AN INTERNAL PROCESS EVALUATION OF *THE STORYTIME PROJECT*: A PARENTAL DIALOGIC STORY-READING PROGRAMME

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Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Doctor of Education, is entirely my own work, and that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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Abstract

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An Internal Process Evaluation of *The Storytime Project*: A parental dialogic story-reading programme

This thesis is an internal process evaluation of a parental dialogic story-reading programme called *The Storytime Project.* The aim of the empirical study was to evaluate the significance of the project to the participants and to gain insight into how it might be improved by engaging in depth with the processes involved in running the project. The views of all the project's stakeholders – children, parents, early childhood practitioners, home school liaison teachers, classroom teachers, school principals, and project administrators – were gathered for the evaluation study using a mixed methods research approach. *The Storytime Project* is a collaborative initiative between Marino Institute of Education and Dublin's Northside Partnership. It runs twice yearly for a five week period. The project evaluation targeted parents and children from areas that are socio-economically marginalised. The project aims to support children's oral language development and to enable parents and children to become users of their local public library. The project also focuses on parental empowerment. Relevant research demonstrates the following: Positive family-school relationships and family-child relationships benefit children's learning; parents are interested and able to carry out learning activities at home with their children; parental storybook reading has a positive impact on children's overall literacy development; brief instruction in interactive reading has an enduring effect on parents' reading style and the best method of helping parents to support their children's learning is through focused, specific coaching. Findings indicated that relationships between parents and children and between parents and educational settings improved as a result of engagement with *The Storytime Project*. Strategies designed to improve children's oral language, and shared with parents during the project, were practised and continue to be used. Parents reported increased confidence and knowledge of literacy practices and as a result began to get involved in school-based activities and use their local library.

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There is no alibi in being (Bakhtin, 1993)

This thesis is focused on the evaluation of a parental dialogic story reading project called *The Storytime Project*. The study may be described as an internal process evaluation design (Rossi, Lipsey & Freeman, 2004) using a mixed methods research strategy. The introductory chapter has a dual focus. Firstly it describes the research topic, that is, *The Storytime Project*. Secondly it presents the aims of the evaluation of *The Storytime Project* and the rationale for conducting the evaluation study. The chapter concludes with an outline of the content of the remaining chapters of the thesis.

The Storytime Project

The focus of the research is a parental story reading programme which has been operating in the north side of Dublin City since April 2010. *The Storytime Project* is the result of collaboration between Marino Institute of Education (MIE) and Dublin's Northside Partnership group. It evolved from a story reading programme with traveller parents initiated by Kelleher (2005), as part of a Master in Education study. The current project extends the work by targeting parents and children from areas of socio-economic disadvantage in the Dublin Northside Partnership catchment area. *The Storytime Project* aims to support children's oral language development, decontextualized language[1] in particular and to enable parents and children to become users of their local public library by the end of the project period. Dublin City Library offered support to *The Storytime Project* in 2011. One of the aims of the project is that parents would continue to read to their children once the five week project comes to an end. An implied aim of the project is to nurture and develop children's interest in storybooks. The project also focuses on parental empowerment. To this end, the

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[1] "Language used in ways that eschews reliance on shared social and physical context in favour of reliance created through the language itself" (Snow, Cancino, De Temple & Schley, 1991 p. 90).

project consciously situates the project induction seminar and graduation ceremony in a third level college environment (Marino Institute of Education) and it creates a relaxed, hospitable environment for project participants.

Implementation of the Project

The Storytime Project is a five week project. It is introduced to parents, schools and Early Childhood settings twice each year, usually once before Christmas and once between Christmas and Easter. Figure 1.1 describes the structure and modus operandi of the project.

Director of *The Storytime Project* meets with Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) teachers & Early Childhood (EC) educators for planning and CPD purposes.

Each HSCL teacher & EC educator recruits approx. 5 parents of 3-5 year old children through their school/ECE setting.

Parents, accompanied by HSCL teachers and EC educators, attend Marino Institute of Education for induction workshop on dialogic story-reading for approx. 1.5 hours.

The 5 weeks of story-reading to children begins - 1 book per week, with an accompanying tip-sheet. As each book is finished, it is returned to the HSCL /EC educator and exchanged for a new book. At this point support is offered by the HSCL/EC educator and the parent gives an update on his/her experience of the project.

At the end of week 4, the HSCL teacher/EC educator accompanies parents to their local library to return books and to procure the book for the final week. At the same time parents join the library and are given a tour of same by library staff.

After 5 weeks of the programme have elapsed, parents, HSCL teachers and EC educators return to Marino for a graduation ceremony and to evaluate the project through group discussion.

Figure 1.1 Modus Operandi of *The Storytime Project*

The researcher is currently the director and developer of *The Storytime Project*. However, the researcher is at one remove from the project after the induction workshop has taken place. The day-to-day operation of *The Storytime Project* is the responsibility of the HSCL teachers and EC practitioners.

The Storytime Project's Stakeholders

Marino Institute of Education, a college of education, is an associated college of The University of Dublin, Trinity College. One of the institute's five guiding principles is to assist parents to fulfil the responsibilities of their role as educators. *The Storytime Project* aims to be faithful to this guiding principle.

The function of The Northside Partnership group is to support economically disadvantaged communities on the north side of Dublin city. It is located in Bonnybrook, in the heart of the community it supports. It works with key people and groups to create opportunities for its community through education, employment, enterprise, training, development and supports for families ('Our Mission',n.d.). Northside Partnership is funded by the Irish government and some charitable sources ('About us', n.d.).

When it joined *The Storytime project* in 2011, Dublin City Library undertook to provide books for the project and to stock follow-up reading material. It also agreed to introduce parents to their local library, to facilitate them in filling out their library application, to show them around the library and provide refreshments for groups of parents on the day of their first encounter with the library. Amnesties are considered for parents who may previously have been library users and have book loans or fines outstanding. The Coolock branch of the library, located in the community from which most of the parent participants live, hosts occasional public story-telling events on Saturdays. Participants in *The Storytime Project* are invited to these events.

The Aims of *The Storytime Project*

The aims of *The Storytime Project* in are (1) supporting parents in reading stories to children for the duration of the project and into the future through the use of the public library, (2) supporting parents in using dialogic story-reading strategies when reading to their children (3) the development of children's decontextualized language, (4) the nurturing of children's interest in storybooks, (5) the development of print awareness and concepts of print and (6) the empowerment of parents participating in the project. Notwithstanding the central focus on language development in this study, emergent literacy cannot be ignored given that print media (storybooks) is the vehicle that *The Storytime Project* uses to develop children's oral language. Therefore, although the primary focus of the project is on developing children's ability to use decontextualized language, there is also a focus on emergent literacy skills such as print awareness[2] and concepts of print[3].

Context of the Project

Recruitment of parents.

HSCL teachers and EC practitioners invite two to five parents from each of their schools or Early Childhood settings to participate in *The Storytime Project.* When considering what parents to recruit for *The Storytime Project,* HSCL teachers and EC practitioners use the criterion agreed at the initial meetings in 2009 when the project was set up: parents must be in a position to be capable of benefitting from the intervention, that is, they should not be in crisis, as this might prevent parents from participating in and

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[2] Aspects of print-related knowledge that a child might internalise whilst listening to story include, for example, knowledge of story structure and the written language register (Duursma, Augustyn & Zuckerman, 2008). Other aspects of print awareness might be the child's understanding of what print looks like and the fact that print carries meaning (Kassow, 2006; Strickland & Schickedanz, 2004).

[3] Print concepts include the child's understanding of how to handle a book, that is, page turning, tracking and also the knowledge that a book has a title, an author, perhaps an illustrator, table of contents and blurb at the back of the book. Print concepts also include the knowledge of what a word is, what a sentence is, what a letter is and the fact that there are spaces between words (Whitehurst & Lonnigan, 2001).

completing the project. Gordon (1983) designed a model to target different populations in intervention or prevention programmes. Originally used in the field of health, the model was later used in education interventions (e.g. Burkhart 2004; Downes, 2011, 2014) to differentiate between levels of intervention needed in working with different populations. He stipulated three levels based on need as follows: universal (the full population can be offered the programme); selected (a sub-population, identified at a greater level of risk than the general population, is offered the programme) and indicated (targeted individuals who are considered at the highest level of risk). In relation to *The Storytime Project*, universal and selected populations were recruited. Some HSCL teachers recruit parents by issuing a general invitation to new parents on Open Day (universal approach) and following it up by sending a note home with children once they have started school. Other HSCL teachers consult with classroom teachers and decide together what parents they might invite to participate in the project (selected approach). Children recruited by EC practitioners are generally 3-4 years old and children recruited by the HSCL teachers are usually 4-5 years old. Challenges and opportunities in relation to recruitment will be discussed further in the findings chapter.

From induction to graduation.

Once recruited, parents then attend a workshop based on story reading at Marino Institute of Education. They are accompanied by the HSCL teacher or the EC practitioner. The induction workshop is consciously and deliberately held at Marino Institute of Education in order to add status and significance to the project. During the planning stages for the project in 2009, teachers felt that by situating the project in a third level environment, it would give parents an opportunity to come into a venue that they may never previously have visited and that it might 'break down barriers' for them. The chapter on findings looks more closely at these issues. Within a week of the workshop being held, the project commences. (See appendix A for a detailed description of the induction and graduation workshop.)

Parents are given one book per week over a five week period to read to and discuss with their child. They are also given a DVD (produced by MIE) which reinforces literacy strategies modelled during the induction workshop.

The HSCL teacher or EC practitioner distributes the books on a weekly basis and collects the book that has been read. This meeting with the parent is an opportunity to support the parent by offering advice or modelling strategies as required. At the end of the fourth week, parents go to the local library to collect their fifth book. They are accompanied by the HSCL teacher or EC practitioner, as appropriate. This is to support the parent through the process of joining the library and meeting library personnel who are familiar with *The Storytime Project.* The experience is evaluated in written form by parents. After the five week project has been completed, parents visit Marino for a second time, to attend a graduation ceremony. At this time they review the project orally and listen to one another's accounts of their experience of implementing the project. They are also awarded a certificate of completion.

Research shows that interventions that prove their staying power and loyalty to a community are rewarded by the confidence and commitment of the community (Bradlow, 2007; Paulin, 2007).[4] There is a sense that this is occurring in the case of *The Storytime Project* which has been running for five and a half years to date (December 2016).

Involvement of Dublin City Library.

Dublin City Libraries agreed to supply books for *The Storytime Project* from 2011. Parents now join their local library (with the assistance of the HSCL teacher or EC

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[4] Bradlow, K (2007) The Role of Government in Community Development in Aotearoa New Zealand, Masters Thesis, Development Studies Degree, Victoria University of Wellington
Paulin, J (2007) Sustainable Community Development Approaches: Views of Community Focus Group Participants, commissioned by DIA

practitioner) as part of the project and receive their book for the fifth week directly from the local library. It is hoped that parents will continue to use the library on completion of *The Storytime Project*. Library personnel give special attention to participants in *The Storytime Project.* They provide a tour of the library, show parents how to locate a book and some libraries provide a cup of tea for parent participants, as mentioned previously. The libraries currently involved in the project are Coolock, Raheny and Donaghmede. The chief organising librarian is situated at Cabra library.

The provision of books by Dublin City Libraries was welcomed and relieved a financial burden on the Northside Partnership group who heretofore had supplied the books for the project. However, since the involvement of Dublin City libraries, *The Storytime Project* moved from providing books regularly for children and parents to 'keep' to expecting each book to be returned to the library. This transition was a recent development (in 2011) and will be discussed later in the findings chapter. Currently parents have no book as artefact from the reading project. However, they are presented with a graduation certificate and a rosette for their child (introduced in December, 2013) at the graduation ceremony.

The role of Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) coordinators and Early Childhood (EC) practitioners.

A description of the HSCL teacher is merited here because their role is different to the role of the classroom teacher and is perfectly suited to involvement in a programme involving parents and school.

The underlying policy of the Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) Scheme is one that seeks to promote partnership between parents and teachers. The purpose of this partnership is to enhance pupils' learning opportunities and to promote their retention in the education system. In addition, the HSCL scheme places great

emphasis on collaboration with the local community. The HSCL scheme is the pioneer in involving the school in the life of the community and involving the community and its agencies in the life of the school (Conaty, 2006, p.6).

The five goals of the HSCL Scheme focus on

1. supporting marginalised pupils

2. promoting co-operation between home, school, and community

3. empowering parents

4. retaining young people in the education system

5. disseminating best practice (Conaty, 2006 p.8).

All urban DEIS[5] schools, both primary and post-primary, are included in the HSCL scheme (Dept. of Education & Skills; Dept. of Children & Youth Affairs and Tusla, 2014). A recently published information booklet for DEIS schools on the HSCL scheme (Dept of Education & Skills et al.,2014) opened with the following comment from an OECD report (1997) on the success of the HSCL scheme:

It is clear from the Irish experience that educational initiatives based in schools can raise the educational level of the adults involved, and result in a general sense of empowerment in the local community. Parental involvement, especially in areas of socio-economic deprivation, does not just benefit the children and the school - it is a crucial aspect of lifelong learning.

Early Childhood practitioners involved in the project are either working directly with children or are managers of early years' settings in the Northside Partnership area. In keeping

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[5] Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) the Action Plan for Educational Inclusion, was launched in May 2005 and remains the Department of Education and Skills policy instrument to address educational disadvantage. The action plan focuses on addressing and prioritising the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities, from pre-school through second-level education (3 to 18 years). http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools-/

with the focus on DEIS schools, early childhood settings are all based in the most concentrated area of disadvantage which is the area immediately around the Northside Partnership office in Coolock. They are all community settings. There are no private childcare providers involved in the project.

HSCL teachers and EC practitioners are central to the effective running of *The Storytime Project*. It would not be possible to implement the project without their cooperation and commitment. As previously described, they recruit parents, accompany them to the induction workshop and crucially, provide support to parents as they participate in the five week programme. The role of HSCL teachers and EC practitioners became more complex with the involvement of Dublin City library in the project. Heretofore teachers and EC practitioners supplied books once a week for five weeks to parents. Now they supply books for the first four weeks, support parents in filling out a library application and then during the fourth week they confer with parents around arrangements to return their fourth book to the library and collect the fifth book. There are instances whereby parents are unable to go to the library and HSCL teachers/ EC practitioners organise to collect books on their behalf. Although this increases the burden on HSCL teachers and EC practitioners, the organisers are continuing to strive to get parents involved with their local library because they believe this will support them and their children to become independent book readers.

Choosing books for the project.

When *The Storytime project* began, the books that were used were those recommended by the Kelleher study (2005). These were five classic fairy tales written by Val Biro and part of *The Oxford Reading Tree* series. These books were chosen for the simple language used in the text. This was because of concerns that levels of parental literacy might be low and the project did not want to deter parents from getting involved due to their own

low literacy levels. The Kelleher study had focused on parents from the travelling community where literacy levels were particularly low (Cemlyn, Greenfields, Burnett, Matthews, & Whitwell, 2009). After the first iteration of the project in 2010, teachers[6] voiced their reservations about the books, finding them limited in vocabulary. Over a period of time, books have been replaced by others chosen by the project director and researcher using the following criteria: Engaging plot relevant to young children's lives; stories that allow children experience the emotions of other (Saracho, 2017); illustrations that generally reflect the text rather than being counter-intuitive to the text; language that is accessible for parents with low literacy levels but still contains vocabulary that supports children's language development and the use of texts that are sufficiently conceptually challenging in order to require children to grapple with ideas and to take an active stance towards constructing meaning (Beck & Mc Keown, 2001).

The Storytime Project and its modus operandi have been described in detail. The question of the need for such an initiative now merits attention.

Rationale for *The Storytime Project*

The need for an initiative such as *The Storytime Project* was established by a research study called Preparing for Life (PFL) which was conducted by The Geary Institute, UCD and commissioned by The Northside Partnership group in 2008. PFL was a community-led initiative and was funded by Atlantic Philanthropies (AP) and The Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA). PFL identified the need to improve levels of school readiness of young children living in areas in North Dublin that had been identified as disadvantaged. PFL worked with families from the time of pregnancy until the children start school (Doyle, Mc Namara, Cheevers, Finnegan, Logue & Mc Entee, 2010).

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[6] Teachers alone are mentioned in this instance because EC practitioners did not join *The Storytime Project* until the third iteration of the project in April-June 2011.

Preparing for Life identified the communities of the North Dublin area as socio-economically disadvantaged using socio-demographic measures from the Irish census, for example, the percentage of people living in social housing, employment status and level of education (Central Statistics Office, 2006). The 2006 census indicates that the original PFL catchment area comprised 6,439 inhabitants, with 7% being born outside Ireland. Approximately 60% of people from the original catchment area were living in social housing, 16% were unemployed, and 5% had completed a third level education (Doyle, Mc Namara et al, 2010, p.5). In Table 1.1, data from a more recent national census, in 2011, is used to compare Priorswood Electoral Division C, which is in the heart of the Northside Partnership catchment area, with Grace Park electoral division, which is where Marino Institute of Education is located. Both areas are in North Dublin, 4.2 miles apart but there is a wide socio-economic disparity between the two locations. This is evidenced in the socio-demographic measures - percentage of the population that holds third level qualifications and that lives in local authority housing.

Table 1.1 Data from National Census 2011

Electoral Division	Priorswood C, Dublin 17	Grace Park, Dublin 9
Total population	4,491	5,670
Total population over age 15	3,354 = 75%	4818 = 85%
% population (over 15) in employment	47.8	50.1
% population living in local authority housing	45	4.3
% population with third level qualification	16.8	41.3

The majority of schools in the Northside Partnership area have been categorised by the Department of Education as DEIS Band 1 schools. This is the highest level of disadvantage that the department attributes to schools. Of the eighteen schools that have participated in *The Storytime Project*, twelve are DEIS Band 1 schools, three are DEIS Band 2 and three are non-DEIS schools. Irish schools where there is a high concentration of

children from socio-economically marginalised backgrounds have been found to suffer from a multiplier effect, that is, because disadvantage is concentrated in particular schools, the overall effect of disadvantage is greater. The *Learning from the evaluation of DEIS* report (2015) reported on the *Growing Up in Ireland*[7] study that indicates that indicate nine-year-old students in urban DEIS schools have much lower levels of reading achievement (as measured by the Drumcondra reading test) than their peers in non-DEIS primary schools" (p.3).

Marino Institute of Education contacted The Northside Partnership group offering educational support to the group in its work with parents. In so doing, as mentioned earlier, Marino Institute was acting on its 6th guiding principle, that is, "to assist parents to fulfil the responsibilities of their role as educators" (Marino Institute of Education, n.d).

Rationale for the Evaluation Study of *The Storytime Project*

Considerable time, money *and* expertise have been invested in *The Storytime Project* since 2009. Four and a half years into the running of *The Storytime Project*, it is timely to investigate how the project is operating, that is, if the processes that have been set in place at project design stage are being implemented according to the intentions of the project design and if they have evolved, the nature of that evolution. Evaluation of this programme is necessary at this point in time to inform the key personnel from Marino Institute of Education, the Northside Partnership and the Dublin City library service as to the efficacy and value of *The Storytime Project*.

Although parents have evaluated their experience of participation in the project at the end of their five week engagement with it, it is now important to look at the project after

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[7] "Growing Up in Ireland is a Government-funded study of children being carried out jointly by the ESRI and Trinity College Dublin. The study started in 2006 and follows the progress of two groups of children: 8,000 9-year-olds (Child Cohort) and 10,000 9-month-olds (Infant Cohort). The members of the Child Cohort are now aged 17/18 years and those of the Infant Cohort are 8 years old" (Growing up in Ireland, 2017).

some time has elapsed to explore if participation in the project has any longer term or lasting influence on participant parents and children. The voices of other stakeholders also need to be heard, for example, those of the HSCL teachers, Early Childhood practitioners, classroom teachers, school principals and the children themselves.

The project needs an in-depth evaluation now because other jurisdictions have expressed an interest in adopting the project model. Evidence of the effectiveness of the project would increase confidence in investing time and resources in the project.

The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy 2011-2020.

The project is significant now because of the emphasis on literacy in the *National Literacy and Numeracy strategy* 2011- 2020. The strategy describes actions to support parents and communities – "provide advice and information to parents to enable them to support their children's language, literacy and numeracy development" (p.22). The strategy advises schools to build effective working relationships with parents and communities to support learning and in so doing to use Home-School-Community liaison (HSCL) teachers to support this work in DEIS schools (p.23). This concurs with the aims of *The Storytime Project*.

The strategy exhorts schools to "provide or host sensitively designed opportunities for parents to develop their confidence and their capacity to help their children at home in relation to literacy and numeracy" (p.23). It also encourages schools to get involved in initiatives in parental and wider community initiatives that support literacy and numeracy. It specifically mentions shared reading and the library services as examples. *The Storytime Project* uses dialogic reading, which is a form of shared reading with specific instructional guidelines. The library service is also a key and integral part of the project. The strategy emphasizes the "need to target support for family and community initiatives that are proven

to work" (p.21). Chapter two will outline how the modus operandi of *The Storytime Project* is supported in the literature on early language and literacy development.

The Storytime Project is equally significant in relation to the Primary School English curriculum (DES/NCCA, 2009) and the relatively recent introduction of Aistear, the early childhood curriculum framework (NCCA, 2009). These curricula will be examined as part of the literature review.

Aim of the Evaluation Study

The purpose of an evaluation is to assess the effects and effectiveness of something, typically some innovation, intervention, policy, practice or service (Robson, 2011). The aim of this evaluation study is to evaluate the significance of the project to the participants and to gain insight into how the project might be improved by engaging in depth with the processes involved in running the project. Specifically it will explore

- teachers' and early childhood practitioners experience of implementing the processes of *The Storytime Project*. In other words, what is the on-the-ground reality of recruiting parents; organising and accompanying parents to the induction work-shop at Marino Institute of Education; mediating the dialogic story-reading strategies to parents as required; advising/supporting parents through the process of reading and dialoguing with their child for the five-week duration of the project; accompanying parents to the library; facilitating the collection of the fifth library book and organising and accompanying parents to the graduation ceremony at Marino Institute of Education
- parent-child dialogic engagement around story reading
- children's use of decontextualized language as described by their parents
- parental knowledge of children's developing knowledge of books and reading.

- parental confidence and attitude in relating with their children's school or Early Childhood setting.

- parental confidence and attitude in relating with their local library

- children's motivation and engagement as perceived by significant adults in the project

- children's reported experience of the project

For the purposes of clarity, the table below juxtaposes the aims of *The Storytime Project* with the aims of the evaluation of the project.

Table 1.2 Aims of *The Storytime Project* and Aims of the Evaluation of the Project

Aims of The Storytime Project	Aims of the evaluation of The Storytime Project
1. supporting parents in reading stories to children for the duration of the project and into the future through the use of the public library	To explore - 1. teachers' and early childhood practitioners' experience of implementing the processes of *The Storytime Project*. In other words, what is the on-the-ground reality for educators of - • recruiting parents • organising and accompanying parents to the induction work-shop at Marino Institute of Education • mediating the dialogic story-reading strategies to parents, as required • advising/supporting parents through the process of reading and dialoguing with their child for the five-week duration of the project, as required • accompanying parents to the library, as required • facilitating the collection of the fifth library book organising and accompanying parents to the graduation ceremony at Marino Institute of Education
2. supporting parents in using dialogic story-reading strategies when reading to their children	2. parent-child dialogic engagement around story reading
3. the development of children's decontextualized language	3. children's use of decontextualized language as described by their parents
4. the nurturing of children's interest in storybooks the development of print awareness and concepts of print	4. parental knowledge of children's developing knowledge of books and reading

5. the empowerment of parents participating in the project	5. parental confidence and attitude in relating with their children's school or Early Childhood setting 6. parental confidence and attitude in relating with their local library
	7. children's motivation and engagement as perceived by significant adults in the project
	8. children's reported experience of the project

Organising Framework for the Thesis

The thesis consists of five chapters. The introductory chapter outlines the dual focus of this study. Firstly, it describes the structure and implementation of *The Storytime project*. It provides a rationale for the project and examines the current context of the dialogic reading project. Secondly, it describes the rationale for and the aims of the evaluation study.

Chapter two considers the literature relevant to the evaluation study and the dialogic story-reading project which is the subject of the evaluation. It examines theories of language and learning, models of language and literacy acquisition and then looks at resonances between the emergentist perspective, dialogism and dialogic learning and a socio-cultural world view. Socio-culturalism, combined and integrated with Freirean theory and Bakhtin's dialogic theory, forms the theoretical framework for this study. Dialogic learning theory is then linked to dialogic story-reading. The chapter moves on to look at curricula in the early years in Ireland, their resonances with sociocultural theory and participatory learning theories and their approaches to language and literacy learning. It also looks at decontextualized language, parental involvement in children's learning, different types of shared reading and it reviews the literature around dialogic story-reading, examining the sociological and procedural factors that influence its effectiveness. Finally it considers some research on evaluation, looking at evaluation research, the research paradigms that inform evaluation research and the different approaches to evaluation research.

Chapter three addresses the research methodology employed in this study. This study is an internal process evaluation design using a mixed methods research strategy. The mixed methods comprise a small scale quantitative survey followed by data collection using qualitative methods, specifically, focus group discussions, individual interviews, document and diary analysis. The focus of the evaluation is primarily formative, that is, it seeks to get information on the programme design and conceptualisation, the implementation process and the impact of the project on participants (Rossi et al, 2004). Data will be gathered and analysed so that it can feed forward into future planning of *The Storytime Project.*

Chapter four considers the findings. Quantitative findings were analysed using SPSS software. They were then combined with the qualitative findings and both sets of data were analysed together using NVIVO software. Using NVIVO ensures that coding and analysis is systematic and transparent.

Chapter five features the conclusion of the evaluation and discussion. The future of *The Storytime Project* is considered. Recommendations, arising from analysis of both sets of data, are listed here.

The introductory chapter outlined the dual focus of this study: firstly a description of the parent-child dialogic story-reading project called *The Storytime Project* and secondly on the aims and rationale for an internal process evaluation of the project. This literature review extends the dual focus by examining literature that informs both *The Storytime Project* (e.g. learning theory, oral language and literacy) and the evaluation of the project (approaches to evaluation). The review is divided into two parts. The first part will review theoretical perspectives in relation to learning, language and then literacy (p.18-66). The second part (p.66- 110), will focus on oral language in the context of dialogic story-reading, the factors that need to be in place in order for dialogic story-reading to be effective and the issues that militate against its effectiveness. Finally, the literature review will consider approaches to evaluation.

Literature Review Part 1

From Behaviourist to Constructivist, Socio-Constructivist and Socio-Cultural Models of Learning and Language

Cooper observed in 1993 that the field of education has undergone a paradigm shift in designed instruction from behaviourism to cognitivism and then to constructivism. Racineros and Padros, (2010), assert that the most recent shift has been towards dialogic learning. A defining feature of this evolution from behaviourism to dialogism is the change in relationships of power between the teacher and the learner from one of total control by the teacher to a more nuanced relationship that emphasizes cooperation, collaboration and power sharing.

A behaviourist approach to learning is characterised by the transmission of knowledge, whereby a teacher is providing the knowledge to the students directly (Forrestor,

& Jantzie, 1997). Within this paradigm, learners tend to work as individuals and knowledge stands alone and requires explanation, not interpretation. The teacher is viewed as the authority that disseminates fixed knowledge to students by means of a lecture (Scheurman, 1998). The student attempts to absorb the content, delivered didactically. The teacher is in a position of power as transmitter of the content. Knowledge and learning are decontextualized from the world outside school (Villegas and Lucas, 2002). Behaviourism focuses on the linking of stimuli and response and reinforcers (Skinner, 1968). Repetition and reinforcement is used for consolidating learning. A behaviourist approach is not concerned with internal mental states. (Leonard, 2002). Constructivists argue that behaviourist theory does not consider the role of thought and emotion in action and pure observation, therefore, does not give any insight into how the learner constructs meaning. From a positivist[8] perspective, however, pure observation makes behaviourism scientifically and objectively measurable.

Behaviourist views on language acquisition claim that language is acquired through imitation and reinforcement (Skinner, 1957). Children imitate the language that they hear around them and make associations between words and objects. Parents/adults/others reinforce their efforts with praise and correct errors. Lightbown and Spada (2013) give some particular examples of how a behaviourist approach to language learning works. Their analysis of an adult and two-year-old child's interaction showed that 30% to 40% of a child's utterances were based on imitation of adult speech but they also found that children imitate to different extents and that what they imitate is based on choices that come from their current interest and those interests come from inside the child and not the environment. Other critiques of a behaviourist view of language acquisition point out that children can acquire language despite limited input from adults. Lidz, Waxman & Freedman, (2003) found that

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[8] A Positivist paradigm claims that only "factual" knowledge gained through observation (the senses), including measurement, is trustworthy. The world is seen as external and objective. In positivism studies the role of the researcher is limited to data collection and interpretation through an objective approach and the research findings are usually observable and quantifiable. (Dudovskiy, 2016).

children aged sixteen to eighteen months were able to make sense of an anaphoric[9] reference without guidance. Also children make novel errors (that is, errors not learned through imitating adult conversations) as they acquire language (e.g. "I bringed it with me"), which indicates reasoning and the ability to extrapolate from prior knowledge (Mc Gilvray, 2014).

Cognitivism replaced Behaviourism as the dominant learning paradigm in the 1960s. The cognitivist view focuses on how the learner mentally processes information. Mental activity such as thinking and problem-solving is emphasized. Cognitivism focuses on how the brain receives, internalises and recalls information (Leonard, 2002). Unlike Constructivism, it is not concerned with creativity or the autonomy of the learner but with the best way of transmitting schemas (organised patterns of thought or a mode of thinking about things or ideas). One criticism of cognitivism is that it has low ecological validity, that is, real-life situations might produce different results to laboratory tests. This is because cognition is influenced by human emotion and personality (Mueller, 2011). Humans are more than information processors – they are meaning makers (Bruner, 1990).

A cognitive theory of language is put forward by Chomsky (1999) who argued that language is innate and that humans have a language acquisition device (LAD) as part of their cognitive structure. Chomsky argues that children's efforts at speaking are different to what they hear. They are therefore approximating in some way rather than simply copying adult talk. Children also generalise on grammatical rules which suggests that they have a grasp of the grammatical construction of their language. Constructivists such as Piaget do not deny that language development is innate but Piaget does not subscribe to Chomsky's idea that there is a specific language device in the brain. He sees language development as part of

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[9] Anaphoric reference means that a word in a text refers back to other ideas in the text for its meaning (https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/anaphoric-reference). An example might be when an adult says "Look at the red car. Look at the green car. Now show me the yellow one. 'One' refers back to the car.

cognitive development (Piaget, 1923). Most researchers now agree that language acquisition occurs as a result of interplay between biological and environmental factors.

Constructivism is a theory of knowledge characterised by a focus on meaning making rather than the absorption of information. In other words, the learner must make her own sense of learning material. The learner makes sense of her learning experience on her own or collaboratively (social constructivism) and then integrates this new experience with previous understandings in order to generate a new understanding. Learning is influenced by culture and context so students' understanding may differ. The teacher is a facilitator and guide. (Good and Brophy, 2010). Sense-making happens through discovery, inquiry, exploration and hands-on learning (Duffy & Jonassen, 1992). Von Glasersfeld (1995) makes the following key observations with regard to constructivism: Intersubjectivity is required before supporting the learner to move to a new understanding. However this does not mean that teachers and learners need to *copy* one another's understanding but rather to be able to 'fit' with it. Teachers and leaders must be capable of deconstructing their own assumptions in order to be effective supporters of learning. Finally, Von Glaserfeld asserts that 'doing' comes before thinking. In other words, practice comes before theory.

A social constructivist view of language learning foregrounds the importance of social interaction as a means towards the development of language. The learner is supported or scaffolded by a more able other (Wood, Bruner, Ross, 1976). Vygotsky is a social constructivist whose description of the zone of proximal development[10] underpins the role of the other in supporting the learner (Vygotsky, 1987). It resonates with Dewey's inquiry based learning: "If [the learner] cannot devise his own solution (not of course in isolation, but in

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[10] The zone of proximal development (ZPD) is seen as the difference between what a child can do independently and what he or she is capable of doing with targeted assistance (scaffolding).
Vygotsky coined this term to describe the area where instruction is most beneficial for each student – just beyond his or her current level of independent capability (Lui, 2012).

correspondence with the teacher and other pupils) and find his own way out he will not learn, not even if he can recite some correct answer with one hundred per cent accuracy" (Dewey, 1916, p.188).

Social constructivism claims that learning occurs on two levels, first the social level (interpsychological) and then the individual level (intrapsychological). Children move from other-regulatory (external) behaviours to self-regulatory (internal) behaviours through interactions with others in the environment (Dorn, 1996, p.16). It is through social exchange that the child learns to monitor and organise his thinking (p.16). Donaldson (1978) used Vygotskian theory to connect the growth of the intellect and the growth of consciousness. She made a key point in relation to the growth of the intellect – that intellectual powers cannot develop unless a person has a measure of control over his thinking. "If the intellectual powers are to develop, the child must gain a measure of control over his own thinking and he cannot control thinking while he remains unaware of it" (Donaldson, 1978, p.129). Therefore, the process of practising behaviour in the social sphere, becoming aware or observing it and then internalising the behaviour is how the learning process occurs. This also explains Vygotsky's assertion that language shapes thinking. Talking is the social act; language shapes the thought, which is the internal act.

Bruner was influenced by the work of Lev Vygotsky, believing that a child's social environment and social interactions are key elements of the learning process. Bruner coined the term 'scaffolding' with Wood and Ross in 1976. "Scaffolding is the process by which tutors help plan and organize the activity of children so that they can execute a task that is beyond their current level of ability" (Bibok, Carpendale & Müller, 2009,p.18)[11]

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[11] Bibok et al. describe the six sub-processes of scaffolding as follows: (1) recruitment ("[Tutors] enlist [children's] interest in and adherence to the requirements of the task"; p. 98); (2) direction maintenance (tutors ensure that children's problem-solving activities are directed toward achieving particular outcomes that

Scaffolding enables the learner to operate in his zone of proximal development whereby he can realise his learning potential more successfully than he would without support.

Like Vygotsky, Bruner considers language to be a tool of thought (Bruner, 1983). In other words, he argues that language shapes thinking, and language, informed by culture, shapes the self (Bruner, 1996). Boroditsky (2011) found support for this thesis when she worked with an aboriginal community in Pormpuraaw, Northern Australia. Boroditsky discovered that the community, who speak the Kuuk Thaayorre language, did not use spatial terms such as 'right', 'left' and 'straight ahead' but instead used cardinal directions (north, south, east, west, and so forth). A five year old child from Pormpuraaw was able to point north precisely and without hesitation (p.63). When Boroditsky asked an audience of eminent scholars in Stanford University to do the same thing, point north, they were either unable to do so or they had to spend some time figuring out the answer. Boroditsky described another study that found if people are taught new colour words, it increases their ability to discriminate colours (2011). Boroditsky concluded that language shapes thought but it also works the other way around – thought influences language too (p.65). Bruner argues that language shapes our mental world, but "culture shapes the mind… it provides us with the toolkit by which we construct not only our worlds but our very conception of ourselves and our powers" (1996, p.x). Bruner does not believe that people are imprisoned by their culture – it is possible to transcend culture. This, Bruner holds, is the role of education. Bruner believes

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contribute to completion of the task); (3) frustration control (tutors manage and regulate children's negative emotional reactions to difficulties in solving the task in order to maintain their commitment to finishing the task); (4) reduction in degree of freedom ("[Tutors simplify] the task by reducing the number of constituent acts required to reach solution"; p. 98); (5) marking critical features (tutors make salient to children features or aspects of the task that are important or relevant for its completion); and (6) demonstration (tutors model "idealized" solutions to task requirements so that they may be imitated by children during completion of the task (p. 98).

that education is a process of negotiation between the individual and culture (Takaya, 2008, p.4). Early in his career, Bruner might have been described as a cognitivist p.10), but he evolved into a social constructivist and ultimately he is a socio-culturalist (Takaya, 2008),

"Socio-cultural theory is closely related to social constructivism but its lens is wider" (Scott & Palincsar, 2013). A socio-cultural perspective is an inter-disciplinary field, that is, it consists of a range of different perspectives and theories that share some basic asumptions on knowledge, learning and development (John-Steiner, 1996). Scott and Palincsar argue that a socio-culturalist will use culture as the lens through which learning is examined whereas a constructivist is more interested in how the learner creates meaning from his/her learning (2013). This does not mean that constructivism and socio-culturalism are incompatible; rather a constructivist might create meaning from learning using the lens of socio-cultural theory. Socio-cultural theory focuses on the causal relation between social interaction and individual cognitive development. It emphasizes collaboration and collaborative higher-level thinking and asserts that individuals internalise group thought, which is processed and then fed back in to the group to further the group construction of knowledge (Leonard, 2002). Socio-cultural theory embraces apprenticeship models of scaffolding of which Barbara Rogoff is a proponent.

Rogoff (2008) shares Bruner's view on the role of culture in learning when she argues that "it is incomplete to focus only on the relationship of individual development and social interaction without concern for the cultural activity in which personal and interpersonal actions take place" (p.49). Rogoff describes three phases in her socio-cultural theory of learning: apprenticeship, guided participation and participatory appropriation. Apprenticeship occurs when a newcomer to a practice advances their skills in a practice through observation and participation with others. The concept of guided participation refers to children actively

learning and acquiring new skills alongside their parents or other adults. The adults are

supporting and guiding the child and the guidance could be non-verbal or verbal and involves

the adult arranging and managing the child's interactions with the environment (2008).

Participatory appropriation is the change that takes place in the individual learner as he goes

through the process of learning an activity that he will later handle on his own. The act of

appropriation is the way the individual handles the situation on his own, based on his

experience of learning about the process (2008). "Rogoff viewed the social interaction

between adult and child as providing bridges[12] between known skills and information needed

to solve new problems" (Dorn, 1996, p.18).

> Through social interaction, the adult bridges the gap between the familiar and the
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> unfamiliar for the child and the child gradually takes control of the learning as his/her
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> understanding develops. It is the child's understanding of the known skill that
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> provides a bridge for extending learning to the next level (Dorn, 1996, p.18).

Bruner's concept of scaffolding and Rogoff's concept of guided participation and

participatory appropriation are central to the process of dialogical story-reading between

parent and child (See Table 2.3, p.53 for an illustration of the guided participation model).

Socio-cultural theory also embraces Lave and Wenger's (1991) communities-of-

practice models. Communities of learners pool knowledge and develop together becoming

more central to the learning community as they develop in expertise.

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[12] "Bridging in development occurs much like the construction of bridges over highways. In actual bridges, pillars are first erected. These pillars do not support anything yet, because the horizontal part of the bridge, on which the road will pass, is still missing. Yet the "empty pillars" mark the future road. Later horizontal structures are built over the pillows, bridging from one place to another. Similarly in developmental bridging, people first set up an empty structure, which, like the pillars, sketches the way for building new knowledge. Then, people fill the empty structure with relevant content, thereby reaching the target knowledge" (Granott, Fischer & Parziale, 2009, p.17).

Educational theorists tend to agree that no single theory of learning is sufficient to capture the intricacies of how individuals learn (e.g. Jonassen, 2009; Wood & Attfield, 2005). Behaviourism, as discussed previously, does not allow for human mediation. Cognitivism does not consider the influence of human emotion. Constructivism is criticised for its lack of specificity. There are numerous instructional models based on constructivism but no real efforts to come up with an agreed model. It's more a philosophical framework than a theory of instruction (Tobias & Duffy, 2009, p.4). Sweller (2009) says that Constructivism demands that a child learner acts like a scientist but this is not possible for a child because she lacks the necessary content knowledge and she cannot retrieve information rapidly from her long-term memory. However, a constructivist approach does not preclude guidance from a more able other (Tobias & Duffy, 2009). With guidance children can achieve more than when their learning is unsupported (Bruner, 1983). It seems, as Wood and Attfield (2005) and Jonassen (2009) asserted, that all learning theories have something to offer the learning process but no one theory is the panacea for all learners. Theory in relation to language acquisition has moved to an integrative view and this will be considered presently in relation to Emergentism. The focus will now turn to dialogic theory, the influence of which is threaded throughout both *The Storytime Project* and the process evaluation of the project (See theoretical framework, chapter three).

