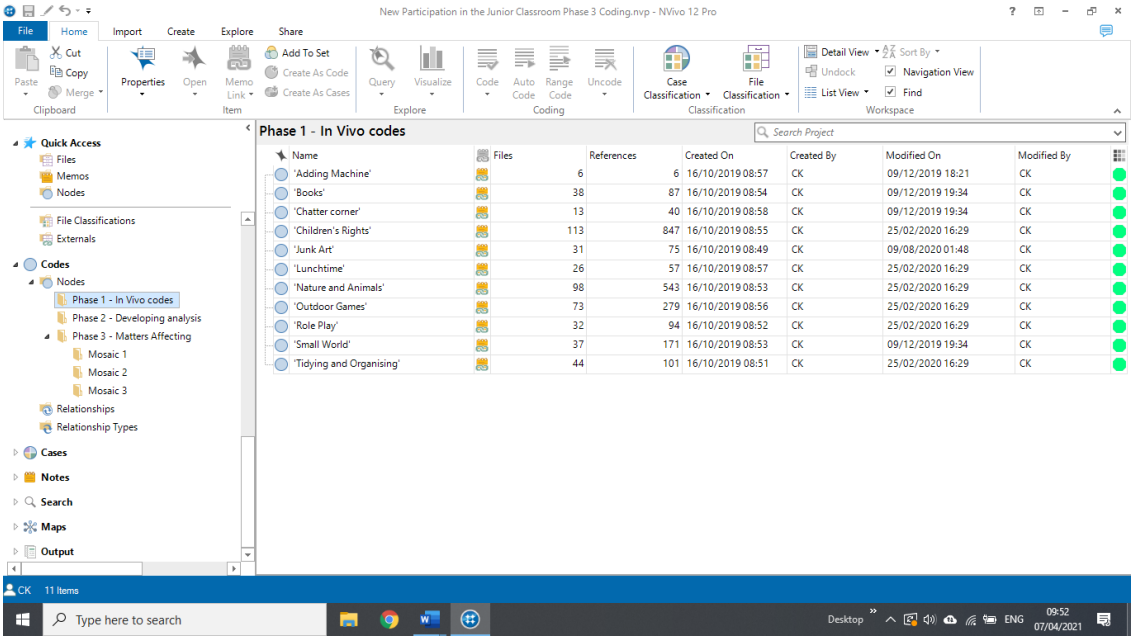
Later the children made collaborative drawing and colouring responses to the story 'We all sing with one voice and they were observed voting on what to draw, which ideas to pick etc. and using language from the lesson such as, we are all together and we are 'now we are all attached on our idea'.

Appendix G

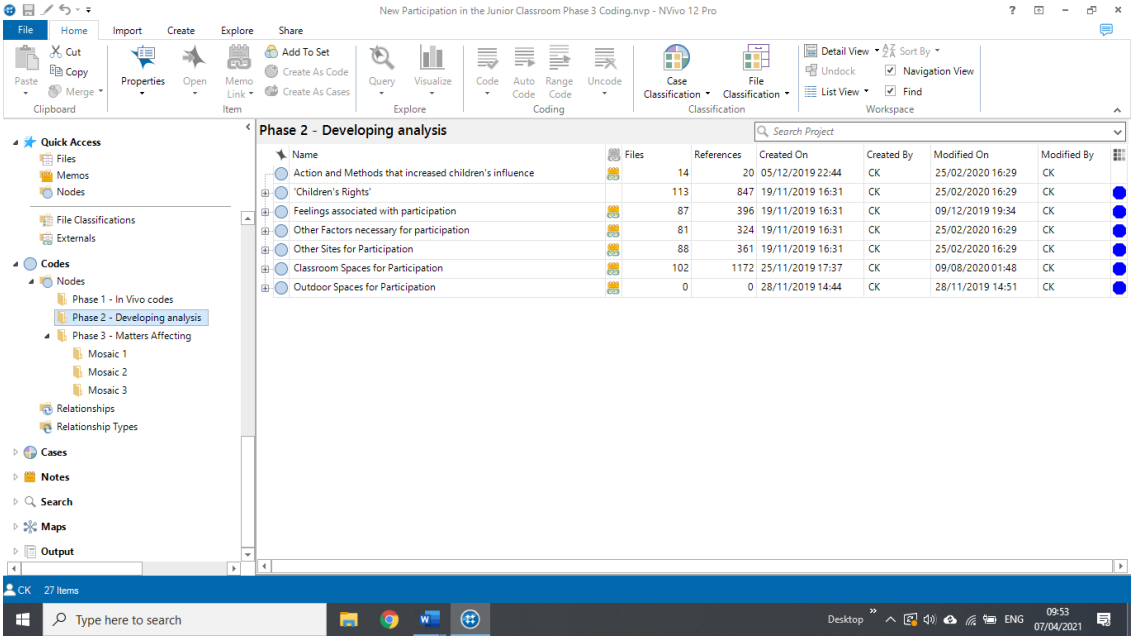
Image of database in NVivo software



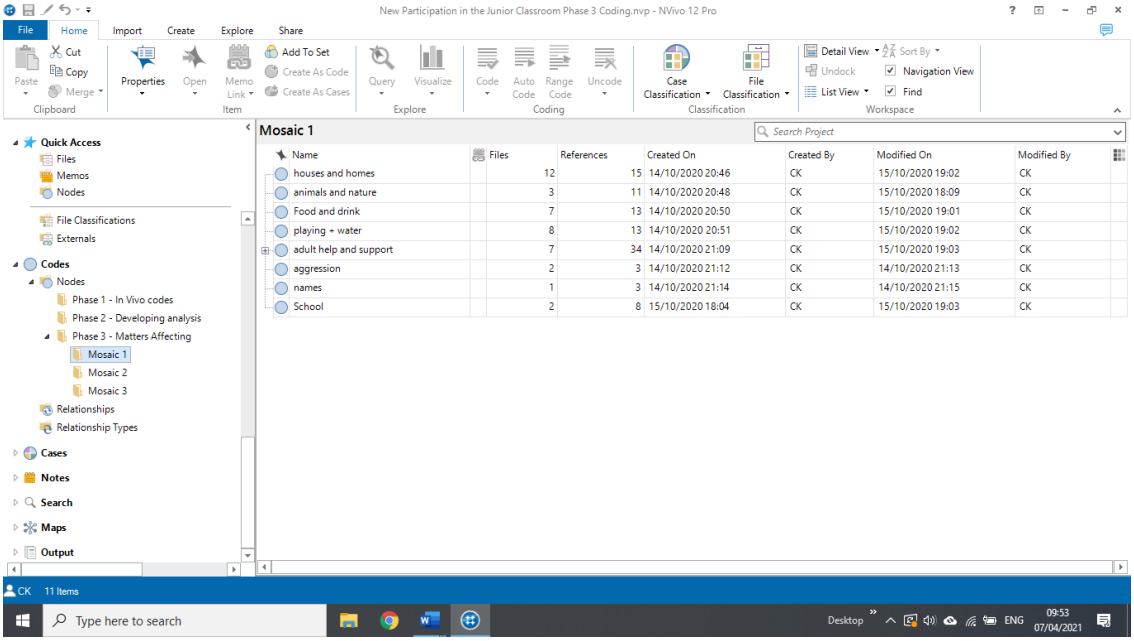
Codes and References from Phase 1 of Grounded Theory