Learning Theory and Dialogism

Dialogic learning

Racionero and Padros, (2010), claim that conceptions of learning have moved from a transmission-of-knowledge approach to a constructivist approach and now to dialogic learning, whereby learning results from communicative interaction between the learner and those with whom he/she interacts, for example, parents, peers, teachers, relatives, friends and others. According to Beck, Giddens and Lash, 1994, the move to dialogic learning is propelled by technology's 'demonopolisation of expert knowledge'. The teacher is no longer a repository and purveyor of knowledge but a designer of the interactive learning environment and facilitator of communicative learning interactions (Racionero & Padros, 2010). Robin Alexander (2004) talks in similar terms about the dialogic relationship. describing dialogic teaching as -

> *collective*: teachers and children address learning tasks together, whether as a group
> or as a class; *reciprocal:* teachers and children listen to each other, share ideas and
> consider alternative viewpoints; *supportive*: children articulate their ideas freely,
> without fear of embarrassment over 'wrong' answers; and they help each other to
> reach common understandings; *cumulative:* teachers and children build on their own
> and each other's ideas and chain them into coherent lines of thinking and enquiry;
> *purposeful*: teachers plan and steer classroom talk with specific educational goals in
> view (p.38).

Alexander's view of dialogic learning is non-hierarchical and dependant on close listening and responsive relationships between teacher and learner. There are hints of dialectic thinking in Alexander's dialogical approach. This will be expanded upon presently when examining dialogic thinking as it relates to the theoretical views of Bakhtin and Vygotsky.

White (2016) models her 'dialogical pedagogy' on Bakhtin's thinking about dialogue. She describes the principles of dialogical pedagogy thus:

Dialogic pedagogy is - an infinite space of possible meanings; a place where curriculum is dialogue; contingent responsiveness to 'other'; characterised by lively discussion about ideas of importance to learners; interested in valued knowledge from a range of sources; resistant of end points; interested instead in points of wonder; not afraid to set challenges or respond to those posted by others; concerned with ideas, not correct answers; welcoming of uncertainty; respectful of the pace and style (forms) of communication learners bring to the classroom; underpinned by relationships that take time to understand others; influenced by what can be seen and what is unseen but nevertheless important; respectful of diverse ideas and ideologies; encouraging of debate, dissensus and perhaps even silence; interested in insider and outsider perspectives on topics; at times lots of fun and at other times potentially painful. Sometimes both! (pp.36-37).

White's interpretation of dialogic pedagogy emphasizes the open-endedness of dialogue and it does not concern itself with arriving at one agreed interpretation of knowledge/learning or events. According to Reznitskaya, the hallmarks of dialogic discussion are - shared authority between students and teacher; discussions that centre on open-ended questions that target higher order thinking and provide answers that might be ambiguous - not entirely singular and certain; students and teacher build upon and connect with one another's utterances rather than the teacher simply providing feedback. Feedback is used to construct new meaning; the teacher helps to make visible the connections between students' ideas and students are thinking metacognitively; students take positions on issues and support their positions with reasoning and students engage critically and collaboratively with one another's ideas,

building on previous oral contributions and co-constructing ideas. Reznitskaya (2012)

devised a Dialogic Inquiry Tool (DIT) to facilitate analysis of classroom discussion. The DIT

(See table 2.1), allows users to identify where their classroom discussion style lies on the

tool's continuum between monologic (i.e. didactic, teacher-controlled) and dialogic practice

and is thus a helpful tool to support educators to reflect on their practice.

Table 2.1 Selected Dialogic Inquiry Tool Indicators

Ratings	Indicator		
	Monologic		Dialogic
	1 2	3 4	5 6
1. **Authority**	The teacher has exclusive control over discussion Content and processes. She or he nominates students, asks questions, initiates topical shifts, and evaluates the answers.	There are occasional opportunities for students to freely engage in the discussion. These are rare and involve only a few students. Most of the time, the teacher controls turn-taking, prescribes topic choice, and reshapes the discussion to align with specific fixed content.	Students share major responsibilities for the process and substance of the discussion. They manage turns, ask questions, react to each other's ideas, suggest topical shifts, and propose procedural changes.
2. **Questions**	Teacher questions target recall of specific facts from the story. These are simple "test" questions with one right or wrong answer known from the story or other sources.	The teacher asks questions of mixed quality, including complex, open-ended questions. Open questions are often designed to "lead" students to a narrow range of interpretations of the text deemed acceptable by the teacher.	The discussion centers on truly open and cognitively challenging questions. The questions target higher order thinking, involving students in critical evaluation and analysis.
3. **Feedback**	The teacher uses short, formulaic, or ambiguous feedback. The feedback does not invite students to further develop their answers (e.g., "Umm.	The quality of teacher follow-up is mixed. The teacher often listens to and works with student responses, but occasionally misses important	The teacher consistently works with student answers to inspire further exploration. He or she praises or questions the process of reasoning,

		OK. Tracy?")	opportunities to help the group to advance their inquiry further.	not the conclusions (e.g., "But how is cheating different from lying?").
4.	**Meta-level reflection: Connecting student ideas**	The teacher does not relate student answers to each other.	The teacher sometimes misses opportunities to connect students' ideas.	The teacher does not miss opportunities to make visible the connections among student ideas and prompt students to relate their ideas to what's been said by others. He or she often attributes student ideas and questions to specific speakers (e.g., "Bill, do you want to respond to Kim's example?").
5.	**Explanation**	Students do not explain what they think and why. Their responses are brief and factual, consisting of a word or a phrase.	Students occasionally share opinions and provide good justification for them. Longer student responses may represent simple retelling of events from the story.	Students take personal positions on the issue (e.g., "I think," "I believe," "I feel") and support them with reasons and examples. They make elaborate, lengthy contributions, explaining their thinking to others.
6.	**Collaboration**	Student responses are short, disjointed, and unrelated to each other. Students primarily "report" about established, known facts.	Students occasionally build on each other's ideas. The collaboration often involves sharing of similar experiences, rather than a critical analysis of each other's ideas (e.g., "This happened to me, too! I was visiting my aunt in Boston….").	Students engage in critical and collaborative "coconstruction of ideas." Their responses are "chained together," as they react to each other's ideas.

Reznitskaya (2012)

Reznitskaya's (2012) hallmarks of a dialogic discussion can be used to describe the

nature of the parent-child dialogic story-reading relationship as collaborative, co-constructive

and open-ended. Other key hallmarks of dialogic learning such as - the change in power

relationships, the role of the non-expert adult in supporting children's learning and the role of culture and the community in the learning process – will be addressed later in this chapter when the influence of dialogic learning on dialogic reading is examined (See page 40).

Research on the cultural origins of human cognition (see Tomasello, 1999, for example), have concluded that the mind itself is dialogic. Dialogic cognitive representations exist in the mind to support collaborative interactions, inter-subjectivity and shared intentionality (Racionero and Padros, 2010). Bahktin's (1981) writing on dialogism, described in more detail in chapter three, is consistent with this thinking. Paulo Freire's (1996) assertion that dialogism is inherent in human nature is also consistent with this view. Bakhtin's thinking about dialogism will now be compared to that of Vygotsky, followed by a comparison with Freire.

Bakhtin and Vygotsky.

Bakhtin's concept of Dialogism - the idea that language is inherently dialogical; even the unit of a word is dialogical because its meaning comprises the collectively constructed meaning of that word over time (Bakhtin, 1981) - and Heteroglossia[13], both discussed later in the research methods chapter, also resonate with a socio-cultural perspective, given Bakhtin's emphasis on the importance of context and of the construction of meaning. Language cannot be separated from the social and political context from which it emanates. However, some commentators (Wegerif, 2008; White, 2011) argue that Vygotskian thinking and Bakhtinian thinking are not compatible because the former belongs to a dialectic and the latter to a dialogic view. A dialectic view comes from Hegel's description of thesis, antithesis and synthesis (Popper, 2007). A viewpoint is put forward, an opposing viewing is pitted against it and the topic is debated until synthesis is achieved, that is, until a reconciliation of views is

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[13] Heteroglossia claims the primacy of context over meaning (Bakhtin, 1981).

reached. Dialogism, on the other hand, does not require that a consensus view emerges from polarised positions. According to Wegerif (2008), dialogism implies two voices and assumes an underlying difference rather than identity, whereas dialectical thinking assumes that meaning is ultimately grounded on identity rather than upon difference. Thompson (2012) agrees with Wegerif that fundamentally different ontologies underpin Vygotsky's dialectic and Bahktin's dialogic but Thompson argues that they have more in common than in difference. Thompson claims that synthesis encompasses remnants of both original arguments and is not a new singular position. He also says that there must be dialectic within dialogue. "Effective classroom dialogue involves both teachers and students explaining their reasoning and substantiating their judgements" (p. 93). It would be a mistake, Thompson argues, to subordinate reasoning to an emphasis on the acceptance of multiple voices without analysis (p.99). "A post-modernist focus on the quality of dialogue at the expense of dialectical models of analysis could tend to undervalue important forms of extended classroom 'talk for learning' whose dialectic and dialogic functions are closely intertwined" (p.90). Reference to the works of both Vygotsky and Bakhtin is consistent with the theoretical framework for this study, therefore, although each position is ontologically different. A parent and child discussing a story, for example, will sometimes create understandings together and agree on one interpretation; other times they will create understanding together but have separate, equally valid, interpretations; at other times again, the parent might make a direct teaching point which is a monologic[14], rather than a dialogic or dialectic act.

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[14] Bakhtin differentiates between dialogic and monologic discourse by giving an example of monologic discourse in relation to a pupil-teacher discourse. When the teacher's aim is to inculcate a particular idea which the learner can then reproduce, that is monologic discourse. In contrast, in dialogic discourse there is an effort to build meaning collaboratively and there is a genuine concern for the meaning of the other (Lyle, 2008, p.225).

Bakhtin and Freire.

Bakhtin and Freire also invite comparison in relation to dialogism. "Both were fascinated by language and by ideas of dialogue, and both insisted on the situated socio-political nature of the word and its users" (Rule, 2011, p.924). Both emphasized the open-endedness of dialogue and the unfinalizability of human being (Rule, 2011). However the dialectic –dialogic tension identified in the relationship between Bakhtin and Vygotsky is also evident in the relationship between Bakhtin and Friere. Friere sees subjectivity and objectivity in "constant dialectical relationship" (Freire, 2005, p. 50) that is, there is a persistent tension between perspectives as seen through the individual subject and what is considered to be externally verifiable. Freire was not interested in dialogue as conversation but dialogue that has an epistemological curiosity, that is, as a means to develop a better comprehension about the object of knowledge (Macedo, as cited in Freire, 2005). In dialogue with Macedo, Freire says –

> Dialogue is a way of knowing and should never be viewed as a mere tactic to involve students in a particular task. We have to make this point very clear. I engage in dialogue not necessarily because I like the other person. I engage in dialogue because I recognize the social and not merely the individualistic character of the process of knowing. In this sense, dialogue presents itself as an indispensable component of the process of both learning and knowing (Freire, 2005, p.17).

Freire, though he is interested in the lived experiences of people with whom he is engaging as dialogue, does not see those lived experiences as ends in themselves but as material for finding a path to transformation or to self-awareness/consciousness. The notion of transformation, is crucially important as an aim for the dialogue for Freire. Rule (2011) writes that Freire identifies the basic contradiction of his epoch as being between oppression and liberation, "leading dialectically to humanization, which liberates both the oppressor and the

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oppressed to become more fully human" (p.930). Freire's approach to teaching literacy amongst marginalised groups and his work at developing people's critical consciousness continues to influence practice and is referenced throughout this work (see p.48-49, p.52, p.132, p135-139 and p.265).

Bakhtin rejected the notion of dialectic seeing it as reductive and monologic and deemed that a dialectic approach crams everything into one abstract consciousness, thus obliterating dialogue and polyphony[15] (Rule, 2011). For Bakhtin, however, "a unified truth is possible, but it is created multiply through a plurality of unmerged consciousnesses. What emerges is an epistemology that is relational (Pearce, 1994) and inclusive of difference: not a dialectical 'either/or' but a dialogic 'both/and' (Clark & Holquist, 1984, p7)" (Rule, 2011, p.935).

It could be contended that without dialectic there is no antithesis, no opposition and arguably, then, no progress. To use a modern day example: Establishment politics has embraced the anti-establishement, thus at once claiming and eliminating opposition. In *The Guardian* newspaper, Ian Leslie's headline reads "In an age when even the powerful decry elites, we're all anti-establishment now" (Leslie, 2016, n.p.). Donald Trump, Iain Duncan-Smith and Nigel Farage have all declared themselves anti-establishment in recent times, writes Leslie. "Even the most insidery of insiders now feel it necessary to portray themselves as alienated outsiders" (Leslie, 2016, n.p). Freire, however, does not agree that dialogue eliminates difference. Rather "it troubles it, engages with it, in an attempt to deepen understanding" (Rule, 2011, p.930). In this way, learning is possible through dialogue. Notwithstanding their different perspectives on the nature of dialogue, Bakhtin and Freire both embrace dialogue as a way of learning to know and learning to be human. The dialogic relationship is one of reciprocity and intersubjectivity rather than hierarchy and didacticism.

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[15] Polyphony means many voices (Dictionary.com).

Learning theory has thus journeyed through the image of teacher as repository of all knowledge to the teacher as guide and supporter of learning and ultimately as partner in learning.

Having mapped the evolution of learning theory, the next section examines a theory that has been appropriated from other disciplines to explain the acquisition of language – Emergentism. An Emergentist perspective deems that language develops alongside and together with other aspects of development, such as cognitive, biological and social. Thus it is an integrative view of language acquisition.

The Emergentist View of Language Acquisition

Traditionally models of language acquisition have preoccupied themselves with the nature versus nurture dichotomy between those who believe that language is part of the genetic make-up of the child (nature) and those who believe that the environment shapes the child's language (nurture). Lately there has been a move in the literature to integrate both perspectives. This integrative view is encapsulated in Emergentism. Unlike the other theories described (Behaviourism, Cognitivism, Constructivism, Dialogism) here, it is not a theory about the process of learning but rather about the origin of learning. Hollich, Hirsh-Pasek, Tucker and Golinkoff, (2000) describe it as a meta-theory. Emergentism suggests that development is caused by the unplanned or random interaction of multiple heterogeneous components, each affecting the other. Something new emerges from the process (Thelen & Smith, 1994 as cited in Hollich et al,. 2000). The new entity that emerges from the process stands alone, exhibits qualities that were not evident in the elements that combined to make it (e.g. Popovic (2008) uses the example that the wetness of water is not evident in its constitutive elements – hydrogen and oxygen) and so the new element is greater than the sum

of the elements that combined to cause its occurrence. In recent years Emergentist theory has been applied to the debate on language acquisition (Hollich et al., 2000).

Emergentist theory views the origins of human cognition as both innate and the result of environmental influences (Hollich, Hirsh-Pasek et al, 2000). "Issues invoking ''nature versus nurture'' arguments have receded and been replaced by more refined 'gene–brain–environment–behavior' interaction models" (Warren and Abbeduto, 2007). According to Hulit and Howard (2010), "those who believe language is learned recognize that the child must have the right anatomic equipment, and must be ready to acquire language in terms of cognitive, perceptual, and neuromuscular maturation. Their emphasis, however, is on environmental influences" (p. 17). Those who believe, on the other hand, that language is innate and universal among humans must accept that the environment plays some role in language acquisition (Barroqueiro, 2010, p.2). Hollich et al. (2000) talk about how language development is composed of many different components, emanating from both innate and environmental sources - "It is only when words, grammar, social interaction, environmental cues and a biologically appropriate substrate 'act together' that the child can be said to 'truly' construct grammar, in the fullest sense" (p.13).

According to a review of the literature on early language acquisition by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) in Ireland (2011), the emergentist view of language acquisition

> seeks to explain language acquisition in terms of the interaction between child
> learning mechanisms and environmental input (Hoff, 2004). It recognises the role of
> the child's psychological status, cognitive skills and social precocity in language
> acquisition, and the interactions between these elements and caregiver input. Within

this view, the contribution of a knowledgeable adult is considered to be part of the language construction process" (Shiel,Cregan, Mc Gough & Archer, 2012, p.299).

The adult-child relationship in language acquisition and development is central to emergentism because through interaction the child utilises both social precociousness and neural processing skills to develop his/her language (Shiel et al, 2012). An emergentist perspective on language and literacy acquisition and development, which embraces the influence of genetics (as did Vygotsky – see John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996) as well as the influence of the environment, thus embraces some of the same components thought to give rise to the production of language and to a socio-cultural world view (social interaction and culture/environment). According to socio-cultural theory, children are born with basic biological constraints on their minds. Each culture, however, provides 'tools of intellectual adaptation.' These tools (e.g. memory aids such as mnemonics, note-taking, drawing, writing; also tools such as clocks, compasses) allow children to use their basic mental abilities in a way that is adaptive to the culture in which they live. An examination of the intellectual tools of language and literacy now follows - tools that are central to the process of dialogic story-reading.

The Inter-Relatedness of Language and Literacy

Language.

The NCCA review on oral language development (Shiel et al, (2012), highlighted the significance of a social/interactive model of language acquisition and development. This report views learning as a process of making meaning (p.74). The purpose of language is to make meaning (Halliday, 1973, p.24) and the emergentist view argues that the acquisition of language is a continuum where learners develop their ability to mediate meaning through language (p.74). Language is therefore the very basis of learning (p. 74). Bruner and Halliday

both identify types of meaning in language that map this continuum and each interpretation may be understood as corresponding to one another. Bruner's inter-subjective mode (happens during the first year of life) corresponds with Halliday's interpersonal meta-function; Bruner's actional and normative modes (pre-school years) corresponds to Halliday's ideational meta-function which is about the ability to interpret experience (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004); and Bruner's propositional mode (age three onwards), corresponds to Halliday's textual meta-function. Textual meta-function encompasses all of the grammatical systems responsible for managing the flow of oral and/or written language. These systems make text coherent (Halliday, 2003).

Table 2.2 illustrates the progression of a young child through Bruner and Halliday's corresponding stages.

Table 2.2 Bruner (1983) and Halliday (2003) Stages of Children's Language Development

Stage	Bruner (1983)	Halliday (2003)
First year of life	Intersubjective mode	Interpersonal metafunction (About the relationship, the degree of intimacy between interactants.)
Pre-school	Actional and normative mode	Ideational metafunction (A semantic system to analyse/make sense of /theorise experience. It deals with the transmission of ideas, events, processes and with relations.)
Age 3 onwards	Propositional mode	Textual metafunction (The grammatical systems responsible for making text and language coherent.)

The continuum of stages outlined by Bruner and Halliday and described in Table 2.2, demonstrate that the child first masters meaning in language through the adult care-giver child relationship through the speaking of 'motherese' or child-directed speech (Snow, 1977). This phase is contingent on a *deep* engagement between care-giver and child where they jointly attend to one another (Halliday's interpersonal metafunction phase). This is the beginning of the listener-speaker relationship and its attendant skills such as initiating and

responding to a topic, turn-taking and maintaining eye contact. The adult may further support the child's utterances by building on what the child says, repeating, recasting, elaborating, explaining and modelling (Wasik, Bond & Hindman, 2006). Research, for example the Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years (REPEY) project (2002), demonstrates that the quality of the adult's support in supporting children's language is key to the success of that support. Shiel et al, (2012) describe the importance of an "enabling teaching style" in supporting children's language development, that is, a style that adjusts to match the comprehension levels of the child (p.17). High interest in the language topic on the part of the child also contributes to progress in language development. Grammar and parts of speech are assimilated when heard in meaningful life contexts. All of these aforementioned factors are tenets of a social–interactionist perspective on language development.

As the child grows she/he attributes meaning through observing the world and deriving an understanding from the experience (Halliday's ideational metafunction phase) and then finally the child learns to attribute meaning semiotically. Piaget claims that children acquire the semiotic function, or representational ability, at around eighteen months old (Lenninger, 2006) when they can use one object to represent another (e.g. a sweeping brush can be a horse). In later years, the child learns to mean semiotically in increasingly abstract ways through engagement with grammar and punctuation. This engagement leads to meta-linguistic awareness because the child is beginning to realise that he/she can think about language, manipulate language and thus see language as outside of themselves, as a tool that can be used to represent experience in whatever way the user chooses. Zipke (2008) says signs of children's developing metalinguistic awareness include noticing and commenting on rhyme and puns, exploring nonsense words and making word jokes (e.g. Why did the witch go to night school? She wanted to learn how to spell). This awareness of the representative function of language paves the way for the ability to use decontextualized language. One of

the aims of the evaluation study is to explore children's use of decontextualized language as described by their parents.

> Decontextualized language refers to language, such as that used in story narratives and other written forms of communication, that is used to convey novel information to audiences who may share only limited background knowledge with the speaker or who may physically be removed from the things or events described (Whitehurst & Lonnigan, 1998, p.851).

Decontextualized language requires precise use of grammar, syntax and vocabulary because it cannot rely on context to elaborate meaning (Curenton & Justice, 2004). It will be considered in greater detail in a later section. For now, a closer look at the path of language development and those skills needed to develop language is merited.

Vocabulary and grammar.

Theorists disagree on how language acquisition happens, but there is widespread consensus on the direction it tends to take (Lightbrown and Spada, 2013). Children are learning language from the moment they are born. Understanding language precedes expression but by age one a child will usually have uttered her first word. Two-word noun-verb sentences such as 'Mommy Juice' are typical at age two and even though prepositions and verbs may be missing, the word order reflects the word order of the language they are hearing. "Thus, for an English-speaking child, 'Baby Kiss' does not mean the same as 'Kiss Baby' (Lightbrown & Spada, 2013, p.7). At age two, some children may be able to produce three word sentences. Lightbrown and Spada make the point that children are not merely making imperfect imitations of what they hear their parents say – they seem to choose the best words to get their meaning across (p.7). By age two a child will have an expressive vocabulary of fifty words or more. Some two year-olds may have up to 300 words. At 3

years, children may have anywhere from 500-1,100 words in their vocabulary and at 5-7 years, children have an expressive vocabulary of 3000-5000 words (Jarzynski, 2011).

In relation to the acquisition of grammar, Brown (1973) discovered that there is an order in the way children acquire grammar. He presented a list of grammatical morphemes[16] in the order of which they are acquired, some of which are as follows – 1. Present progressive – 'ing' (e.g. Mommy running); 2. Plural – 's' (two books); 3. Irregular past forms (Baby went); 4. Possessive 's' (Daddy's hat); 5. Copula (Mommy is happy); 6. Articles 'the' and 'a'; 7. Regular past – 'ed' (She walked); 8. Third person singular – simple present – 's' (e.g. She runs); 9. Auxiliary 'be' (e.g. He is coming). The relationship between vocabulary and grammar is one of inter-dependence and reciprocity (Dickinson, Hirsch-Pasek, and Golinkoff, 2011). Simon-Cereijido and Gutiérrez-Clellen, (2009) found strong associations between lexical and grammatical measures of language, supporting an inter-dependence hypothesis.

Research on the teaching of vocabulary to young children emphasises the importance of playful contexts that are interactive, responsive and culturally appropriate (Dickinson, Hirsch-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2011, Neuman, 2011). Dickinson et al. outline six principles of word learning for supporting children's vocabulary development which emphasise the importance of frequent exposure to the word, a focus on interactivity and responsiveness between the adult and child, deep attention to the meaning of the word and a clear definition of the word. The word must be of interest or made interesting for the child and it must be

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[16] A morpheme is the smallest meaningful unit in the grammar of a language (Booij, 2007). It does not necessarily relate to the "word count" or "syllable count" of an utterance. For example,'Happy' is one word, it has two syllables (ha-ppy), and because it contains only one unit of meaning it is one morpheme. If you add another unit of meaning, such as 'un', to make 'happy' into 'unhappy' you still have one word, but three syllables ('un-ha-ppy') and two morphemes ('un' and 'happy'). (Bowen, 1998).

explored beyond its particular context into multiple contexts. Finally, Dickinson et al. emphasise that vocabulary learning and grammatical development are reciprocal processes (2011). There are clear resonances between these principles and a socio-cultural approach to learning. One of the strongest pieces of research in relation to vocabulary is the claim that children must hear words in multiple contexts and many times in order for the word to become part of their lexicon (e.g. Childrers & Tomasello, 2002). The research on effective vocabulary teaching tends therefore to emphasise hearing words many times and in a variety of contexts. Snell, Hindman & Wasik, (2015), Beck, McKeown & Kucan, (2013) and Vadasy & Nelson, (2012) offer similar advice on effective vocabulary teaching, encapsulated well in Beck et al.'s (2013) procedure for the teaching of a word: Examine the word as it occurs in the context of the story; explain the word in child-friendly language; ask children to repeat the word with you (because it builds a memory for the sound and meaning of the word); give examples of the word in contexts other than the story; children provide their own examples of the word and finally, children repeat the word again at the adult's prompting. Beck et al. (2013) recommend a robust, targeted approach to the teaching of vocabulary rather than a reliance on reading or on natural contexts (e.g. home environment, and incidental occurrences) to acquire vocabulary. They argue that many children are disadvantaged by the latter approach if they are not good de-coders or if they do not get opportunities for vocabulary development in natural contexts. Therefore there is a case for targeted, 'robust' instruction. What this means in the context of story-reading is to focus on particular challenging words that have arisen in a story when the "story has been read, discussed and wrapped up" (p.61). As part of the procedure to teach new words described above, Beck et al. (2013) describe of a number of ways that children can be actively involved in the learning of new vocabulary. For example, the adult asks the child to choose a correct answer from a series of given answers and based on the story just read to the child –

In the story, the bears were *astonished* when Goldilocks started laughing at the big mess they'd made. If something makes you *astonished,* that means it's so unusual that you are surprised and shocked by it. Say our word.

Would you be *astonished* if:

- You met someone from Cleveland or from the planet Venus?

- Your dog said hello or your baby cousin said hello?

- Your mother served spaghetti for dinner or if she served a banana split? (p.72).

The vocabulary development approach using story described above is targeted in so far as particular words in the story are chosen by the adult to elaborate upon but discussion around these words may occur naturally as the adult and child talk about the story. In dialogic story-reading, the relationship is one of reciprocity and the child is encouraged to be the questioner as much as the adult (Reznitskaya, 2012). Mc Gee and Schickedanz (2007), recommend giving a brief definition of a challenging word as the story is being read. This should be done without breaking the rhythm of the story-reading. They also recommend pointing to the salient part of an illustration to assist comprehension of the word, using dramatic gestures as the adult reads (e.g. shrugging one's shoulders to illustrate what 'shrugging' is), using intonation and varying the story's pace to infer meaning (p.744). These are subtle, non-didactic strategies that support children's understanding. Neuman (2011) and Lennox (2013) argue for the prioritisation of vocabulary teaching as part of early literacy instruction, such is its importance. Shared story reading can be an excellent way to enhance a child's vocabulary acquisition (Fisher, Frey and Lapp, 2008) as explicitly teaching word meanings within the context of the storybook can have a powerful effect on increasing a child's word consciousness and interest in expanding their vocabulary (Coyne et al., 2004).

In their description of the process of language development, Lightbrown and Spada (2013) mention that verbs are a relatively late development in the single-word period of English-speaking children and children who have difficulty learning language tend to have particular problems learning verbs (Oetting, Rice and Swank, 1995). This is one reason why it is important for the adult to be aware of the various classes of words that need to be emphasised as part of vocabulary development: Nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, positional prepositions (behind, up, down, under, over), prepositions which denote time and sequence (e.g. when, later, soon) and prepositions which explain and reason (e.g. if, so, then, because).

The key components of language.

Vocabulary and grammar, considered above, comprise two of the key components of language, namely, semantics (vocabulary is part of semantics, which is the ability to develop meaning), syntax (word order), phonology (the sound system of language), morphology (a component of grammar) and pragmatics (how language is used, including the social conventions of language). As children build their vocabulary and develop their ability to make meaning, they are concurrently developing expertise in language's other key components: phonology, syntax and morphology. Phonology is developed from an early age as the baby experiments with language, when the baby coos, babbles, and eventually utters his/her first word at around the age of twelve months (Peccei, 2006). The phonology of language is facilitated by the adult care-giver as the child interacts with his/her environment. Syntax is one of the major components of grammar. It is the arrangement of words in a sentence, word order. "It is syntax that gives the words the power to relate to each other in a sequence . . . to carry meaning--of whatever kind--as well as glow individually in just the right place." (Tufte, 2006, p.9). Most children will have grasped, to a good extent, the syntax of their native language by the time they begin school (Hargis, 2008) but there is substantial variation in the rates of language development, more so than other maturational milestones,

so attempts to universalise language development should be avoided (Shiel et al., 2012). Morphology is another major component of grammar. It concerns itself with the internal structure of words. Some knowledge of morphology is evident in children when they begin school, for example, four year old children are generally aware that if 's' is added to the end of a word, it denotes a plural or if 'ed' is added to a regular verb (as in 'talk') it places the verb in the past tense. As children become adept in the use of the grammatical system, their ability to represent themselves through oral and literate text is honed. This is Halliday's textual metafunction phase. The three metafunctions act to convey meaning simultaneously, systematically and interdependently in a text, not distinctly or independently (Haratyan, 2011, p.264).

Spoken language can be broken down into the elements or functions or components described above: phonology, syntax, semantics, morphology and pragmatics (how we use language to name, label, describe, explain, recall, re-tell, predict, speculate, infer and more). Pragmatics is also about how the speaker modifies speech to clarify meaning for the listener through changing tone, eye contact and turn-taking). (Brandone, Salkind, Golinkoff & Hirsh-Pasek, 2006). Bloom & Lahey (1978) simplify these elements of language into three essential constituents of language: The form, content and use of language. Form encompasses phonology, morphology and syntax; content refers to semantics and use refers to pragmatics. They are represented in the new Primary Language Curriculum (2015) as the three elements of language learning, that is (1) Developing communicative relationships through language (corresponds with 'use'), (2) Understanding the content and structure of language (corresponds with 'form' and 'content') and (3) Exploring and using language (corresponds with 'use'). These elements are acquired through interaction with others in the environment but their acquisition is also contingent on the child's cognitive processes functioning

effectively. This is consistent with an emergentist view of language acquisition. It is timely now to consider oral language's relationship to literacy in the context of this study.

Oral language underpins literacy development.

Lawrence and Snow, (2011) describe a number of different relationships between oral language and literacy that have been identified in the literature. They list the relationships as follows: Skill in oral language is a developmental precursor to reading acquisition (G. Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2002; G. J. Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998); to reading with comprehension (Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002); to enable student understanding of the importance of context, background knowledge, the structure of an argument and to encourage motivation around the development of vocabulary and comprehension. Skill in oral language is central to students' ability to participate in oral discourse in class; to engage in such activities as questioning the author and reciprocal teaching[17]; and it is also key to student engagement in collaborative reasoning around texts. The relationship between oral language and literacy changes over time as the child's learning develops. In the early years, for example, there is a strong relationship between oral language ability and letter-name knowledge, concepts of print, phonemic awareness and oral reading fluency whereas in the later years, elements of language such as academic vocabulary and narrative discourse have a larger impact on children's reading comprehension (Storch & Whitehurst, 2002).

Lawrence and Snow, (2011) specifically mention the following aspects of oral language as being related to reading: telling stories, comprehending stories, using academic language forms like definitions, producing extended discourse, producing effective arguments and comprehending multiple perspectives in arguments (p.323). The authors

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[17] Reciprocal teaching takes place between a teacher and a student in the form of a dialogue and focuses on a piece of text. The goal of the exercise is to improve comprehension through the activities of questioning, predicting, clarifying and summarising. The teacher and student take turns leading the activity (Palincsar, 1986).

comment that procedures such as dialogic reading are normally seen as vocabulary-building interventions, whereas, in fact, dialogic reading also promotes the development of deep comprehension skills (p.324). Deep comprehension skills such as summarising, questioning, clarifying and predicting become evident as children and parents engage in dialogic story-reading.

Sénéchal, LeFevre, Smith-Chant & Colton (2001) provide a conceptual framework for emergent literacy that proposes the *separation* of language and emergent literacy. Literacy skills differ from oral language in that literacy requires specific instruction usually in specific environments whereas oral language can be learned through informal interactions in the home and cultural environment (Sénéchal & Young, 2009). Oral language is acquired slowly (Dickinson, Golinkoff, & Hirsh-Pasek, 2009), "builds on its own success" (Dickinson, Griffith, Golinkoff, Hirsh-Pasek, 2012 p.3) and develops over the span of a lifetime. In contrast, basic literacy skills such as decoding and alphabet knowledge are usually rapidly developed, given appropriate instruction, in the early years of a child's life (Dickinson, Griffith et al, 2012). Sénéchal et al's (2001) proposal to separate language and literacy conceptually does not deny the inextricable relationship between the two skills. Recent research, including Snow & Lawrence (2011) referred to above, claims that oral language actually underpins literacy skills (e.g. Dickinson, Golinkoff et al, 2010, Silven, Poskiparta, Niemi & Voeten, 2007; Storch & Whitehurst, 2002). There is also a large body of research which indicates that development in one language process influences development in another, for example there is a link between the development of written and oral language (e.g. Bissex, 1980; Clay, 1982; Goodman, 1986; Hulme & Snowling, 2014).

If we accept that reading comprehension depends on both decoding and language comprehension skills […], there is no doubt that broader oral language skills

(including grammar, semantics and pragmatics) are also important for reading

comprehension. In short, reading for meaning depends on all four domains of oral

language (Hulme & Snowling, 2014, p.1).

This implies that oral language and literacy skills should not be separated. This thinking is in

keeping with the emergent literacy perspective, the contemporary view on how literacy is

acquired. It deems that literacy learning begins from birth, that there is a reciprocal

relationship between language and literacy learning and that increased understanding in one

sphere of literacy can contribute to learning in the other (Erickson, 2000, p. 193). The

reading readiness perspective, in contrast, claimed that children are typically not ready to

embrace formal literacy until they are 6.5 years old (Erickson, 2000, p. 194) and not until a

set of pre-requisite skills are in place. The emergent approach to literacy sees children on a

continuum of literacy behaviours whereas the readiness perspective considers that children

need to go through a series of "predetermined, sequential steps" (p.194) before they can begin

to read. Current thinking in relation to literacy development, therefore, emphasises the inter-

relatedness of oral language and reading (Hulme & Snowling, 2014).

A focus on language or literacy skills in the context of dialogic story reading.

In the context of dialogic story-reading, a form of interactive shared story-reading

where the adult reads a story to the child[18], (to be discussed in detail later, see p.88), the

primary emphasis is on the development of oral language through dialogic, meaning-making

and meaning-building transactions[19] (Rosenblatt, 2004). However, because dialogic story-

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[18] In dialogic story-reading, the child is an active listener and asks questions, makes comments and dialogues with the adult around the story. Gradually the child becomes the teller of the story and the adult becomes the listener (Whitehurst, n.d.).

[19] Rosenblatt (2004) claimed that Dewey chose the word 'transaction' over 'interaction' because 'interaction' has positivist connotations. An 'interaction' is a single, objective event whereas, Dewey, thought, 'transaction' implies a process that is more ongoing, or "unfractured" (p.1364). The transactional paradigm is consonant with post-modern thinking, where the subject and object are no longer considered to be two distinct entities allowing for a purely objective truth. Instead the subject is connected to the object - the observer becomes part of the

reading involves the use of texts as a conduit to developing oral language, there is also necessarily a focus on print awareness and on concepts of print. Furthermore, children's decontextualized language skills, the development of which is one of the aims of dialogic story-reading, have been found to be related to conventional literacy skills "such as decoding, understanding story narratives, and print production (e.g., Dickinson & Snow, 1987)" (Whitehurst and Lonigan, 1998, p.851). Therefore, although the development of oral language is the primary aim of dialogic story-reading, the connection to more formal literacy skills cannot be ignored.

Notwithstanding the inter-relatedness between oral language, reading and writing, the main emphasis in dialogic story-reading, where the aim is to enable the child to take over the story telling from the adult (Trivette & Dunst, 2007; Whitehurst, 1992), is on dialogue; on meaning-making transactions (Rosenblatt, 2004) that facilitate comprehension and intersubjectivity; on the development of vocabulary and talk around stories and not on the teaching of specific literacy skills such as alphabet knowledge, although this may arise incidentally. Pianta (2006) suggests that if the focus is shifted from meaning to a more explicit instructional focus when reading stories to children, it can threaten the nature of the relationship between the caregiver and the child.

Sim and Berthelson (2014) conducted a home intervention study in Queensland, Australia with eighty parents and children to explore the effects of two kinds of shared reading interventions on children's learning: dialogic reading and dialogic reading plus print referencing (i.e. pointing to letters, and words, commenting and questioning on word beginnings and endings, tracking words while reading and commenting about rhyme (p.52). The children ranged in age from 4.92 years to 6.25 years. They attended Catholic schools in a

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observation (Bohr, 1959 as cited in Rosenblatt, 2004). Post-modernism rejects the notion of a singular objective reality or truth.

Queensland city suburb. Their ethnicity or socio-economic status was not described. The researchers pre-tested and post-tested the children and used randomised control trials in their study. Results showed that both groups scored significantly higher in expressive vocabulary, rhyme and concepts about print post-intervention. However, there was no significant difference in outcomes between the dialogic reading only group and the dialogic reading and print referencing group. Sim and Berthelson commented on the finding thus: "There appears to have been a trade-off between reading in a fun or enjoyable manner and explicit teaching of letter knowledge" (p.54).

A similar finding was made by Lonigan, Purpura, Wilson, Walker, & Clancy-Menchetti, (2013) in their study of 324 preschoolers from low-income backgrounds and primarily of African American ethnicity (82%). They found that individual interventions to improve children's oral language and decoding skills, in the form of 10-20 minute withdrawal from class, five days a week, by staff who had bachelor's or master's degrees in psychology, education or speech-language pathology (p.118), brought about statistically significant results but the study found that *combining* those interventions did not improve outcomes for children.

Hindman, Connor, Jewkes and Morrison (2008) found that parents and teachers overwhelmingly focus their book-related talk on meaning-related rather than code-related information. This is not surprising in relation to parents who are not trained in the teaching of code-related skills. In any event, parents are not teachers and the purpose of reading to their child is usually to enjoy the story together.

Mol, Bus & De Jong (2009) found that younger children's print knowledge did not benefit from interactive storybook encounters but older children's print knowledge *did* benefit. The age cohort studied was children between the ages of 2.5 years and 7.5 years.

The authors surmise that younger children possibly expend most of their energy on understanding/meaning whereas for older children comprehension does not require the same effort that it might for a younger child. Older children are becoming more aware of print generally and this enables them to benefit in terms of increased print knowledge as well as oral language knowledge. The primary focus of dialogic story-reading, therefore, is on oral language development through dialogic, meaning-making and meaning-building transactions (Rosenblatt, 2004) but recognises that language and literacy skills are interrelated and interdependent (Dickinson et al., 2010; G. J. Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). Marie Clay (2001) supports this view, seeing a reciprocal relationship between oral language, reading and writing; language is both a resource for and a beneficiary of reading and writing.

Dialogic story reading develops informal literacy skills, what Paris (2005) describes as the unconstrained skills of literacy, that is, vocabulary and comprehension. Unconstrained skills are so called because the parameters for learning are unlimited unlike constrained literacy skills such as letter naming, and alphabet knowledge. Unconstrained literacy skills develop throughout life and are infinite in terms of what can be learned. They are more difficult to assess than constrained skills which are finite and generally acquired between ages four and eight years of age. See the continuum below illustrating highly constrained to unconstrained skills (Stahl, 2011).
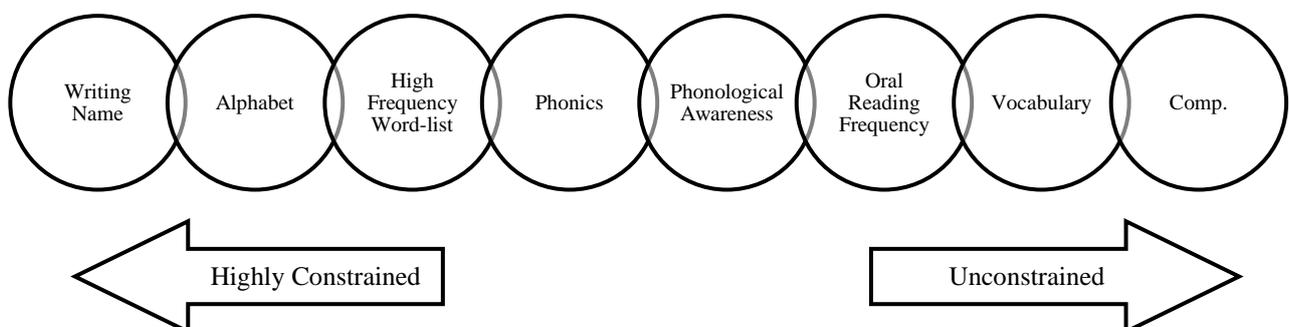
Figure 2.1 A Continuum from Highly Constrained to Unconstrained Skills

There is research that argues for the pre-eminence of the technical skills of reading over language development work (see for example the national early literacy panel report (NELP), 2008) but others argue that language is the underlying factor influencing the development of code-related skills such as phonological processing and print concepts (Dickinson, Golinkoff, & Hirsh-Pasek, 2010). As far back as 1987, Dickinson and Snow found evidence to suggest that the development of children's decontextualized language skills are related to conventional components of literacy such as decoding, understanding story narratives, and print production. It is also argued that a focus on vocabulary development in the early years pays dividends in terms of children's later language and comprehension ability (Dickinson et al, 2010). For example, Roth, Speece et al., (2002) found that two aspects of oral language, oral definitions[20] and word retrieval and one aspect of emergent literacy – print awareness – were the most predictive factors of first and second class reading comprehension.

Snowling and Hulme (2011) were quoted earlier in relation to their assertion that reading depends on all four domains of language: phonology, grammar, semantics and pragmatics. For example, decoding depends on phonology and reading comprehension depends on semantics, or meaning. Reading, they claim, is therefore parasitic on language (2011). The ability to recode (to pronounce words from unknown letter strings) and to comprehend are vital skills for reading (Gough & Tunmer,1986). Snowling and Hulme argue that recoding depends on phonology and comprehension depends on grammar, semantics, pragmatics and phonology (2011). Of course it can be argued that oral language, in turn, is

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[20] Oral definitions are related to decontextualized language because to define words children must move beyond the here and now and talk in abstract terms (Kennedy, Dunphy et al, 2012).

parasitic or builds upon, reading. As the reader moves from learning to read to reading to learn, s/he moves on to more demanding and complex texts and takes on additional roles.

To conclude, a balanced position is well articulated in the recent review of significant literature in the area of literacy (NCCA, 2012). The review states that there is a reciprocal relationship between listening, speaking, reading and writing and development in one supports development in the other. Equally, a difficulty or weakness with one or more of the components will have an impact on the other elements" (Kennedy, Dunphy et al, 2012, p.317).

The next section examines the relationship between dialogic learning and dialogic reading. It focuses on models of scaffolding to illustrate how the dialogic relationship might function.

Connecting Dialogic Learning Theory to Dialogic Reading

Dialogic learning was described earlier as an interactive approach to learning distinguished by collaborative interactions, inter-subjectivity, shared intentionality and horizontal rather than hierarchical power relations (Racionero and Padros, 2010). Shared intentionality however, does not mean that participants in dialogue must have shared views. "Common ground makes communication possible, but difference makes it meaningful. Common ground does not have to mean a shared identity but must rather depend on a shared will to listen to and accept each other critically" (Portelli, 2005).

Three key components of dialogic learning sit well with the process of dialogic reading: The first relates to power relations, the second to the use of the non-expert adult in supporting children's learning (Tellado and Sava, 2010) and the third to the claim that learning and the learner cannot be separated from the community from where the learner and

learning takes place (see for example, Bakhtin, 1981; Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989; Lave & Wenger, 1991 on Situated Learning).

Power relations and dialogic learning.

Power relations change in dialogic reading when the child eventually takes over from the adult to become the story-teller. Bakhtin considers power relations in his concept of the Carnivalesque (Dentith, 1995). Carnival is a time when the powers of authority are subverted. The people take over the streets and celebrate. They create parodic effigies of powerful figures. Mis-rule takes over from rule. Chaos trumps control and authority. In dialogic reading, the child takes the lead. The intention may not be to subvert authority but the mischief and joy associated with carnival would not be misplaced in the dialogic reading scenario. Sipe, in his typology of expressive engagement (2002) describes children's spontaneous participation in stories and likens many of their behaviours to the Carnivalesque. He details how children sometimes engage their bodies in a wild dance in response to the text or how they sometimes directly address characters in a story or they might insert themselves in the story as the hero. In order for this mischief and joy to be given free rein, Marjanovic-Shane's (1996) suggests that the relationship between the child and adult must be very close because the humour will only be understood in its context if there is intersubjectivity between the adult and child. In other words, there needs to be a deep and empathic relationship between adult and child to enable the atmosphere of carnival to exist.

Figure 2.2 illustrates the various ways that children participate in stories: They dramatise, that is, they act out the gestures or behaviours of one of the story's characters; they directly address a character in the story ('talking back') – 'Watch out for the troll!'; they critique or control the text by suggesting alternative plots, characters and settings (Sipe, 2002, p. 477); they insert themselves in the story by assuming the role of one of the characters

(p. 478); and finally, they wrest control ('taking over') of the text from the author, whereby they do not try to interpret the text in any way but use it as a springboard for their own fantasies and creations (p.478).
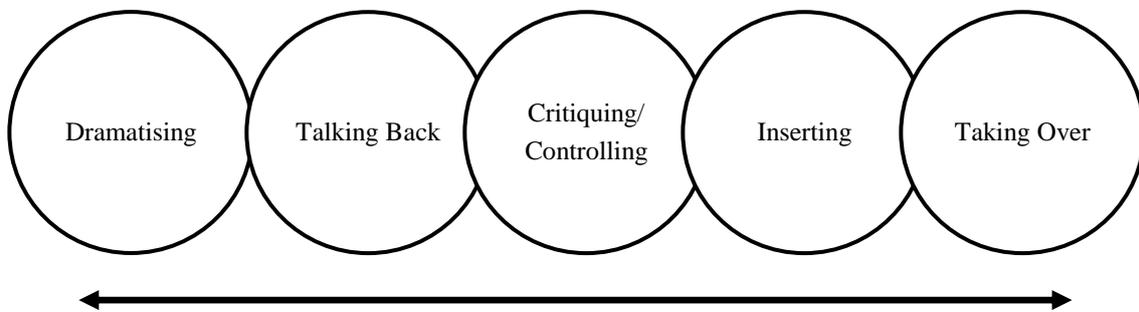
Figure 2.2 A Typology of Expressive Engagement (Sipe, 2002).

In terms of relationships of power, Sipe (2002) says that the typology in Figure 2.2 represents a continuum of control. As the child moves from dramatizing to talking back to eventually taking over, power relations have shifted from the adult reader to the child. This mirrors the control shift envisaged for dialogic story-reading, where the child eventually becomes the storyteller. The degrees of taking over the text just described also demonstrate Rosenblatt's (2004) transactional theory in action. The text is not fixed or immutable but is acted upon and changed by the reader.

Freire, who informs the theoretical framework for this study, is committed to changing power relationships between people (the oppressors and the oppressed) through education, literacy education in particular (Freire, 1996). His overarching aim was the transformation of social structures to allow people to become "beings for themselves", not to integrate the oppressed into the structures of oppression (Freire, 1996, p.55). Freire's critical approach to literacy was that learners should learn to 'read' their world and then to 'read' words (Freire & Macedo, 1987).This was to be done through dialogic engagement where participants maintained equal control of the process through attitudes of mutual respect and

humility (Rugut & Osman, 2013). A condition of trust and communication "between teacher (who also learns) and learner (who also teaches)" would then pertain (p.23). Freire eschewed what he described as 'Banking Education', whereby the teacher, in a position of power, deposited information in the minds of the learner to be passively assimilated (Freire, 1996). Education, rather, is a collective activity. However, it would be wrong to assume that learner's knowledge, feelings and understanding go unchallenged. Freire saw the role of the teacher as someone who has authority without being authoritarian, someone who intervenes to challenge and to help the learner reflect on ideas about cultural, social and gender constructs (Rugut & Osman, 2013). A Freirean approach resonates with current understandings of dialogic learning through the desire for the autonomy of the learner realised through mutually respectful dialogic relationships.

The non-expert adult and scaffolding.

Adults involved in the story-reading process in *The Storytime Project* are parents, not qualified teachers. Teachers are trained in pedagogy whereas parents are not. Parents are given instruction and advice on how to conduct the story-reading sessions at *The Storytime* induction workshop but the intention of the workshop is to support parents, in their particular and special relationships with their children, to foster their children's language development rather than train parents to teach their child to read. Neuman and Gallagher, (1994) devised a support model that could be used by parents in their daily exchanges, both verbal and non-verbal, with children.

It is based on Rogoff's (1990) idea of guided participation and on scaffolding (Wood, Bruner & Ross, 1976). It describes four stages in the support process: Get Set, Gives Meaning, Builds Bridges and Step Back. These are described in Table 2.3.

Table 2.3 Guided Participation Model (Neuman & Gallagher, 1994)

Supporting Children's Learning: Definition of the Four Processes in Guided Participation

Aim: To construct a model that might be used as strategies by parents in their daily exchanges, both verbal and non-verbal, with children

Stage 1: Get Set
- Recruits the child's interest in an activity
- Gives children a reason to become involved in an activity
- Focuses children's attention on something observable, "Look at this…"
- Attempts to keep their attention throughout an activity

Stage 2: Gives Meaning
- Helps the child understand what is important to notice and the values associated with labels and objects that are seen in the environment
- Adds descriptive comments or elaborations about an object
- Adds animation or affect to objects to make the activity come alive and provoke interest
- Demonstrates or models a behaviour

Stage 3: Builds Bridges
- Makes connections to child's past or future: "Do you ever…"
- Elicits connections from a child: "Tell me if…"
- Encourages imagination: "Can you imagine if…"
- Induces hypothetical, cause-effect type thinking: "What if…"

Stage 4: Step Back
- Gives the child a strategy for completing a task: "This is a way you can make it work…"
- Encourages turn taking on the part of the child
- Provides elaborative feedback: "No…It works this way…" "How about trying…"
- Responds to the child's initiatives: "So you are building a train?"

From: Roskos and Christie (2007). (Eds) Play and Literacy in Early Childhood: Research from Multiple Perspectives

The first three stages in Neuman and Gallagher's Guided Participation Model (1994) fit particularly well with the story-reading process in dialogic story-reading. This will become apparent later when Whitehurst's dialogic language prompts are discussed (see p.67-68 of this chapter).

The use of the non-expert adult is central to the concept of dialogic learning. Studies examined by Tellado and Sava (2010) demonstrate that the use of a non-expert adult can support children's learning when they share the same cultural codes (facilitates understanding and inter-subjectivity) and when there is a pre-existing relationship with the adult, for example, a family member.

Situated learning and the socio-cultural context.

The third component of dialogic learning that resonates with dialogic reading is situated learning[21]. There is an abundance of evidence that suggests that a child's learning is improved when his/her community, usually family, is involved (e.g. Burchinal, Peisner-Feinberg, Pianta & Howes, 2002; Brooks-Gunn, Berlin & Fuligini, 2000; Peifer & Perez, 2010; Saracho & Spodek, 2010; Sénéchal and Young, 2008). Therefore it may be said that situated learning is located within a socio-cultural perspective.

> Within the realm of literacy, a socio-cultural perspective –
>
> emphasizes an understanding of family culture and world view in developing interventions. It includes reciprocal teaching and conversation between parents and a facilitator. The sociocultural theorists characterize literacy as a social activity in which learners attempt to derive meaning from text and incorporate their own life experiences into learning (Ada, 1988; Delgado-Gaitan, 1994; Neuman, 1996 as cited in Neuman & Dickinson, 2002).

Neuman (1996) explains that 'parents teach more than the mechanisms and strategies of reading during storybook activity with their children; rather, they impart socio-cultural knowledge' (p.824). This model is also referred to as a facilitating model. Proponents of sociocultural parenting interventions call for building on parental strengths and including parent ideas in intervention efforts (Auerbach, 1989; Taylor, 1997).

Caspe (2003) describes Freire's view of literacy as embedded in the social and cultural lives and practices of people and not as an isolated set of neutral skills. He says that

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[21] Situated learning theory asserts the following: "Classroom learning is by its nature out of context and irrelevant. Knowledge presented in the context of work settings and applications is most relevant and effective. Learning is a highly social, interactive activity that involves a great deal of collaboration and mentoring" (Leonard, 2002, p.174).

family literacy programs that adhere to Freire's paradigm are considered part of the social change paradigm (Auerbach, 1995; Neuman, 1995) and he lists the characteristics of these programmes as follows: maintenance of participant control, the use of dialogue as a key pedagogical process, content that focuses on critical social issues from participants' lives and the creation of plans of action for social change.

The examination of three key components of dialogic learning – power relations, the non-expert adult and Situated Learning – has shown that there are abundant connections between dialogic learning theory and dialogic reading. The next section of the literature review will look at curricula in the primary years in Ireland - Aistear, (NCCA, 2009), The Primary School Curriculum, (DES/NCCA, 1999) and the new Primary Language Curriculum (2015). It will consider their theoretical underpinnings and will ascertain if dialogic story-reading has a place in these curricula.

Theoretical Perspectives of Irish Primary School and Early Childhood Curricula

The Primary School Curriculum (PSC) was published in 1999 and Aistear in 2009. Each could be said to reflect theoretical views of learning of their time. Both could be described as sharing an over-arching socio-cultural framework. This can be established by studying the introduction to the Primary School Curriculum (DES/NCCA, 1999) and Aistear's twelve principles (NCCA/Aistear, 2009). The introduction to the Primary School Curriculum features principles or sub-categories of principles that include the following:

collaborative learning should feature in the learning process; the range of individual difference should be taken into account in the learning process; social and emotional dimensions are important factors in learning; the child's existing knowledge and experience form the base for learning and the child's immediate environment provides the context for learning (Primary School Curriculum: Introduction, 1999 p.8-9).

The basic tenets of a socio-cultural approach to learning are in evidence in these principles, i.e. the influence of the child's particular knowledge and experience and the influence of the environment on learning.

A brief look at a selection from Aistear's twelve key principles similarly indicates that the curriculum framework is informed by a socio-cultural theoretical perspective – The principles informed by the words 'Relationships', 'Active', 'Relevant and Meaningful' and 'Uniqueness' hint at a socio-cultural theoretical orientation. Looking further at Aistear's four themes: Well-being, Identity and Belonging, Communicating and Exploring and Thinking, - these themes also hint at a focus on context or particularity and on activity and social interaction. Both Aistear and the PSC, therefore seem to be informed by a socio-cultural perspective. There are theoretical nuanced differences between the two, however, and these can be illustrated for example, by looking at how adult-child relationships are described by each document. Aistear emphasises reciprocity in the adult-child relationship -

> Early learning takes place through a reciprocal relationship between the adult and the child – sometimes the adult leads the learning and sometimes the child leads. The adult enhances learning through a respectful understanding of the child's uniqueness. He/she alters the type and amount of support as the child grows in confidence and competence, and achieves new things (Aistear: Principles & Themes, p.9.)

The PSC attaches great importance to the adult-child relationship – "The quality of the relationship that the teacher establishes with the child is of paramount importance in the learning process" (Introduction, p.20) but it sees the adult-child relationship a little differently to Aistear. The teacher's role is to plan learning experiences for the child based on her estimation of the child's developmental needs-

The principle of guided activity and discovery and the importance of the teacher in providing the most effective learning experiences for the child are central to the curriculum. In order to ensure that learning is fully productive, the teacher needs to identify particular stages of development in the child's understanding and then choose the sequence of activities that will be most effective in advancing the child's learning (Introduction to Primary School Curriculum, p.15).

Gray & Ryan, (2016) describe the difference in relationships between adult and child in the two curricula as follows: "Whereas Aistear highlights the importance of a reciprocal relationship between adult and child, the PSC places emphasis on the adult's role as the child's instructor" (Gray & Ryan, 2016, p191). The dialectic/dialogic divide identified earlier when considering theories of learning is therefore manifested in the theoretical nuances between Aistear's (2009) and the Primary School Curriculum's (1999) different descriptions of the adult-child relationship.

Aistear (2009) and the new Primary Language Curriculum (2015) are influenced by recent ideas on effective pedagogy. These ideas, in turn, affect the nature of pedagogical relationships, moving towards a dialogic approach to developing and nurturing children's oral language. This will now be explored.

New pedagogies and recent curricula.

Neylon (2012) writes that *Aistear* is informed by a theoretical perspective called Relational Pedagogy (RP). Boyd, Mac Neill and Sullivan (2006) describe RP thus -

The relational pedagogy approach treats relationships as the foundation of good pedagogy, building on the strong emphasis on relationships already embedded in pedagogy itself (MacNeill and Silcox, 2006). Relational pedagogy equips learners to become partners in their own education for life. At the same time, it recognises that

building relationships without improved student learning across all of the dimensions of education does not constitute good pedagogy (para. 2).

Boyd et al. describe three practices that define RP: Reflective behaviours, class meetings held in the format of circle time and student centred learning (Boyd et al., 2006, front page). Brownlee and Berthelson, (2006) claim that Relational Pedagogy encourages - the fostering of mutual respect between student and teacher and between student peers; the examination of personal beliefs; supporting students to become contextual knowers; practising situated learning and working from a constructivist perspective. Development is seen as transformation of participation rather than a series of age-based stages -

Transformation occurs at a number of levels: for instance, the learner changes at the level of their involvement, in the role they play in the learning situation, in the ability they demonstrate in moving flexibly from one learning context to another, and in the amount of responsibility taken in the situation (Rogoff 1998, p. 691, as cited in Dunphy, 2008).

Hedges and Cullen's (2012) Participatory Learning Theories (PLTs) have much in common with Boyd et al.'s Relational Pedagogy. The two are situated in socio-cultural theory, both embracing learning approaches that are relational and dynamic and that emphasise co-construction, dialogue, children's funds of knowledge[22], belonging and a partnership approach to families. Hedges & Cullen (2012) list three ideas that pertain to Participatory Learning Theories. Firstly, children's 'Funds of Knowledge' (knowledge gleaned outside schooling, in the domestic sphere), secondly, dispositions or habits of mind such as curiosity, perseverance and self-regulation and thirdly, working theories, that is, children use intuitive knowledge to develop their learning, continually refining their theories

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[22] "the historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being" (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 2001, p. 133).

when they learn more. Implicit in these three constructs are notions of the agentive and

already competent, not becoming, child. This is the image of the child that is at the heart of

Aistear's *Key Messages from the Research Papers* (2009, p.9). The hallmarks of Relational

Pedagogy and Participatory Learning Theories feature in research findings on effective

pedagogy. Table 2.4 lists those features hereunder.

Table 2.4 Research in Australia and U.K. on Effective Pedagogy

Quality teaching early foundations: Best evidence synthesis (Australia) (Farquhar, 2003).	Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years (U.K.) (Siraj-Blatchford, Sylva, Muttock, Gilden & Bell (2002).
Effective pedagogy involves working with children as emergent learners	Adult and child involvement in high-quality dialogue (Sustained shared thinking)
Effective pedagogy is informed by contextual knowledge of children's learning	Co-construction of learning that is sometimes teacher-initiated and sometimes child-initiated
Effective teachers use content knowledge confidently to support and extend children's learning in interactive and play-based situations	Use of modelling, demonstrating, questioning and explaining.
Effective pedagogy scaffolds, co-constructs, promotes metacognitive strategies and also facilitates children's learning in the context of adult/older child activities	
Pedagogy is effective when the social setting is organised in ways that support learning and maximises outcomes	
Pedagogy is effective when the physical setting is organised in ways that support learning and maximises outcomes	
Effective teaching is responsive to children's physical and emotional well-being	

The new Primary language Curriculum for Junior and Senior infants is aligned with

the principles and methodologies of Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework

(NCCA, 2015) -

Drawing on Aistear and research on language development, the language curriculum recognises the importance of positive dispositions, the individuality and agency of the child, the centrality of collaborative learning, play as a pedagogical approach, and the integrated nature of learning. (2016, p.100).

The curriculum also talks about the centrality of teacher-child interactions in developing children's oral language based "on the concept of reciprocity" (p.101). Like Aistear, it mentions that some interactions will be child initiated and the teacher responds and other interactions will be teacher initiated and the child responds (p.101). It writes that "Language is co-constructed between the adult and child through joint attention, mutual interest and enjoyment" (p.20). It refers to the importance of the home and family culture when it includes as one of its aims the importance of building on children's prior knowledge (p.26) and when it talks about the role of parents in supporting children's language development -

Children's homes and communities play a key role in their language learning, which is developed through meaningful interactions with parents and extended family and friends. Parents play a key role in supporting children's language development and in establishing the language of the home prior to children acquiring additional languages (p.20).

This clearly situates the new primary language curriculum within socio-cultural theory and suggests a theoretical bent towards dialogic learning, thus positioning it at the forefront of contemporary research-based thinking about the nature of teaching and learning. It also demonstrates its resonance with the features of effective pedagogy outlined by Farquhar (2003) and Siraj-Blatchford et al., (2002).

Finally, if we look at how the various curricula are structured, we see that the number of Learning Outcomes included in the Primary Language Curriculum is far less than the

number of content objectives in the Primary School Curriculum (1999), ninety-four learning outcomes and two hundred and sixty-nine content objectives respectively (NCCA, 2016, p.8). The change from content objectives to learning outcomes shifts the focus from the teacher to the child and his/her learning. There will be a return presently to Aistear (2009), the Primary School Curriculum (1999) and the new Primary Language Curriculum (2015) to determine their commitment to oral language development and dialogic story-reading.

Concluding Thoughts on Part 1

Thus far, this chapter has outlined various theories of learning, giving a close description of theories that can be described as part of the socio-cultural paradigm, the over-arching theoretical framework for the evaluation study. It was followed by an examination of dialogic learning and it was concluded that the shift from Behaviourism to dialogic learning tracks a shift in the locus of control in the learning process from the teacher to the learner. The relationship between language and literacy as interdependent, inter-related and interwoven was explored. The use of books, vehicles of literacy, to support language development in *The Storytime Project* is an illustration of this interdependence. It was established that meaning-making and support from another (e.g. mother-child relationship) is central to the development of language. Models of scaffolding (processes of supporting learning, (Bruner et al.,1976) and apprenticeship of learning (Rogoff, 1990) established that meaning-making and support from a more able other is also central to literacy, indeed to the learning process. Meaning-making and support from another are central to the operation of both *The Story-time project* (meaning-making between adult and child and adult support for the child) and the evaluation of the project (meaning-making between evaluation participants such as the project director, educators and parents and support for parents from educators. Support is also given to educators from the director of the project). Again, this demonstrates a

compatibility with socio-cultural theory, one of the main theories informing *The Story-time Project* and the evaluation study (See Table 3.1).

Common underlying principles of the Primary School Curriculum (NCCA/DES, 1999) Aistear (NCCA, 2009) the early childhood curriculum framework and the new Primary Language Curriculum (2015) were visited to situate them in relation to current theoretical perspectives such as socio-cultural theory, dialogic learning, relational pedagogy and participatory learning theories.

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Literature Review Part 2

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Part two of the literature review opens with an examination of oral language in primary school curricula in Ireland. It investigates the various curricula to determine their approaches to literacy learning and to ascertain if dialogic story-reading features. The review then looks at decontextualized language, the development of which is one of the aims of *The Storytime Project*. This is followed by a focus on the strategies used to promote children's oral language through dialogic story-reading and mediated to parents at the dialogic story-reading induction workshop at Marino Institute of Education. The role of parents in dialogic-reading is then examined as well as the factors that impede parental involvement in their children's literacy development. Research on dialogic reading is examined closely. The final section of the literature review considers research on evaluation.

Oral Language Development and Irish Curricula

Emergent literacy and curriculum.

Socio-cultural theory claims that learning is influenced by the social and cultural context in which the learner finds herself. This makes family a significant learning influence on children's lives. It is usually in the family home that emergent literacy behaviours are first

observed. The tenets of emergent literacy resonate with socio-cultural theory in a number of ways: Emergent literacy acknowledges the role of the home environment in shaping children's literacy development and the importance of learning through activity and through authentic real-life experiences. Aistear and the Primary School Curriculum share an emergent approach to literacy. Aistear defines emergent literacy as follows:

> Emergent literacy is concerned with children developing a growing understanding of print and language as a foundation for reading and writing. Through play and hands-on experiences children see and interact with print as they build an awareness of its functions and conventions (Principles and themes, p.54).

Aistear's commitment to an emergent literacy approach is clear if one examines a sample learning opportunity based on the creation of a print-rich environment, from each of its three life stages – babies, toddlers and young children. See Table 2.5 for examples.

Table 2.5 Aistear's Sample Learning Opportunities for Babies Toddlers and Young Children

Age Group	Learning Opportunity
Babies	The adult shares a variety of books including babies' favourite ones, and encourages them to lift flaps, feel textures and press buttons to hear sounds (Principles and themes, p.36)
Toddlers	The adult models how to use English and Irish books – right-way up, left to right on the page (Principles and themes, p.37)
Young children	The adult uses a variety of books including large format books to help children develop early reading skills and to learn about the basic terminology and conventions in English and Irish books – author and illustrator, predicting the story from the pictures, going from left to right and from top to bottom, turning pages in sequence, using page numbers to locate a story, drawing attention to action words (Principles and themes, p.40).

The child's journey towards literacy as described in Table 2.5 is developmental, interactive and supported by an adult. The relationship with an adult is described as a partnership (Principles and themes, p.35).

The PSC does not use the term 'emergent literacy'. In fact the word 'emergent' crops up once only in the English Teacher Guidelines (p.88) and not at all in the English curriculum document or in the introductory book to the PSC. Nevertheless, the PSC describes language acquisition in what could be described as emergent literacy terms, by acknowledging that children develop considerable verbal facility without any formal teaching input -

> Language acquisition is a developmental process. It begins from birth and continues throughout the primary school and beyond. The child comes to school with considerable verbal facility. This is achieved not in any formal learning or teaching situation but in the day-to-day social context of the home, and its most important characteristic is the engagement of the child in a stimulating and challenging way. This process of language learning is linked inextricably with a growing knowledge of the world (PSC English, p.7).

Two of the principles of the English Language Curriculum are directly linked to emergent literacy: Firstly the statement that oral language, reading and writing are integrated and inter-related and secondly the reference to 'process' being as important as 'product' in the writing process (English Language Teacher Guidelines, p.2). The new Primary Language Curriculum document uses the word 'emergent' eight times. Progression Milestone 'b' for the reading section describes part of a child's emergent reading behaviour as listening and responding to stories, understanding that print carries messages "and that text tells the same story each time it is read"(p.67). There is also a reference to the importance of using emergent skills in playful ways (p.20) and to the use of an emergent approach to reading

(p.67) and writing (p.71). The use of a continuum of Progression Milestones and Progression Steps to document a child's progress in his/her language learning emphasizes the individuality of each child's learning journey, with each child potentially joining the continuum at a different point .

Aistear, the PSC and the Primary Language Curriculum all recognise a holistic approach to literacy acquisition, that is, literacy is acquired in many different ways, both formally and informally (PSC English, p.7), for example through play and story, through engagement with multi-media devices, library visits, exposure to print-rich environments and through a balanced approach to literacy at school, which includes an emphasis on both skills and comprehension in literacy and on the provision of authentic real-life literacy-learning contexts. The new Primary Language curriculum states that –"Like the 1999 curriculum, 'the strands are not discrete areas of learning, as they overlap and interact to form a holistic learning experience for the child' (DES, Introduction, p. 42)" (p.9). A playful approach to literacy teaching and learning is emphasized through its Stage 1 (Junior and Senior Infants) learning outcomes. All these learning outcomes begin with the phrase - "Through appropriately playful learning experiences, children should be able to…" The emergent approach to literacy seen in all three curricula also recognises the developmental nature of literacy as opposed to a reading readiness perspective. The Primary Language Curriculum states that "Language learning is a developmental process in which each child engages at his/her own individual rate" (p.18); the role of parents in supporting children's early literacy development (e.g. NCCA/DES, 2009, Principles and Themes, p.9); the role of the child as constructor of her own literacy (e.g. NCCA/DES, 2009, Principles and Themes, p.10) and the interconnectedness of oral language, reading and writing as described earlier in this review (p.35).

Dialogic story-reading and curriculum.

There is no reference to the term 'dialogic story-reading' in Aistear (2009), the

Primary School Curriculum (1999) or The Primary Language Curriculum (2015). However,

all documents have learning goals or content objectives that are connected to it in some way.

Table 2.6 lists some examples.

Table 2.6 Learning Goals Connected to Aistear & PSC

Learning Goals/Content Objectives/Learning Outcomes Connected to Dialogic Story-Reading in Aistear(2009), The Primary School Curriculum (1999) and The Primary Language Curriculum (PLC) (2015)
In partnership with the adult, children will use language with confidence and competence for giving and receiving information, asking questions, requesting, refusing, negotiating, problem-solving, imagining and recreating roles and situations, and clarifying thinking, ideas and feelings (Aistear, Principles and themes, p.35).
In partnership with the adult, children will respond to and create literacy experiences through story, poetry, song, and drama (Aistear, Principles and themes, p.35).
The child should be enabled to engage in shared reading activities - stories, poems, plays, picture books (PSC English, p18).
The child should be enabled to talk about past and present experiences, and plan, predict and speculate about future and imaginary experiences (PSC English, p18).
The child should be enabled to focus on descriptive detail and begin to be explicit in relation to people, places, times, processes, events, colour, shape, size, position (PSC English, p20).
The child should be enabled to respond to characters, situations and story details, relating them to personal experience (PSC English, p21).
The child should be enabled to analyse and interpret characters, situations, events and sequences presented pictorially (PSC English, p.20).
Tell and retell stories and personal and procedural narratives of increasing complexity to familiar and unfamiliar audiences using appropriated sequencing, tense and vocabulary (PLC, p.51).
Describe, predict and reflect upon actions, events and processes relating to real and imaginary contexts (PLC, p.51).
Demonstrate understanding through the ability to give and follow instructions, comprehend narratives and explanations, and clearly state a case, including speculating, hypothesizing, justifying, negotiating, arguing and complaining (PLC, p.51).
Choose, read and communicate about text in a range of genres for pleasure and interest (PLC, p.52)
Experience and respond to the aesthetic, creative and imaginative aspects of text and a range of genres expressing preferences and opinions (PLC, p.52).

The statements above comprise many of the skills that are developed through the practice of

dialogic story-reading. The commissioned research report for the NCCA, conducted by Shiel,

et al (2012) recommended that future curricula focus on dialogic interactions such as repetitions, recasts, expansions, prompts and questions (p.30). The Primary Language Curriculum (2015) includes oral language activities in its support material that facilitates the use of these interactions. It has a dedicated section on critical thinking and book talk, on story sacks and puppet play and on Talk Time ("Support material for teachers", 2016). However, it is a missed opportunity not to have included support material on dialogic story-reading. The website that hosts the support material for teachers is not a finished product in the way that a printed book might be so there may be scope for adding material on dialogic story-reading in the future. This would be particularly helpful in including parents in children's educational development.

The next section investigates whether decontextualized language features in school curricula. Literature on decontextualized language, to be examined presently because it is central to *The Storytime Project* and to the evaluation of the project, will argue that children need to be able to use decontextualized language because the skill of speaking in abstract terms is important for learning in school and in life. Therefore, the development of decontextualized language should feature in school curricula.

Decontextualized language and curriculum.

Decontextualized language, that is, language that is not rooted in the immediate context and as such is more complex because words alone convey meaning to the other party (Barnes, Grifenhagen & Dickinson, 2016), is another area of literacy that is central to dialogic story-reading and is not explicitly mentioned in Aistear (2009) or the Primary School Curriculum (1999). Shiel at al's (2012) research report recommends that future curricula should include the modelling of decontextualized language and children should be scaffolded to produce this language (pp.30-31) Both Aistear and the PSC, however, *imply* that

decontextualized language will feature in children's language learning. For example, Aistear's *Guidelines for Good Practice* encourages children to plan, predict and speculate about future or imaginary experiences particularly during pretend play (p.39). The English language curriculum for infant classes states that the child should be enabled to "talk about past and present experiences, and plan, predict and speculate about future and imaginary experiences" (p.17). This requires the use of decontextualized language. Decontextualized language is specifically mentioned in the new Primary Language Curriculum (2015). Oral language learning outcomes five and six read -"Through appropriate playful learning experiences, children should be able to use sophisticated oral vocabulary and phrases, including the language of text, topic and subject-specific language and express and use decontextualized language" (p.51). Oral language progression milestone E reads -

> The child begins to use decontextualized language, such as topic-specific language acquired through texts and through interactions with others. He/She recalls unshared experiences, sequences and events for a listener. The child is more aware of audience and uses language differently depending on the listener. He/She speaks with a wider range of oral vocabulary and detail, uses context to help understand new words and responds to lengthy instructions. The child reflects on experience, gives explanations, considers problems and suggests solutions" (p.63).

Interestingly, there are five references in the Progression Continua in the Primary Language Curriculum (pp. 63-65) to 'unshared' experiences, conditions which require decontextualized language to be used. During the infant to second class years, the child should develop the ability to retell the main points of an unshared experience and to initiate conversation on an unshared experience (pp.64-65). The new Primary Language curriculum

(2015) therefore, emphasises the importance of decontextualized language in more explicit terms than either Aistear (2009) or the Primary School Curriculum (1999).

Decontextualized Language – A Broader Examination

Chang-Wells & Wells (1993) discuss three aspects of cognitive change that happens when learning occurs: the ability to organise and monitor one's own thinking; (the process begins and is learned at a social level and then becomes internalised), the ability to decontextualize; (to detach a concept from its original context and bring it to another), and thirdly, the ability to integrate and systematise. They claim that all of these dimensions of cognitive change are dependent on literacy because literacy demands the practice of these abilities. When reading, for example, the learner is actively making meaning, exploiting texts to gain meaning from them and then cataloguing and contextualising that meaning in relation to previously held concepts. In discourse, the speaker makes meaning with the listener in order to create intersubjectivity through dialogue. This is an act of meaning-making through checking, clarifying and then arriving at joint understanding. To invoke Vygotskian theory then, decontextualized language is the 'practice arena' for decontextualized thought because talk shapes thought (Bruner, 1983).

Dewey (1910) wrote that the role of education is to transform language into an intellectual tool, "to direct pupils' oral and written speech, used primarily for practical and social ends, so that gradually it shall become a conscious tool of conveying knowledge and assisting thought" (p.179). He went on to explain that "the successful accomplishing of the transformation requires enlargement of the pupil's vocabulary, rendering its terms more precise and accurate and formation of habits of consecutive discourse" (p.180). Dewey did not coin the term but he captures the essence of decontextualized language, which was later

defined by others such as Whitehurst and Lonigan, (1998), Dickinson & Tabors, (1991) and Snow (1983) as follows:

> Decontextualized language refers to language, such as that used in story narratives and other written forms of communication that is used to convey novel information to audiences who may share only limited background knowledge with the speaker or who may be physically removed from the things or events described. In contrast, contextualised uses of language rely on shared physical contact, knowledge and immediate feedback. Children's decontextualized language skills are related to conventional literacy skills such as decoding, understanding story narratives, and print production (e.g., Dickinson & Snow, 1987).

The definition below from the NCCA's review of research on language emphasises the autonomy of decontextualized language -

> Decontextualized language is language which is context-free (Bernstein, 1971), autonomous (Olson, 1977) or disembedded (Donaldson, 1987). It is not rooted in any immediate context of time or situation and does not rely on observation or physical experience (Painter, 1999) but stands as an unambiguous or autonomous representation of meaning (Olson, 1977). Decontextualized language is more cognitively and linguistically complex than conversational language and will be required of children when they enter formal schooling (Snow, 1991) (Shiel, et al. 2012, p.14).

Using decontextualized language gives children opportunities for extended discourse in the form of explanations, personal narratives, creating imaginary worlds, and conveying information to strangers (Raban, 2014). The creation of imaginary worlds will most likely require the practice of key dialogic reading strategies such as speculating and hypothesizing.

The use of story facilitates the development of decontextualized language because story is life experience in an abstract form. "Narrative fiction offers models or simulations of the social world via abstraction, simplification and compression" (Mar & Oatley, 2008). Practising decontextualized language is therefore imperative to ensure children's language develops appropriately in order to support their increasingly complex language encounters as students.

Decontextualized language practised in the home by parents tends to be around explanations of "how things work or why we do things, narrative comments about events that happened in the past or may happen in the future, pretend utterances used during pretend play, and non-immediate talk during book reading" (Rowe, 2013, p.261). Rowe (2013) found that preschool children, whose parents provided them with explanations and who spoke narratively about past or future events, had larger vocabularies one year later. Cregan, (2008) found that there was a discontinuity between the types of language used in the home and in the school amongst children from lower socio-economic groups. This put those children at a disadvantage in school. To avoid the perpetuation of social hierarchies by schools, therefore, there needs to be a focus on the development of children's ability to use decontextualized language. Language registers change according to culture, class and location but Cregan (2008) argues that this should be viewed as *difference*, not disadvantage (2008). This focus on decontextualized language is not to deny the other systemic factors that cause inequality; it is merely a constitutive element of what should be a multi-faceted, multi-agency approach to tackling problems of social inequity (Edwards & Downes, 2012).

Research on decontextualized language found that when mothers who lived in marginalised communities were taught about decontextualized language and then practised it in story-book encounters with their children, it increased the use of decontextualized

language by children (Morgan & Goldstein (2004). The study also found that the use of decontextualized language during storybook reading resulted in an increase in the amount of talk and in the length of conversational episodes in parent-child-interactions. Dickinson and Tabors (2001) identified four language areas that prompted the use of decontextualized language -

1. Narrative comments/ talking about events in the past and the future
2. Explanatory talk, e.g. how things work and why we do things
3. Non-immediate talk (talking around the book) during book reading
4. Talk during pretend play

Rowe (2013) used the language areas identified by Dickinson & Tabors in her longitudinal study where she examined parents' use of decontextualized language with their children at the ages of 18 month, 30 month and 42 months. Rowe found that parents who used more narrative utterances and more explanations with their 3-5 year olds, had children with larger PPVT (Peabody Picture Vocabulary test) scores 1 year later. Rowe also found that parents used more decontextualized language as their children got older; at 18 months only 2.2% of parent utterances were decontextualized whereas at 42 months 9.4% were decontextualized. She found that there was no association between use of pretend utterances and child vocabulary increase. This appears to contradict Beal's (2001) findings that parents' use of pretend utterances during play with 3-year-olds relates to children's later vocabulary comprehension and to their ability to provide formal definitions. It also appears to contradict Weisberg, Ilgaz, Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, Nicolopoulou & Dickinson's (2014) finding that children learned words related to fantastical themes quicker than they did words on realistic themes. Despite Rowe's finding, however, her recommendations for the development of children's decontextualized language include the recommendation that adults engage in

pretend play with children. She suggests additionally that adults answer children's 'why' questions, talk about the past and the future, make predictions, read books and make connections between the story and the child's life. Research on decontextualized language therefore indicates that it is important for children to practise decontextualized language because it prepares them for abstract reasoning required in school where they will use language as an intellectual tool. Decontextualized language makes children better at re-telling narratives, giving explanations and thus clarifying their thinking.

Gee (2016) makes the claim that "there is no such thing as decontextualized language" (p.11) and argues that people are referring to vernacular and non-vernacular forms of language when they speak of decontextualized language. Non – vernacular forms of language are socialised languages that people learn when they develop a specialist interest, for example, the language of medicine, architecture, plumbing, religion, street gangs and so on. Gee argues that if children are able to conquer the grammatical vagaries of their vernacular language, they can also conquer same in the non-vernacular. This argument is supported by Gorski (2010) who writes that linguists know that "all language varieties are highly structured with complex grammatical rules and syntaxes (Gee, 2004; Hess, 1974; Miller, Cho, & Bracey, 2005)" (p.17). "What often are assumed to be deficient varieties of English — varieties spoken by some poor people in Appalachia, perhaps — are no less sophisticated", says Gorski, "than so-called "standard English". Gee (2016) claims that *schools* fail children, thus perpetuating social inequality, because they do not facilitate children in switching from the social language of home to more formal language registers. The problem is one of cultural estrangement for children and schools have a duty to support children to bridge this gap, says Gee (2016). He describes the problem thus –

I may own coats, pants, shirts, ties, and shoes of all different sorts. These are my

resources. But I may not know, for a given event or situation, how they are supposed

to go together, that is, what coat, pants, shirt, tie, and shoes I should wear together to

be "accepted" as having dressed "correctly" for the event or situation. When we are

talking about language, the resources are partly a "gift" from our human biology (that

helped us acquire them), but the knowledge of how to combine them to be "accepted"

as having used the "correct" language in a physics classroom is not. That has to be

learned (Gee, 2016, p.13).