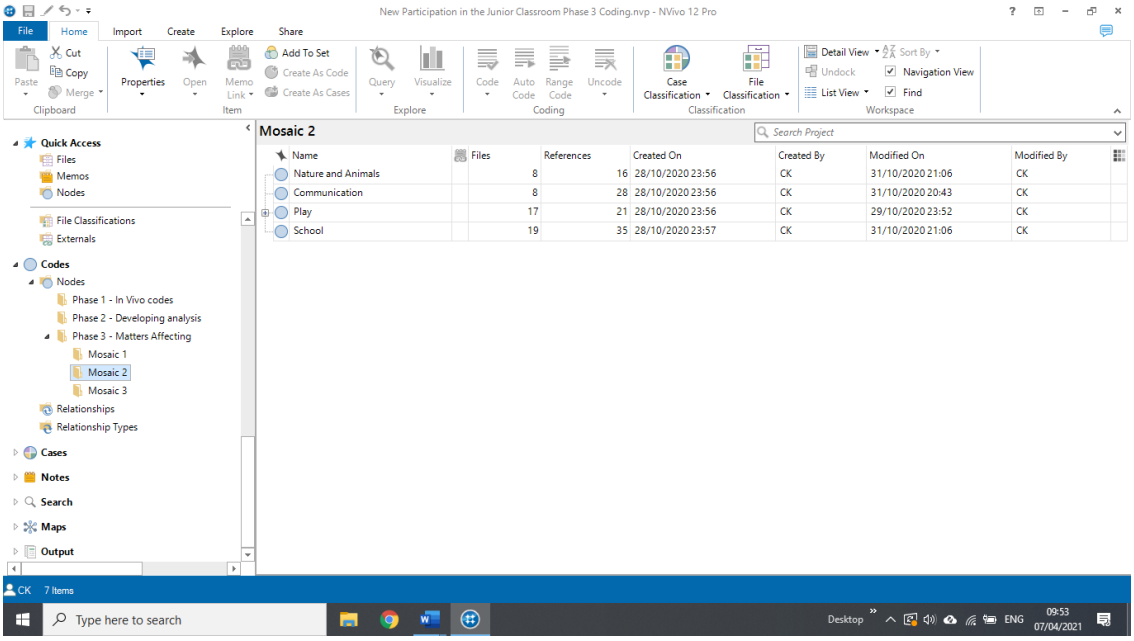


Codes and References from Phase 2 of Grounded Theory



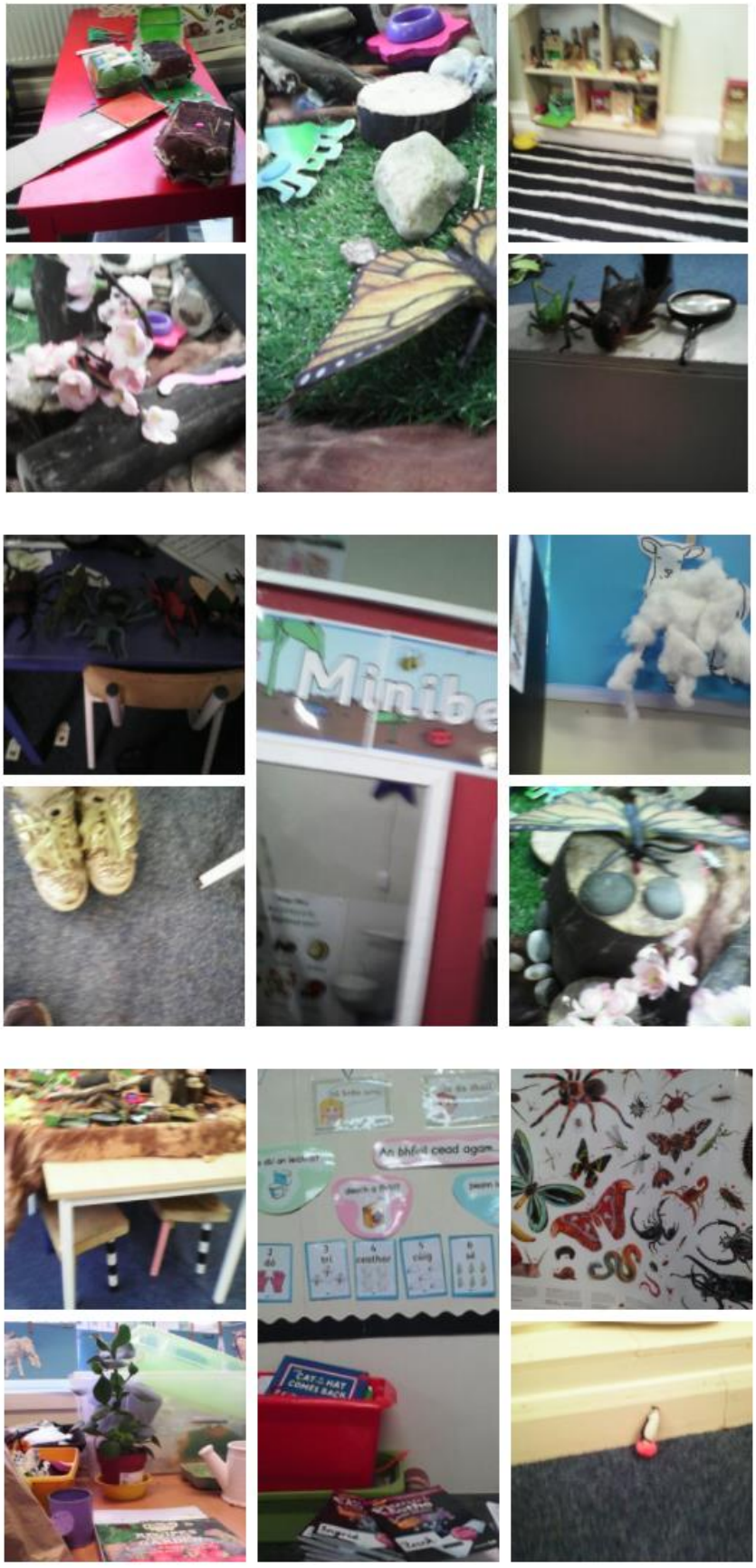
Codes and References from Phase 3 of Grounded Theory