Gee's (2016) arguments that perceived insufficiencies in the use of decontextualized

language is more about cultural estrangement than poor language ability are important and

valid. It seems that a two-pronged approach to supporting children's language in school

would therefore be appropriate, that is, a focus on both the technical or formal aspects of

language and a focus on providing appropriate cultural learning contexts in schools. An

appropriate cultural learning context should ensure that children are supported to learn how to

use different types of language without denigrating the home language.

Parental Involvement in Children's Learning

Parenting influences the child's self-concept as a learner (Desforges and Abouchaar,

2003). Parental involvement in their children's learning is associated with higher academic

achievement for their children (Jeynes, 2005; Kim, S. & Hill, N. (2015)[23]. Parent-child

interactions, (especially when they are warm, responsive and interesting to the child),

influence a child's academic development (Christian, Morrison & Bryant, 1998). Landry,

Smith, Swank, Zucker, Crawford, and Solari (2012), described an intervention they used with

mothers called The Play and Learning Strategies (PALS) curriculum, a coaching programme

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[23] In Kim, Sung Won Kim and Nancy E. Hill's (2015) meta-analysis of parental involvement and student academic achievement, the relationship between parental involvement and achievement was equally strong for fathers and mothers, although mothers' mean levels of involvement were higher than fathers'.

for parents, designed to strengthen the bond between parent and child and to stimulate the child's early language, cognitive, and social development. Parents were tutored to respond to children encouragingly, building on children's interests and using rich language. The authors found that mothers practised shared reading more effectively with their children after their involvement in the programme. For example, they used more open-ended questions and conversation prompts and expanded on children's comments. Their children, in turn, asked more questions and sought information about the text and commented about the pictures and the text, and generally exhibited more enthusiasm for the shared reading activity.

The impact of parental involvement in their children's learning when children are attending primary school is far greater than the impact associated with variations in the quality of schools (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003). The scale of the impact is evident across all social classes and all ethnic groups.

Meta-analytic evidence indicates that family literacy interventions have a greater impact than most educational interventions (Swain, Brooks & Bosley, 2014). For example, parents learn how to support their children's learning and from that often springs an interest in improving their own literacy; they learn more about how school systems operate and become more involved in social and supportive networks. In other words, parents were developing forms of social and cultural capital (concepts developed by Bourdieu, 1986[24]) which is a metaphor for ways and means that allow people to improve their status in society (p.79). These networks often provide opportunities for parents to further their learning and development (p.77). Desforges & Abouchaar, (2003) describe the social and emotional

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[24] "Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital refers to the collection of symbolic elements such as skills, tastes, posture, clothing, mannerisms, material belongings, credentials, etc. that one acquires through being part of a particular social class. Sharing similar forms of cultural capital with others—the same taste in movies, for example, or a degree from an Ivy League School—creates a sense of collective identity and group position ("people like us"). But Bourdieu also points out that cultural capital is a major source of social inequality. Certain forms of cultural capital are valued over others, and can help or hinder one's social mobility just as much as income or wealth" (Social Theory Rewired, 2011).

benefits that parents derive from being involved in their children's literacy development:

They develop greater resilience, greater mental health, improved relationships, greater social

competence and less delinquent behaviours. Improved relationships then, in turn, improve

shared book reading interactions. For example, research by Bus & Van Ijzendoorn (1988)

found that parent-child dyads that were securely attached were less anxious during the

reading session than less securely attached dyads. Those adult-child pairs that were anxious

in approaching a reading session affected the emotional atmosphere surrounding a reading

session and this in turn affected the outcome (Bus & Van Ijzendoorn,1988 p.1269). A key

element of book reading is a mutually enjoyable atmosphere (Bus, 2002). Findings from

Carpentieri et al's (2011) report on meta-analytic research were similar to meta-analytic

research undertaken by Swain et al. (2014) in the U.K. It found that family literacy

programmes are effective, both in improving child literacy and in improving parental support

skills. A Turkish longitudinal study, part of one of the meta-analyses in the Carpentieri et al.

(2011) report, found that family literacy programmes brought long-term returns to society,

such as better employment outcomes in adulthood (Kağıtçıbaşı, Sunar, Bekman, &

Cemalcılar, 2005).

Some researchers argue that family literacy operates from a deficit model (Swain,

Brooks and Bosley, 2014), that is, the tendency to blame disadvantage on the people who are

disadvantaged rather than on the political system that causes it. They argue that family

literacy is about imposing certain cultural values of school on families and not taking

cognisance of the value of the culture of the family (Rocha-Schmid, 2010). (The concept of

deficit thinking is examined in detail later in this review – see p.124). Others claim that being

introduced to what happens in schools is empowering for parents and allows them to become

part of school culture rather than keeping parents as outsiders. The experience could therefore

be inclusive and empowering (Wolfendale, 1996). Hanafin and Lynch (2002) claim that the

voices of parents from working-class backgrounds have been absent from educational debate and decision-making for decades, mainly because they have been seen as unable to participate. Schools, they argue, are biased towards middle class culture and government initiatives intended to support marginalised parents veer towards being patronising rather than egalitarian. Interviewed about the HSCL scheme in the Hanafin & Lynch (2002) study, a parent named John, commented "Now the only side I've seen of the home-school liaison teachers is that they're organising courses for parents, not the actual input into helping the parent and pupil which is I presume the basis of their organisation" (p.44). Hanafin and Lynch (2002) found that working class parents were interested and capable of being involved in their children's schools but they were prevented by the structures and practices of the school system in their community.

The emphasis on dialogue rather than didacticism throughout *The Storytime Project* allows for an exchange of views and a sharing of expertise that makes the process of working with parents inclusive and reciprocal rather than didactic and passive. In addition to this, some of the Early Childhood educators who participate in *The Storytime Project*, live in the same communities as the parent participants. This may mitigate to some extent feelings of cultural dissonance for parents Delpit, 1995).

In a European Commission report, *Family Literacy in Europe*, Carpentieri, Fairfax-Cholmeley, Litster & Vorhaus, (2011) identified Ireland and Germany as behind in recognising the importance of the home environment on literacy acquisition relative to their European peers. The introduction of *Aistear,* the early childhood curriculum framework (2009) in Ireland and the National Literacy and Numeracy strategy (2011) both highlight the role of parents in developing children's literacy, thus bringing policy focus on the home literacy environment. *Aistear* emphasizes the importance of parental involvement in their

children's education in a dedicated chapter in the *Guidelines for Good Practice* section called *Building partnerships between parents and practitioners.* Here, it encourages parents to support their child's learning by reading to him/her, joining the local library and choosing books together (p.9). The Primary School Curriculum (1999) also acknowledges parents' role in their children's language development, for example, and it describes ways that parents might support children's language development (NCCA, 1999, English Teacher Guidelines p.19). The National Literacy and Numeracy strategy (2011) similarly places strong emphasis on parental involvement in children's educational development. The emphasis on parental involvement is evident at policy level but to transform this into practice is another challenge, especially if school systems continue to employ a deficit approach towards working class parents, as identified by Hanafin and Lynch in 2002.

Parent-child interactions during reading.

Using real-time audio recording, Gilkerson, Richards & Topping (2017) found that language engagement and interaction between parent and child is higher when they are engaged in story reading sessions than during non-reading sessions. Story-reading, therefore, is a worthwhile context to support the development of parent-child language interactions. There is a growing body of work suggesting the importance of specific types of language interactions -

Social–interactionist theories of language acquisition (e.g., Baumwell, Tamis-LeMonda, & Bornstein, 1997; Chapman, 2000; Landry, Miller-Loncar, Smith, & Swank, 1997) provide evidence that linguistically responsive facilitation strategies such as the use of open-ended questions, expansions, advanced linguistic models, and recasts are associated with positive language achievements in young children (e.g., Baker & Nelson, 1984; Nelson, 1977; Vasilyeva, Huttenlocher, & Waterfall,

2006;Wasik, Bond, & Hindman, 2006; Yoder, Spruytenburg, Edwards, & Davies, 1995). (Hamre, Justice, Pianta, Kilday, Sweeney, Downer & Leach, 2010, p.331).

The linguistically responsive facilitation strategies mentioned above have been used in interventions and curricula that are associated with children's language development (e.g. McKeown & Beck, 2006; Wasik et al., 2006).

Saracho (2017) examined a number of studies (e.g. Bojczyk, Davis & Rana, 2016; Neuman, 1996; Saracho, 2012), that explored parent-child interactions during shared story reading to ascertain what strategies were successful in expanding children's vocabulary. Findings from Saracho (2012) include the following: Parents acceptance of and response to children's ideas and predictions around books in a sensitive way lead to extended conversations around books. Open-ended questions facilitated children's predictions about and helped to ensure accurate responses in relation to events in the book. Conversations about the story fostered children's ability to problem-solve in relation to the plot, absorb the vocabulary of the story and improve their abstract thinking. Bojczyk, Davis, and Rana (2016) examined the mothers' reading strategies during shared storybook reading and categorised them based on the quality of children's responses to them. They categorised strategies as low, medium and high level. Examples of low level strategies included encouraging children to "look or listen without pointing or verbalizing" (Saracho, 2017, p.557). Medium level strategies involved children pointing and making one-word responses and high level strategies, eliciting high quality linguistic responses from children, involved strategies such as asking 'WH' questions, asking children to make comparisons related to the plot, asking children for definitions and building on the children's utterances. Neuman (1996) found that active discussions of stories seemed to increase children's vocabulary, understanding of story events, recall of stories, and knowledge of print conventions.

In addition to finding that the strategies above facilitate children's language development, research also found that training in how to use the strategies increases competence in using the strategy (National Reading Panel, 2000). The author of this review incorporated a range of strategies to encourage and develop children's talk, and these ideas have been modelled for parent participants in *The Storytime Project* and are used on the training DVD. Strategies included were adapted from Whitehurst (for example PEER and CROWD prompts (1992) in table 2.7 below and others, such as those described above, sourced in the literature.

Table 2.7 Oral Language Learning Strategies

Oral Language Strategy	Example of Strategy	Purpose of the Strategy	Strategy as Referenced in the Literature
Orienting or setting the scene	I wonder what this is about … Look at author, illustrator …	To focus the child	Harris, Robinson, Chang & Burns, 2007
Checking the child is 'with you'	It's a beautiful blue sky and there are no cl----.	To focus the child and checks comprehension	Blau, 1991
Connecting picture to text	Oh, look at the owl. I wonder does it say anything about the owl. Let's see…..	To develop concepts of print, print awareness and comprehension	Coyne, McCoach , Loftus, Zipoli & Kapp (2009); Paivio, 1971; Sadoski & Paivio, 2013; Rosenblatt, 1994;
Connecting to life experience and accessing prior knowledge	There's a cat. Do you have a cat?	To develop comprehension	Rosenblatt's Transactional Reader Response Theory (1994). Prior knowledge: Pearson, Hansen & Gordon, 1979; Rupey & Wilson, 1996 Text to self, text to text and text to world: Keene & Zimmerman, 1997; Goudvis & Harvey, 2000

Follow the child's lead by talking about what he/she wants to talk about		To encourage the child's talk	Mc Cabe & Peterson, 1991
Eliciting comments by questions, especially open-ended questions	I wonder …	Vocabulary development and developing comprehension	Cole, Maddox & Lim, 2006; Landry, Smith Swank & Miller-Loncar, 2000; DeBaryshe, 1993
Discussing new words, phrases	He's pulling my leg – what does that mean? Another word for 'fib'?	To develop vocabulary and comprehension	Vocabulary: Harris, Golinkoff & Hirsh-Pasek, 2010 Research on idom: Gibbs, 1987, 1991; Levorato & Cacciari, 1992; Nippold & Rudzinski, 1993; Nippold & Taylor, 1995; Nippold, Taylor & Baker, 1996.
Supporting Echoing Sustaining comments	You're dead right! Oh I see, and did he …?	To boost self-esteem and encourage persistence	Gambrell, 2011
Modelling and Pursuing/ Elaborating, Expanding	It's good? Yes, it's good and it might make the children try harder too. Why do you think?	To extend the dialogue	Mc Keown & Beck, 2006; Landry, Smith, Swank & Miller-Loncar, 2000 (elaborative utterances) Fletcher, Cross, Tanney, Schneider & Finch, 2008
Recasting	Child: He thrun the ball Adult: Did he? He threw the ball?	To model correct language without 'correcting' the child	Mackey & Philp, 1998 The Modern language Journal 82 (3)
Repeating. Re-read text	He huffed and he puffed and he ...	To embed vocabulary. To support comprehension.	Childers & Tomasello, 2002; McKeown & Beck, 2006
Repeat what the child says. It reinforces the child's verbalization, letting the child know that he/she is correct	Yes, that's a cat.	To boost self-esteem, reinforce vocabulary and aid comprehension	Zevenbergen & Whitehurst, 2003; Whitehurst, 1992
Retelling a story "Guided reconstructions are more effective than mere retellings"(Mc Gee & Schickedanz, 2007, p.746)		To develop synthesizing skills (comprehension)	Cornell, Senechal & Brodo, 1988; Pellegrini & Galda, 1982; Mc Gee & Schickedanz, 2007

Vary tone and pace for dramatic effect and to support comprehension		To support the child in interpreting the story and to increase enjoyment of story	McGee & Schickedanz, 2007
Performing voices for different characters in the story			Sipe, 2002
Summarising	So far Goldilocks has broken the chairs, eaten the porridge, slept in the beds……	To developing comprehension and metacognition. To encourage the child to use decontextualized language.	Palincsar & Brown, 1984; Rosenshine & Meister, 1994
Predicting	I wonder what will happen?	To develop comprehension. To encourage the child to use decontextualized language.	Strickland, 2002; Mc Gee & Schickedanz, 2007
Projecting	What would you do if you were Red Riding Hood? (text to self)	To develop identity through story. To develop comprehension, theory-of-mind. Requires the child to use decontextualized language.	Bruner, 1996; Keene & Zimmerman, 1997; Goudvis & Harvey, 2000
1. Informing, 2. Describing, 3. Explaining, 4. Inserting short definitions while reading aloud	A pumpkin? It's a vegetable. You can eat it. It's round and orange. It grows in the ground.	To scaffold content knowledge and build vocabulary To support comprehension	**1, 2 and 3** Cole, Maddox & Lim, 2006 **3**.Penno, Wilkinson & Moore, 2002; DeBaryshe, 1993 **3 and 4** Justice, Meier, and Walpole (2005) **4**. Collins, 2004; Elley 1989
Pausing to allow child to think and comment		To allow the child to initiate conversation on a topic	Budd Rowe, 1972; Colmar, 1999
Setting up a hypothesis, Speculating, Deducing, Making inferences	I suppose it might be …	Develops comprehension. Encourages the child to use decontextualized language.	Zucker, Cabell, Pentimonti & Kaderavek, 2013; Hindman, Connor, Jewkes & Morrison, 2008; Dougherty Stahl, 2014; Van Kleeck, 2008.

Clarifying, Checking meaning, Revoicing	Do you mean that the monster is unpredictable? You don't know what he is going to do next? Is that it?	To develop comprehension. To encourage the child to use decontextualized language.	Ferris, 2013. Revoicing: A tool to engage all learners in academic conversations. *The Reading Teacher*
Thinking out loud to support comprehension and to model thinking process	I'm thinking that even though the Gingerbread man feels safe, the fox might be planning something bad...	To develop comprehension. To encourage the child to use decontextualized language.	McGee & Schickedanz, 2007
Draw attention to 'reading', Tracking	Those are the words. Will I read what it says?	To make a connection between oral and written text for the child.	Gagen, 2007

Of the twenty-three strategies listed in Table 2.7, fifteen of them refer to comprehension. The purpose of the majority of the strategies, therefore, is to support children's interpretation of meaning. Herber (1970) contended that reading comprehension skills are on a continuum from literal to inferential to evaluative skills. Literal comprehension skills require the learner to skim and scan the text and self-question; inferential comprehension skills require the learner to make connections, comparisons, inferences and predictions and evaluative comprehension skills require the learner to synthesise information, determine the importance of information, summarise, paraphrase and self-question. Inferential and evaluative comprehension skills are used in dialogic story-reading and are heavily referenced in Table 2.7 above.

In an important study by Trivette, Dunst & Gorman, (2010) which examined the effects of parent-mediated joint book reading on the early language development of toddlers and pre-schoolers; the specific 'linguistically responsive facilitation strategies'(Hamre et al, 2010) employed by parents were scrutinised to determine their efficacy. These strategies are as follows: Relates to child's experience; positive feedback; expansions; open-ended questions; follows child's interests; commenting; correction; imitation; follows up with

questions; labelling and attention getting. Trivette et al (2010) found that the strongest effect came from relating the book to the child's experiences and positive feedback from parents during the reading episode. After that, on equal pegging, (average effect size of .33, which is considered to be small to medium (Halle, Forry, Hair, Perper, Wandner, Wessel & Vick, 2009) came expansions, (i.e. elaborating with or helping the child to elaborate on his/her utterances) open-ended questions and 'follows the child's interests'. The effect sizes were all statistically significant and small to medium. Trivette et al. concluded that if the strategies listed above are employed, this directly facilitates the development of children's expressive language (2010). These strategies are all modelled at the *Storytime* induction workshops.

Dialogic Story-Reading and Other Forms of Shared Reading

The term 'Shared Reading' was coined by Holdaway in 1979. Holdaway's definition referred to a process whereby the teacher used big books to model reading to students. The model was described as "a model for teaching children beginning literacy skills, such as learning one-to-one tracking of text and letter-sound relationships, while reading books with enlarged text." (Schickedanz & McGee, 2010, p.323).

A review of the literature shows that Shared reading has become an umbrella term for a variety of types of reading that involve people sharing a text, usually a teacher and a group of students (Fisher, Frey and Lapp, 2008). Fisher et al, (2008) claim that shared reading is currently used to describe a range of reading activities including echo reading (students echo words aloud that the teacher reads), choral reading (students and teacher reading aloud together) or cloze reading (teacher reads aloud and pauses to allow students to 'fill the word gap'). Other forms of reading such as Readalouds, paired reading, guided reading or dialogic reading are not mentioned in their description of shared reading.

Short, Kane and Peeling (2000) consider that shared reading is an interactive experience. They describe the process of shared reading as one where the children read key words and phrases with the teacher as the teacher reads the text aloud. The teacher also asks the children some questions about the text. Short et al (2000) describe what they call 'guided reading', that is, when the teacher practises strategies that support reading, such as using pictures to help construct meaning, making predictions, rereading, segmenting and blending phonemes, and finding familiar word chunks to decode words. The teacher works with small groups of children that are at a similar stage in reading development when he/she is conducting a guided reading lesson. The ultimate aim of guided reading is to support children to become independent users of reading strategies so that they can tackle increasingly difficult texts independently (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996).

Paired reading as described by Topping (1987) is a process whereby both adult and child are reading together a text chosen by the child. The adult supports the child through difficult text. Then when the text becomes easier, the child signals to the adult to stop reading and the child continues unaided until he/she gets into difficulty again.

Readalouds as described by Sipe, (2000) are also interactive and are akin to the process of dialogic reading in that the book is discussed as the story is read, the teacher follows children's comments about the story, the teacher takes on special voices to depict the various characters and the teacher also discusses the illustrations, the author and design features of the book. Sipe's understanding of readalouds is close to dialogic reading but it makes no reference to the child ultimately becoming the storyteller. Cunningham and Zibulski (2011) outline the advantages of readalouds: They give children access to texts that are beyond their independent reading level. They also help children to learn how to make predictions about text and to see reading as a shared activity with many connections to the

real world (Hall and Moats, 2000; Lane and Wright, 2007; Strickland and Morrow, 1989 as cited in Neuman & Dickinson, 2011). Mc Gee and Schickedanz, (2007) describe the process of using Readalouds in detail. They outline what the teacher/adult should do on days 1,2 and 3 as they engage with the child around a story. Mc Gee and Schickedanz emphasize the importance of analytic talk, achieved through predicting, inferencing and making connections between events in different parts of the story. Like Sipe,(2000), Mc Gee and Schickedanz do not talk about the child becoming the storyteller at the end of the process. They focus instead on improving the child's ability to analyse the text in increasingly sophisticated ways. Lennox (2013) conducted a review of recent research on readalouds. She concluded that well-planned, engaging and interactive readalouds supported young children's language development, thinking and reasoning ability but only if adults (teachers in her context) - understand what quality adult-child interactions are and can practise them; are aware of the variety and range of literature for children, especially information books and practise shared reading more frequently with children, emphasising vocabulary development and higher order thinking skills.

Eeds and Wells (1989) refer to the need to avoid the teacher's 'gentle inquisition' in conversations around books during readalouds. They claim that the typical conversation in classrooms is based on initiation-response-evaluation (Wells and Arauz 2006, p.380) and this is unsatisfactory because it provides little opportunity for the student's voice to be heard (p.380). They favour instead what they describe as "grand conversations" (as cited in Fielding and Pearson, 1994, p.66). This puts the teacher in the position of 'coequal' (p.66) in the discussion. Fielding and Pearson say that in this role the teacher can still capitalise on 'teachable moments, clarify confusion and keep track of students' ideas (p.66). This position of teacher as 'coequal' is in line with a dialogic theoretical position as previously discussed (p. 26 this review).

The National Early Literacy Panel (NELP) in the U.S. (2008) describe shared reading in more all-encompassing terms to include a variety of read-aloud methods and other engagements with books, many of which focused primarily on supporting children's vocabulary and grammatical development (e.g., High, La Gasse, Becker, Ahlgren,& Gardner, 2000; Wasik & Bond, 2001; Whitehurst et al., 1988) or print skills acquisition (e.g., left-to-right direction, letter names, etc.; Justice & Ezell, 2002). (Schickedanz & McGee, 2010 p.323).

It is clear that there are many ways for adults and children to engage in shared reading and that there are many sub-divisions of shared reading, including dialogic reading, the focus of this study. Research indicates that dialogic reading is the most interactive form of shared reading and effect sizes measuring oral language tend to be greater for dialogic reading than for less interactive forms of reading (Kennedy, et al, 2012). This point is echoed throughout the literature:

> When adults give children an opportunity to be an active participant in the reading experience by using evocative techniques during the reading (e.g., asking the child questions about the pictures or the story, encouraging the child to tell the story along with the adult), children show greater language gains than when adults just read the book to the child (Zevenbergen,Whitehurst and Zevenbergen, 2003).

An interactive approach to shared reading facilitates co-construction of meaning as the adult and child engage in dialogue and shared meaning around the text (Mercer & Littleton, 2007). The child who is passive in the shared reading experience does not get the opportunity to share her interpretations of the text or to agree or disagree with the adult around the meaning of the text. This is why interactivity is important. Research has shown, however, that many adults, when reading a story to children, do not use an interactive approach. Zucker et al.

(2013) report that 40% of teachers (Dickinson & Smith, 1994) and 63% of parents (Hammett et al., 2003) engaged in limited amounts of talk during shared reading. Other research found that without instruction, dialogic behaviours occur infrequently during shared reading (e.g. Hammet, Van Kleek & Huberty, 2003; Huebner, 2000; Huebner & Meltzoff, 2005). It would seem, therefore, that professional development for teachers and special training for parents is needed in order to support the development of an interactive approach towards story-reading.

The term dialogic reading was coined by Whitehurst (1988). He described it as the practice whereby a child and an adult share a picture book, focus on the picture book and focus on the story through talk. When most adults share a book with a preschool child, they read and the child listens. In dialogic reading, the adult helps the child become the teller of the story. In the process they discuss the text, co-constructing meaning. The adult gradually becomes the listener, the questioner, the audience for the child. The child learns most from books when he/she is actively involved (Trivette & Dunst, 2007; Whitehurst, G. R., 1992). Three key principles underpin dialogic reading : "evocative techniques (e.g. asking questions to the child), adult feedback (expanding, modelling, correcting, praising), and progressive change (provision to challenge the child to expand their own thinking)" (Fraide, Ganotice, Downing, Mak, Chan & Lee, (2017). The process of dialogic story-reading fits well with socio-cultural theory because it is predicated on social interaction and also on context. An adult (teacher, parent, care-giver) reads to a child and discusses the story as he/she reads. The adult uses the story to connect with the child's life (e.g. Were you ever lost? Tell me about it….). In essence story is social experience tied up and narrativised. It is 'life experience made more compelling through narrative' (Mar and Oatley, 2008).

To complete the exploration of various definitions of shared reading and dialogic reading, it is appropriate to return to Whitehurst the originator of the term dialogic reading.

His (1992) description of a series of sequences in dialogic reading create a clear picture of the particular types of strategies that are employed in order for dialogic reading to take place. The **PEER** sequence is an acronym for the adult to: **p**rompt the child to say something about the book, **e**valuate the child's response, **e**xpand the child's response by rephrasing and adding information to it, and **r**epeat the prompt to make sure the child has learned from the expansion.

An example of an interaction between an adult (usually a parent) and a two year old child might be as follows:

> The adult points to a cat and says "What is this?" (visual prompt). The child answers "A cat". The adult says, "That's right, (the evaluation); a black cat (expansion). What is it again? It's a _____ ___ (repetition). (Whitehurst, 1992).

The adult might go on to inquire "Who do we know that has a cat?" The child responds by talking about a relative or neighbour. This important strategy supports the child in relating the story to his/her life experience. Whitehurst calls it a distancing prompt. He describes five prompts or comments to encourage the child to say something. Whitehurst uses another acronym, **CROWD**, to describe these encouraging comments:

1. **C**ompletion prompts. Allow the child to finish your sentence. The child understands what to do by the upward inflection of the adult voice towards the end of the sentence and the space left to be filled by the child.

2. **R**ecall prompts. These prompts happen when you want to re-read a book that you have already read with the child. You might ask the child "Can you help me remember where Molly brought Patch for a walk?" It encourages children to respond and makes the relationship more egalitarian if you are recalling together

and mulling over matters together, rather than putting the child on the spot by asking a direct question.

3. **O**pen-ended prompts. Whitehurst says that these prompts tend to focus on the pictures in books and they work best if the pictures are rich in detail. The idea behind open-ended prompts is to encourage a narrative flow from the child. Just like with the recall prompt above, it is better to speculate with the child rather than to ask a direct question (Powell & Snow, 2007)

4. **Wh** – prompts. These are what, where, when and why questions. These are not open-ended questions but they serve a good purpose in that they support the child in deepening his/her focus.

5. **D**istancing prompts. These require children to make a link between the book and the real world. For example, when Hansel and Gretel get lost in the woods, the adult might recall with the child a time he/she got lost in a department store.

These prompts are the hallmarks of dialogic reading and comprise what separates dialogic reading from other forms of shared reading described above. All of Whitehurst's strategies are used by *The Storytime Project* along with additional ones, twenty-three strategies in all (see Table 2.7). Robin Alexander (2003) has added to Whitehurst's list of dialogic strategies. He lists children's dialogic strategies as follows: Children narrate, explain, instruct, ask different kinds of questions, receive, act and build upon answers, analyse and solve problems, speculate and imagine, explore and evaluate ideas, discuss, argue, reason and justify and negotiate (Alexander, p.38).

It is sometimes difficult to separate and to assess studies on dialogic reading and other forms of shared reading because it is not always clear what exactly is happening in the adult-child interactions. For example, in the meta-analysis by Mol, Bus & de Jong (2009), the

authors state that the included studies did not provide enough details to grasp exactly what happened during the interactive reading sessions. What does emerge in the research literature, however, is that the method with the most interactivity, is the method most likely to demonstrate positive outcomes. (Trivette & Dunst, 2007). Bojczyk, Davis & Rana, (2016) write that "in high-quality shared reading interactions, children show greater gains in language development compared to when adults simply read the book to the child (Britto, Brooks-Gunn, & Griffin, 2006; Phillips & Lonigan, 2009; Zevenbergen &Whitehurst, 2003)".

Review of the Research on Dialogic Reading

Dialogic story-reading has been extensively researched and there are meta-analyses available as well as individual studies that variously describe its effectiveness and the factors that may impinge on its effectiveness. Dialogic story-reading is widely held to have positive effects on child outcomes in the domain of oral language (e.g. Mol, Bus, De Jong & Smeets, 2008; Swanson,Vaughn, Wanzek, Petscher, Heckert, Cavanaugh, Kraft &Tackett, 2011; Trivette & Dunst, 2007). Dialogic reading causes children to use more words, speak in longer sentences, score higher on vocabulary tests and demonstrate overall improvement in expressive language skills (Harris, Golinkoff & Hirsh-Pasek, (2011). Dialogic reading enhances expressive language and emergent literacy skills in children from all socio-economic groups, even after relatively brief (four week) interventions (McKeown & Beck, 2006. p.283). The improvement in both spheres – language and emergent literacy - supports the thesis that language and literacy are inextricably linked and that success in one area leads to success in the other.

The first published study relating to dialogic reading is by Whitehurst, Falco, Lonigan, Fischel, DeBaryshe, Valdez-Menchaca & Caulfield, (1988) in a study called

'Accelerating language development through picture book reading'. This study used a control group and an experimental group. Parents in the experimental group were tutored to ask open-ended questions of their children, to help their children expand on their comments and to answer children's questions. The children in the experimental group scored significantly higher in post-tests than the children in the control group.

Research carried out by Swanson, Vaughn, Wanzek, Petscher, Heckert, Cavanaugh, Kraft & Tackett, (2011) indicates that the quality of studies on shared reading has increased in recent years -

> Previous syntheses of storybook reading have indicated a lack of high-quality research, qualifying the findings and decreasing the ability to make robust statements regarding the effects of read alouds on literacy outcomes for children (Blok, 1999; Scarborough & Dobrich, 1994). Our synthesis of the current literature indicates the amount of high-quality research has increased (p.271).

In examining the effect of dialogic story-reading, Swanson et al's (2011) meta-analysis of eighteen studies found moderate to large mean effect sizes for dialogic reading interventions on child outcomes of phonological awareness, print concepts, reading comprehension, and vocabulary. The study focused on children aged three to eight years who were considered to be at risk of reading difficulty. The interventions were conducted by teachers.

A study on vocabulary growth using read alouds by Silverman, Crandell and Carlis (2013) claimed that there is little emphasis on *explicit* vocabulary instruction in the dialogic reading approach. This claim is supported by Wasik, Hindman and Snell (2016). They found that the dialogic story-reading studies they examined as part of a larger review on book reading practices did not focus on specific target words during the book reading. This may be a disadvantage to children who are considered to have low vocabulary knowledge relative to

their peers. Silverman and Crandall, (2010) found that children benefitted from a differentiated approach to vocabulary learning: Those children with richer vocabulary benefitted from the practice of defining and contextualizing words, whereas children with lower vocabulary knowledge "tended to benefit more from nonverbal instructional practices such as acting out and illustrating words" (Silverman et al., 2013, p.102). Proponents of a dialogic-story reading approach might argue that vocabulary expansion can occur as part of the 'wh' (who, what, why) prompts. It could be said that what the research really highlights is that any method is only as good as the implementer's ability to tailor the method to the needs of the children receiving the intervention.

The efficacy of dialogic reading is affected by children's age.

The meta-analysis conducted by Mol, Bus, De Jong & Smeets, (2008) used sixteen studies and 626 parent-child dyads. The synthesis revealed that a 4% variance in vocabulary growth amongst studies was explained by the additional effects of Whitehurst's (Whitehurst, Falco, Lonigan, & Fischel, 1988) "dialogic reading" technique (Mol, Bus, and De Jong, 2009). This research points towards the greater efficacy of dialogic reading as a technique to improve vocabulary over other types of story-reading to children. Mol, Bus, de Jong and Smeets' (2008) meta-analysis also found that there were moderate effects in terms of improvements in children's expressive vocabulary. Improvements were significantly greater for expressive than receptive vocabulary. Younger children, 2-3 year olds, benefitted more from dialogic story-reading than did 4-5 year olds. This finding was also made by the NELP (2008) report. The authors speculated that this could be because parents might not have modified their dialogic teaching strategies for older children (p.21) Older children often like to hear a story told without interruption and do not need constant mediation on the part of the adult to keep them 'on track' with the story. The implication of this finding is that CPD should clearly differentiate between dialogic reading strategies for 2-3 year old children and

4-5 year old children. Whitehurst (2002) recommends differentiating dialogic reading strategies for younger children. He recommends the PEER (prompt, evaluate, expand and repeat) sequence for very young children, and more sophisticated strategies are proposed in the CROWD (completion prompts, recall prompts, open-ended prompts, What, why, where prompts, that is, questioning and distancing prompts).

The shared reading method with the most interactivity produced the best outcomes.

Trivette and Dunst, (2007) conducted a secondary analysis of three research syntheses produced by the *What Works Clearinghouse* on the effectiveness of reading instruction with preschool children. They compared three types of reading methods: dialogic reading, interactive shared reading and shared book reading. Table 2.8 defines the three reading methods –

Table 2.8 Reading Practices Analysed by Trivette & Dunst (2007)

Dialogic Reading	During the shared reading practice, the adult and child switch roles so that the child learns to become the storyteller with the assistance of the adult who functions as an active listener and questioner.
Interactive Shared Book Reading	Interactive shared book reading involves an adult reading a book to a child or a small group of children and using a variety of techniques to engage children in the text.
Shared Book Reading	Shared book reading involves an adult reading a book to one child or a small group of children without requiring extensive interactions from them.

Sources: What Works Clearinghouse (2006a; 2006b; 2007)

They found that the method with the most interactivity was the method most likely to demonstrate positive outcomes. Specifically they found that dialogic reading was related to significant improvements in linguistic processing[25] and interactive shared book reading was

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[25] The ability to attach meaning to language or the cognitive processes involved in producing and understanding linguistic communication; (www.freedictionary.com)

related to significant improvements in print-related knowledge. The outcomes of the meta-analysis studied indicate that dialogic story-reading produces beneficial outcomes to varying degrees for children.

High fidelity to reading programmes had a beneficial effect on outcomes.

Mol, de Bus and Jong's (2009) meta-analysis of 31 studies showed a moderate effect for oral language. They found that shared reading programmes that evidenced high fidelity to the modus operandi of their programme were more effective in developing the oral language of participants than programmes that had no information in relation to programme fidelity. Fidelity to the implementation of interactive reading strategies, quality interactions in the control group and frequency of book reading episodes contributed to the success of interventions. Mol et al (2009) also found that interventions led by researchers had better outcomes for children than those led by teachers. Interactive reading scored better than dialogic reading but when dialogic reading was implemented by researchers, there was no statistically significant difference between the effectiveness of interactive reading versus dialogic reading. In their study on vocabulary growth using read alouds in twenty-six early years' settings with four year old children, Siverman et al., (2013) found that fidelity to the intervention protocol was associated with gains in word learning.

Irish Studies

Prevention and Early Intervention Network (PEIN).

PEIN "is a network of evidence-based practice, advocacy and research organisations across the Republic of Ireland that share a commitment to improving outcomes for children, young people, and their communities" (http://www.pein.ie/about/). The network includes intervention projects to support children, young people, and their economically disadvantaged

communities. It receives its funding substantially from Atlantic Philanthropies[26] and also

from the Irish Government and some non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Some of

PEIN's projects are loosely connected to achieving literacy objectives but no study relates

specifically to dialogic reading. See appendix Z for details on these initiatives. *The Tallaght*

West Childhood Development Initiative (CDI) and *The Young Ballymun* group are affiliated

to PEIN. They have run a series of intervention programmes in their respective Dublin

districts, both of which are identified areas of socio-economic disadvantage. These initiatives

have run successful literacy initiatives such as the *Doodle Den* after school literacy

programme by CDI and Young Ballymun's *Write-Minded Literacy Strategy* which aims to

improve literacy practices for children from four to eighteen years' old in schools and in the

community.

Doodle Den is an after school literacy project for 5-6 year olds in Tallaght, Dublin.

Based on the *Balanced Literacy framework.* The programme involves 90 minute sessions,

three times a week, after school, for 32 weeks over a school year. Each session covers key

literacy learning objectives that are taught through games, arts and crafts activities, drama

and PE (Rafferty & Colgan, 2013). It is not a dialogic story-reading initiative.

Write-Minded is one of a suite of services and strategies that constitute

youngballymun (SQW, 2012). Within the *Write-Minded Literacy Strategy,*(2005), the focus

on community and parents is realised through three initiatives: *Breakfast Buddies, Story*

Sacks and *Incredible Book Club*. These initiatives support parents to read stories to their

children and to make story sacks which contain resources to help bring stories to life for the

children. The initiative closest in practice to dialogic story-reading within the *Write-minded*

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[26] Atlantic Philanthropies is an international organisation that gives grants to support people and communities who are disadvantaged. (http://www.atlanticphilanthropies.org/about-atlantic).

Literacy Strategy is the *Incredible Book Club*, so called because it is linked to a socio-emotional development initiative for children targeting teachers, parents and children, called *Incredible Years. The Incredible Book Club* is a shared story-reading initiative that targets children aged three to eight years. Of all the literacy initiatives currently running in Ireland, *The Incredible Book Club* arguably bears the closest resemblence to *The Storytime Project*. For that reason it merits closer scrutiny. Training for parents takes place over four weeks for thirty minutes a week. Each week parents receive an *Incredible Book Club* pack which includes a story book and literacy activities related to the book. Literacy activities in the packs include a list of words for parents to act out with their children; questions to prompt discussion; a book review sheet asking children to say what they thought about the book and activity sheets to support language acquisition. Parents take the activity pack home each week, and complete the activity sheets together with their children. Each thirty minute training session includes review of the previous week's activities. The work of the *Incredible Book Club* is based on the Balanced Literacy Framework, which requires that equal emphasis is placed on each of these four aspects of literacy instruction - word knowledge, reading, fluency, reading comprehension and writing (SQW, 2012, p.8). Some of the differences between the *Incredible Book Club* and *The Storytime Project* include the following: There is a singular focus on dialogic story-reading in *The Storytime Project*. The induction workshop focus on the 23 strategies, including Whitehurst's PEER and CROWD strategies. The PEER and CROWD strategies are not consciously employed in the approach taken by *The Incredible Book Club,* though some dialogic strategies are used. The focus of *The Incredible Book Club* is more dispersed, including as it does, an activity pack for parents and children which facilitate the development of word knowledge, reading, fluency, reading comprehension and writing (SQW, 2012, p.8). There is no mention of the child taking over control of the story in *The Incredible Book Club*. This is one of the hallmarks of dialogic

story-reading. The connection with the local library is a feature of *The Storytime Project* but not a feature of the Ballymun project. There is no ceremony with a presentation of certificates to parents at the end of four week *Incredible Book Club* shared reading project. The *Incredible Book Club* is part of a suite of literacy initiatives under the umbrella of the *Write Minded Literacy Strategy*, *The Storytime Project* is a stand-alone project with an emphasis on continuity through local libraries. A process evaluation of the *youngballymun* project conducted in 2012, which includes an evaluation of *The Incredible Book Club*, identifies it as a successful and worthwhile initiative. Its research-based shared story-reading project is similar in many ways to dialogic story-reading but its focus is broader.

Other Irish literacy initiatives include the *Better Reading Partners* in the Tolka Area Partnership, Dublin (2008) – a paired reading project evaluated in 2010; *Wizards of Words* (2012) a paired literacy improvement programme commissioned by Barnardos for children in first and second class in primary school, and involving older volunteers from the community; and the *Write to Read* project (2011) in Dublin, an intervention to improve literacy skills of children in first and second class in primary school. The project also focused on professional development for teachers and creating professional learning communities. Appendix Z contains a list of all the PEIN projects that have had research carried out on them. None of them are dialogic story-reading initiatives.

NEYAI: National Early Years Access Initiative

The National Early Years Access Initiative was set up to improve the quality of the early years sector in order to improve, in turn, educational outcomes for young children (aged 0-6) in economically disadvantaged areas in Ireland (Mc Keown, 2014). Eleven projects were set up to variously support children's learning by training and mentoring early years practitioners. The duration of the initiative was three years, 2011 to 2014. The eleven

projects, many of them specifically focusing on oral language development, were seen as

demonstration projects that would be evaluated and then, depending on outcomes, could be

adopted as best practice in the sector. The initiative was managed by Pobal, a government

agency that manages social inclusion interventions and was funded by Atlantic

Philanthropies, Mount Street Club Trust, Department of Children & Youth Affairs,

Department of Education & Skills, and Pobal. Each initiative received approximately

€100,000 per annum over the three years. Table 2.9 lists the projects undertaken by NEYAI.