New Participation in the Junior Classroom Phase 3 Coding.nvp - NVivo 12 Pro
File
Home
Import
Create
Explore
Share
Paste
Cut
Copy
Merge
Clipboard
Properties
Open
Memo Link
Add To Set
Create As Code
Create As Cases
Item
Query
Visualize
Explore
Code
Auto Code
Range Code
Uncode
Coding
Case Classification
File Classification
Classification
Detail View
Undock
List View
Sort By
Navigation View
Find
Workspace
Quick Access
Files
Memos
Nodes
File Classifications
Externals
Codes
Nodes
Phase 1 - In Vivo codes
Phase 2 - Developing analysis
Phase 3 - Matters Affecting
Mosaic 1
Mosaic 2
Mosaic 3
Relationships
Relationship Types
Cases
Notes
Search
Maps
Output
Mosaic 2
Search Project
Name
Files
References
Created On
Created By
Modified On
Modified By
Nature and Animals 8 16 28/10/2020 23:56 CK 31/10/2020 21:06 CK
Communication 8 28 28/10/2020 23:56 CK 31/10/2020 20:43 CK
Play 17 21 28/10/2020 23:56 CK 29/10/2020 23:52 CK
School 19 35 28/10/2020 23:57 CK 31/10/2020 21:06 CK
CK
7 Items
Type here to search
Desktop
ENG
09:53
07/04/2021

Appendix H

Photomap collages from lesson 6



Appendix I

Poem composed with children's input on community

Community

Part of the web that joins us together

Helping our friends no matter the weather

It's making us happy, feels really nice

Like a giant great pie, we're all getting a slice

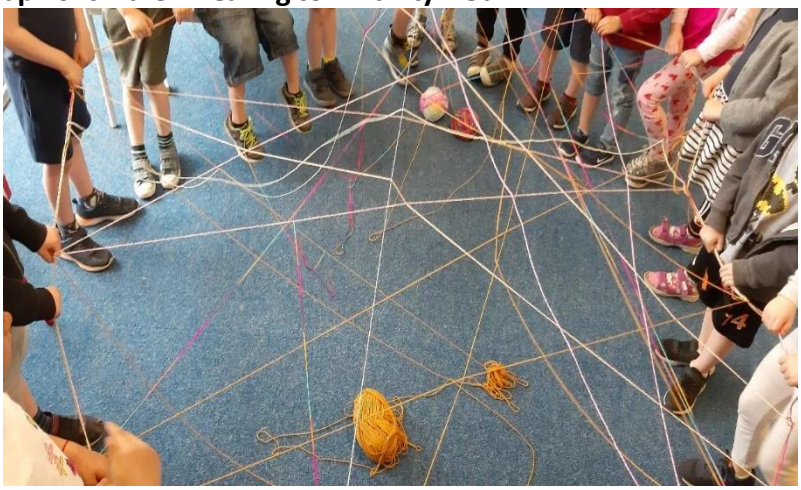
Feeling attached, proud of our group,

Being kind to nature, cleaning our stoop

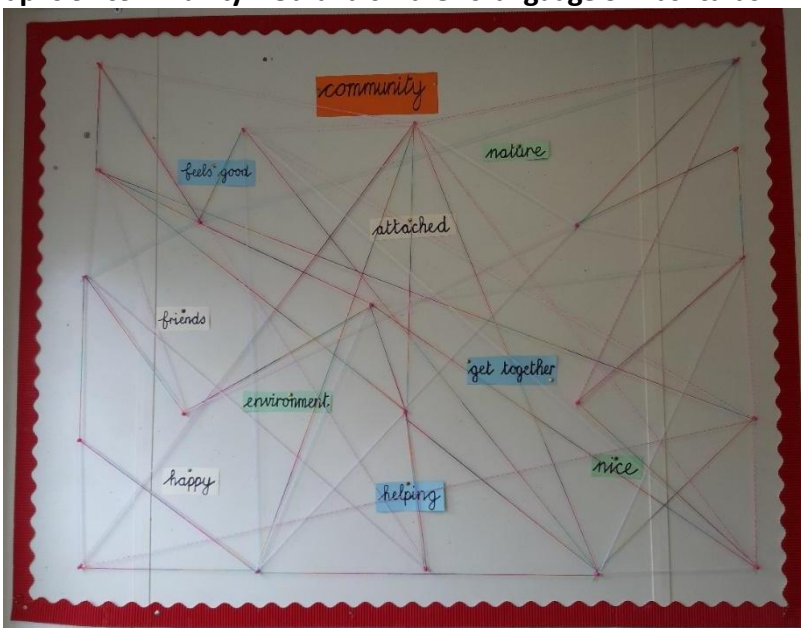
This is our community, our own patch of land

We all work together, we all lend a hand

Photograph of children weaving community web



Photographs of 'community web' and children's language on flashcards

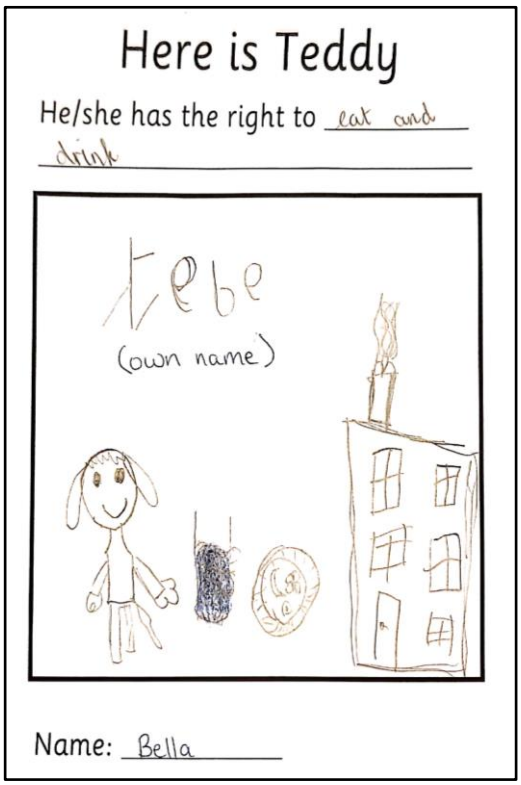


Appendix J – Response pages from lesson 1

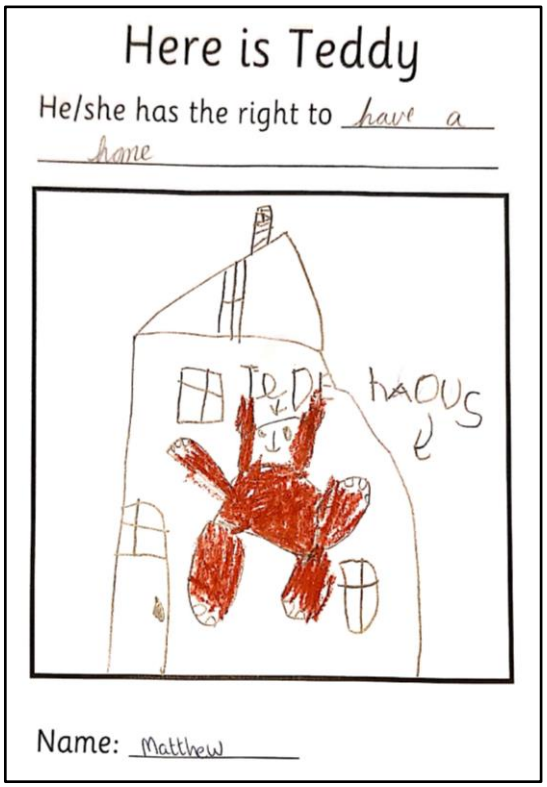
Responses to teacher-made book on rights (all names are pseudonyms)