Table 2.9 List of Projects in the National Early Years Access Initiative

ID	Location	Name	Lead Agency	Core Activities
BC	Ballyfermot/ Chapelizod	Early Years Language and Learning Initiative	The Ballyfermot/ Chapelizod Partnership Company Ltd.	Train and mentor early years staff in Hanen Programme to: (i) Improve the child's language development (ii) Support parents to encourage the child's language development
CC	Canal Communities	Canal Communities Family Welfare Initiative – Bringing it all Back Home	Daughters of Charity Child and Family Service	Train and mentor early years staff in Marte Meo Programme and Incredible Years Programme to: (i) Improve the child and parent outcomes (ii) Intensive outreach with children and their parents
CK	Cork	Happy Talk	Cork City Partnership Limited	Improve the language skills of children aged 0-6 years in The Glen and Mayfield areas of Cork City through parent training programmes and working with teachers and early years providers
CN	Clondalkin	Addressing Gaps Between Training and Practice	South Dublin County Partnership Ltd	Mentor early years staff to improve outcomes for children and their parents
DD	Dublin Docklands	Early Learning Initiative	National College of Ireland	Train and mentor early years staff in numeracy skills to deliver: (i) Improve the child's numeracy skills (ii) Support parents to encourage the child's numeracy development
DL	Donegal	The Professional Pedagogy Project (PPP)	Donegal County Childcare Committee	Train and mentor early years staff to improve outcomes for children

FL	Fingal	Fingal Parents Initiative	The Fingal County Childcare Committee Ltd	Train early years staff to deliver: (i) Parents Together (6-Week Parenting Course) (ii) Parents Plus Early Years (12-Week Parenting Course)
LK	Limerick	Start Right Limerick	PAUL Partnership Ltd	Train and support early years staff to: (i) meet Síolta standards (ii) do intensive outreach with children and their parents
LD	Longford	Tús Nua Project	Longford County Childcare Committee	Train and mentor early years staff to improve outcomes for children

Mc Keown, 2014, p.8. Evaluation of the Learning Community in the National Early Years Access Initiative. Main Report.

Oral language development features in the description of the NEYAI initiative but it is based on the Hanen programme, which is a research–based language programme for parents of children with language delays. Dialogic story-reading is not listed as a feature of any of these interventions.

Kelleher's (2005) study, the pre-cursor to *The Storytime Project*, was a shared story-reading project undertaken with children from traveller families in the North Dublin area. Kelleher conducted a five week study. Her focus was on intervention and she visited the traveller homes to support four parents and four children throughout the project. She put a strong emphasis on weekly evaluations completed by parents and on scaffolding parents based on their reported difficulties with the process. Kelleher's intervention study found that parent-child linguistic interaction increased as a result of involvement in the intervention, including the use of decontextualized language. Kelleher also found that parents' confidence at scaffolding their children's utterances during storybook reading grew and parents' perceptions of their children's abilities changed. Preschool teachers noted an improvement in participating children's language skills and a new interest in looking at books in preschool.

A review of the literature on Irish studies with a specific focus on dialogic story-reading was undertaken by the author. Searches included two Irish peer-reviewed journals: Irish Educational Studies and An Leanbh Óg. An electronic search featured multiple databases, for example, Academic Search Complete, Eric and JStor and journals in the field of Early Childhood Education and literacy. If Irish research on this area is scant, it is encouraging that Irish *policy documents* have identified this lacuna. A review of the Irish Primary School Curriculum (1999) was conducted in 2005. Concerns about the teaching of oral language were identified as was the development of higher-order thinking skills (NCCA, 2005; DES, 2005, p.50).

Kennedy, Dunphy et al's commissioned research report for the NCCA on Literacy in Early Childhood and Primary Education (3-8 years) in 2012 specifically recommended that a review of the Primary School Curriculum (1999) should address shared storybook reading, amongst other aspects of literacy, because they were not fully described in the Primary School English Curriculum (p.32). "The need for children to establish a strong academic vocabulary from an early age, including attention to conceptual categories and connecting words" was also identified in the research report (p.32). Other areas identified by the group were the need to include motivation and engagement as key aspects of literacy development as well as "the need to develop positive dispositions towards literacy from the outset" (p. 33).

Table 2.10 gives a list of studies in relation to dialogic story reading. Many of them have already been referred to in this review. Some of the studies listed are not strictly dialogic reading studies but are included because the strategies used in the studies closely resemble or include dialogic reading strategies amongst other strategies employed. The nuanced differences between various forms of shared reading makes research on a particular form of shared reading, such as dialogic story-reading, challenging.

Table 2.10 Studies on Shared Reading/Dialogic Reading

Year	Author(s)	Title of Study	Type of Study	Description	Outcome
1988	Whitehurst, Falco, Lonigan, Fischel, DeBaryshe, Valdez-Menchaca & Caulfield	Accelerating language development through picture book reading. *Developmental Psychology, 24(4)552-559*	1-month, home-based intervention, designed to optimize parental reading of picture books to young children. Experimental group and control group. Interactive strategies used, though **not strictly dialogic reading.**	1-month, home-based intervention. Intervention group **parents** taught strategies to elicit child talk.	Experimental group scored significantly higher in post-tests than did the control group. Follow-up 9 months after the completion of treatment disclosed continued (although statistically diminished) differences between the two groups.
1992	Valdez-Menchaca; Whitehurst	Accelerating language development through picture book reading: A systematic extension to Mexican day care. *Developmental Psychology, Vol 28(6) 1106-1114.*	Intervention group & control group	20 Mexican 2-yr-olds from low-income backgrounds. Children in intervention group were read to individually by a **teacher** using dialogic reading techniques.	Differences favouring the intervention group were found on all standardized language post-tests and on some measures of language production. Valdez-Menchaca and Whitehurst demonstrated that dialogic reading can significantly impact the language skills of children from low-income families.
1994	Arnold, Lonigan, Whitehurst & Epstein	Accelerating language development through picture book reading: Replication and extension to a video-tape training format.	4 week intervention. 2 groups. Dialogic reading using video tape training and a regular storybook reading group.	Used video tape instruction to train adults in the use of dialogic reading.	Children in video training group had greater expressive vocab scores than did children in the regular storybook reading group.

1994	Whitehurst; Arnold; Epstein; Angell; Smith & Meagan; Fischel	*Developmental Psychology, Vol 30(5), 679-689*	A picture book reading intervention in day care and home for children from low-income families. Dialogic reading study. 6 week intervention. 3 groups: control group, parent-child group and teacher child group.	Used video-tape training for adults - a self-instructional video	Significant increments in language development were found. Statistically significant effects of the reading intervention were obtained at post-test and follow-up on measures of expressive vocabulary.
1994	Whitehurst; Epstein; Angell; Payne, Crone & Fischel	*Journal of Educational Psychology 1994, Vol. 86, No. 4, 542-555*	4 yr olds attending Headstart. Randomly assigned children to an intervention. Experienced interactive book reading at home and in the classroom as well as a classroom-based sound and letter awareness program.	Children were pre-tested and post-tested on standardized tests of language, writing, linguistic awareness, and print concepts.	Effects of the intervention were significant across all children in the domains of writing and print concepts. Effects on language were large but only for those children whose primary caregivers had been actively involved in the at-home component of the program.
1994	Scarborough & Dobrich	Oral language: the ability to produce or comprehend spoken language, including vocabulary and grammar *Developmental Review, 14. 245-302*	Meta-analysis of 31 studies of **parent-**preschool child shared reading		Modest findings only in respect of the efficacy of parent – pre-schooler reading on language and literacy skills. Frequency of reading was found to be more important than the quality of the reading. This was refuted in other studies, e.g. Whitehurst, 1988; Schickedanz & Mc Gee, 2010;

1996	Dale, Crain-Thoreson, Notari-Syverson & Cole	Study done with children who had language impairments. 2 interventions, one conversational language training and one in joint story-book reading.	Compared effectiveness of a language-based intervention and a joint book-reading intervention. Parents trained in some dialogic reading strategies.	Program effects on the parents' use of language were more marked than effects on the children's language" p. 230. **Limited overall effects on children's language (p. 231).** "Parents increased their use of what/who questions, open-ended questions, imitation, and expansions more than did parents receiving conversational language training".
1998	Lonigan & Whitehurst	Relative efficacy of **parent and teacher** involvement in a shared-reading intervention for preschool children from low-income backgrounds. (Used in WWC review, also NELP)	4 groups: 1. No treatment 2. School intervention 3. Home intervention 4 Home and school intervention. Children pre-tested and post-tested for language ability	Group 3. Home intervention had the most significant effects.
1999	Lonigan, Anthony, Bloomfield, Dyer & Samwel	95 pre-school children aged 2-5. Control group, shared reading group and dialogic reading group (Used in WWC review, also NELP)		Results favoured dialogic reading in relation to descriptive use of language and shared reading in relation to listening comprehension and the ability to detect alliteration.

1999	Crain, Thoreson & Dale	Enhancing Linguistic Performance: Parents and Teachers as Book Reading Partners for Children with Language Delays *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education 19(1) 28-39*	32 children with language delays were assigned to one of 3 groups: **parent** instruction with one-on-one shared reading; **teacher** instruction with one-on-one shared reading and staff instruction without one-on-one shared book reading practice (control group).	Control group and 2 experimental groups	After adult instruction in Dialogic Reading, children in all three groups spoke more, made longer utterances, produced more different words, and participated more in shared book reading. The magnitude of change in the children's linguistic performance from pre- to post-test was positively correlated with the magnitude of change in adult behaviour.
2000	Hargrave & Senechal	A book reading intervention with pre-school children who have limited vocabularies: The benefits of regular reading and dialogic reading *Early Childhood Research Quarterly 15(1)*	2 groups of eight children. One group did dialogic storybook reading group(dialogic reading) and other group did 'regular story-book reading'	Preschool intervention	Children in the dialogic-reading condition made significantly larger gains in vocabulary introduced in the books, as well as gains on a standardized expressive vocabulary test, than did the children in a regular book-reading situation.
2000	Jordan, Show & Porsche		Studied the effect of a family literacy project on early pre-writing and pre-reading skills in pre-school children. 248 pre-school children; 177 in experimental group and 71 in the control group.	Parents were taught how to discuss a book and surrounding events with their child. Parents in experimental group also observed activities in the pre-school focusing on shared reading, verbal fluency, word associations etc.	Children whose parents who participated in guided homework and the work of the pre-school achieved much higher scores on tests of vocabulary, story comprehension, and storytelling than their peers in the control group.

Year	Authors	Title	Method	Description	Findings
2001	Wasik & Bond	Beyond the Pages of a Book: interactive Book Reading and Language. Dev. In preschool. (Used in WWC review, also NELP)	Intervention. Comparison group study	Interactive book reading initiative with children from low-income backgrounds. Objects were used to concretely represent words. Teachers were taught to use open-ended questions	Children who were in the interactive book reading intervention group scored significantly better than children in the comparison group on Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-III and other measures of receptive and expressive language
2002	Brabham & Lynch Brown	Effects of Teachers' Reading-Aloud Styles on Vocabulary Acquisition and Comprehension of Students in the Early Elementary Grades	**Teachers and graduate students** used a story reading intervention in preschools and kindergartens, using techniques similar to Whitehurst (1988), i.e open-ended questions, making positive comments and relating the text to the children's real life experiences.		Verbally mediated, interactional and performance reading-aloud styles are more effective for vocabulary acquisition than is just reading aloud with no discussion. Findings confirm teacher explanations and student discussions as critical factors that benefit students' learning.
2002	Storch & Whitehurst		Longitudinal study of 626 children from kindergarten to fourth grade		Results demonstrated that (a) the relationship between code-related precursors and oral language is strong during preschool; (b) there is a high degree of continuity over time of both code-related and oral language abilities. There are additional findings too…

2003	Zevenbergen, Whitehurst & Zevenbergen	Effects of a shared-reading intervention on the inclusion of evaluative devices in narratives of children from low-income families	Comparative study. 30-week shared-reading intervention conducted in HeadStart classrooms and homes. The remainder of the sample experienced the regular Head Start curriculum.	The impact of a shared-reading program on the narrative skills of children from low-income families was examined. Participants in the study were 4-year-old children (N = 123) enrolled in Head Start	Children who participated in the intervention program were significantly more likely to include references to internal states of characters and dialogue in their narratives at the end of the Head Start year than children who did not participate in the intervention programme.
2007	Trivette & Dunst	Relative Effectiveness of Dialogic, Interactive and Shared Reading Interventions	A secondary analysis of three research syntheses produced by the *What Works Clearinghouse* on the effectiveness of reading instruction with pre-schoolers.	The three reading instruction methods were dialogic reading, interactive shared book reading, and shared book reading.	Results showed that child participation was one factor associated with reading related outcomes.
2008	Mol, Bus, de Jong and Smeets		Meta-analysis of 16 studies		Moderate improvements in expressive vocab. 2-3 yr olds benefitted more from DR than 4-5 yr olds. DR works best with high SES families. "Groups at risk for language and literacy impairments benefited less from dialogic reading than groups not at risk" (p.22).
2008	NELP		Meta-analysis of 19 studies		Dialogic story-reading develops vocabulary but also more complex language skills such as grammar, listening comprehension, the ability to form an argument and to elaborate.

2008	Sénèchal & Young,	Meta-analysis of 16 studies	**This study looked a parent-child reading interventions, not specifically dialogic reading**	General parent involvement with their children had no effect on children's literacy improvement but that giving parents specific techniques to practise with their children had an effect that giving general information did not.
2009	Mol Bus and de Jong	Meta-analysis of 31 studies. Interactive reading in educational settings, not solely dialogical reading aka Whitehurst but interactive reading strategies akin to Whitehurst's. Implemented by **teachers and graduate students.**	The studies could be divided into three categories: 8 studies (n = 260) implemented dialogic reading (DR) as developed by Whitehurst et al. (1 988), 11 studies (n = 411) tested the effects of similar techniques without referring to the specific dialogic reading format and were coded as interactive reading (IR), and another 12 studies (n = 1,354) included extra classroom activities to support the interactive reading sessions.	Moderate effect size for oral language skills. Researchers working one-to-one with children had better outcomes than teachers working with groups of children. Fidelity implementation was higher with researchers than with teachers. Interactive reading scored better than dialogic reading but when DR was implemented by researchers, there was no statistically significant difference between the effectiveness of IR versus DR. More elegantly designed studies with a higher fidelity score revealed higher effect sizes. "Interactive reading in early education warrants implementation"

| 2010 | Reese, Leyva , Sparks, & Grolnick | Maternal Elaborative Reminiscing Increases Low-Income Children's Narrative Skills Relative to Dialogic Reading, *Early Education and Development,* 21(3), 318-342. | Comparison between dialogic story-reading and elaborative reminiscing. Thirty-three low-income parents of 4-year-old children attending Head Start were randomly assigned to either dialogic reading, elaborative reminiscing, or a control condition. | Dialogic story-reading strategies taught via a slide show on a lap-top. 5 storybooks a month given to mothers for 5 months. Researcher phoned homes each month to remind mother to return book and to go over DR strategies with the mother.

There was no check on implementation fidelity. | Elaborative reminiscing boosted the quality of children's narratives in comparison to dialogic reading. Elaborative reminiscing was also effective in supporting children's story comprehension.
However, children whose mothers were trained in elaborative reminiscing did not have better expressive vocabulary skills or tell longer stories than children in the other conditions.
"Perhaps the low-income mothers in this study perceived the elaborative reminiscing techniques as easier, and thus they used the techniques more often than the mothers instructed in dialogic reading used dialogic reading techniques"(p336). |
| 2010 | Trivette & Dunst | | Parent-mediated joint book reading using specific named reading strategies | | The strongest effect came from relating the book to the child's experiences and positive feedback from parents during the reading episode. After that came expansions, which is elaborating with or helping the child to elaborate on his/her utterances. The effect sizes were all statistically significant and small to medium. |

| 2011 | Swanson,Vaughn, Wanzek, Petscher, Heckert, Cavanaugh, Kraft &Tackett, | A Synthesis of Read-Aloud Interventions on Early Reading Outcomes Among Preschool Through Third graders at risk for reading difficulties. | Synthesis of 29 studies and meta-analysis. 18 of the 29 studies qualified for meta-analysis. Only **teacher** delivered interventions were used, no parent interventions. Focused on students at risk of reading difficulties. Pre-schooler to third grade. Coding sheet aligned with WWC | 3-8 year old children at risk for reading difficulties | Found moderate to large mean effect sizes for dialogic reading interventions on child outcomes of phonological awareness, print concepts, reading comprehension, and vocabulary. |

| 2011 | Barnyak | A Qualitative Study in a Rural Community: Investigating the Attitudes, Beliefs, and Interactions of Young Children and Their Parents Regarding Storybook Read Alouds | Multiple case studies of six rural families. Children ranged in age from 2-7 years. Video-taped observations of parents reading to their children. Studies were of rural families. **No training in dialogic story-reading given to parents.** Study examined what parents did when reading to their children. The qualitative research methods used in the study consisted of semi-structured interviews with parents and children and direct observation of the dyads while reading storybooks aloud. | Some dialogic story-reading were used by parents in this small-scale study. **Because there was no training, DR strategies were used organically and haphazardly.** Strategies observed included prediction (4 mothers); 5 out of 8 children spontaneously offered ideas about the books and each parent briefly commented on her child's ideas but did not elaborate in detail. All parents asked questions and all parents pointed to text and illustrations to support their child's comprehension. Repetition was pointed out by one parent. No parent asked their child to recall, retell or summarise. Observations were analysed using The Adult/Child Interactive Reading Inventory (ACIRI) (DeBruin-Parecki 2004, 2007). | Findings show that the parents' and children's self-reported attitudes and beliefs about reading were aligned with observations conducted by video recordings. Some dialogic story-reading strategies were used by parents. This occurred with no training in dialogic story-reading. |

| 2012 | Levin and Aram | Mother-child joint writing and storybook reading and their effects on kindergartners' literacy: an intervention study. | 7 week intervention study with 124 mother-child dyads from low SES neighbourhood in Tel Aviv. Children (50 boys, 74 girls) were average age of 5.4 years. 3 groups: Control group, interactive storybook group and teaching of writing group. **Not strictly dialogic reading, though DR strategies used. Not exclusively a DR study.** | In the story-reading group, mothers were guided on how to read interactively and read at home to their child 3 times a week for 7 weeks. Interactions were video-taped. Tutors visited homes once a week to augment the mothers' training. Mothers used open-ended questions and adjusted the questions to the child's needs. Analysis of video looked at comments relating to recall, completion, illustration, 'wh' questions, word meaning or relating material to the child's life; also to print and alphabetic skills, also questions in relation to plot and character. | Results showed an increase in interactivity during story-book reading due to the intervention. There was no transfer of success from one group activity to the other (i.e. from story-reading to writing group or from writing to storybook reading). Mothers contributed to dialogue three times more than their children; mothers focused more on story and illustrations and ignored print and story grammar (ie. setting, theme, plot and resolution). Mothers tripled the number of dialogues they initiated and doubled the number of enhancing dialogues. Children increased their initiation of dialogue by 2.5 times. |

| 2013 | Aram, D., Fine, Y. & Ziv, M. | Enhancing parent–child shared book reading interactions: Promoting references to the book's plot and socio-cognitive themes. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly,* 28, 111– 122. | Intervention using control group and intervention group. **This is not strictly a dialogic story-reading study** but Bruner's (1986) structure of the complete storybook reading experience is very similar to dialogic story-reading. | A shared story-reading intervention to promote parents' and pre-schoolers' references to storybooks' plot and socio-cognitive themes during shared reading. Sample of 58 families from low-SES background. All parents given four books, one new book weekly, and instructed to read each book four times per week to their children. "Parents in the control group were given no further guidance, whereas parents in the intervention group were guided in reading the books interactively with their children using Bruner's (1986) structure of the complete storybook reading experience" (p.111). | Results showed that "parents and children in the intervention group referred more than their control counterparts to both the book's plot and its socio-cognitive themes. The advantages of the intervention were maintained beyond effects of parental education and of children's gender, vocabulary, and social cognition level. The study revealed the importance of direct guidance of parents and the potential of shared reading contexts for eliciting rich conversations between parents and children" (p.111). |

| 2013 | Lonigan, C., Purpura, D.J., Wilson, S.B., Walker, P.M. & Clancy-Menchetti, J. | Evaluating the components of an emergent literacy intervention for preschool children at risk for reading difficulties.

Journal of Experimental Child Psychology 114, p.111–130 | The intervention groups consisted of (a) dialogic reading plus phonological awareness training (Group 1), (b) dialogic reading plus letter knowledge training (Group 2), (c) dialogic reading plus the combination of phonological awareness and letter knowledge training (Group 3), (d) standard shared reading plus the combination of phonological awareness training and letter knowledge training (Group 4), and (e) a control group that received only the ongoing classroom curriculum (Group 5). | A study in Florida consisting of 365 3- to 5-year-olds from Head Start centres in Northern Florida. | By the end of the preschool year, children's skills had increased substantially. Interventions had statistically significant positive impacts only on measures of their respective skill domains. Combinations of interventions did not enhance outcomes across domains, |
| 2014 | Sim & Berthelson | Shared book reading by parents with young children: Evidence-based practice. | A randomised control trial using three groups: a control group, a dialogic reading group and a dialogic reading group plus print referencing. | A study in Queensland Australia using a sample of 42 boys and 38 girls ranging in age from 4.92 years to 6.25 years. | Reading in a dialogic manner as well as reading in a dialogic manner with the addition of print referencing, helped improve children's early literacy skills, specifically – expressive vocabulary, rhyme and concepts about print. There was no significant difference in outcome between the dialogic reading group and the dialogic reading plus print referencing group. |

| 2014 | Pilinger & Wood | Pilot study evaluating the impact of dialogic reading and shared reading at transition to primary school: early literacy skills and parental attitudes | Small scale exploratory study comparing the impact of shared reading and dialogic story-reading on 4-year-old children's early literacy skills and parental attitudes to reading prior to and following school entry. | The children's rhyme awareness, word reading, concepts about print and writing vocabulary were assessed before and after a 6 week period of the intervention. Four illustrative case studies are presented. | Findings indicated that DR had a positive impact on children's enjoyment of reading, concepts about print, parent–child reading behaviours and parental attitudes to joint storybook reading. The children who experienced shared-book reading also demonstrated improvements in word reading. There were no changes in rhyme awareness or writing vocabulary for either group. Self-report assessed intervention fidelity. Although all parents in the study professed that they used the DR techniques while reading, these techniques were not individually specified. Thus the minutae of the parent-child interaction cannot be examined. |
| 2017 | Fraide, Ganotice, Downing, Mak, Chan & Lee | Enhancing parent-child relationship through dialogic reading | 48 Hong Kong Chinese parents (mean age = 38.7) participated in this study. Majority of these parents were female with college degrees and in full-time employment. Pretest-posttest experimental research design used. | The relationship between adults and children before and after training in the practice of dialogic reading techniques, was studied. Forty-eight Cantonese speaking parents with children aged between 3 and 12 were recruited from schools. They were assessed prior to and after undergoing a four hour dialogic reading training programme with a two-hour follow-up session using the Parent–Child Relationship Inventory. | The results of this study suggest that DR has considerable potential for improving parent–child relationships. The findings are discussed in the context of the particular situation of adult-child relationships in Hong Kong. |

Dialogic learning theory, dialogic reading strategies and oral language skill development, particularly around the development of decontextualized language - are all connected and those connections are made in this study. Dialogic learning theory sees the dialogic relationship as collaborative, reciprocal, co-constructive, intersubjective and open-ended, with an emphasis on higher-order thinking (e.g. Reznitskaya, 2012). Dialogic reading uses a set of interactive oral language strategies such as reciprocating and building on children's utterances, using open-ended questions, and employing higher-order thinking skills by making inferences and developing hypotheses, in order to nurture children's language development. The oral language skills developed in decontextualized language are semantic, syntactic and pragmatic. The child develops her ability to talk about the past and the future, for example, to give explanations, using complex sentence structure (such as subordinate clauses) and talk about hypothetical situations (Dickinson and Tabors, 2001). These skills are scaffolded by a more able other, a parent in the context of this study, who facilitates the language development by using these strategies in a collaborative, supportive, reciprocal, dialogic way. This is the journey from dialogic theory to dialogic practice. The review will now change focus to look at the various issues that can impact on how children learn in dialogic reading initiatives.

Factors that Influence Outcomes for Dialogic Reading Interventions

The success or failure of dialogic reading strategies can be attributed to key variables identified in individual studies and also in meta-analytic studies. Some of these variables relate to what Berliner (2013) describes as outside-of-school factors, for example, living in poor segregated neighbourhoods (Sampson, Sharkey & Raudenbush, 2008); the socio-economic status of the family (Fernald, Marchman, Weisleder, 2013), mothers' level of education (Hoff, 2003; Lyytinen, Laasko & Poikkeus, 1988; Scarborough & Dobrich, 1994;)

and the home literacy environment (Evans, Kelley, Sikora & Treiman, 2010; Kassow, 2006).

Other variables relate to the processes around dialogic story –reading such as child

engagement and motivation; the quality of the adult-child interaction/adult reading style;

fidelity to dialogic reading strategies; frequency of reading episodes; the re-reading of texts;

adult reading behaviours and the training that an adult receives in dialogic reading strategies.

Variables relating to outside-of-school factors will be examined first, beginning with, for the

purposes of context, a brief description of child poverty during the period of the evaluation of

The Storytime Project.

Hearne & McMahon (2016) of TASC Ireland (Think Tank Action on Social Change)

reported on child poverty in Ireland during the years of the recession, 2008 to 2014. Using

data from Ireland's Central Statistics Office and the *Growing up In Ireland* research, the

report said that the proportion of children living in consistent poverty in Ireland almost

doubled from 6.3 per cent in 2008 to 11.2 per cent in 2014. This amounted to one in eight

children living in consistent poverty. The report also revealed that one-parent households

suffered greatly during the recession, with 22.1% living in poverty. Of those families that

became homeless, they reported, two-thirds were headed by lone parents – usually mothers.

There were also cuts to child benefit during this period. The evaluation of *The Storytime*

Project, spans the years 2010 to 2013, which was during the recessionary period referred to

here.

In examining much of the literature on the relationship between social class and

academic under-achievement, it is important to keep a broader sociological perspective on

achievement in mind. For example, there is research that shows that mothers from higher

socio-economic groups are better at mediating dialogic story-reading strategies than mothers

from lower socio-economic groups (Bus& Van Ijzendoorn, 1995). Interpreted outside of its

cultural and sociological context, this finding has deterministic undertones and can lead to the development of a deficit view. Deficit thinking has a deleterious and debilitating effect on marginalised groups and therefore deserves further consideration.

Deficit thinking.

White (2014) describes a deficit view as follows -

Cultural deficit discourse is a cornucopia of coded labels and descriptive variables that focus an essentializing, critical lens on the parenting, values, 'lifestyle,' and 'home environment' of the poor and working-class, channeled as a diagnostic to explain struggles to ascend the socio-economic ladder and challenges using the 'great equalizer,' i.e. schools, as vehicles of upward mobility. Here, the middle class and occupants of any higher rungs are rendered the epitome of 'family values' and discipline, and become paragons of parenting both explicitly and by default. Indeed, cultural deficit models give way to a range of implicit and explicit comparisons since defining deficiencies must entail measuring against some relative standard of proficiencies. These can only be the most sweeping of comparisons since determining how and why wealthier people would be inherently more competent as parents is unquantifiable (White, 2014, p.156).

Smit (2012) writes that deficit thinking creates another barrier to equality for people who are already disenfranchised by the socio-economic system. It allows a laziness to develop around the issues causing inequality because deficit thinking assumes that the problem lies in the make-up of those who are marginalised and not in broader structural and systemic factors. Deficit thinking amongst educators, therefore, is particularly troubling, given their potential exposure to young children who experience poverty and marginalisation (Simone, 2012). Pai (1990) points to the importance that one understands that one's own world-view, standards,

and expectations are themselves the products of a particular cultural perspective, rather than reflective of a universal norm.

Wilson (2010), writing about poverty in Harlem, Now York City, argues that a complex web of structural and cultural forces combine to impact on people living in poor, segregated neighbourhoods. He writes that both social acts (e.g. stereotyping, stigmatization, discrimination in hiring, job promotions, housing and admission to educational institutions) and social processes (e.g. school tracking "that purports to be academic but often reproduces traditional segregation" (p. 201), racial profiling by police and redlining by banks (i.e. when mortgage lenders discriminate against potential clients based on the neighbourhoods in which they live) act against marginalised groups. Writing about culture, Wilson says that "culture provides tools (habits, skills and styles) and creates constraints (restrictions or limits on outlooks and behaviour) in patterns of social interaction" (2010, p.203). In areas of concentrated poverty, cultural norms, seen as negative by members of higher socio-economic groups, (e.g attitudes of resignation to life circumstances) may be embedded over generations and may take generations to shift, even if families move to more affluent neighbourhoods. Wilson refers to a comment made by sociologist, Erik Olin Wright (2008) who cautioned that if experiences of discrimination and disrespect are systematic and sustained over time, they can lead to psychological states that may be misinterpreted as norms by social investigators, thus pathologising social groups. This is deficit thinking. It seems that the complex social and cultural factors that cause deprivation need a holistic and sustained, longitudinal response, whereby multiple poverty-related problems are tackled with a multiple, multi-pronged, systems response.

Multiple factors influence student achievement.

Berliner (2013) identifies a number of factors that affect student achievement:

Factors such as family income; neighbourhood collective efficacy, violence rate and average income; medical and dental care available and used; level of food insecurity; number of moves a family makes over the course of a child's school years; whether one parent or two parents are raising the child; provision of high quality early education in the neighbourhood; language spoken at home; and so forth, all substantially affect school achievement. The outside-of-school factors affect achievement three times more than do the inside-the-school factors (Berliner, 2013).

Ramey and Ramey (2004) are unequivocal about the research in relation to children's skill levels as they enter the education sphere:

No matter how much public schools improve their kindergarten through high school curricula and instruction, the irrefutable evidence indicates that a child's entry skill levels, and the family's ability to support a child's literacy development, are paramount in early school success (Ramey & Ramey, 2006, p.445).

In an evaluation of a cohort of children who participated in the first year of the Free Pre-School Year in Ireland, McKeown, Haase and Pratschke (2014) found that child and family characteristics are the largest set of influences on child outcomes, the biggest of those influences being social class. In the measurement of language and cognitive skills specifically, it was found that social class created the largest gap between children (McKeown et al., 2014, p.8). However, a study by Aikens and Barbarin, (2008) acknowledged associations between children's SES and literacy progress, but found that there was a greater association between school and neighbourhood conditions and literacy outcomes than there was between family characteristics and literacy outcomes. Aikens and Barbarin (2008) conclude that children's lives are influenced by multiple relationships and multiple settings and there is a dynamic and reciprocal relationship between settings and the

individual child. Therefore, how children fare developmentally and scholastically are not reflections on the children themselves but of the nature of the experiences they have faced, the resources that they have had at their disposal and the interactions that they have encountered. This is an important distinction to make because it does not label children from low SES backgrounds as being inherently less able than their higher SES peers but points to the influences of structural factors instead. It also implies that closing the literacy gap requires a multi-dimensional, systems-wide effort rather than focusing on 'fixing' the child.

Niklas, Cohrssen and Tayler's (2016) note that family literacy practices can mitigate the effects of living in a low-income household on children's later cognitive achievement (E.g. Linver, Brooks-Gunn, and Kohen 2002; Niklas, Möllers, and Schneider 2013). Activities such as visiting the library, reading to children and the number of books in the home are potentially enriching literacy experiences, they claim, and they predict children's later reading ability. This finding is backed up by several studies mentioned by the authors for example, Bus, van IJzendoorn & Pellegrini 1995; Davidse, Neeltjie, de Jong, Bus, Huijbregts, and Swaab 2011; Feinstein 2003; Melhuish, Phan, Sylva, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford & Taggart 2008; Niklas, Möllers & Schneider 2013 and Niklas &Schneider 2013. Brooker (2015) makes an interesting observation about quantitative research that finds a relationship between the number of books in the home and children's subsequent academic achievement. She argues that families' relationships with books are not captured by such research. For example, some families stock shelves of books and regard them as hallowed objects not to be touched by children while other families with no book stock might be literacy-rich, using magazines, newspapers and electronic devices. The application of quantitative measures to this scenario would deem the book- owning family to be literacy-rich and the other family literacy-poor. In-depth qualitative research studies on literacy practices are important in order to provide this more detailed, relevant information.

Although recent research points to *multiple* factors that cause under-achievement in literacy, earlier research, for example, Hart & Risley, (1995), focused on social class as a determining factor in establishing the extent of young children's vocabulary store. Their widely reported study revealed that there is an enormous gap in vocabulary experienced between children from welfare backgrounds, working class backgrounds and professional backgrounds at age three before they enter the school system. More than two years of observational studies enabled the researchers to calculate the amount of words per hour that each child was typically experiencing. They extrapolated from those figures that there is a 30 million word gap between what a child from a welfare background experiences and a child from a professional background experiences by the time that they reach age four.

Table 2.11 Hart and Risley (2003)

	Amount of words experienced by the child per hour	Amount of words experienced by the child over four years
Children from families dependent on welfare	616	13 million words
Children from working class backgrounds	1,251	26 million words
Children from families whose parents had professional occupations	2153	45 million words

Commenting on the Hart & Risley study, Fernald and Weisleder, (2015) noted that parents' verbal engagement with children also varied *within* the different socio-economic groups. Although they found that families from higher-income groups tended to talk more with their children than families from lower-income groups, they also found that some working-class families talked with their children as much as professionals, and some well-off families talked as little as those from lower-income groups. Fernald and Weisleder, (2015) noted other studies report similar findings with both English-speaking and Spanish-speaking families from different socio-economic groups (e.g. Hoff,2003; Huttenlocher et al., 2010; Weisleder,

Otero, Marchman, & Fernald, 2015). The authors concluded that parents' verbal engagement with their child is often a better predictor of that child's developing language proficiency than is family SES (Hoff, 2003; Weisleder et al., 2015). Hirsh-Pasek, Adamson, Bakeman, Tresch Owen, Golinkoff, Pace, Yust and Suma (2015) found in their study of expressive language of 60 families from low-income backgrounds that there was variation in results across the *full range of language outcome.* These findings raise questions about the link that is consistently made in the literature about the link between poor language outcomes and SES.

This is not to deny that social inequality continues to be a powerful determinant of outcomes for children. The education system in Ireland struggles to mitigate the effects of inequality caused by membership of a marginalised social class. The National Anti-poverty Strategy working group in Ireland described educational disadvantage as the result of an incompatibility between the school and non-school experiences of children (2001). There is dissonance between the experience of social disadvantage and the middle class world view generally upheld by schools (O' Brien as cited in Mulholland & Keogh, 1990). It is not surprising that children from marginalised groups are not finding social and cultural resonance in schools, given the predominantly middle-class teaching profession (Clancy,1982; Downes, 2014; Hanafin, 2004; Morris, 1997). Burns (2015) argues that the Irish government's DEIS scheme (Delivering equality of Opportunity in Schools) is focused on" changing the student and the school rather than challenging inequalities that are rooted in the social structure of society" (p.3). Research by Lareau (2000) echoes this. She refers to international studies that demonstrate it is very difficult to change patterns of class inequality in schooling (p.x). There needs to be a will to tackle structural inequality rather than treating its symptoms.

The variables related to the *processes* around interventions such as dialogic story-reading, mentioned above, merit closer scrutiny because they point to the reasons for the success or failure of interventions. An issue that affects all learning, not exclusively literacy learning, is the child's engagement and motivation. The following section briefly reviews some of the relevant literature.

Child engagement and motivation.

Developing an intrinsic motivation to read in children is important to ensure life-long reading (Gambrell, 2011). Motivation to read is fostered through various literacy practices. Baker, Scher & Mackler, (1997) found that children who have pleasant early life experiences of books are likely to likely to develop a desire to read frequently and broadly in subsequent years. When children experience pleasurable interactions with books, they realize the intrinsic enjoyment that can be derived from reading (McKenna, 1994). Children whose home experiences promote the view that literacy is a source of entertainment are likely to become intrinsically motivated to read (Baker, Serpell, & Sonnenschein, 1995). Baker et al. also found that shared storybook reading plays an important role in promoting reading motivations and that it is related to later interest in independent reading (p.71).

Most of the research on home influences, especially Guthrie (2004), says that high engagement leads to high achievement and the corollary is also true – low achievement leads to low level engagement. Children need to experience success in order to be motivated. Once motivated, success follows - "expertise spirals upward mainly with engaged participation" (2004, p. 8).

Guthrie (2004) found that engaged reading can overcome traditional barriers to reading achievement, including gender, parental education, and income. This is a key finding. By implication it means that a child can read his/her way out of disadvantage.

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Gambrell (1996) reviewed the research on the role of motivation in literacy development. She identified several factors that create motivated readers including: the availability of and sufficient numbers of appropriate books for children, expert teacher modelling of reading and sharing of his/her own reading material with children, allowing children to make choices in selecting books (there was a strong correlation between choice and the development of intrinsic motivation - see also Reynolds & Symons, 2001); using books with which children are already somewhat familiar, allowing children to discuss their choices and to share books with their peers and with adults. Sharing books used in school with family members resulted in supportive home literacy practices.

In 2011, Gambrell proposed seven research-based rules to ensure student motivation. They largely echo findings from her research review of 1996. Those that are additional to it are as follows: Reading tasks and activities should be relevant to children's lives; students should have opportunities to engage in sustained reading; students should have opportunities to make choices about how they engage in and complete literacy tasks as well as making choices in relation to book selection; students are more motivated to read when they have opportunities to be successful with challenging texts; and sincere teacher praise, encouragement and constructive feedback are more motivating to students than prizes (Lepper & Cordova, 1992).

Guthrie, Wigfield, Metsala, & Cox (1999) found that reading motivation predicts reading volume and reading motivation directly predicted reading comprehension performance. Motivation to read is therefore a key variable that influences attainment and it is triggered by active participation, agency for children, relevance to children's lives and scholarly integrity on the part of the person scaffolding.

The next section reviews the literature on dialogic story-reading interactions. The quality of interactions is a key factor in making a dialogic story-reading intervention successful (Fung, Chow & McBride, 2005).

Quality of interactions.

Hirsh-Pasek et al. (2015) found that the *quality* of parent-child communication with children at age two was a better predictor of expressive language one year later than were the quantity of words used or the warmth and sensitivity of the parent-child relationship. The specific activities used to measure quality were early mother-child joint engagement, activities around naming games and story-reading and the fluency and connectedness of exchanges between mother and child. The Marulis & Neuman (2010) study found that quality explicit instruction, discussing words in meaningful contexts and revisiting words were more effective than implicit instruction. They discovered that assessment that was specifically targeted on the intervention programme showed greater gains in studies than using standardized measures (Neuman, Neuman and Dwyer, 2011). Wasik and Bond, (2001) discovered that when children become accustomed to an interactive approach to story-reading and to extension activities that afford opportunities for further exposure to vocabulary learned during book reading, not only does their vocabulary improve but they are more forthcoming in asking teachers to explain words that they don't understand or asking questions around the story.

Senechal and Young (2008) conducted a meta-analytic review of 16 intervention studies to establish if parental involvement has a positive effect on children's reading acquisition. The authors acknowledge the effect of socio-economic status of parents, educational aspirations (e.g., Dandy & Nettelbeck, 2002), and the quality of the mother's language (e.g., Yont, Snow, & Vernon-Feagans, 2003) as influences on children's learning

but, they state, these factors were not the focus of their review (p. 882). In this study of 16 studies, parental involvement in children's literacy was divided into 3 types of involvement: (i) Parents asked to read to children (ii) Parents asked to listen to children reading (iii) Parents trained to do literacy exercises with their children. It was found that general parent involvement with their children had no effect on children's literacy improvement but that giving parents *specific* techniques to practise with their children had an effect that giving general information did not. Toomey, (1993) found that providing parents with simple but specific coaching techniques in relation to reading showed greater benefit s for children at risk of reading failure compared to providing parents with general information. It seems from the three examples above that specific, rather than general strategies for supporting children's language development work best.