"He /she has the right to:"

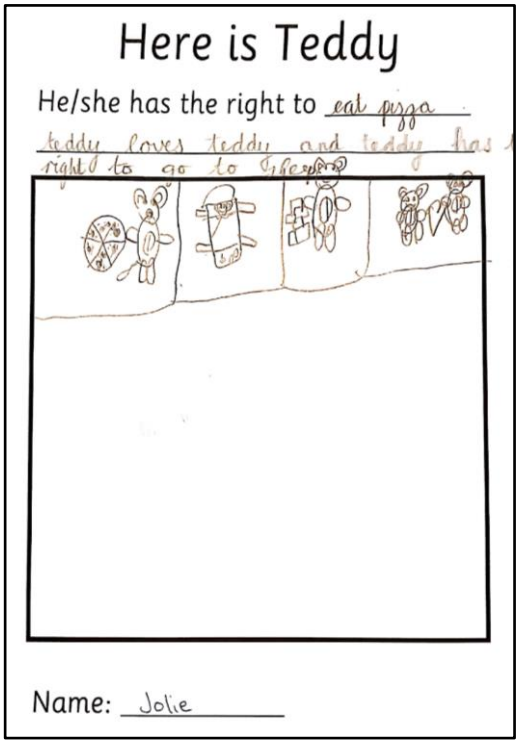
"eat and drink"



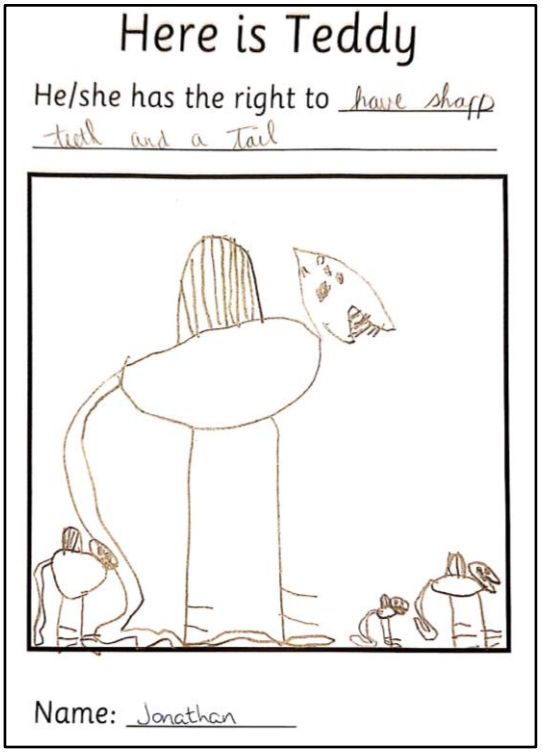
"have a house"



"eat pizza teddy loves teddy and teddy has a right to go sleep"



"have sharp teeth and a tail"



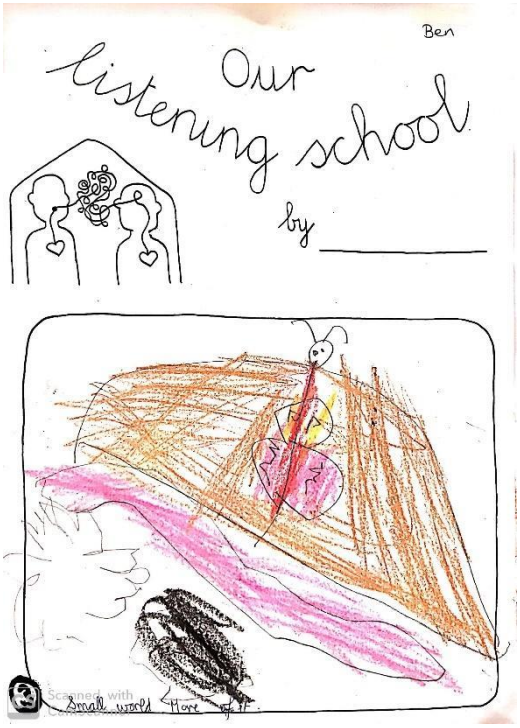
Appendix K

Children's yard drawings after Lesson 5

Appendix L – Listening school responses from lesson 7

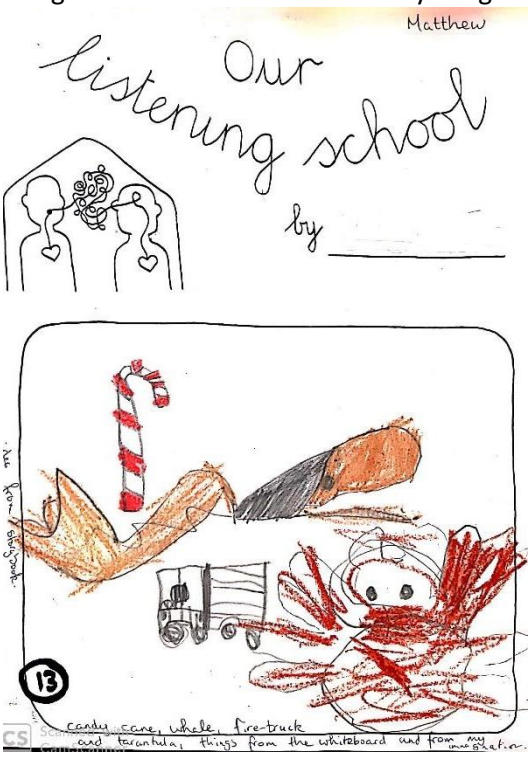
What would school look like if you had your say?

"Small world, more of it"



"More writing on the yard with chalk"

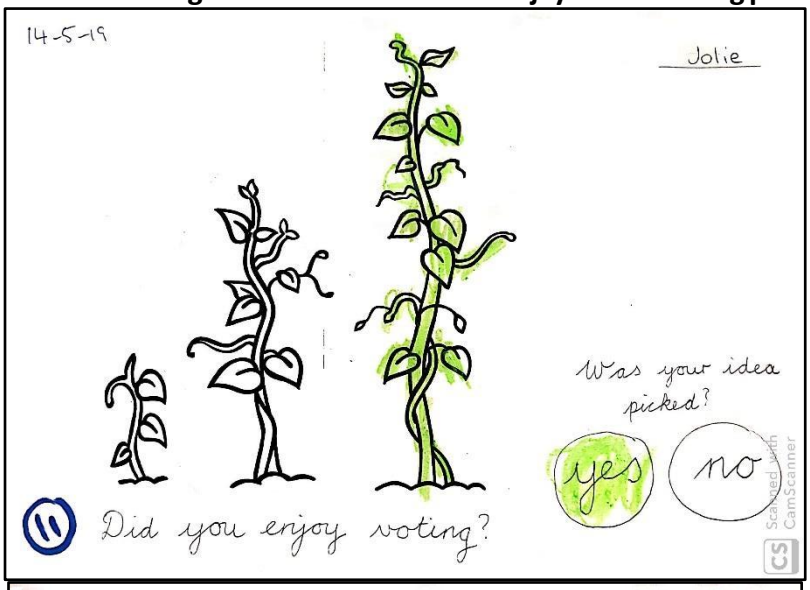
"candy canes, whale, firetruck and tarantula, things from the whiteboard and my imagination"

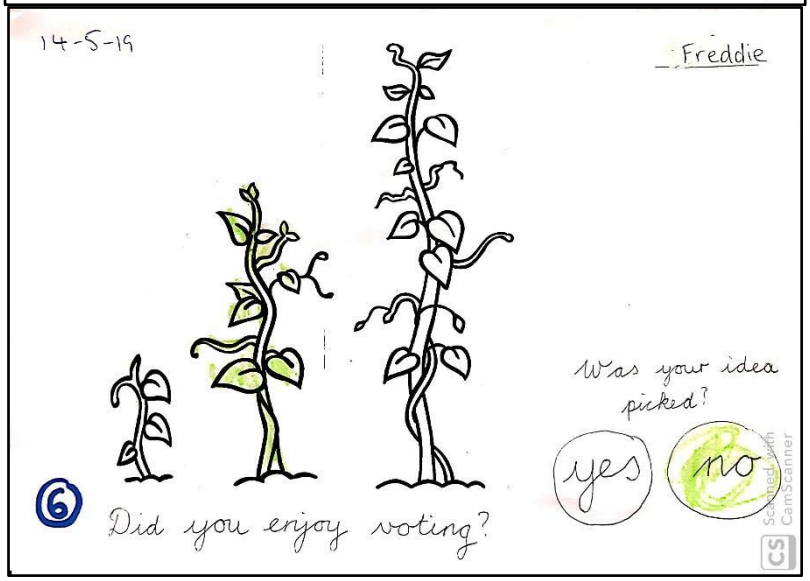


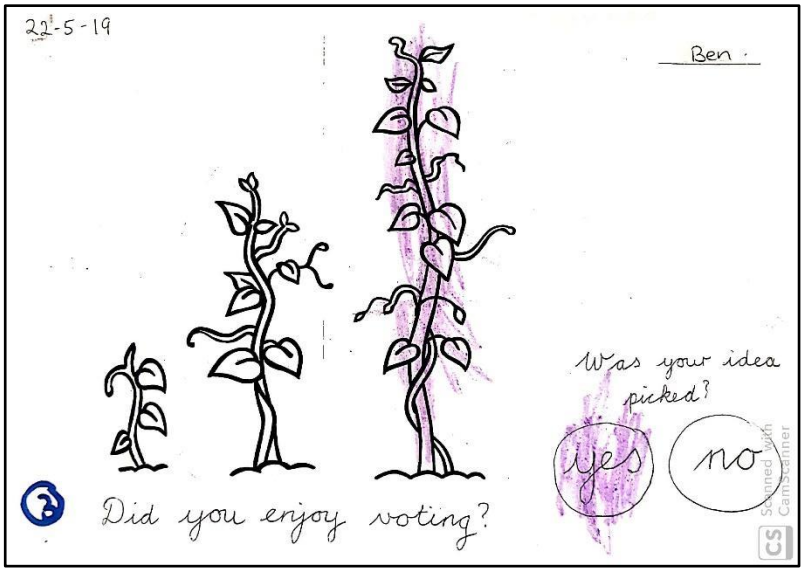
"This is the multi-coloured one, the milipede and the magnifying glass"

Appendix M

Rating scale used during Lessons 8 and 11 to rate enjoyment of voting process

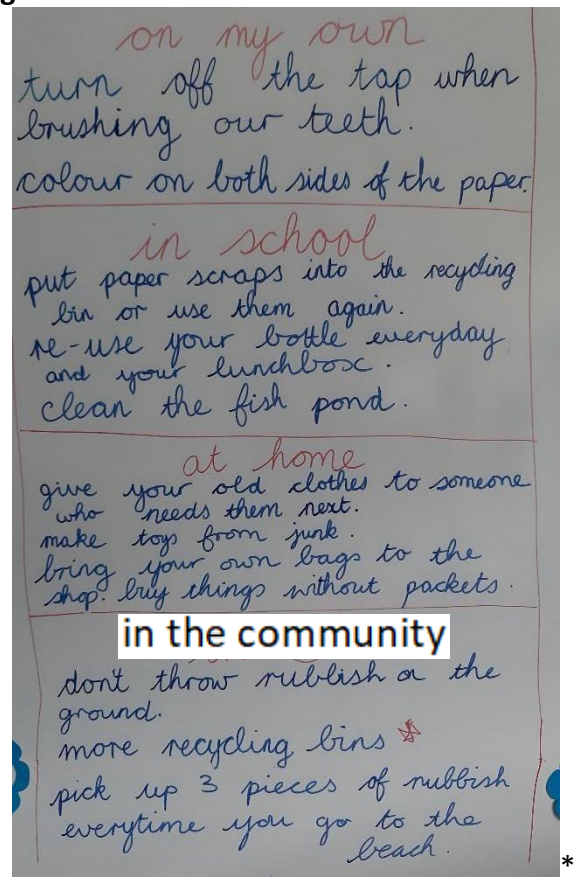






Appendix N

Action plan arising from lesson 12 *



*Edited for anonymity

Feedback from lesson 12

Our Action Plan

On my own

- Turn off the tap when brushing our teeth
- Colour on both sides of the paper

In School

- Put paper scraps into the recycling bin or use them again
- Re-use your bottle everyday and your lunchbox
- Clean the fish pond

At home

- Give your old clothes to someone who needs them next
- Make toys from junk
- Bring your own bags to the shop
- Buy things without plastic