Trivette and Dunst, (2007) found that *how* one reads to children seems to matter more than the sheer amount of reading in terms of developing reading skills. This finding is echoed by Schickedanz & McGee (2010) in their close analysis of the 19 studies used in the NELP report, 2008. An earlier study by Dickinson & Smith (1994) examined pre-school teachers' styles of reading aloud and identified three particular styles: co-constructive, didactic-interactional and performance. They found that children whose teachers were identified as using a performance style had the best vocabulary outcomes a year later when they were in primary school (McKeown & Beck, 2006). Another study by Dickonson & Tabors (2001) identified a co-constructive style of interaction as being particularly beneficial linguistically and intellectually for children. A large number of oral language support strategies listed and described in Table 2.7 (see p.59 this study) are identified by Dickinson and Tabors as intrinsic to a co-constructive style of shared reading. Robertson and Reese, (2017) found that children's language and literacy skills were poorer when parents used lower level, descriptive

strategies, and richer when parents used higher level, prediction/inference strategies during book reading.

Haden, Reese and Fivush (1996) conducted a longitudinal study on mothers' reading style based on their extra-textual comments during shared storybook reading sessions. They categorised mothers' comments into three types: Describers, Collaborators, and Comprehenders. When they analysed the effects of each type, they found that Describers displayed significantly higher amounts of descriptions and elaborative vocabulary, Collaborators made more confirmations of their children's contributions and Comprehenders produced more high-demand extra-textual talk to develop their children's knowledge of print concepts and literacy. The children of these mothers were tested again one year later and they were found to have developed different linguistic advantages depending on the category to which their mother belonged:

> Specifically, children of "comprehender" mothers scored highest on receptive vocabulary and comprehension measures at age six, while children of "collaborator" mothers scores highest on a letter recognition test. In contrast, children of "describer" mothers scored significantly lower on measures of receptive vocabulary, word recognition and story comprehension than children of parents belonging to the other two stylistic groups. Put together, these findings suggest that adult reading style may significantly influence children's later literacy success (as cited in Shuler, 2012).

Some studies found that the quality of interactions varied depending on who was delivering the dialogic reading intervention. Kaiser & McLeod, (2010) found that the most successful mediators of dialogic story reading were researchers. It could be speculated that this is because researchers are focused solely on the research task whereas parents and teachers tend to multi-task. The NELP (2008) report found that there was no difference

between the success of literacy interventions using teachers as the supporting agents and using parents as supporting agents. Both interventions were successful. It did not seem to matter who delivered the intervention; children benefitted in both instances (p.220). In summary, the key messages in relation to interactions are that how one reads to a child matters. Different styles support different aspects of children's language. Conscious, explicit work on discussing words in meaningful contexts and revisiting words was more effective than working in a less explicit manner.

Fidelity to strategies.

Research suggests that fidelity of implementation of an intervention leads to gains for children (Hamre, Justice, Pianta, Kilday, Sweeney, Downer & Leach, 2010). "Conversely, low quality implementation fidelity is a key cause of limited effects" (Dickinson, Freiberg & Barnes, 2011).

Dickinson, Freiberg & Barnes, (2011) study focused on teachers. They were concerned at how language and literacy interventions produce limited success in relation to improved outcomes for children. They discovered that there was a problem in relation to fidelity of implementation of interventions and a problem in relation to methodology; studies clustered together and analysed according to effect sizes may have averaged out the effects of the best programmes. They found that the problem of fidelity of implementation relates to issues around professional development. Ingrained practices are difficult to change, they assert, and to change teacher practice requires intensive support in the form of in-class coaching. They found that interventions that are most effective are those that include in-class support and where the researcher is actively involved in classrooms. Hamre, Justice et al., (2010) examined programme fidelity by dividing their focus into three areas: dosage [frequency], adherence and quality of delivery. They examined these areas in order to

determine if they were associated with children's growth in language and literacy skills across the preschool. They found that teachers complied in respect of dosage and adherence but the use of high quality teaching, (described as the use of evidence-based teacher–child interactions for teaching literacy and language), was much lower. High quality delivery and longer lasting activities (dosage) were associated with significantly greater gains in early literacy skills across the preschool year.

Marulis and Neuman (2010) conducted a meta-analysis looking at the effects of vocabulary intervention on young children's word learning. They conducted moderator analyses to try to explain the disparity of variances in effect sizes among studies. They found that when they trained teachers to enact the intervention with fidelity, effect sizes were larger. Berman & McLaughlin (1976) said that "the bridge between a promising idea and the impact on students is implementation, but innovations are seldom implemented as intended" (as cited in O' Donnell 2008, p.33). Project fidelity therefore, is an area that merits attention.

Affect.

When discussing quality interactions, affect cannot be ignored, that is, the relationship between the people involved in the dialogic interaction. Hirsh-Pasek et al. (2015) claim there is long-standing evidence that warm, responsive parenting and stimulating engagement between parent and child predicts positive language outcomes for the child. They mention several studies to support their claim: Leigh, Nievar, & Nathans, 2011; The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, (NICHD), Early Child Care Research Network (2006) study and Tamis-LeMonda, Briggs, McClowry, & Snow, 2009. Hedges and Cullen (2012) describe intersubjectivity, an indispensable component of dialogic interactions, as comprising of a combination of affect and cognition. Affect is thus at the heart of dialogic relationships. Boyd and Markarian (2011) talk about the importance of "sincere listening".

There is evidence to suggest that a number of aspects of parenting, such as the quality of parent-child attachment, and the way in which control and warmth are combined to form a parenting style, have had strong significant effects on children's later psychological adjustment (Carr, 2006).

Kassow (2006) talks about attachment theory at work when she says that repeated interactions with parents, such as shared book reading, help children to develop a mental model of their parents and this influences their expectations, responses, and future interactions with parents. Bus (1993) also wrote about how reading to children strengthens the emotional attachment between child and caregiver.

Terms such as 'responsiveness' (Landry, Smith, Swank, & Guttentag, (2008); White, 2016) 'reciprocity' (NCCA, 2009), 'intersubjectivity' (Hedges & Cullen, 2012; Racionero and Padros, 2010) and 'relational' (Boyd, Mac Neill and Sullivan (2006); Rule, 2011) crop up again and again in connection with dialogism. These terms suggest that affect is at the core of the dialogical story-reading relationship and may be why parents could be said to be uniquely positioned to engage successfully in dialogic story-reading with their children.

Frequency.

The most fundamental issue relating to the impact of reading on children is frequency according to Dickinson, Griffith, Golinkoff and Hirsh-Pasek , (2012). The difference in frequency with which children had books read to them best explained the differences in their subsequent achievement (Bus, 2002, p.186). However, longitudinally, the association between sheer frequency of reading and children's language and literacy development diminishes (Zucker, Cabell, Pentimonti & Kaderavek, 2013).

Length of reading episodes.

Trivette, Dunst & Gorman's (2010) meta-analysis of twenty-one studies reported that the longest reading episode from all its studies was fifteen minutes. Effects are enhanced for shared book reading strategies with young children when the reading episode lasts more than five minutes. The majority of reading episodes lasted ten minutes.

Rereading the same text.

Young children benefit from repeated exposure to the same book (Robins and Ehri, 1994; Sénéchal et al, 1995; Sénéchal, 1997; Verhallen, Bus, & de Jong, 2006). Rereading a text helps children make sense of decontextualized language (Beck & Mc Keown, 2001). Decontextualized language is more challenging for children because they are working on an abstract level. By returning to the text over and over again, meaning is clarified for children as they grow in familiarity with the text.

Rereading a text facilitates word learning (Horst, Parsons & Bryan, 2011). Horst et al. found that children who were read the same stories repeatedly were very accurate on both immediate recall and on retention tasks (2011). Rereading a text also helps children to realise that the source of the information they need is in the text and that it is permissible (not cheating) to use the text to clarify ideas (McKeown & Beck, 2006).

Familiarity with books increased toddlers' responsiveness to those books even when mothers did not alter the reading strategies they used each time they read it. (Fletcher and Finch, 2014). Children exhibit more control of discussion the more experience they have of the book (Bus & Sulzby, 2000). Slightly contradictory findings come from Trivette, Dunst & Gorman (2010): "When using shared book reading strategies with young children, the effects are enhanced when the episodes last more than 5 minutes and more than a few books are read". The authors recommend "However, it is important to remember that when a child's

interest in the book starts to fade, it is best to try another book or terminate the episode" (p.3). This recommendation causes a dilemma. It seems self-evidently true that it is counter-productive to force a child to continue with a book in which interest has been lost. If abundant research suggests that repeating a reading produces positive learning outcomes for children, it seems to be important to re-use texts. The problem is that it requires a skilled professional to be able to re-use a text and make it continually interesting for the child. This points to the importance of focusing on techniques to use a story in multiple innovative ways with the purpose of developing children's oral language. This might be challenging for adults who are not professionally qualified teachers or who have not attended induction training in dialogic reading strategies.

Inducting parents in dialogic reading strategies.

Arnold et al. (1994) studied the benefits of using video tape instruction to train adults in the use of dialogic reading. At the end of a four week intervention, they found that children in the video training group had greater expressive vocabulary scores than did children in the regular reading group.

Huebner and Meltzoff, (2005) conducted a study whereby they compared instructional methods for training parents in dialogic reading. They found that few parents read with a dialogic style prior to instruction. This finding resonates throughout the literature on dialogic story-reading, for example, Dickinson & Keebler, (1989); Dickinson & Smith, (1994); Huebner, (2000) and Hammet, Van Kleek & Huberty, (2003). Huebner and Meltzoff, (2005) also found that instruction brought about a four-fold increase in parents' dialogic reading behaviours and had significant positive effects on children's language use (including number of words and mean length of utterances) during shared reading. When the data were stratified by parents' education and instructional method (in-person vs. self-

instruction), there was a significant difference favouring in-person instruction as the more efficacious method of instruction, especially for parents with high school education.

Huebner & Payne, (2010) provided "the first evidence that brief instruction in interactive reading has an enduring effect on parents' reading style. Parents taught to use dialogic reading behaviours when their children were ages 2 or 3 years continued to use this reading style more than 2 years later. The frequency of dialogic behaviours among those with prior instruction was nearly double that of parents with no prior instruction. "Analysis controlling for maternal education, child's age, and frequency of family reading found parents with prior instruction used on average 90% more dialogic reading behaviours than parents without instruction".

Standardisation of practice.

Arnold, Lonigan, Whitehurst & Epstein, (1994) highlighted the importance of a standardised approached to training parents in dialogic reading –

These differences in mothers' behaviour during home reading sessions in the present study   highlight potential confounding effects of an intervention administered by multiple trainers. Despite the fact that both trainers were providing the same program in the same location, mothers' reading styles were altered in different ways. The standardization of the video training package avoids the potential confounding effects involved in using multiple trainers. Every mother who viewed the tape was exposed to identical descriptions, explanations, and examples of the key components of dialogic reading. It is possible that this standardization resulted in more reliable effects than did direct training, and consequently, more pronounced effects on children's language were found in the videotape group (Arnold, Lonigan et al., 1994, p.241).

It could be argued that the delivery of a standardised training package flies in the face of the principles underpinning socio-cultural theory. Socio-cultural theory emphasizes the importance of context and altering the level of support for the learner according to the learner's needs. Research demonstrates the success of one-to-one coaching and this is attributed to the quality of the relationship between coach and client (Downer, LoCasale-Crouch, Hamre & Pianta, 2009).

Time spent on training.

Trivette, Dunst and Gorman (2010) claim that it takes a minimal amount of training (less than one hour) to train adults in shared reading skills that affect children's language development. Not only that, but, the type of training, (individual, group or video) does not seem to affect children's language development outcomes. This finding comes from a meta-analysis (twenty-one studies) of the effects of joint book reading on the language development of young children.

In summary, Table 2.12 lists some key findings from the interventions described.

Table 2.12 Summary of Key Findings Relevant to Dialogic Reading Interventions

Explicit instruction works best for children (Marulis and Neuman, 2010)
Specific advice with particular strategies for supporting children's language learning works better than general advice (Marulis & Neuman, 2010; Senechal & Young, 2008; Wasik & Bond, 2001).
Adults need to be trained with regard to programme fidelity, (Marulis and Neuman, 2010).
Adults need to focus on their performance as readers; the quality of their reading affects child outcomes (McKeown & Beck, 2006; Schickedanz & Mc Gee, 2010)
Training in dialogic story reading is effective and enduring (Huebner & Payne, 2010)
Rereading a text helps children make sense of decontextualized language (McKeown & Beck, 2006).

Individual child characteristics must be considered.

Some evidence suggests that individual child characteristics may influence children's ability to profit from shared-reading experiences. For instance, experimental and correlational studies show that children with more initial language benefit most from rich vocabulary explanations (Coyne et al., 2009) or more challenging, inferential questioning, whereas children with less initial language benefit most from a more literal reading style (Reese & Cox, 1999; Zucker, Justice, Piasta, & Kaderavek, 2010). Other correlational studies suggest that only inferential (rather than literal) conversations are beneficial regardless of pre-k children's initial skill levels (Hindman et al., 2008). Dunphy, (2012), argues that a differentiated approach for children is always necessary and dialogic reading programmes are no exception.

The oral language skills of kindergarten children as well as children at risk for language and literacy impairments benefited less from interactive parent-child book reading (Mol et al., 2008). Mol et al, (2009) speculate that this could be because dialogic reading is generally not observed with families at risk (e.g., Bus & van IJzendoorn, 1995; Heath, 1982; Ninio, 1980). Another reason put forward was that families with a low level of education might have difficulty implementing training techniques. This point resonates throughout the literature, i.e. that middle class families benefit more from story reading interventions than do lower income families. However, this could be that training is not specific to children's age or that training is not sufficiently specific. There is research that demonstrates that the more targeted the training is, the more effective it is (Neuman, Newman & Dwyer, 2011). Goldenberg and Gallimore (1995) maintain that if teachers show sensitivity towards parents' feelings of marginalisation and intimidation and if they are respectful of cultural traditions, then "schools can capitalise on the home resources of even the poorest parents to help children learn" (Lareau, 2000, p.xii). Literature explored for this review seems to be sending

a consistent message that generalisations cannot be made about children's achievement based on their social class. For example, as mentioned earlier, Fernald & Weisleder (2015) found that verbal engagement varied within all socio-economic groups and Hirsh-Pasek et al. (2015) found when examining children's expressive language through the lens of social class that there were variations in results across the full range of language outcomes. It is parental involvement in their child's literacy practices that is the most influential factor in a child's later success, more so than variables such as social class, family size and level of parental education (McCoy & Cole, 2011). In relation to that involvement, the quality and quantity of words spoken to the baby in the first three years of life is a stronger predictor of a child's later success than is socioeconomic status, level of parental education, income, or ethnicity (Cartmill, Armstrong, Gleitman, Goldin-Meadowa Medina & Trueswell (2013).

The focus will now shift to look at research on evaluation. A definition of evaluation will be attempted, followed by an examination of the main theoretical paradigms that inform evaluation. The final section will look at evaluation approaches (e.g. Stufflebeam's (2001) Context, Input, Process, Product model) situated in their various paradigms (see table 2.14).

Research on Evaluation

Defining evaluation research.

Definitions of evaluation research will vary according to the lens through which it is being studied. Stufflebeam (2001) attempts a succinct definition which, he suggests, should be acceptable to evaluators from all perspectives: "evaluation means a study designed and conducted to assist some audience to assess an object's merit and worth" (p.11). Trochim, Donnelly & Arora (2016) point out that there are types of evaluations that do not necessarily result in an assessment of worth or merit such as descriptive studies, implementation analyses, and formative evaluations. Formative evaluations, for example, strengthen or

progress the programme being evaluated. They help form and improve the programme by examining the delivery of the program, the quality of its implementation, and the assessment of the organizational context, personnel, procedures, inputs, and so on (Trochim et al., 2016). However, it could be argued that, in assessing what improvements need to be made in a programme, some judgement of merit or worth or value has to be made. Improvement cannot be made unless there is an assumption or judgement made about the quality of the programme that already exists. Fournier (2005) says that "it is the value feature that distinguishes evaluation from other types of inquiry, such as basic science research, clinical epidemiology, investigative journalism or public polling" (p.140, as cited in Mertens, 2015).

Robson, (2011) asserts that evaluation research is "essentially indistinguishable from other forms of research in terms of design, data collection and methods of analysis" (p.178). Where evaluation and research differ, according to Greene, (2000), is that evaluation is intertwined with politics. An evaluation may have been commissioned to prove a political point, to confirm that a plan of action taken by government was correct. Stufflebeam (2001) calls this pseudo-evaluation, which, he claims, produces "invalid or incomplete evaluations" (p.11). Evaluations may also be explicitly situated in a particular political context, whereby the goal of the evaluator, for example, is social justice or human rights for the evaluand (Mertens and Wilson, 2012). Many would agree that it is impossible to separate politics and research or politics and evaluation and that an appreciation and understanding of this is imperative to the conduct of sound research and evaluation. It is the reason why matters such as credibility, trustworthiness and validity (explored later in this chapter) are indispensable to the research and evaluation process. It is also the reason why the researcher's paradigmatic position must be explicitly stated (see chapter 3 for this).

Yarbrough, Shulha, Hopson and Caruthers (2011) do not agree with Robson's view that evaluation research and other forms of research are almost indistinguishable. They acknowledge that both forms of research share the same tools, instruments and methodologies but they identify, for example, the focus on value in an evaluation and also on orientation to stakeholder's needs as a distinguishing feature of evaluation (p.xxvi). They use a set of five standards – Utility (Use, usefulness, influence and misuse (p.xxviii); Feasibility (effects of context, culture, costs, politics, power, resource availability (p.xxviii); Propriety (moral, ethical and legal concerns relating to evaluation (p.xxviii); Accuracy (discusses reliability, validity, and reduction of error and bias (p.xxviii); and Accountability (uses an amalgam of utility, feasibility, propriety and accuracy standards to achieve accountability(p.xxviii). The application of these five standards to the evaluation serve to help determine the quality of the evaluation. (See Table 3.8 (Propriety standard) and appendix W (Utility standard) for an application of selected standards in relation to the current evaluation study.)

Rossi, Lipsey & Freeman, (2004), see evaluation research as applied social research. They described evaluation research as "the use of social research methods to systematically investigate the effectiveness of social intervention programs in ways that are adapted to their political and organisational environments and are designed to inform social action to improve social conditions" (p.16). This definition demonstrates sensitivity towards social and political context and it acknowledges the aim of the evaluation as wishing to improve social conditions. The 'systematic investigation of effectiveness' phrase could reasonably be interpreted as applying to both formative and summative evaluations. Investigation of effectiveness is part of the process of exploring how things work.

Defining evaluation research is not straight forward. By taking a look next at some of the different perspectives that inform evaluation, it makes it clearer why a definition of evaluation might be contested.

Perspectives on evaluation.

Mertens (2015) describe evaluation research as a major genre of systematic inquiry that borrows and enhances the methodologies developed in the research community (p.52). Mertens identifies four major research paradigms: Postpositivism, Constructivism Transformative theory and Pragmatism. Guba (1990) describes each of these paradigms by interrogating their ontological, epistemological and methodological positions. It is important to understand the beliefs that inform each of these paradigms because they influence what, how and why research is conducted. Thus the ontological, epistemological and methodological positions of each of the four paradigms identified by Mertens (2015) are outlined in table 2.13.

Table 2.13 Four Research Paradigms and their Ontological, Epistemological and Methodological positions.

	Postpositivism	**Constructivist**	**Transformative**	**Pragmatic**
Ontology	Critical realism-reality exists but can never be fully apprehended. (Guba,1990, p.23)	Relativist. There are multiple constructions of reality	Critical realist. There is an objective reality. When false consciousness is remedied, reality can be transformed through action.	Not preoccupied with metaphysical matters. Accepts that there is a single reality and that all individuals have 'their own take' on what that reality is (Mertens, 2015).

Epistemolgy	Aspires towards objectivity but recognising that absolute objectivity is not possible	Subjectivist. Findings are the result of interactions between the inquirer and inquired	Subjectivist because inquiry is mediated by the subject's value system.	Researcher studies with diverse communities to understand a problem and take 'intelligent action' (Mertens, 2015, p.38). Researcher is not a distant observer but studies what is of interest and value to him/her. Utilises results in ways that suit the researcher's value system (Tashakkori & Teddle, 1998 as cited in Mertens, 2015).
Methodology	Primarily quantitative. Focus on triangulation of data from multiple sources to combat inability to be objective. Recognition of tensions re internal and external validity, precision versus richness and discovery versus verification.	Primarily qualitative. Individual constructions are elicited and then combined and contrasted dialectically with the aim of finding consensus.	Dialogic, transformative. "Eliminate false consciousness and energise and facilitate transformation" (Guba,1990, p.25).	Mixed Methods. Researcher chooses methods or combination of methods best suited to answering their research questions.

Adapted from Guba, (1990, pp.23-27) and Mertens (2015).

A definition of Evaluation from a post-positivist perspective might be to measure the extent to which the aims and purpose of the evaluation have been achieved chiefly through quantitative research methods. A definition of evaluation from a transformative perspective might be to work with the community, using a cyclical mixed methods model (Mertens, 2007) to gather all views on the workings and effectiveness of the programme and to use data collected for the purposes of advancing social justice and achieving some form of political

self-realisation for participants. The paradigmatic framing of evaluation thus crucially influences definitions of evaluation.

Types of evaluation/evaluation approaches.

There are many types of evaluation described in the literature, emanating from a variety of the theoretical perspectives, as just outlined. They cannot all be described and analysed here but a selection will be studied briefly in Table 2.14. Stufflebeam (2001) identified what he considered the most worthwhile approaches as follows: Client-Centered/Responsive, Utilization-Focused, Decision/Accountability, Consumer-Oriented, Constructivist, Case Study, Outcome/Value-Added Assessment, and Accreditation, and also the Deliberative Democratic evaluation approach.

Table 2.14 Some Evaluation Approaches

Post-positivist models	Constructivist models	Transformative models	Pragmatic models
Tyler's objectives-based evaluation model (1942). It determines whether programme's objectives have been achieved (Stufflebeam, 2001). Not concerned with programme process	Stake's responsive evaluation compares an observed value against a standard (Mertens, 2015). Responsive evaluation focuses more on the activities of the programme and being responsive to key issues identified by stakeholders. The evaluation design develops slowly and changes and adapts as demanded by the evaluation context (Stake, 1996).	Deliberative democratic evaluation – a participatory evaluation model (Howe & Ashcraft, 2005). Emphasizes developing political practices and institutions that mitigate power imbalances among citizens so as to permit their free and equal participation (Howe & Ashcraft, 2005, pp. 2275-2276). Predicated on 3 ideas: 1.Inclusion of all relevant interests; 2. Dialogue that establishes the interests of stakeholders but also subjects those views to scrutiny and 3. Deliberation that involves reaching evaluative conclusions, including value-laden ones but they should be evidence based and require genuine reciprocal cognitive engagement (Howe & Ashcraft, 2005).	Context, Input, Process, Product (CIPP) model (Stufflebeam, 2001). CIPP is classified in the pragmatic paradigm because although it uses programme theory, its overarching emphasis is on the practice elements of the evaluation (Stockmann & Meyer, 2013).
Provus' discrepancy evaluation model (1966) resembles Stufflebeam's CIPP. It looks at four areas of evaluation: Programme definition, programme installation,		Inclusive Evaluation (Mertens, 2003). "A systematic investigation of the merit or worth of a program to facilitate social change" (Mertens, 2015, p.58).	Utilisation –focused program evaluation (Patton, 2008). An evaluation should be judged on its usefulness to its intended users.

programme process and programme product (Hernandez, 2015).		Involves stakeholders in methodological decisions.	
Theory-based evaluation: Evaluator uses the conception of the programmes's structure, functions and procedures appropriate to attain its goals to frame a plan or logic model for the programme (Stockmann & Meyer, 2013).		Empowerment evaluation (Fetterman& Wandersman, 2007). Can be practical i.e focuses on programme improvement or transformative, whereby participants conduct their own evaluation with an outside facilitator (Mertens, 2015).	
Case study evaluations. They break apart and analyse and explain a programme rather than assess merit and worth. A case study uses qualitative and quantitative methods, usually favouring qualitiative methods (Stufflebeam, 2001). It appears that a case study might cross into a number of paradigms, i.e. it could be multi-paradigmatic.	Case study evaluations. They break apart and analyse and explain a programme rather than assess merit and worth. A case study uses qualitative and quantitative methods, usually favouring qualitiative methods (Stufflebeam, 2001). It appears that a case study might cross into a number of paradigms, i.e. it could be multi-paradigmatic.		Case study evaluations. They break apart and analyse and explain a programme rather than assess merit and worth. A case study uses qualitative and quantitative methods, usually favouring qualitiative methods (Stufflebeam, 2001). It appears that a case study might cross into a number of paradigms, i.e. it could be multi-paradigmatic.
			Improvement/ Accountability Oriented Evaluation Approaches are both summative and formative. Focuses on programme improvement and programme merit and worth. Inclusive. Stakeholders are involved throughout the

	evaluation process. Multiple methods used. Objectivist, assuming an underlying reality. Stufflebeam (2001).
	The Decision/Accountability approach is very like the Improvement/Accountability evaluation approach. "It aids decision making at all program levels and stresses improvement. It also presents a rationale and framework of information for helping program personnel be accountable for their program decisions and actions" (Stufflebeam, 2001, p.58). Involves all stakeholders, Uses Qualitative and Quantitative methods and attends to both process and outcomes
	Consumer-oriented evaluation approach. Uses formative and summative evaluation, beginning with formative evaluation. Focus on improving the programme for the consumer. Determines merit and worth of programme. Requires a strong independent, competent and credible evaluator Objectivist. Assumes an underlying reality. (Stufflebeam, 2001).

Stufflebeam (2001) claims that evaluation approaches are showing a strong orientation to stakeholder involvement and the use of multiple methods. He adds that when the approaches listed are measured against evaluation standards, the approaches that come out on top are decision/accountability, utilization-based, client-centered/responsive, consumer-oriented, case study, deliberative democratic, constructivist, accreditation, and outcome/value-added assessment. The approaches described in Table 2.14 are not without their disadvantages. For example, an objectives-based evaluation model ignores process (Hernandez, 2015); theory-driven approaches can be too constrictive structurally, thus not allowing for unanticipated outcomes or side-effects (Coryn, Noakes, Westine & Schroter, 2011); empowerment evaluation is accused of being an ideology rather than an evaluation approach (Smith, 2007 as cited in Mertens, 2015); the deliberative element of democratic deliberative evaluation can be challenging to operationalise (Howe & Ashcraft, 2005) and the consumer-oriented evaluation can be so independent from practitioners that ultimately it may not assist them to better serve consumers (Stufflebeam, 2001). Evaluation approaches must be chosen carefully with cognisance being taken of the aims and purpose of the evaluation, the social and cultural context of the project and the availability of resources and expertise (Hansen, 2005). This evaluation study used multiple evaluation approaches, considered in detail in chapter three.

Conclusion

This chapter opened with an examination of perspectives on learning theory with a particular focus on the socio-cultural perspective which underpins *The Storytime Project* and this evaluation study. It then looked at literature on language and literacy learning and concluded there is a relationship of interconnectedness and reciprocity between language and literacy skills – one feeds into the effectiveness of the other. The primary focus of language

and literacy is on meaning-making and the literature also examined how meaning-making is achieved with the support of a more able other. The review then looked at oral language development and curriculum in Ireland, finding Aistear and the new Primary Language Curriculum (2015) aligned with the latest research on quality pedagogy, advocating co-construction, playful learning and dialogic relationships. An examination of decontextualized language found story-reading an ideal context for its development because narrative requires the use of abstract thinking. A discontinuity between the language of home and school was found to be prevalent amongst children from marginalised social groups, the demographic of *The Storytime Project*. A strong focus on decontextualized language was thus advocated in order to avoid the perpetuation of social hierarchies by schools. The review found parental involvement in children's learning to be beneficial for both the children and the participating adults. Furthermore it found *skilful* adult interactions to be important, because skilful interactions improve children's oral language, with children adjusting their discourse to match the level of discourse of the adult. The review explored different types of shared reading, including dialogic story-reading and reviewed the related literature. This was necessary in order to distinguish dialogic story-reading from other forms of shared reading. The literature indicated that children's oral language is improved by the practice of dialogic story-reading. There is also consensus in the literature that dialogic story-reading can be more effective than other forms of shared reading in producing positive learning outcomes for children. There is evidence that training parents in dialogic training techniques and using examples of good practice on video footage (a practice used by *The Storytime Project*) is successful. But the strongest messages coming from the literature are the importance of interactivity and the centrality of quality teacher-child (or adult-child interactions) in order to support children's oral language development and higher order thinking skills. The adult must be skilled and must know how to develop children's ability to predict, infer, compare,

elaborate, summarise, retell, project, hypothesise and reason. The review looked at these and other strategies that are used in dialogic story-reading and noted the effectiveness of those strategies as reported in the literature. The review also addressed the sociological factors that impact on the effectiveness of dialogic reading such as poverty and social exclusion. In so doing, it critiqued some studies in relation to their tendency towards deficit thinking. Finally, the chapter looked at definitions and models of research evaluation and argued that an understanding and awareness of the paradigmatic origins of evaluation is crucially important in choosing an evaluation model to suit the evaluation purpose.

<center>**CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**</center>

This methodology chapter is presented as follows: It begins by outlining the aims of the evaluation study. This is followed by an examination of the theoretical framework of the evaluation study which culminates in juxtaposing the theoretical framework for the evaluation study with that of *The Storytime Project*. The researcher's paradigmatic position is then charted. The multiple evaluation approaches used in the evaluation are examined. The chapter proceeds to focus on the research design for the study: an internal process evaluation using a mixed methods strategy. Rossi, Lipsey and Freeman's (2004) Programme Evaluation Theory is then described and applied to illustrate *The Storytime Project's* desired impact, the structure and sequence of the intervention and the organisational plan behind the project. The research sample and the quantitative and qualitative data collection strategies employed are outlined. The organisation and analysis of the data are documented. Issues related to the research process such as ethics, reliability, validity, sampling, recruitment of participants will be examined as part of the scrutiny of research. This chapter also outlines the philosophical stance of the researcher and describes how the dual role of the author as researcher and as director of the project was addressed through use of multiple data sources and a mixed methods approach.

<center>**Aim of the Evaluation Study**</center>

The current study was designed as an evaluation of a parent-child dialogic story reading project called *The Storytime Project*. It was designed as an internal process evaluation using a mixed methods research strategy. The aim of the study was to evaluate the significance of the project to the participants and to gain insight into how the project might be improved by engaging in depth with the processes involved in running the project.

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The Storytime Project is a home-school intervention aimed at improving the oral language competency, particularly children's use of decontextualized language, of children aged 3-5 in an area of socio-economic disadvantage. The project also aims to support parents in reading stories to their 3-5 year old children. Specifically the evaluation explores teachers' and early childhood practitioners experience of implementing the processes of The Storytime Project (e.g. recruitment, attendance at induction and graduation, supporting parents in their dialogic interactions with their children and introducing parents to the library); children's use of decontextualized language as described by their parents; parent-child dialogic engagement around story reading; parental knowledge of children's developing knowledge of books and reading; parental confidence and attitude in relating with their children's school or Early Childhood setting; parental confidence and attitude in relating with their local library; children's motivation and engagement as perceived by significant adults in the project and children's reported experience of the project.

The rationale for The Storytime Project and the reasons for conducting an evaluation of the project were outlined in the introductory chapter. An ongoing research project called Preparing for Life (2008), conducted by The Geary Institute UCD on behalf of the Northside Partnership group, identified the need to support families in the Northside Partnership area in providing experiences for their children that would enable them to be ready for school life. The Storytime Project is one initiative that was devised to respond to this need. It is timely, four and a half years into the operation of The Storytime Project, to review its processes and reported effects.

The purpose of an evaluation is to inform action (Rossi et al, 2004). An evaluation of The Storytime Project required that the views of participants were sought and used to inform future iterations of the project to make it more effective and more beneficial to participants.

Theoretical Framework of the Evaluation Study

The next section will look at Freire's and Bakhtin's influences on both the project and on the evaluation of the project. (Socio-cultural theory has already been examined in the literature review so it will not be re-examined here.) It will culminate in juxtaposing the theoretical framework for *The Storytime Project* and the evaluation of the project in Table 3.1.

Paulo Freire is a key theorist whose thinking contributes to the theoretical framework for this evaluation study. Freire's thinking has already been considered extensively (see literature review, p30-31,p.48-49, p.52). His ideas about dialogue and about literacy as social practice, which advocate respectively for learner autonomy and for a focus on the social and cultural factors affecting the learner, influence both the modus operandi of the evaluation study and *The Storytime Project*. Freirean influences on this internal process evaluation are as follows: The inclusion of all stakeholders in the evaluation process; the focus on evaluating the project as a dynamic, evolving entity in process; the use of multiple data sources – individual interviews, focus groups, written feedback from the project and children's drawings – to represent the voices of parents and children. Finally, the consideration of social and cultural factors influencing the lives of all stakeholders led to thoughtful decision-making around choice of venues for interviews and around the style and tone of interactions with stakeholders. Freirean influences on *The Storytime Project* include the dialogic relationship between parent and child; the focus on the child's experience in relation to the story being read; and the emphasis on horizontal relationships (Bartlett, 2008) between all stakeholders in the project.

Bakhtin's writing on dialogism also contributes to the theoretical framework for this evaluation study. A Russian philosopher and literary theorist, Bakhtin's (1895 – 1975)

dialogic theory suggests that we gain knowledge of self, other and the world through dialogic interaction. We become ourselves through dialogic engagement with others. The self is never absolutely known. This is Bakhtin's concept of unfinalizability (Bakhtin, 1984). What is considered to be true is arrived at through many voices. It is not the case that a conglomeration of opinions fused makes the truth but that through a serious engagement of ideas based on a real life context, a particular truth is reached that is valid for that time and context. Bakhtin (1984) calls this polyphony, meaning - many voices. Each utterance carries with it addressivity and answerability, that is, it is addressed to a particular person in a particular context and it is framed in anticipation of a response. Utterances carry the remnants of the past and the seeds of the future and their meaning evolves with time, politics and context. So, for Bakhtin, truth, is contingent.

On language itself, Bakhtin sees it as dynamic and ever changing, always influenced by historical, cultural and political context and being continuously shaped and developed in interactions between people. Words in language belong to nobody but they are used by particular individuals, in particular ways (Bakhtin, 1986). Language is populated with the intentions of others (Irvine, 2012). "The word lives, as it were, on the boundary between its own context and another, alien, context." (Bakhtin, 1981; 284).

Dialogism is the characteristic epistemological mode of a world dominated by heteroglossia [context]. Everything means, is understood, as a part of a greater whole - there is a constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others. Which will affect the other, how it will do so, and in what degree, is what is actually settled at the moment of utterance. This dialogic imperative, mandated by the pre-existence of the language world relative to any of its current inhabitants, insures that there can be no actual monologue. One may, like a primitive tribe that knows only its own limits, be deluded

into thinking there is one language, or one may, as grammarians, certain political figures and normative framers of "literary languages" do, seek in a sophisticated way to achieve a unitary language. In both cases the unitariness is relative to the overpowering force of heteroglossia, and thus dialogism (Bakhtin, 1981, p.426).

According to Bakhtin, context dictates meaning, therefore every interaction is unique and new. Bakhtin describes this in his Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics -

Nothing conclusive has yet taken place in the world, the ultimate word of the world and about the world has not yet been spoken, the world is open and free, everything is still in the future and will always be in the future. (p.166).

The differences identified earlier (p.24-25) between a dialogic and dialectic theoretical position notwithstanding, Bakhtin's thinking resonates with a socio-cultural world view. A socio-cultural world view also permeates this evaluation study and *The Storytime Project*, particularly in relation to its emphasis on the importance of context and of social interaction. The chief influence of Bakhtin on *The Storytime Project* is on the dialogic relationships between parent and child. An attitude of reciprocity and habits of listening to and building on the child's contribution to the dialogue are central to the project. Bakhtin's influence on the evaluation study are evidenced by use of the same habits and attitudes in data collection.

Because of the dual focus of this study, that is, on *The Storytime Project* and on the evaluation of *The Storytime Project*, it may be helpful to look at a theoretical framework for both entities, illustrating resonances and coherence between the two. Table 3.1 below juxtaposes the theoretical framework for *The Storytime Project* with the evaluation of *The Storytime Project* .

Table 3.1 Theories Informing *The Storytime Project* and the Evaluation of *The Storytime Project*

Theories informing *The Storytime Project* and the Evaluation of *The Storytime Project*

	The Storytime Project	**Evaluation of *The Storytime Project***
Influence of Socio-cultural theory	1. Emphasis on dialogic relationships between parent and child and between educator and parent. 2. Emphasis on parent voice and parent feedback at meetings, Dialogue between educators and parents at induction and graduation meetings, 3. Inclusive tone of induction presentation. 4. Photographic exhibition of previous parent-participants supports new parents in 'owning the induction space' and to feel part of a community of learners. 5. Educators act (initially) as mediators or 'bridgers'(Dorn, 1996; Granott & Parziale, 2009; Rogoff, 2003) between parents and library	Decisions made about where, when and with whom interviews and focus groups took place based on wishes of the participants
Bakhtin	Dialogic story-reading is the modus operandi of *The Storytime project*	Use of dialogic approach to gather data through focus groups and interviews
Freire	Partnership approach between parents and educators. Education for empowerment is one of the aims of *The Storytime Project*.	The inclusion of all stakeholders in the evaluation process; the focus on evaluating the project as a dynamic, evolving entity in process; the use of multiple data sources – individual interviews, focus groups, written feedback from the project and children's drawings – to represent the voices of parents and children; the consideration of social and cultural factors influencing the lives of all stakeholders led to thoughtful decision-making around choice of venues for interviews

		and around the style, tone and power balance in interactions with stakeholders.
Pragmatism	Responsive approach to resolving operational difficulties that arise during the project	Mixed Methods approach used in evaluation study
Constructivism	Project originally conceived as a result of interaction and deliberation between HSCL teachers and Marino Institute of Education. Emphasis on meaning-making through interaction between parent and child	Emphasis on meaning-making through interaction between researcher and stakeholders.
Transformative learning theory	Relationships with parents are reciprocal, cooperative, dialogic, respectful and transformational in the sense that an aim of the project is for parental empowerment. The project aims ultimately to empower parents to become ambassadors and mentors for the project.	Researcher as evaluator is informed by transformative learning theory and seeks to carry out the evaluation in ways that include all stakeholders and that empowers stakeholders to take action to transform their lives, e.g. improving parental knowledge of their children's learning so they can mentor their children successfully and develop more egalitarian relationships with the school.
Post-positivism	NA	1. Use of quantitative methods (a survey) as one aspect of data collection. 2. Use of Rossi, Lipsey and Freeman's (2004) programme theory to describe the projected impact of the evaluation, the Service Utilisation Model and the Programme Functions and Responsibilities (pp.119-121).

Having established the theoretical framework for both *The Storytime project* and the evaluation of the project, it follows that the researcher's paradigmatic stance would be examined.

Researcher's Paradigmatic Position

A paradigmatic position is the set of personal epistemological beliefs held by an individual. "Personal epistemological beliefs reflect an individual's views about what knowledge is, how knowledge is gained, and the degree of certainty with which knowledge can be held" (Brownlee & Berthelsen, 2006, p.17).

This researcher is influenced by thinkers in education such as Dewey (1897; 1916), Freire (1968), Vygotsky (1987) and Bakhtin (1984). This is reflected in my paradigmatic position (my 'way of looking at things') and in the ethos of relationships and in project implementation of *The Storytime Project*. Dewey believes that true education comes through the stimulation of the child's powers by the demands of the social situations presented (1897); Freire emphasises the relationships between power, politics and society in education and Vygotsky asserts that a child can learn more effectively when supported by a more able other. A socio-cultural perspective underpins the current research. Ontologically there is an acceptance by the researcher of multiple realities in this evaluation study and these multiple realities will be represented through qualitative methodological strategies. It is important to note that Mixed Methods are used to conduct the evaluation study and Mixed Methods are informed by a pragmatic world view. Biesta (2010) argues that paradigms should be considered as ''tools'' useful to the research process rather than static belief systems. This pragmatic stance does not mean that there are no beliefs informing action but that methodology can be used as a tool and thus to some extent be separated from belief systems (2010).