In the Community

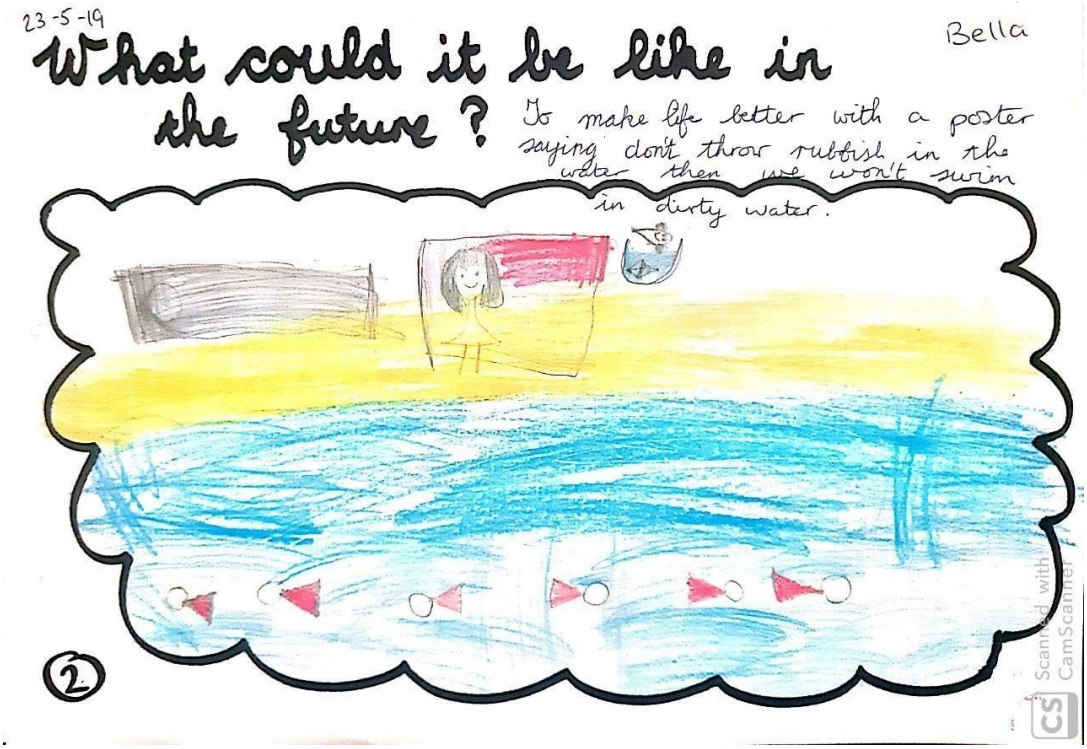
- Don't throw rubbish on the ground
- More recycling bins
- Pick up 3 pieces of rubbish every time you go to the beach

Based on Creating Futures Resource Lesson 8

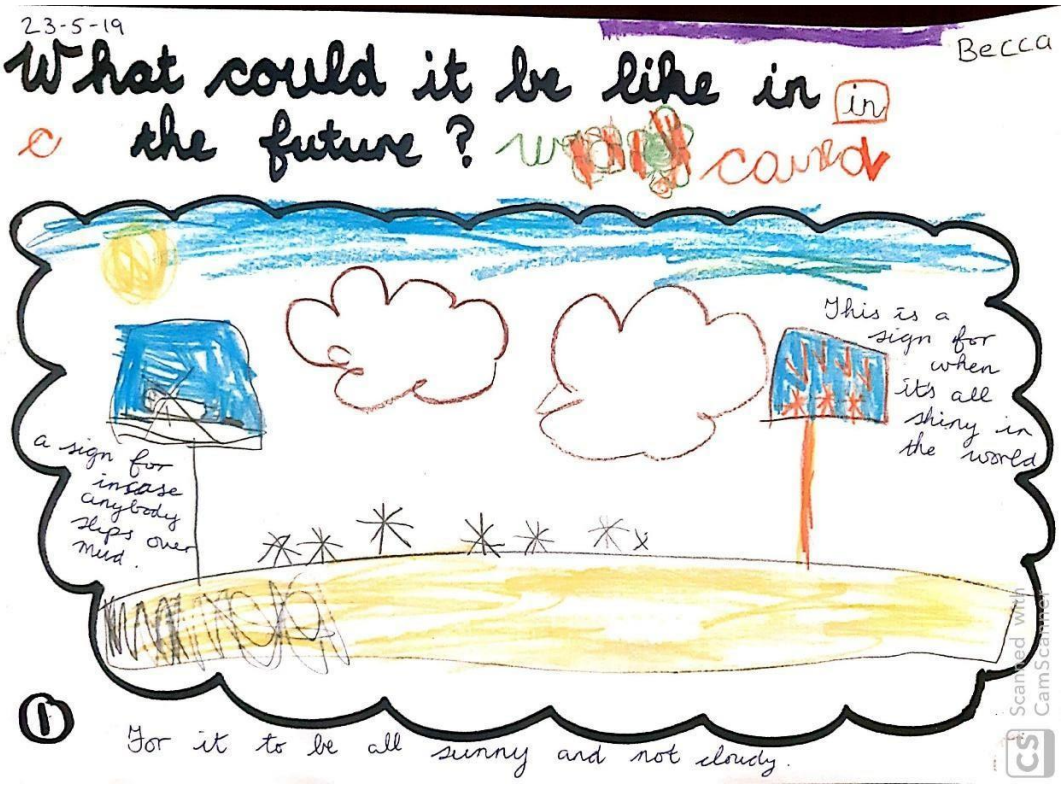
Appendix O

Future maps from lesson 12

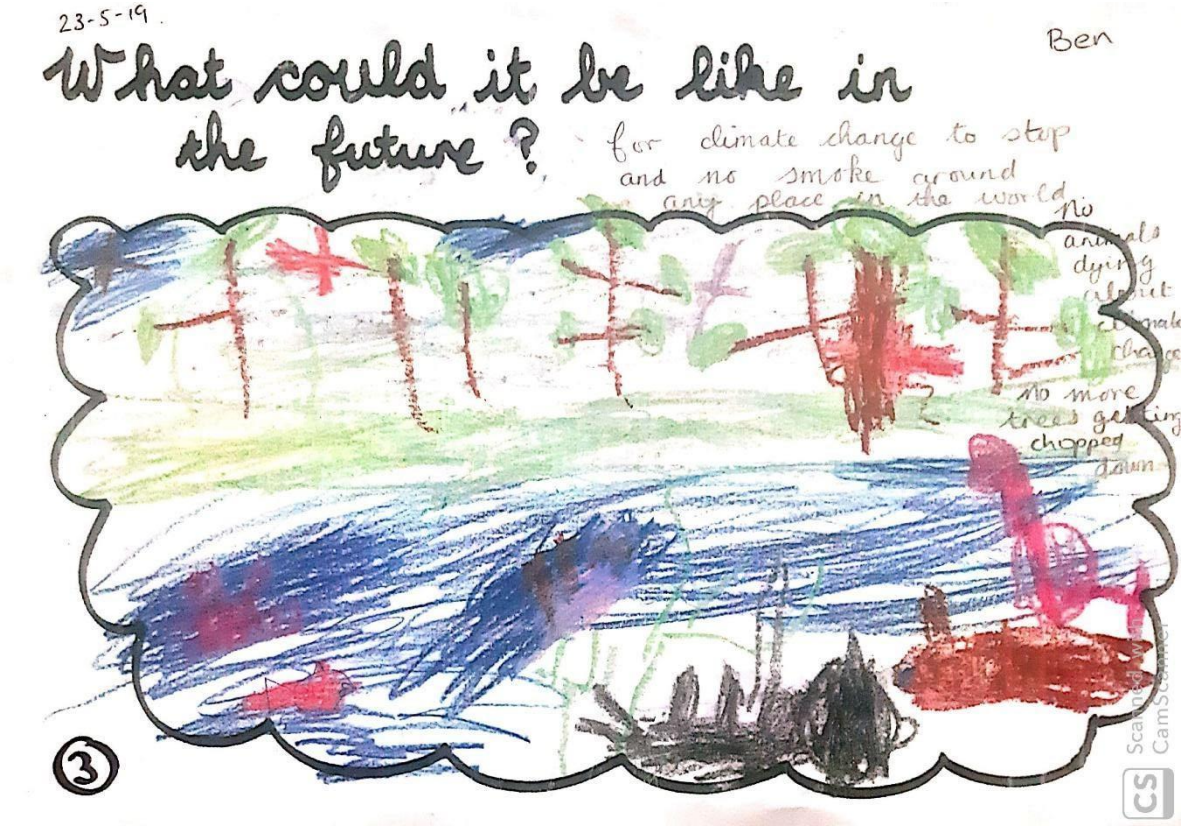
Bella: To make life better with a poster saying don't throw rubbish in the water and then we won't swim in dirty water.