Epistemologically, the view of knowledge is that it is subjective. Multiple viewpoints are represented through questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions and diary analysis. The axiological assumption is that the researcher positions herself in the study and admits to particular values and biases informed by the thinkers described above.

The debate between dialectic (Vygotsky and Friere) and dialogic (Bakhtin) throughout the study is a reflection of the liminal theoretical space inhabited by the researcher. The dialogic view allows for plurality of views, an "unmerged consciousness" (Rule, 2011, p.935) that is inclusive of difference, while the dialectic view allows for a synthesis of points of view. In other words, a new position is formed, based on the accommodation of different positions. Thompson's (2012) argument that there must be dialectic within dialogue seems reasonable to the researcher.

In outlining the ontological, epistemological and axiological position of the director/researcher of this evaluation study, it makes the world view and values of the director/researcher explicit. These thinkers, to a greater or a lesser degree, emphasized the role of culture and of social mediation in teaching and learning and their thinking could be interpreted as coming broadly from a socio-cultural perspective.

Just as it is important to make the paradigmatic position of the researcher explicit, it is equally important to make clear the paradigmatic origins of the evaluation approach chosen for this study. The paradigmatic approach that was chosen for this study was a multiple evaluation approach which means that the evaluation is permeated by concepts from all the major research paradigms. This will now be examined.

Multiple Evaluation Approaches in this Evaluation

This evaluation study borrows from all four of the paradigms described earlier in the literature review: Postpositivist, Constructivist Transformative and Pragmatic. Its use of mixed methods implies a pragmatic stance; its use of quantitative methods (a questionnaire), its intermittent focus on programme impact as well as process and its use of Rossi, Lipsey and Freeman's (2004) three components of programme theory: impact theory, service utilisation plan and programme organisational plan models of *The Storytime Project,* hints at a post-positivist stance; its decision to hear the voices of all stakeholders interactively, chiefly through focus groups and interviews indicates a constructivist stance; the use of Freirean and emancipatory ideas by the researcher, who is also director of the project being evaluated, suggests that the evaluation is also influenced by a transformative perspective. Examples of this include the involvement of all stakeholders in the evaluation process; the focus on evaluating the project as a dynamic, evolving entity in process; the use of multiple data sources – individual interviews, focus groups, written feedback from the project and children's drawings – to represent the voices of parents and children. Finally, the consideration of social and cultural factors influencing the lives of all stakeholders led to thoughtful decision-making around choice of venues for interviews and around the style and tone of interactions with stakeholders. Multiple evaluation approaches thus form the theoretical framework for this evaluation study. Table 3.2 below lists the labels commonly associated with different paradigms A tick (✓) beside various labels indicates their inclusion in the evaluation study.

Table 3.2 Labels Commonly Associated with Different Paradigms

Postpositivism		Constructivist		Transformative		Pragmatic	
Experimental		Naturalistic		Critical theory		Mixed Methods	✓
Quasi-experimental		Phenomenological		Neo-Marxist		Mixed Models	
Correlational		Hermeneutic		Feminist theories		Participatory	
Causal comparative		Symbolic interaction		Critical race theory			
Quantitative	✓	Ethnographic		Freirean	✓		
Randomized control trials		Qualitative	✓	Participatory (Emphasis is on a "bottom-up" approach with a focus on locally defined priorities and local perspectives (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995).	✓ Researcher as participant		
		Participatory action research		Emancipatory	✓		
				Postcolonial/indigenous			
				Queer theory			
				Disability theories			
				Action Research			
				Indigenous			
				Human Rights/equity focused			

Mertens (2015, adapted from Lather (1992) and Guba and Lincoln (1989, 2005).

Bledsoe and Graham (2005) found that using multiple approaches "can serve to complement the evaluation and enhance the information generated" (pp.317-318). They also commend the use of a multimethod research design with a multiple evaluation approach, commenting that they result in the development of responsive evaluations to both communities and organizations (Bledsoe & Graham, p.302). Stufflebeam (2001) comments that there are many occasions when it is functional to mix and match different approaches. Trochim, Donnelly and Arora (2016) argue that there is no inherent incompatibility between the different approaches - each of them brings something valuable to the evaluation table. In fact, they say, in recent years attention has increasingly turned to how one might integrate results from evaluations that use different strategies, carried out from different perspectives, and using different methods. There are challenges to using multiple approaches too, not least that they require more than superficial knowledge of each approach and the evaluator needs to be aware of potential tension points between approaches. For example, use of empowerment strategies might sometimes be at odds with more empirically oriented strategies (Bledsoe & Graham, 2005).

In summary, the use of multiple approaches to this evaluation design indicates that there is a multiplicity of theories influencing the research design. It is now timely to look at that research design.

Overview of the Research Design

Formative and Process-Focused Study

Trochim (2016) posits that the most important basic distinction to be made between types of evaluation is that between formative and summative evaluation. Formative evaluation is intended to help in the development of a programme/intervention. It concerns itself with answering 'how' or 'what is going on' questions. Summative evaluation focuses

on assessing the effects and effectiveness of the programme (Robson, 2011, p.181). Formative evaluation is also known as process evaluation and summative evaluation as outcome or impact evaluation (p.181). The purpose of formative evaluation is to improve the quality of the programme being developed in order to facilitate the achievement of the objectives for which it was designed (Beyer, 1995). Scriven (1967) argued that *emerging programmes* should be the subject of formative evaluations, and that summative evaluations should be reserved for programmes that have been well-established and have stable and consistent implementation. He also argued that in formative evaluations, it is beneficial if the evaluator is an insider in order to become part of the 'feedback loop' that makes providing programme improvement information possible. Some writers on evaluation consider process evaluation to be a sub-division of formative evaluation (e.g. Trochim, 2016), others use the terms 'formative' and 'process' interchangeably (e.g. Robson, 2011). Process evaluation is also called implementation evaluation or programme monitoring, if the evaluation is ongoing (Rossi, 2004). Despite the nuances of difference, however, all interpretations of a process evaluation seem to agree that the focus is on the processes of the programme, how those processes have been implemented and if they have been implemented as the programme intended. An assessment of programme process assesses also the fidelity and effectiveness of a programme's implementation (Rossi, 2004). The operation of the programme is examined.

> Process evaluation investigates how well the program is operating. It might examine how consistent the services actually delivered are with the goals of the program, whether services are delivered to appropriate recipients, how well service delivery is organised, the effectiveness of program management, the use of program resources, and other such matters (Rossi et al., 2004, p. 57).

This study, an evaluation of a parental dialogic story reading project called *The Storytime Project*, was conceptualised as an internal process evaluation design using a mixed methods research strategy. Although this evaluation study has been called a process evaluation, and the focus is largely on processes, there are undeniably traces of impact evaluation present too. This is because it is difficult to draw definitive lines between the two types of evaluation. When researching the operation/processes of a programme, invariably data will emerge that relates to impact because the two areas are linked. In any case, as mentioned already in the literature review, improvement cannot be made unless there is an assumption or judgement made about the quality of the programme that already exists. Mertens (2015) supports this view. "Although summative evaluations tend to focus more on program impact, formative and developmental evaluations can include program impact data that is viewed as a barometer for program changes" (p.71). It might be helpful, therefore, to see the relationship between process and product as a continuum rather than polar opposites.

The evaluation study is described as internal because the researcher is centrally involved in the project as director. The evaluation study is being carried out with and for those involved, rather than being imposed on them by external reviewers. Robson (2011) says that positive responses are more likely in this instance. This could be interpreted as a limitation of the study and will be discussed later. Other research indicates that when the decision-maker is involved in the evaluation it is more likely that the evaluation information will be used (Patton, 1997; Cousins, 2003).

A free-standing process evaluation such as the evaluation under scrutiny should yield quality assurance information (p.57). Participants in the quantitative phase of the evaluation, a survey, were asked for their views on the impact of the project on participants, on the modus operandi of the project and on ways that the project might be improved. The

qualitative phase of the evaluation concentrated on a deeper examination of the questions asked in the quantitative phase. Processes investigated included the process of how parents were recruited, how educators related with and supported parents during the five weeks, how parents and children fared together during the nightly 10-15 minute reading and talking sessions; parents' experience of the public library, of the induction and graduation ceremonies at Marino Institute of Education and of the resources provided by the project such as the DVD and story support sheet/tip-sheet. Data on all of these processes emerged through the questionnaire, interviews, focus groups, diary analysis and feedback documentation from the graduation ceremonies. The evaluation thus explores how the process of the project is being implemented and what is the experience of its participants (parents, children, teachers, early childhood practitioners, school principals, Dublin City Library and Northside Partnership personnel) Data have been gathered and analysed so that they can feed forward into future planning of *The Storytime Project*.

Rationale for a *Process* Evaluation

A process evaluation was chosen for the purposes of examining the workings of *The Storytime Project*. An impact or outcomes based evaluation would not have given insight into how the project operated and what processes needed to be improved. An impact evaluation is planned for a later stage once quality information has been gathered in relation to the processes of the project. It was decided to ascertain in the first instance how the project was working for participants, whether it was deemed worthwhile by participants and what changes in practice and relationships it has wrought. If it is decided to proceed at a later date with an impact/outcome evaluation, then children would be required to undergo some form of pre-test before embarking on the intervention project, something that is not practised at present.

Mixed Methods Design

This process evaluation used both quantitative and qualitative approaches to data collection, that is, a mixed methods design. There is a substantial body of literature on quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods methodology in existence. The aim here is not to revisit the fundamentals of these methods but to describe mixed methods methodology in the context of its choice for this study. Therefore an understanding of qualitative and quantitative methodologies and their underpinning epistemological and ontological assumptions is assumed.

Mixed methods research involves collecting, analysing, and interpreting quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or in a series of studies that investigate the same phenomenon (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009). The central premise of mixed methods designs is that the combination of both qualitative and quantitative approaches provides a better understanding of the research than a single approach would (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). "It is now widely accepted that qualitative and quantitative research traditions, rather than being seen as opposed to or in competition with each other (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Furlong, 2004) should be used, where appropriate, in some kind of combination" (Bryman & Cramer, 1999; Moore et al., 2003 as cited in Haggis, 2008, p.158). The philosophical underpinning of mixed methods designs is that of pragmatism, that is, the methodological approach is chosen on the basis of 'what works best'. Pragmatism views truth as contingent and as changing over time and it endorses eclecticism and pluralism, for example, different and even conflicting theories and perspectives can be useful (Robson, 2011). Pragmatism also considers human inquiry (studying our everyday lives in our daily environment) as "analogous to experimental and scientific enquiry" (p.28).

A mixed methods design provides more comprehensive evidence than quantitative or qualitative methods singly might supply and researchers can use a wider range of tools for data collection, thus getting both a broader and deeper understanding of the subject under study. Mixed methods research "encourages the use of multiple worldviews or paradigms rather than the typical association of certain paradigms for quantitative researchers and others for qualitative researchers" (p. 10). It can provide superior answers to research questions (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie & Turner, 2003) because multiple forms of evidence are used. The mixed methods used in this study comprise a small scale quantitative survey followed by a series of focus groups and individual interviews. The design is sequential. Information gleaned from the quantitative survey helped to inform the focus groups and individual interviews.

The reason for choosing a mixed methods design is for the purposes of triangulation of data and complementarity. Greene, Carracelli, and Graham's typology of reasons for mixing methods (1989) list five reasons for mixing methods in their typology, all of them relevant to the current evaluation. They are (1) triangulation (one method's findings corroborates the other's), (2) complementarity (one method seeks elaboration, clarification of the other's), (3) development (results from one method helps to develop or inform the other method), (4) initiation (seeks the discovery of paradox and contradiction, new perspectives, the recasting of questions from one method to the other method (p.62) and (5) expansion (extends the breadth and depth of inquiry by using different methods for different inquiry components (p.62). A mixed methods design was also chosen for reasons of inclusivity, i.e participants like a variety of approaches to giving feedback. Some are more comfortable with one-to-one interviews, some with journaling, others enjoy focus groups and others prefer the anonymity of questionnaires and feedback forms. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004)

described a mixed methods approach to research design as inclusive, pluralistic, and complementary (pp.17-18).

Leech and Onwuegbuzie's typology, (2007), identified three functions of a mixed method design that can be used to create a typology of mixed method designs. The three functions are as follows: (1) To what extent are the methods mixed from fully to partially mixed; (2) the time orientation of the design, that is whether the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the study were carried out concurrently or sequentially and (3) the emphasis of approaches, that is, are the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the study equally important or does one method have dominance over the other. These criteria yield eight mixed methods designs, one of which describes the current evaluation study: This mixed methods study is partially mixed, sequential and the qualitative aspect of the research has dominant status. (p.270). When the methods are partially, rather than fully mixed, it means that data is not mixed together until the data interpretation stage (p.267), as is the case with the current study. In relation to the time orientation of this study, it was sequential. The quantitative element, a survey or questionnaire, was administered first in June 2013 and this was followed by the qualitative element which included focus group discussions and individual interviews. These took place from December 2013 onwards. Diary keeping took place during the sixth iteration of *The Storytime Project* in the Autumn of 2012. Two HSCL teachers recorded their experiences of the programme in diary form in real time throughout the five week programme. In relation to methodological dominance, the qualitative aspect of the study is dominant. It was informed by the quantitative part of the study. Questions posed in the questionnaire were used later as thematic starting points in semi-structured interviews and in focus group discussions.

Other documents for qualitative analysis comprise extant paper material relating to the project, for example, parents' written evaluations on *The Storytime Project* on completion of the project over the past three years; records of meetings and feedback from HSCL teachers and EC practitioners; community and school notices publicising various iterations of the project. These will be discussed in greater detail presently under the heading - qualitative data. Figure 3.1 illustrates the research design for the mixed methods design of the evaluation study.

Quantitative Phase:
Questionnaire / survey to HSCL teachers, classroom teachers, EC educators, school principals, personnel from Northside Partnership and Dublin City Council library

Qualitative Phase:
Focus group interviews, individual interviews, diary analysis, parental group feedback and weekly evaluations

Focus group interviews with Parents, HSCL & EC educators, and children

Individual interviews with parents, HSCL & EC educators, principals, classroom teachers, Northside Partnership and Dublin City Library employee

Feedback from parents through weekly evaluations and through the graduation event. Also diary analysis.

Figure 3.1 Research Design Partially Mixed, Sequential. Qualitative Aspect has Dominant Status

Using Elements of a Theory-Based Approach

Rossi, Lipsey et al. (2004) emphasize the importance of programme theory as a basis for designing evaluation research. They describe 3 components of programme theory which, if made explicit, clarify the theory, management and organisation of the project: impact theory, service utilization plan and the programme's organisational plan. Although the evaluation being conducted here is an internal process evaluation, some questions in relation

to the impact of the study are put and it is important to articulate the intended /desired impact

of the project. The figures that follow illustrate each of those components. The first

component, programme impact theory, articulates the cause and effect of *The Storytime*

Project simply and directly hereunder: A parental training programme equips parents with

dialogic story-reading skills, which, when applied in interactions with their children effects

improvements in children's oral language, parent-child relationships and parental

empowerment.
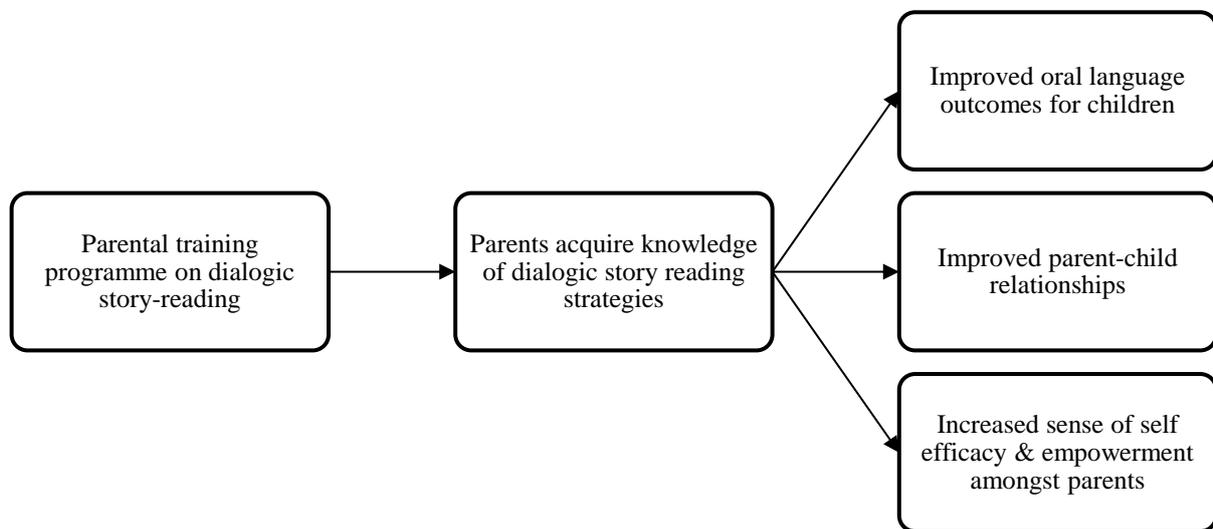
Figure 3.2 Programme Impact Theory

Adapted from Rossi et al., 2004, p.143.

The second component, the service utilisation plan, tracks the journey that the

recipients of the service make from beginning to end (Rossi et al., p.142).

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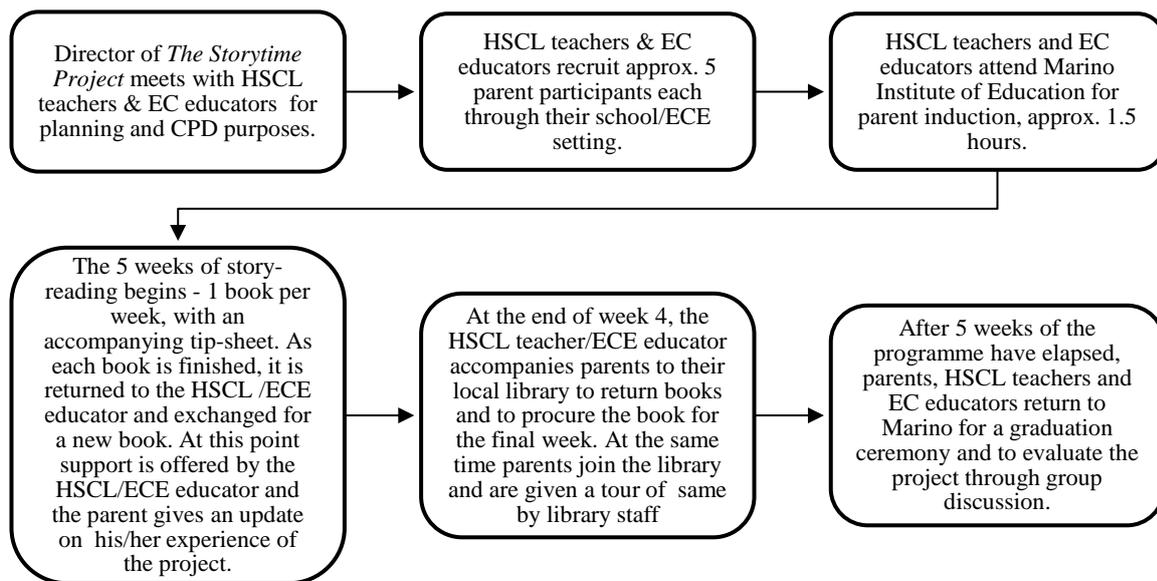
Figure 3.3 Service Utilisation Flowchart for *The Storytime Project*

The programme's organisational plan is written from the perspective of the project's management (Rossi et al., 2004, p.142). The plan describes the functions and activities that the programme is to perform and also the human, financial and physical resources required for the execution of the project.

Administration

- Director of project liaises with Northside Partnership officer to organise induction and graduation ceremonies, explore sponsorship for the project, organise a dignitary to present graduate certificates and ensure mailing lists of HSCL teachers and ECE educators are up-to-date.
- Liaise with Dublin City Library with regard to the library's role in the project, including the selection and ordering of new books for the project and ensuring that library branches are au fait with dates for visits from parents.
- Liaise with finance department at Marino Institute with regard to financial output for *The Storytime Project.*
- Provision of information seminars on *The Storytime Project* for other bodies interested in running the project.
- Induction for HSCL teachers and ECE educators joining the project.
- Analyse evaluations from previous iterations of project and implement recommendations, if possible, in consultation with Northside Partnership, Dublin City Library, HSCL teachers and EC educators.
- Organise and fund photographic exhibition, research information sheets and catering for induction and graduation events
- Design tip-sheets for each new book to be distributed to parents.

Project Contact

- Northside Partnership official recruits schools and ECE centres for project
- monitors numbers of parent participants, numbers of participating schools and changes in personnel amongst ECE educators and HSCL teachers.
- Organises and funds graduation certs for parents and rosettes for children.
- Organises some project sponsorship.
- Sends reminders to participants about library events and graduation dates.

Project Management
Northside Partnership officer does follow-up with HSCL teachers and EC educators throughout project

Project Closing
Northside Partnership officer circulates photographs of induction and graduation to schools and ECE centres.

Target Population
Parents and children in Northside Partnership area

Figure 3.4 Programme Functions and Responsibilities

Adapted from Rossi et al., 2004, p.145.

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<p style="text-align:center">Research Sample</p>

The research sample comprises all participants in *The Storytime Project* between 2010 and 2013, the first three years of the project. The sample emanates from a population which consists of all participants in *The Storytime Project* from 2010 to date (December 2016). The sampling frame is a list of all the elements in the population from which the sample is drawn, comprising 612 people broken down as follows: 279 parents and 279 children aged 3-5 from 18 schools and 5 Early Childhood settings (See appendix B for list of participating schools and Early Childhood settings); 5 ECE practitioners, 11 HSCL teachers, 18 classroom teachers, 18 school principals, 1 Northside Partnership executive and 1 Dublin City Library librarian. See Table 3.3 for details on the sample that was extracted from each group and the nature of their participation in the research.

Table 3.3 *The Storytime Project*: Data Collection Methods

Participants	Focus Group Discussions	Individual Interview	Document Analysis	Questionnaire
Parents n=279	1 group 2010-2013 (cohorts 1-6)	2 parents. One from 2010-2011 cohort and one from 2011-2012 cohort	Weekly evaluations and collated feedback from graduation ceremony.	NA
Children n=279	1 group of five children from 2011-2012 cohort	NA	Children's drawings	NA
HSCL teachers n=11	1 group representing various iterations of the project	1 HSCL teacher	2 reflective diaries	10 HSCL teachers
EC practitioners n=5	1 group representing 3rd to 6th iterations of the project	1 EC practitioner	NA	5 ECE practitioners
Classroom teachers n= 18	NA	2 classroom teachers interviewed together	NA	18 classroom teachers

School Principals n= 18	NA	2	NA	18 school principals
Library personnel n=1	NA	1	NA	1 member of Dublin City Council library
Northside Partnership personnel n=1	NA	1	NA	1 member of Dublin Northside Partnership management team

The sample used in the evaluation study is a purposive sample. In purposive sampling, a sampling frame is ''a resource from which you can select your smaller sample'' (Mason, 2002, p. 140 as cited in Teddlie & Fen, Yu, 2007, p.83). This is exactly what is done in the context of this evaluation study. Different elements of the sampling frame were asked to participate in interviews, focus group discussions and the questionnaire. Maxwell (1997) defined purposive sampling, as a type of sampling in which, ''particular settings, persons, or events are deliberately selected for the important information they can provide that cannot be gotten as well from other choices'' (as cited in Teddlie & Fen Yu, 2007, p.77). The sample is necessarily purposive because the evaluation requires that the voices of the various groups of stakeholders are represented and that their contributions can be attributed to the group from which they emanated.

The questionnaire survey also involved a purposive or non-probability sample. It is a non-probability sample because those who completed the questionnaire were not randomly selected. They comprised all those involved in *The Storytime Project* with the exception of parents and children.

Parents, children and classroom teachers involved in the qualitative stage of the evaluation were a snowball sample (a sub-category of purposive sampling (Teddlie & Fen

Yu, 2007) because they were recruited by other members (HSCL teachers) of the sampling frame on behalf of the researcher.

<div align="center">**Instrumentation and Data Collection**</div>

Quantitative Data

The function of Onwuegbuzie's sequential design (2009) is that the results of the first phase can help to inform the second phase. Information gleaned from the quantitative phase informed the structure of interviews in the qualitative phase. It should also have yielded a range of perspectives that enriched the data collected in the qualitative phase of the evaluation.

Questionnaire.

The quantitative phase comprised a short questionnaire (See appendix C) of HSCL teachers, classroom teachers, principals, ECE practitioners, an official from The Northside Partnership and from Dublin City Library. The focus of the questionnaire is on the participants' views, opinions and beliefs about *The Storytime Project* and of their perceptions of the effect of the project on participating children and parents. The questionnaire also invites comments on how the project might be improved. It was disseminated to fifty-four participants in June 2013. Parents and children were not asked to participate in this quantitative phase of the evaluation. Reasons for not including parents in the questionnaire included avoidance of evaluation fatigue, avoidance of the difficulties involved in contacting large numbers of parents, delivering and collecting questionnaires and avoidance of potential difficulties that parents might have encountered in completing the questionnaires. There was also considerable existing feedback documentation from parents in the form of weekly evaluations of the programme and end-of-programme evaluations conducted at the graduation

ceremony. The exclusion of children from participating in the questionnaire was because a

questionnaire was not deemed appropriate for children, given their age and level of maturity.

In seeking the views of participants, a set of thirty-two questions was carefully

prepared. Rossi et al, (2004) identify five types of questions that might be asked in evaluating

a programme, depending on the programme issues that are being addressed. Those question

types are listed in Table 3.4 below. The number of times each type of question was used in

the questionnaire is listed in the second column.

Table 3.4 Types of Questions Used in Evaluating a Programme

Types of questions used in evaluation (Rossi et al., 2004)	Distribution of question type in the questionnaire (32 questions in total)
Questions about the social conditions that the programme sets out to ameliorate	5
Questions about programme conceptualisation and design	2
Questions about programme process – operations, implementation and service delivery	6
Questions about programme impact – i.e. outcomes , effects	12
Questions about programme cost and cost effectiveness (p.54).	0
Questions pertaining to the classification of participants and of their settings (Not included in Rossi et al.'s model).	7

Table 3.4 shows that, with the exception of the category on cost and cost effectiveness, all

other categories of questions as identified by Rossi et al. (2004), featured in the

questionnaire. The questions were based on three sources: (1) the literature on dialogic story-

reading, decontextualized language and parental involvement in their children's education;

(2) information needed to be gathered to inform the development of the project; (3) the

original research questions, which are as follows -

- What were teachers' and early childhood practitioners' experience of

   implementing

- the processes of *The Storytime Project*,

- children's use of decontextualized language as described by their parents,

- parent-child dialogic engagement around story reading,

- parental knowledge of children's developing knowledge of books and reading,

- parental confidence and attitude in relating with their children's school or early childhood setting,

- parental confidence and attitude in relating with their local library,

- children's motivation and engagement as perceived by significant adults in the project,

- children's reported experience of the project.

There are four sections to the questionnaire: (1) State your role, work-place and work experience (2) Your views on the impact of the project on the participants involved (3) Your views on the induction workshop, the DVD, the graduation ceremony and the future of the project and (4) Your suggestions for ways in which the project might be improved. The questions in sections two and three of the questionnaire were structured in the form of a Likert scale. There were a series of statements to which respondents had to strongly agree, agree, be undecided, disagree or strongly disagree. La Marca, (2011) says that the use of Likert scales as a method in surveys is popular because they are easily understood, responses are easily quantifiable, easy to analyse mathematically and easy to code. Because degrees of agreement or disagreement are offered, the survey does not force respondents into taking a stand on a particular topic but allows them to express indecision. This makes it easier for the respondent. However, this could also be disadvantageous to the researcher because respondents tend to avoid extreme options on a scale and this could yield up a large amount of neutral answers.

Section four of the questionnaire comprised three open-ended questions as follows: (1) Do you have any suggestions for how *The Storytime Project* might be improved? (2) Is there anything else about the project that you would like to be examined as part of an evaluation of *The Storytime Project?* (3) Do you have anything else to add? This section yielded rich responses that will be examined in the chapter on data analysis.

Piloting the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was piloted on seven people. It was completed by a librarian, an official of The Northside Partnership, a creche manager, an early childhood practitioner, a classroom teacher, and 2 colleagues in Marino Institute who are former primary school teachers. These people had the same occupations as those who ultimately completed the questionnaire.

There was a recommendation that a question should be added at the end of the questionnaire asking "Do you have anything else to add?" This question was included in the final version of the questionnaire.

Respondents were asked to 'tick' the relevant box. It was suggested to change the wording to 'fill in' the relevant box. This was a better description of what respondents were required to do. The final questionnaire was changed to the recommended wording. One respondent reported that he/she did not understand the word 'speculate' in the statement "Children are better able to speculate about the plot than they were before their participation in *The Storytime Project*". As a consequence of this, the statement was changed to read "Children are better able to use language to clarify their thinking about a story than they were before their participation in *The Storytime Project*".

Two respondents commented that they were confused when the statements on the questionnaire went from positive to negative. They felt a cognitive dissonance around that.

For example, in section two, statement N reads "Involvement in *The Storytime Project* has no impact on the child's academic progress at school". Statement O follows and reads "Parents develop a positive relationship with their local library as a result of their participation in *The Storytime Project*. This was a deliberate strategy to prevent respondents from answering as if on 'automatic pilot'. In the final questionnaire statements that were framed negatively were highlighted by using bold font and they were also underlined. Statement N thus read as follows "Involvement in *The Storytime Project* has **no impact** on the child's academic progress at school". This comprises the changes that were made to the final questionnaire as a result of the piloting process.

The questionnaire was distributed and responses collected during the month of June 2013. It was analysed using the statistical package for Social Sciences (SPSS). It was then combined with the qualitative data and uploaded to NVIVO 10, a software analysis package, to be analysed jointly. Results are analysed in the chapter on findings.

Qualitative Data

Phase two of the evaluation, which is the substantive phase, was conducted using qualitative research strategies including focus group discussions, in-depth individual interviews, diary analysis and analysis of extant documents such as evaluations from various iterations of the project. It was analysed using NVIVO 10 software. The process will be described towards the end of this chapter.

Focus groups.

Four focus group discussions were planned: One focus group with parents who completed the project between 2010 and the end of 2012, one focus group discussion with children one with HSCL teachers and one with ECE practitioners. (See Table 3.1, page 114 for details.) Focus groups were chosen as a data collection tool because they are especially

suitable for exploring people's knowledge and experiences and can be used to observe not only what people think but how they think and why they think that way (Kitzinger, 1995). "Focus groups explicitly use group interaction as part of the method. This means that instead of the researcher asking each person to respond to a question in turn, people are encouraged to talk to one another: asking questions, exchanging anecdotes and commenting on each other's experiences and points of view" (1995, p.299). The focus groups were not piloted because focus group discussions are held regularly with parent participants of *The Storytime Project* at each graduation event and the director of the project is practised in facilitating that kind of interaction.

The focus group discussion with six HSCL teachers took place at Marino Institute of Education in December 2013. The focus group discussion with four ECE practitioners also took place in December 2013 at The Northside Partnership offices in Coolock. These meetings were relatively easy to arrange and involved a number phone calls back and forth over a period of two weeks or so. The focus group with HSCL teachers was arranged for after a graduation ceremony at Marino. This meant that teachers were already at the venue and did not have to make a special arrangement to meet again for the focus group discussion. Marino Institute of Education paid for taxis to ferry home parents who had received lifts to the graduation ceremony from teachers. This enabled the HSCL teachers to stay back at MIE for the focus group discussion and enabled parents to get home in a timely and convenient fashion without disruption to their schedules.

Focus group discussions with parents.

Focus group discussions arranged with parents presented some challenges. Parents were selected for focus group discussions on the basis of their availability and willingness to participate in the research. In other words, a convenience sample was used. It was difficult to

recruit parents to take part in a focus group or in individual interviews. The experience resonates with some HSCL teachers and some ECE practitioners' experience of recruiting parents to participate in *The Storytime Project*. This will be discussed in detail in the chapter on findings. Appendix D describes a first attempt to conduct a focus group with parents. The discussion chapter will consider the challenges outlined in appendix D in the context of the effects of the relationship between socio-economic status, power relations and self-esteem. The attempt to hold the focus group is described in appendix D in order to give some insight into why convenience sampling was necessary in choosing parents for interview and focus groups. Another parent focus group discussion was organised and on this occasion three parents turned up. The group was small but a rich discussion took place.

All HSCL teachers (10), and ECE practitioners (5), [27] who were involved in *The Storytime Project,* were invited to participate in focus groups. Four ECE practitioners contributed to a focus group and one ECE practitioner who did not take part in the focus group agreed to participate in a one-to-one interview. Six HSCL teachers participated in their focus group and one of those teachers subsequently did an in-depth one-to-one interview. The children's focus group interview took place in May 2014 and was from the ninth iteration of *The Storytime Project* which was conducted during March and April 2014. The reason for this was it was felt that if children from 2010 to 2013 were interviewed, it was unlikely that they would remember being involved in the project at all.

Children's drawings.

When the children's focus group discussion closed, children were invited to draw a picture to depict their feelings about *The Storytime Project.* Iona Literat (2013) wrote that

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[27] The 5 centres involved in *The Storytime Project* were chosen by The Northside Partnership because they are located within the Northside Partnership area and they are funded by the HSE or they are funded as community projects.

there are many ways of eliciting research responses from children, one being through the medium of drawing.

> Because of its co-constructed and playful nature, as well as its lack of dependence on linguistic proficiency, participatory drawing emerges as a highly efficient and ethically sound research strategy that is particularly suited for work with children and young people across a variety of cultural contexts. The analysis of drawn images, complemented by a subsequent discussion of these drawings in the context of their production, has the potential of revealing a more nuanced depiction of concepts, emotions, and information in an expressive, empowering, and personally relevant manner (Literat, 2013, p.84).

Neu and Berglund (1991) state that children use writing and drawing to "test and stabilize their feelings and to think about and explore their surroundings" (p.147). Levin and Bus (2003) see drawing as one aspect of children's 'representational-communicative system'.

Interviews.

As outlined in Table 3.1, eight individual interviews were conducted and one interview was shared between two classroom teachers, which brought the total number of people interviewed to ten. Two interviews with parents, two with primary school principals, one with two classroom teachers, one with a HSCL teacher, one with an ECE practitioner, one with a Northside Partnership official and one with a Dublin City Library official. All interviews were conducted at the participants' place of work with the exception of the two parents. Both parents were interviewed at the school where their child attended. This venue was chosen because it was convenient for both parents involved. Tea, coffee and biscuits were provided by the researcher. Interviews with parents were conducted in November 2013.

Two school principals participated in one-to-one interviews, one male and one female. Both principals' schools were involved in *The Storytime Project* from the outset. A one-to-one interview was also conducted with the Dublin City Council librarian who was involved with *The Storytime Project* since Dublin City Library joined the project. In fact this librarian was involved in early discussions with the director of *The Storytime Project* to ascertain how the library might contribute to the project. An official from The Northside Partnership project, who is involved in the organisation of the project along with the director of the project, was also interviewed. Interviews were semi-structured and were informed by the results of the questionnaire. See appendices E, F, G, H, I, J, K, for interview schedules.

Interviewing parents.

Parents and children were key participants in the research project. The parents, at least, were acted with, rather than upon. Because parents were central to the project, it was important to elicit their views on their experience of the project so that the project might be improved for future parent participants. Appelby, (2004) claims that parents' perspectives are key to designing new family literacy projects because of their insider insight on issues such as recruitment and retention.

A note of caution is added by Dickinson and De Temple, (1988). They warn that parents might tend to give what they consider to be socially desirable responses, especially when they are asked about their parenting practice. However, it could be argued that all interviewees would be tempted to give socially desirable responses. This is not necessarily a characteristic of parent interviewees alone.

The qualitative data were then uploaded to NVIVO 10 data analysis software. As mentioned previously, the *quantitative data* were processed using SPSS. The quantitative data were then uploaded to NVIVO 10 for analysis along with the qualitative data. This is in

keeping with the particular mixed methods research design for this evaluation study – a design that is partially mixed, sequential and the qualitative aspect of the research has dominant status. (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007, p.270). When the methods are partially, rather than fully, mixed, it means that data is not mixed together until the data interpretation stage (p.267).

The Analysis Process

Using NVIVO 10

The NVIVO process of analysis follows the principles of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In choosing to use NVIVO software, the decision to use thematic analysis is thus made for the researcher because this is how the software package is structured. Thematic analysis involves the breaking down of data into individual units (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and then coding these units into categories. Categories are further analysed and the overarching themes emanating from the analysis eventually emerge from this process. There are six phases of thematic analysis in Braun and Clarke's (2006) model as follows: (1) Familiarisation with the data (2) Coding (3) Searching for themes (4) Reviewing themes (5) Defining and naming themes and (6) Writing up (Clarke & Braun, 2013, p.121). It is important to note that although six distinct phases of analysis are listed and described, that this model should not be viewed as linear whereby one cannot proceed to the next phase with completing the prior phase (correctly); rather analysis is a recursive or iterative process. This method of analysis fits well with the theoretical orientation of the evaluation study. A socio-cultural perspective emphasizes the contingency of knowledge and Bakhtin's theory on Dialogism equally emphasizes this contingency -

Everything means, is understood, as a part of a greater whole - there is a constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others.

Which will affect the other, how it will do so, and in what degree, is what is actually

settled at the moment of utterance (Bakhtin, 1981, p.426).

Description of the Six Phases of Thematic Analysis

The first phase of data analysis consisted of reading, re-reading and becoming

familiar with the data. The data was then coded, a process described by Saldana (2009) as "a

judgement call since we bring our subjectivities, our personalities, our predispositions, and

our quirks to the process" (p.7). The researcher made judgement calls several times so that

the coding process became a recursive or iterative process. In a number of instances codes

were banded together and renamed as a single code[28]. For example, the following codes:

'Approaching the classroom teacher' and 'Knowledge of classroom teachers of *The Storytime*

Project' became a single code called 'Link with the classroom teacher'. This code in turn

was merged with the code 'Including class teachers and ECE practitioners in Induction and in

the SP project in general' and 'Suggestion to interview classroom teacher' to form a category

called Teacher Talk. Table 3.5 lists the ten codes with the highest number of references in the

data. The subject matter of these ten codes will feature throughout chapter 4 through the

thematic analysis process.

Table 3.5 Ten Codes with Highest Amount of References in the Data

Code	Number of References
Use of strategies to support children's utterances at storytime	71
Feelings about the value of *The Storytime Project*	68
Library visit	52
Comments about books	44
Parent-child bonding	35
Parent confidence levels	32
Recruitment strategy	31
Fidelity to modus operandi of *The Storytime Project*	29

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[28] In NVIVO software codes are referred to as nodes.

Influence of the project on educators' and parents' professional development	25
DVD and tip sheet (combined as 'resources')	23 for DVD, 17 for tip sheet

The complete data set included questionnaires, interview transcripts, focus group discussions, completed written evaluation forms from parents (from April 2010 to December 2012) and collated feedback from graduation ceremonies (from June 2010 to December 2012). Categories were then devised based on the commonalities between codes. The 76 codes were subsumed into the eleven categories. The eleven categories were named as can be seen in Table 3.6.

Table 3.6 Description of Categories Devised from 76 Initial Codes

Categories	Description of Category Contents
Organisational Issues – Modus Operandi of *The Storytime Project*	Initiating participation in *The Storytime Project;* maintaining contact with participants; training parents; induction and graduation events; recruitment of new teachers and EC practitioners; CPD work with teachers and EC practitioners; decisions regarding changing the location of the induction workshop; use of resources such as the library, the DVD and tip-sheet; and training of parents to become mentors for *The Storytime Project*.
Importance of the System (Fidelity)	How the structure of the project is designed to improve children's oral language.
Parental Relationships, Confidence and Knowledge of their Child's learning.	How the project may or may not support parents in developing relationships with their children and with the school/EC setting; the effect that the project had on self-esteem and on parental knowledge of their children's learning.
The Future of *The Storytime Project*	What could or should happen after the evaluation has been completed? Should the project continue? Should the structure and process of the project be put in brochure format to facilitate its dissemination to other jurisdictions?
Underlying Rationale Informing *The Storytime Project*	Sharing research and literature on literacy with parents, teachers and EC practitioners. Ensure awareness of purpose of project /rationale is clear to teachers, EC educators and parents.
Use of Learning Strategies by Parents, Educators and Children	What have parents and educators learned and how have they adapted their story reading practice as a result of participation in the project? What learning strategies are widely used, seldom used and not used and why is this so? Are strategies to develop children's decontextualized language being used?