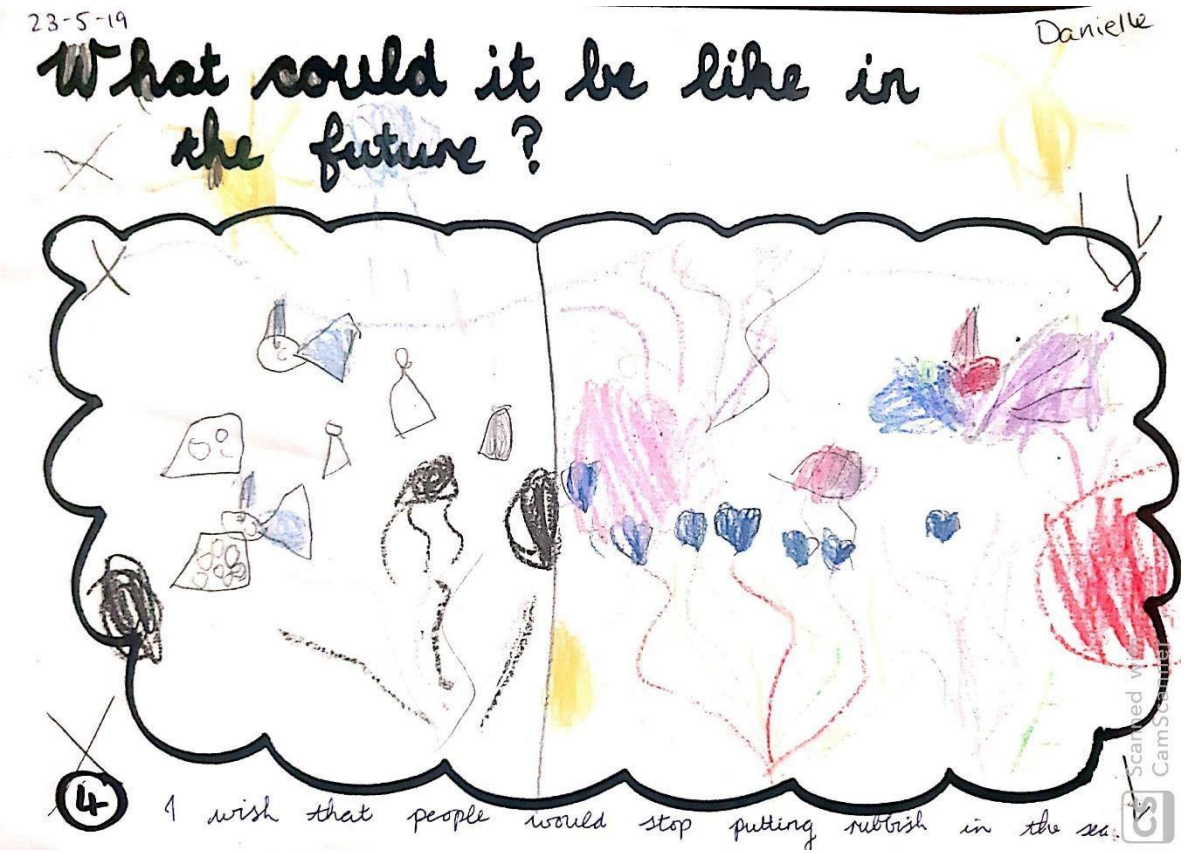
Becca: For it to be all sunny and not cloudy. A sign for incase anybody slips over mud. This is a sign for when it's all shiny in the world.



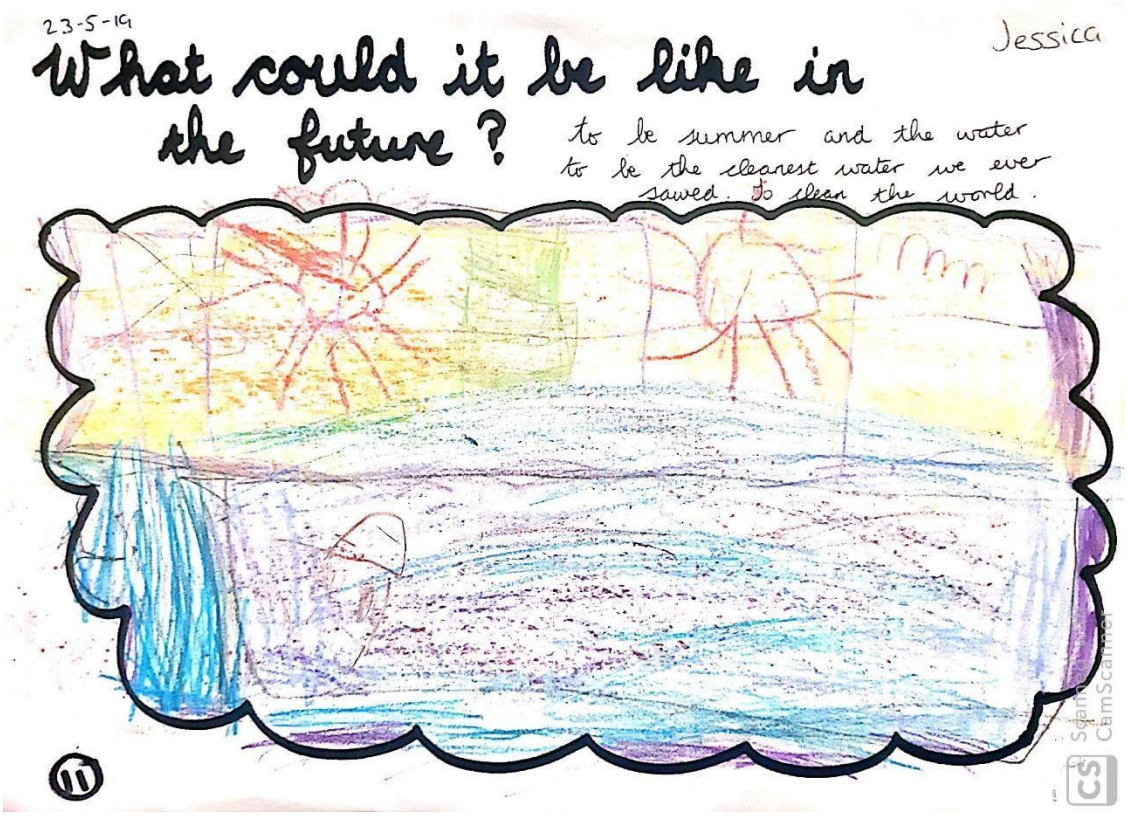
Ben: For climate change to stop and no smoke around any place in the world. No animals dying about climate change. No more trees getting chopped down.



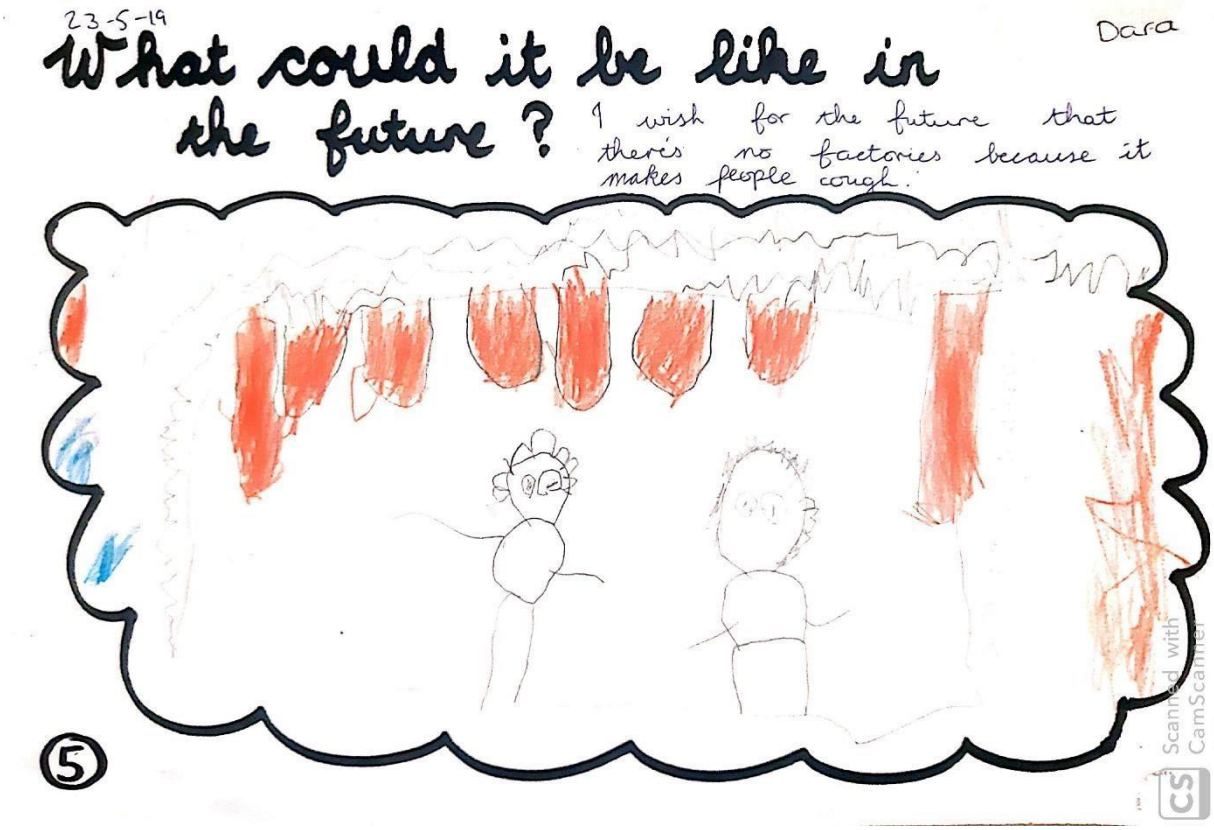
Danielle: I wish that people would stop putting rubbish in the sea.



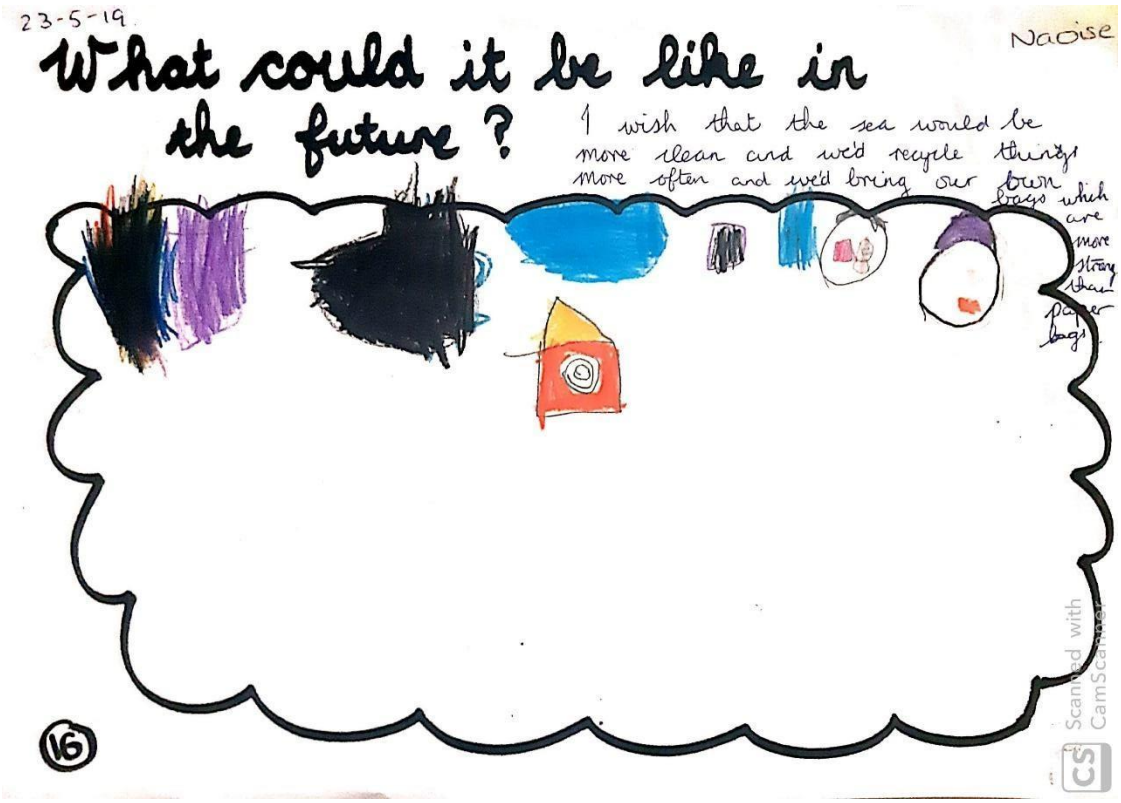
Jessica: To be summer and the water to be the cleanest water we ever sawed. To save the world.



Dara: I wish for the future that there's no factories because it mkes people cough



Naoise: I wish that the sea would be more clean and we'd recycle things more often and we'd bring our own bags which are more strong than paper bags.



Quentin: Things that 'x' rubbish and pick them up from the sea and they turn it into food for sea animals and when they come they pull it out.