Issues About Books	Comments about types of books chosen for project; levels of literacy required to read books; gender role models in stories for children, morality issues in stories that are of interest to children; choices around books for children; support for parents around generating conversation from books; repetition of book readings – how many nights per book?
Role of Classroom Teacher and EC Practitioner Working in the Educational Setting	How participants view the role of classroom teachers and EC practitioners. Some would like to attend induction; others would like copies of the DVD and tip-sheets.
Building Partnerships	Partnerships that have formed as a result of participation in the project – parents and schools (overlap with category 3 parental relationships), teachers and EC practitioners, Dublin City Library (DCL) and schools, DCL and Marino Institute, DCL and Northside Partnership and Marino Institute with all of the bodies mentioned.
Children's Experience of *The Storytime Project*	How are children's voices heard in the project? Should they choose the books they would like to hear read to them? Should they be allowed to attend the graduation ceremony?
Unanticipated Benefits of *The Storytime Project*	Has the data revealed any benefits of involvement in *The Storytime Project* besides those aspired to in the project's aims?

All 76 codes were then fed into relevant categories. This is phase three of the NVIVO process and is known as 'searching for themes (developing categories). The collated data in each of the eleven categories was then examined. As messages or themes emanating from each category were identified a memo was created for that category. The series of memos were then instrumental in arriving at themes. This process is phase 4 of the NVIVO process and is called 'Reviewing themes - drilling down'.

Eventually three over-arching themes were identified: Relationships, Storytime Processes and Language and Learning. This is stage five of Braun & Clarke's process of thematic analysis – Defining and Naming Themes. These three themes can be connected back to the aims of the evaluation as already outlined. An evaluation sets out to explore certain questions and the data produces findings in relation to those questions. An NVIVO code-book , (see appendix L) produced by the software, tracks the analysis process. It shows phase 2 - the generation of initial codes, phase 3 - the development of categories and phase 4 -

developing a thematic framework. The thematic framework identifies Relationships,

Storytime Processes and Language and Learning as the three overarching themes.

Figure 3.5 illustrates where each category (already listed in Table 3.6) is situated in

relation to a theme. Invariably there are instances of overlap. For example, elements of

'Unanticipated Benefits', can be threaded across all three themes.

Theme 1: Relationships	Theme 2: Storytime Processes	Theme 3: Language & Learning
Parental Relationships, Confidence & Knowledge	Fidelity to the Project Structure/System	Use of Learning Strategies by Parents, Educators and Children
Children's Experience of The Storytime Project	Future of The Storytime Project	Underlying Rationale Informing The Storytime Project
Building Partnerships	Organisational Issues	Issues around books
Unanticipated Benefits of The Storytime Project	Role of the classroom Teacher and EC Practitioner from the Setting.	

Figure 3.5 Eleven Categories within Three Themes

Once themes are defined and reviewed, the sixth and final stage of Braun & Clarke's

thematic analysis, 'writing up', begins. In order to facilitate the identification of each data

source during the 'writing up' process, a coding system was devised. This is illustrated in

Table 3.7. Note that all names in all tables are pseudonyms.

Table 3.7 Coding System for Data Transcripts

Focus Groups (FG)	Interviews (INT)	Parental Feedback From Graduation Ceremonies (FFGC)	Weekly Evaluations (WE)	Diary Analysis (DA)
FG1 Feb 2014 Parents 2010-2013	INT 1 March 2014 Parent Lorraine	FFGC 1 June 2010 1st graduation day	WE 1 April 2010 Collated weekly evaluations	DA 1
FG2 May 2014 Children	INT 2 March 2014 Parent Annemarie	FFGC 2 January 2011 2nd graduation day	WE 2 Sept 2010 Collated weekly evaluations	DA 2
FG3 Dec 2013 EC practitioners representing 3rd to 6th iterations of the project	INT 3 March 2014 HSCL teacher Claire	FFGC 3 June 2011 3rd graduation day	WE 3 June 2011 Collated weekly evaluations	
FG4 Dec 2013 HSCL teachers representing various iterations of the project	INT 4 April 2014 EC practitioner Noirin	FFGC 4 January 2012 4th graduation day	WE 4 January 2012 Collated weekly evaluations	
	INT 5 April 2014 School principal Donal	FFGC 5 June 2012 5th graduation day	WE 5 June 2012 Collated weekly evaluations	
	INT 6 April 2014 School principal Maeve	FFGC 6 December 2012 6th graduation day	WE 6 December 2012 Collated weekly evaluations	
	INT 7 April 2014 Dublin City Library Malachy			
	INT 8 April 2014 Northside Partnership Emily			
	INT 9 & INT 10 together April 2015 Classroom teachers Eva & Rhiona			

Using the coding system in Table 3.7, chapter four will present the findings, beginning with the questionnaire (C), and then merging the findings from the questionnaire with the findings of the qualitative aspect of the study as per the research design.

Ethical Considerations

All ethical protocols demanded by St. Patrick's College, Dublin City University, were followed. The purpose of the research was explained to all participants and their informed consent was obtained. Assurances were given and care was taken to protect the identity of participants. Each participant was given a Plain Language Statement and an Informed Consent form to read and sign. (See appendices M, N and O for example). Participants were advised that participation in the evaluation study is voluntary and that even when consent is given, it may be withdrawn at any time. No participant declined to sign the form. Consent was sought again, verbally at the beginning of each interview.

Informed consent was obtained from the children's parents on the children's behalf. A special informed consent form written in clear age-appropriate language was designed for the children to be read out to them by their parents (see appendix N). Children were invited to sign the form by writing their names or drawing a smiley face to indicate their consent. Then, on the day of the interviews, children were invited to participate in the focus group and were given the option of not getting involved. An additional adult, the Home School Liaison teacher, was present throughout the focus group discussion with children. Children's assent was also interpreted by observing their engagement, their body language and their facial expressions (Eide & Winger, 2005). When, children became restless while watching a piece of video footage, for example, the video footage was ceased and the children re-engaged when they were invited to comment on a story-book. This concept of situated ethics is important when working with young children because children may not understand the notion

that giving consent at a single point in time has consequences for later periods of time (Flewitt, 2005; Wood, 2014). Therefore, children have a right to express their choices on an ongoing basis (Wood, 2014, p. 8).

Ethical Issues that Arose During the Evaluation – Practising Reflexivity

Reflexivity can be defined as "maintaining a self-critical attitude and questioning taken-for-granted assumptions regarding the political nature of our work and its (intended and unintended) effects, as well as the social distribution of these effects" (Poland, Frohlich, Haines, Mykhalovskiy, Rock, & Sparks, 2006, p. 61). Poland et al. describe six conditions for the practice of reflexivity which have been amended for general use by Van Draanen (2016) as follows: "(a) attention to the tacit knowledge and perspectives that practitioners bring to their work, (b) an openness to being transformed by engaging with those from different social backgrounds who may question our evaluation practices, (c) questioning the knowledge we hold to be valid, (d) a curiosity about other perspectives and ways of seeing, (e) mindfulness and presence, and (f) an awareness of power and one's social location" (p.2). This list is helpful in tracking one's own attention to the practice of reflexivity. Sandelowski & Barroso's (2002) definition describes reflexivity as an inward looking at self, an outward looking at cultural, historical, linguistic and political influences and an 'in-between' looking at what happens in the interaction between the researcher and the study participant. It is note-worthy that Sandelowski and Barroso mention the interaction between researcher and study participant as a site for reflexivity. It is a reminder that interactions are a result of the coming together of two (or more) individuals, with all their attendant baggage, to construct meaning together in a unique way. These interactions must be analysed with great care and attention because of their particularity.

The American Evaluation Association (AEA) recognises the importance of reflexivity. It says reflexivity supports evaluators in avoiding the reinforcement of cultural stereotypes and prejudice in their work and to remain cognisant of marginalization (Van Draanen, 2016). The AEA sees it as critical that evaluators are sensitive to how it might feel to be devalued, marginalized, or subordinated because it helps to ensure responsible use of evaluative power in promoting equality and self-determination (Van Draanen, 2016).

I was strongly aware of relationships of power during the project and the evaluation process (Poland et al.'s (2006) sixth condition for the practice of reflexivity). As director of *The Storytime Project*, and member of an academic staff in a third level institution, I was conscious that I was in a position of power in relation to the teachers, early childhood practitioners and parents involved in the project. I made some genuine, if gauche, attempts to mitigate this during the project by adopting the following strategies at induction and graduation ceremonies: I distanced myself from ownership of knowledge by referring to 'the experts,' thereby locating expertise outside of myself; I avoided elitist academic language when explaining the modus operandi of the project and its rationale and I told self-deprecatory anecdotes about my attempts to tell stories to young children in my family and in my junior infant classroom when I was a primary school teacher. I also assisted in the serving of refreshments to participants. During the evaluation process, I employed similar strategies to put interviewees at ease. Despite using these strategies and despite reassuring all interviewees during the evaluation process that "there are no right and wrong answers" (FG 3, p.6) "I'm not looking for you to say *The Storytime Project* is the greatest thing since sliced bread, I'm looking for critical, either positive or negative, whatever your opinion is, just give that" (FG 3, p.6); - I recognise I may still have been in an invidious position when acting as both project director and evaluator. Parents might still have found it difficult to share how they fared in trying out the dialogic story-reading strategies or about what exactly went on in

interactions with their children. One parent memorably told me "No, I am bluntly honest; I'll tell you out straight!" (INT 2, p.1) but others may not have felt as uninhibited. I could have used an external evaluator to collect data but made the decision not to because I felt it would have been almost impossible to gain access to parents using an unknown interviewer; there would have been issues around trust and I also felt that it would have been difficult for an external evaluator to understand the processes and nuances of *The Storytime Project* without having 'lived with it' (Conley-Taylor, 2005).[29]

I struggled sometimes to find a balance between listening and responding to parents' and children's recommendations for the project and advancing the project's research-based agenda. This problem is also partly due to my dual role as project director and project evaluator. Two issues that came up repeatedly in the data were that parents wanted more than one book a week to read to their child and they also wanted the induction workshop moved to a local venue. In relation to the first issue, I wanted to give children the option to choose their own books but feared that if several books were available to children and parents, they might read all of them quickly and superficially instead of the in-depth engagement required for dialogic story-reading to work. Stahl (2005) recommends that in order to build vocabulary, children should have opportunities to encounter words repeatedly and in a variety of contexts. I realised that children could be exposed repeatedly to vocabulary using multiple texts as well as simply focusing on one text. (This realisation ties in with Poland et al's (2006) third condition of reflexivity – questioning the knowledge we hold to be valid.) When I reflected on this dilemma, I realised that I sometimes veered towards a paternalistic attitude towards participants and that although it is important to protect the integrity of the project's processes, this can be achieved in different ways. It is necessary to trust the intentions of project

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[29] It is important to note that the findings of the evaluation will not materially affect the evaluator and director of *The Storytime Project*. The evaluation findings, be they negative or positive, will not affect my job, promotional opportunities, or remuneration. There is no desire to achieve a particular result – the object is to gain as much information as possible about the processes of the project so that informed decisions can be made about it.

participants rather than to second guess how they might behave if given a choice of books. The second issue was that parents wanted the induction workshop moved from Marino Institute of Education to a local venue. Again I struggled with this suggestion because Marino Institute was deliberately chosen to afford participants the opportunity to attend a workshop in a third level institution. The intention was that this might be empowering for participants. Again, I had to reflect on my resistance to this suggestion. I cannot presume to know what will be an empowering experience for parents. (This realisation resonates with Poland et al's (2006) second condition of reflexivity – an openness to being transformed by engaging with those from different social backgrounds who may question our evaluation practices.) Perhaps if a local venue is tried out for a future iteration of the project, the project participants can then reflect together on that experience and make a decision on how to operate into the future.

Another ethical issue in the evaluation was how to address the power differential between primary school teachers and the early childhood practitioners. Most of the EC practitioners were not qualified to degree level and some of them may have felt intimidated in the presence of the primary school teachers who tended to be more vocal at CPD, induction and graduation meetings. All educators, regardless of their academic background, were given the same professional treatment and the same professional respect by the project. This may have been empowering for some. During the evaluation process, I made the decision to divide teachers and EC practitioners into two separate focus groups, in part because I wanted to hear their unique perspectives (Poland et al.'s (2006) fourth condition of reflexivity - a curiosity about other perspectives and ways of seeing) but also because I wanted each group to have their own space to speak without inhibition. The focus groups worked very well in this regard.

Finally, meta-evaluation could be seen as a form of reflexivity because it demands awareness of and reflection on a process. McLean (1991) advocates meta-evaluation as a means of determining if an evaluation was carried out according to externally approved evaluation standards. The American *Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation, 2005 to 2010* devised a set of standards (Yarbrough, Shulha, Hopson, & Caruthers (2011) which will be examined presently under the heading *Evaluating the Evaluation*. One of the standards - *Propriety* looks at criteria for deciding whether the evaluation was conducted in an ethically sound fashion. Table 3.8 below describes the standard and comments on how each element of the standard was addressed during this internal process evaluation. An in-depth assessment is needed to bring out the richness and efficacy of the standard. The evaluator's comments in this instance are necessarily brief because the points raised are already considered elsewhere in the dissertation.

Table 3.8 Propriety Standards

Standard	Description of standard	Comment by evaluator
PI Responsive and Inclusive Orientation	*Evaluations should be responsive to stakeholders and their communities.*	The project is a response to a community's need as identified by stakeholders situated in the community. The internal process evaluation included all project participants. It was initiated in order to see how processes could be improved to better serve project participants. In that way the evaluation is responsive to stakeholders and their communities.
P2 Formal Agreements	*Evaluations agreements should be negotiated to make obligations explicit and take into account the needs, expectations, and cultural contexts of clients and other stakeholders.*	Plain Language Statements and Informed Consent forms were furnished and explained to all participants in focus groups and individual interviews for the evaluation.
P3 Human Rights and Respect	*Evaluations should be designed and conducted to protest human and legal*	One of the aims of the project under evaluation is the

	rights and maintain the dignity of participants and other stakeholders.	empowerment of parents participating in the project. The evaluation was designed so that parents' and children's voices could be heard in a variety of ways, e.g. through focus groups, (parents, children), individual interviews (parents), project feedback forms (parents), oral feedback during the project (parents) and drawings depicting their feelings about the project (children).
P4 Clarity and Fairness	*Evaluations should be understandable and fair in addressing stakeholder needs and purposes.*	Plain language statements and comprehensive mediation of information to participants by the evaluator ensured that the evaluation was understandable. Fairness was aimed for by constant reflection on processes by the evaluator; by consultation with participants in relation to decisions around interview venues and times and by triangulation of data.
P5 Transparency and Disclosure	*Evaluations should provide complete descriptions of findings, limitations, and conclusions to all stakeholders, unless doing so would violate legal and propriety obligations.*	See chapter on findings.
P6 Conflicts of Interests	*Evaluations should openly and honestly identify and address real or perceived conflicts of interests that may compromise the evaluation.*	Issues around the dual role of evaluator and project director have been reflected upon and documented.
P7 Fiscal Responsibility	*Evaluations should account for all expended resources and comply with sound fiscal procedures and processes.*	All expenditure is ratified by the finance department at Marino Institute of Education. Expenses in relation to *The Storytime Project* and the evaluation of the project are determined for the annual institute budget and ratified by the finance department on behalf of the president of the Institute.

Adapted from Yarbrough et al., (2011).

Quality Assurance

"Although reliability and validity are treated separately in quantitative studies, these terms are not viewed separately in qualitative research. Instead, terminology that encompasses both, such as credibility, transferability, and trustworthiness is used" (Golafshani, 2003, p.600). A trustworthiness record is established by drawing on different data sources (Grinnell & Unrau, 2011, p.549). Trustworthiness was established in this evaluation study by using mixed methods and multiple data sources such as a questionnaire, focus group discussions, individual interviews, reflective journals and document analysis. All personnel involved in *The Storytime Project* participated in some way in the evaluation study. For example, parents, children, HSCL teachers, EC practitioners and personnel from the Northside Partnership and Dublin City Library. These personnel are involved in *The Storytime Project* for different reasons and would therefore have different perspectives to share. Trustworthiness was consolidated further by the percentage of responses to the questionnaire. 54 questionnaires were distributed and 49 completed questionnaires were returned, a 90.7% response rate.

The dual role of the researcher as director of the project being evaluated and architect of the process evaluation has been highlighted earlier. A potential difficulty in relation to data analysis is that the researcher's own subjectivity will be difficult to control, given that the researcher is also the project's director. The use of multiple data sources and a mixed methods approach should mitigate this effect. The questionnaire, for example, is anonymous. At the beginning of each interview and focus group discussion, participants are encouraged to express their opinions freely and are reminded that this is what is necessary for the evaluation to be capable of throwing up suggestions for the improvement of *The Storytime Project*. The

use of Nvivo software for the qualitative analysis process will also mitigate to some extent the subjectivity of the researcher.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) use the term 'dependability' instead of reliability and they mention the importance of being able to audit the research as a means to achieving dependability. The NVIVO software produces an audit of the thematic analysis process in the form of a code-book and this can be viewed in appendix L.

The concept of replicability or repeatability is an important concept in quantitative research (Golafshani, 2003). It corresponds to terms such as credibility and transferability in qualitative research. The use of weekly evaluations and recorded feedback at graduation ceremonies, records of which date back to the first iteration of the project in April 2010, testify to the replicability of the data. The evaluations and feedback from the first iteration in April 2010 bear a strong resemblance to the evaluations and feedback gathered and collated in December 2012. Commendations of the project in December 2012 are consistent with earlier commendations (e.g. deepening of the parent-child bond and surprise at children's knowledge) and criticisms are also strikingly consistent (disliked some of the books). See appendix P and appendix Q).

Evaluating the Evaluation

One way of assessing whether an evaluation is credible, well-designed and meets the needs of the programme is to pit it against a set of standards designed to test evaluation quality. That is precisely the function of Yarbrough et al.'s (2011) five standards (Utility, Feasibility, Propriety, Accuracy and Accountability). Yarbrough et al, (2011) identified three principles that should be adhered to in using their standards: The standards require adaptive, responsive and mindful use - they should not be applied literally and superficially (p.xxxii); no standard is more or less important than another and the standards need to be studied in

depth to glean rich understanding of them. The standard of Propriety has already been examined briefly when considering the issue of ethics. The standard of Utility is explored in depth for the purposes of meta-evaluation in appendix W. A description of the other standards by Yarbrough et al., (2011) can be seen in appendix Y. This meta-evaluation of the Utility standard was conducted after the evaluation was completed - a practice that is endorsed by the creators of the evaluation standards, (Yarbrough et al., 2011).

Conclusion

This methodology chapter described the evaluation study as an internal process evaluation. The theoretical framework for the study was considered using a Freirean, Bakhtinian and socio-cultural theoretical lens. The evaluation study was identified as being influenced by multiple evaluation approaches and those approaches were pinpointed in the study. The researcher's paradigmatic position was explored. The use of multiple evaluation approaches in the study together with the dual role of the researcher as project director and project evaluator combines to make this evaluation study complex and it underlines the importance of a reflexive approach to the study. This was documented. The modus operandi of the evaluation was then interrogated and fitted to *The Storytime Project*. The aim of the evaluation study was articulated and an overview of the research design – a mixed methods study – was given. The research sample was described in detail as was the quantitative and qualitative data that was collected. The process of analysis – thematic analysis was described. Issues of ethics were considered including the importance of a reflexive approach to the role of evaluator. Quality assurance was examined and the dual role of the researcher was considered. Finally, evaluating the evaluation was considered using standards provided by *The Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation* in the U.S. (Yarbrough et al., 2011). This evaluation study was tested against the standard of Utility in appendix W.

Overall this chapter aimed to show the multiple theoretical influences in this evaluation study and to map those theories onto the research design and process, which is described in detail. Chapter four will now consider the findings from the data.

This chapter presents the findings and analysis of the internal process evaluation of *The Storytime Project* using a mixed methods research strategy. The aim of the empirical study was to evaluate the significance of the project to the participants and to gain insight into how the project might be improved by engaging in depth with the processes involved in running the project. Specifically it set out to explore -

- teachers' and early childhood practitioners' experience of implementing *The Storytime Project*

- children's use of decontextualized language as described by their parents

- parent-child dialogic engagement around story reading

- parental knowledge of children's developing knowledge of books and reading.

- parental confidence and attitude in relating with their children's school or Early Childhood setting.

- parental confidence and attitude in relating with their local library

- children's motivation and engagement as perceived by significant adults in the project.

- children's reported experience of the project

At the time of writing, (November 2015), 543 parents and 543 children have participated in twelve iterations of *The Storytime Project*. The children range in ages from three to five years and are attending pre-school, Early Start or are in Junior Infants in primary school. The numbers of schools and EC settings participating vary from one iteration of the project to the next but approximately four early childhood settings (including one Early Start) and eleven schools take part in each project iteration.

In chapter three the research design and methodology was presented. Thematic analysis was introduced as the analytic strategy and its compatibility with the evaluation study's theoretical framework was noted. The process of analysis was then described, including the illustration and description of the themes that emerged from the data. This chapter will present and discuss the findings from the entire data set. The chapter begins by presenting the findings from the questionnaire. This is followed by the combined data from both quantitative and qualitative sources. The combined data set will be examined under the three key themes identified: Relationships, *Storytime* Processes and Language and Learning. Sub-themes[30] are subsequently explored under each of these key themes. Each theme and sub-theme can be directly linked to what the evaluation study set out to explore.

Results from the Questionnaire

The purpose of the questionnaire was to establish the views of those involved in the *Storytime Project* with the exception of parents and children whose perspectives were gathered using interviews and focus group discussions exclusively. Questionnaire respondents were asked for their views on the impact of the project on participants, on the modus operandi of the project and on ways that the project might be improved. Although this data was analysed as a distinct entity, it was subsequently merged with findings from the qualitative data as per the research design using partially, rather than fully mixed methods (Leech and Onwuegbuzie, (2007). Fifty-four copies of the questionnaire were distributed to teachers (including HSCL teachers, classroom teachers and two learning support teachers), EC practitioners, school principals, a representative from The Northside Partnership group

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[30] Sub-themes in this chapter correspond directly to 'categories' in chapter three. The term 'categories' was used by NVIVO 10. Once the three themes - Relationships, Storytime Processes and Language and Learning - were identified, the eleven 'categories' were re-named as sub-themes. The term 'sub-theme' is better because it is clearly identified as belonging to a theme.

and a representative from Dublin City Library. Forty-nine out of fifty-four people returned completed questionnaires, a 91% response rate. (See Table 3.1, Chap 3, also Appendix M).

Key findings from the questionnaire included the following: *The Storytime Project* encouraged parents' interest in their children's development in reading, improved children's literacy behaviours, nurtured positive relationships between parents and schools, encouraged parents to get involved in school activities and fostered good relationships with the local library, increasing the likelihood that parents would continue to use the library after their five-week engagement with *The Storytime Project*. The modus operandi of the project was strongly endorsed by participants and 86% of respondents stated their intention to continue their involvement with the project. Two additional key findings emerged in the final 'open response' section of the questionnaire: The respondents reported that relationships between parents and their children improved as a result of participation in the project and secondly, parents were empowered by their experience of participation in the project. All of these findings are corroborated in the qualitative research findings and will be discussed jointly through thematic analysis. Table 4.1 outlines the findings from the questionnaire. Findings from the 'open responses section follow immediately after Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Findings from the Questionnaire (n = 49)

Literacy Behaviours	• 91.3% agreed or strongly agreed that children show an increased interest in listening to stories after their participation in *The Storytime Project*. • 68.9% agreed or strongly agreed that children are more confident in choosing their own books in the school or EC centre library after their participation in *The Storytime Project.* • 86.7% of respondents said that children are better able to discuss characters in a story than they were before participation in *The Storytime Project.* • 77.8% of respondents said that children are better able to use language to clarify their thinking about a story than they were before their participation in *The Storytime Project.* • 79.6% of respondents reported that children are better able to relate stories to experiences in their own lives than they were before their participation in *The Storytime Project.* • 97.7% of respondents disagreed with the statement that they saw no improvement in a child's literacy behaviour after his/her involvement in *The Storytime Project.*
Parents – Attitudes and Involvement	• 97.8% of respondents reported that they disagreed with the statement that *The Storytime Project* is just another initiative that takes a lot of teacher/EC practitioner time for little gain. • 63% of respondents disagreed with the statement that *The Storytime Project* does not attract parents who are most in need of help in supporting their children's language and literacy development. • 84.1% of respondents reported that involvement in *The Storytime Project* helped them to improve interpersonal relationships with participating parents. • 82.6% of respondents reported that *The Storytime Project* helps to eliminate negative feelings about school for parents. • 74.5% of respondents reported that some parents have volunteered for other school/EC centre activities after their involvement in *The Storytime Project.* • 100% of respondents felt that involvement in *The Storytime Project* encourages parents' interest in their child's development in reading. • 91.4% of respondents disagreed that involvement in *The Storytime Project* has no impact on parents' attitude towards school. • 84.8% of respondents disagreed with the statement that involvement in *The Storytime Project* has no impact on the child's academic progress at school.
The Library as a Resource	• 63.1% of respondents reported that they agreed with the statement that parents developed a positive relationship with their local library as a result of their participation in *The Storytime Project*. • 82.6% of respondents reported that they disagreed with the statement that it is unlikely that families will use their local library once they have completed *The Storytime Project.*
Storytime Induction Workshop	• 93% of respondents reported that they strongly agreed (62.8%) or agreed (30.2%) with the statement that the induction workshop at Marino gives parents good ideas on how to get their children talking about stories. • 13.6% of respondents agreed (nobody agreed strongly) that teachers and EC practitioners could do this work with parents without an induction workshop.
DVD	• 83.3% of respondents reported that they strongly agreed (33.3%) or agreed (50%) that the Storytime DVD clearly demonstrates how to support their children's talk about stories and their related life experiences.

Graduation Ceremony	• 97.7% of respondents reported that they strongly agreed (63.6%) or agreed (34.1%) with the statement that the graduation event at Marino is important because it engenders a sense of pride and achievement in parent participants for having completed the project. • No respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that "The graduation event is a waste of teachers'/EC practitioners' time". 95.4% disagreed with the statement, 63.6% disagreed strongly. • 4.5% of respondents reported that they agreed that the graduation event is of little benefit to parents. Nobody strongly agreed with this statement. 93.2% disagreed (40.9%) or strongly disagreed (52.3%) with the statement.
Continued Involvement with *The Storytime Project*	• 87.8% of respondents reported that they strongly disagreed (46.3%) or disagreed (41.5%) with the statement that they intend to leave *The Storytime Project* as it is difficult to recruit parents. • 86% of respondents reported that they strongly agree (48.8%) or agree (37.2%) with the statement that they intend to stay involved with *The Storytime Project* for the foreseeable future. • 14.05% of respondents reported that they strongly agree (4.7%) or agree (9.35%) with the statement that they intend to leave *The Storytime Project* and run a version of it in their own schools. 69.8% disagreed (32.6% strongly and 37.2% disagreed) with the statement.

'Open Responses' Section of the Questionnaire

The 'open responses section' of the questionnaire invited responses to the following questions: -

1. Do you have any suggestions for how *The Storytime Project* might be improved?

2. Is there anything else about the project that you would like to be examined as part of an evaluation of *The Storytime Project?*

3. Do you have anything else to add?

Typical responses included the following: -

The real impact is on parents and on their relationships (not just educationally) with their children (principal, June 2013, Appendix R[31], p.5).

I have seen the story project acting as a springboard for many parents. By becoming involved in the project they then move on to becoming involved in more classes, PA

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[31] Appendix R comprises the collated comments at the end of the questionnaire

meetings and then FETAC courses. The bond between the parent and child is also enriched (HSCL teacher, June 2013, Appendix R, p.3).

Broaden the project to include all parents of children in Junior Infants (Appendix R, p.4)

Consider changing the location for the induction seminar (Appendix R, p.4 & p.6)

Integrate the classroom teacher into the working of the project (Appendix R, p.5)

Change the storybook every three days instead of five days, which is the current practice (Appendix R, p.3)

Design a brochure that describes how the project operates (Appendix R, p.2)

Marino might support HSCL teachers more in recruiting parents, may-be by advising teachers on how to recruit parents or by issuing an invitation from Marino Institute of Education instead of an invitation from the child's school (Appendix R, p.1)

Introduce a train the trainer programme, that is, individual HSCL teachers or EC practitioners would run the workshop currently done by the director of *The Storytime Project* and parents who have completed the project would be trained to mentor new parent project participants Appendix R, p.4)

Comments such as the first two above, in relation to parent-child relationships and parental empowerment are repeated many times throughout the qualitative research findings and constitute a major finding for the evaluation study. This emerges through the thematic analysis of the combined data set. All findings from the questionnaire were merged with qualitative data from interviews and focus groups and subjected to a process of thematic analysis using NVIVO 10.

Thematic Analysis - Three Key Themes

This section presents the findings according to three main themes Relationships, *Storytime* Processes and Language and Learning, which were identified through the process of thematic analysis. Within each theme, sub-themes are also discussed. The diagram below (Figure 4.1) outlines how the three main themes were analysed and are presented in this chapter.

Relationships
- Parental relationships, confidence & knowledge
  - Knowledge of children's learning
  - Relationship with educational setting
  - Parent-child bonding
  - Educator -parent relationships
  - Parental confidence
    - 'target' parents
- Building Partnerships
- Children's experience of *The Storytime Project*
  - Children's drawings
- Unanticipated benefits of *The Storytime Project*

Storytime Processes
- Fidelity to the project structure
  - Importance of structure for parents
  - Variation in implementation of project
- Organisational issues
  - The library
  - Dvd and tip-sheet
  - The graduation certificate & photographic exhibition
  - Marino as a venue for the induction workshop and graduation ceremony
- Future of *The Storytime Project*
- Role of classroom-based & setting -based educators

Language and Learning
- Issues around books
- Sharing underlying rationale of *The Storytime Project*
- Use of strategies to promote children's use of language by parents, educators and children
  - Children's/parents attempts to perform the text
  - Decontextualized language

Figure 4.1 Three Themes and Eleven Sub-themes

As Figure 4.1 shows, there are three themes, eleven sub-themes, fourteen sub-divisions of sub-themes and one further extension of the sub-division 'parental confidence'. In some instances the sub-themes are further sub-divided due to the depth and complexity of the findings. For example, the first sub-theme under Relationships (theme 1) – Parental relationships, confidence and knowledge - is considered at length (p.143-159), because it includes an examination of the following: Parent-child bonding, educator-parent relationships, parental confidence and how confidence was affected by participation in the project. It also looks at if, or how, parents' relationships with educational settings changed over the course of *The Storytime Project*. It explores how parents' knowledge of their children's learning developed, the various partnerships that were forged as the project evolved, children's participation in *The Storytime Project* and finally, some unanticipated benefits of the project to participants.

Analysis of Combined Quantitative and Qualitative Data Using NVIVO

Theme 1: Relationships

Theme one, Relationships, is sub-divided into four sub-themes –

- Parental relationships, confidence and knowledge
- Building partnerships,
- Children in *The Storytime Project*
- Unanticipated benefits of *The Storytime Project*

Parental relationships, confidence and knowledge (sub-theme 1 of theme 1).
Strengthening bonds (sub-division of sub-theme 1).

Parents found that *The Storytime Project* strengthened bonds with their children. "It was a great bonding experience. They enjoyed the quality time together" (FFGC 1, p.2, June

2010). "Really enjoyed spending time with my daughter. It gave us one-to-one quality time."
(WE 5, slide 3. June 2012). "Time alone with the children was great" (FFGC 2, p.1. January,
2011). This finding concurs with research by Bus (1993) who found that reading to children
by a caregiver helps form emotional attachments with the caregiver. Sometimes children in
the family who were not the intended focus of the project got involved in the story and
benefitted also. "Yes I found that my 7 year old was very interested too and wanted to read
the story also" (FFGC 6, slide 13. December 2012). Table 4.2 lists additional sample
comments made by parents in relation to how the project improved relationships with their
child.

Table 4.2 *The Storytime Project* Strengthened Bonds between Parents and their Children

Excerpts from the Data
Example 1: Started to tell me about her days in school. Great, normally she tells me nothing (Collated evaluation forms from parents, WE1, slide 6.April, 2010).
Example 2: The closeness it brought between parent and child…(FFGC 5, p.1. June 2012).
Example 3: Really great to spend time with him away from the other children (Collated evaluation forms from parents, WE1, slide 6. April 2010)
Example 4: Quality time with no TV or games (FFGC 2, p.1. January 2011)
Example 5: It benefitted me, if not with the reading, then spending time with the boys (FG1, p.29. February 2014).
Example 6: After the project was finished, what I missed most was the time with the kids (FG 1, p.13, February 2014).

The finding that parent-child bonds were strengthened during *The Storytime Project* is
important because research connects child school achievement with parent-child
relationships. For example, Landry et al., (2008) found that an increase in parental
responsiveness to children results in children demonstrating better problem-solving,
language, and social skills. This corresponds with a socio-cultural and a dialogical theoretical
perspective, both of which claim that the origin of cognition is social (Vygotsky, 1978;
Racinonero & Padros, 2010).

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The Storytime Project seemed to strengthen bonds between educators and parents participating in the project. Results from the questionnaire testified to this, finding that 84.1% of respondents (or 41 out of a total of 49 people) in the questionnaire reported that involvement in *The Storytime Project* helped them to improve interpersonal relationships with participating parents. Teachers spoke about the bonding that happened in the car journeys to and from Marino Institute of Education:

> Claire: I think even bringing them is a big thing. Actually having parents in your car. I never had parents in my car, ever, obviously I was a teacher. But in this job I've had parents in my car and I have had to take the car seats out….
>
> Aideen: And hoover the car….
>
> Claire: Yes and then they get to know me more asking how old are the kids and we would just have a chat all the way down and it's lovely. I think it's great relationship building.
>
> Aideen: It's a much easier way to chat as well when they are beside you (FG4, p.4. December 2013).

One teacher mentioned how her car became known in the neighbourhood as a result of giving lifts to parents to events for *The Storytime Project*. (FG4, p.5. December 2013). Research by Anderson and Morrison (2007) supports the finding that when parents are regularly talking with teachers that a greater inter-subjectivity between parents and teachers develops. Table 4.3 lists samples of data that demonstrates the strengthening of bonds between parents and educators. Some examples demonstrate that the strengthening of relationships may have dispelled anxieties about school (See, examples 1 to 3). The questionnaire corroborates this

with 82.6% of respondents agreeing that "*The Storytime Project* helps to eliminate negative

feelings about school for parents" (section 2, statement j).

Table 4.3 *The Storytime Project* Strengthens Bonds between Parents and Educators

Excerpts from the Data
Example 1 (parent): Some of the teachers are very approachable. When I was in [names school she attended as a child] school, my mam would barely speak to the teachers but I would find Ray very comfortable, you can have a laugh, you are not afraid to say things in front of him (FG1, p. 21. February 2014).
Example 2 (parent): Well I think he's around the same age as me, (referring to the HSCL teacher) he definitely shows that teachers are not all horrible creatures and they don't always give out to you (FG1, p.22. February 2014).
Example 3 (EC practitioner) I actually found that doing the books with the parents, we have great chats. Whereas some of the parents would never talk to you and now they are speaking to you and asking you questions (FG3, p.8. December 2013).
Example 4 (EC practitioner): I've got to know the parents more through it which is great (FG 3, p.9. December 2013)
Example 5 (HSCL teacher): And when they see you outside of this they say 'Hi' and they know so much more about you and you know so much more about them, it's lovely, it really is great (FG4, p.5. December 2013).
Example 6 (parent): ` Roisin: Yes, he would encourage you. Miriam: He'd say 'there's nothing to it, don't be worrying about it'. Denise: I did that big book reading and he had me reading out loud in front of the kids and I was saying 'no, no, not a hope' at the start.(FGI, p.21. February, 2014).
Example 7 (parent): ….it helped me to get to know the teachers, to get to know Mr. _____ and then I got involved in the Maths for Fun (FG1, p.20. February 2014).
Example 8 (parent): You don't have to be on your best behaviour, he's very comfortable to be around, [Miriam is talking about the HSCL teacher] you do feel comfortable; he's just easy (FG1, p20. February 2014).
Example 9 (parent): Very approachable (referring to the HSCL teacher) (FG1, p.19. February 2014).

Examples cited above in Table 4.3 indicate that although relationships are positive between

educators and parents, there is a gap in power relationships between the two groups. Parents

speak about 'not having to be on your best behaviour' (FG1, p20. February 2014) in front of

teachers with whom they have forged relationships and refer to teachers as being

approachable, which implies that there are teachers who are not approachable. One of the

parents described her school days, how she left after third year and how they all "ran amok"

when corporal punishment was banned "because there was nobody to beat you". (FG 1, p. 29. February, 2014). This comment hints at internalised oppression, that is, feelings of low self-esteem and self-hatred that result when a person or group "who are systematically denied power and influence in the dominant society internalise the messages they receive about what they are supposed to be like, and they may come to believe the messages to be true" (Rowlands, 1997, p.11). Lareau (2000) attributes this power differential to the amount of cultural capital held by individuals and by social groups, as discussed in the literature review (p.70). Middle class parents generally have a lot of cultural capital or at least, have access to it (Mc Coy, Quail & Smyth, (2012), p.28). Possession of cultural capital enables individuals to join social groups and network in those social groups. Parents from lower socio-economic groups tend not to network and thus are excluded from information about classroom friendships, test results, find it more difficult than their middle class counterparts to negotiate relationships with teachers and with school systems (Lareau, 2000, p.xii). Lareau (2000) also found that working class parents are less likely to address pedagogical issues with teachers, seeing what goes on in school as being outside their level of expertise. "They are ideologically inclined to view school and home as separate spheres" (p.xii). However, given Hanafin & Lynch's (2002) findings that working-class parents were effectively deemed unable to participate in schools by school systems that held a deficit attitude towards them, one can only conclude that 'top-down' interventions do not work. School systems must change their attitude towards working-class parents and embrace them as partners.

Parental confidence (sub-division of sub-theme 1).

Teachers reported that parental confidence was much lower than they had imagined prior to their engagement with parents through *The Storytime Project*, (e.g. INT 5, p.2. April 2014) and that confidence levels were lowest among the most marginalised parents (e.g. INT 3, p.1-2. March 2014).

The Storytime Project seemed to improve parents' confidence generally. "I found for me, reading in front of the kids, was making me more confident" (FG1, p.9. February 2014). "Very enjoyable and gets you out and about and meeting new people" (FFGC 6, p.5. December 2012).

All of the HSCL teachers identified parents' lack of confidence and low self-esteem as barriers to getting involved in *The Storytime Project*. One of the HSCL teachers, Ray described some of these parents as 'target families' as follows –

> Generally it's been positive enough but there have been a few experiences where you call to the house expecting the parent to say 'oh yes I'd love to do it' and they'll say 'no, I don't want to do it at all'. They are nervous. The main reason I think is their confidence. They are not confident themselves about reading the books, that their literacy levels aren't high enough and that's why they are nervous about coming down here [Marino Institute of Education] or taking on the roles. They are usually the parents that we call 'target families', you would call to their houses and they are the ones that you really want to get involved. In my experience I find that I would have two target parents and two non-target parents, parents that probably would read to their children the whole time but they wouldn't use the strategies that you show them on the [induction] day. That's my general experience of it anyway (FG 4, p.2. December 2013).

'Target parents' (extension of sub-division of sub-theme 1).

The focus groups and interviewees discussed the issue of 'target parents'. These were parents that the HSCL teachers, sometimes with the aid of the classroom teacher or another teacher in the school, strategically recruited to participate in *The Storytime Project* because they believed they would benefit from the project. Some teachers and EC practitioners

expressed frustration at not being able to recruit 'target' parents as potential participants for *The Storytime Project.* They felt that many parents who volunteer to participate are already reading stories to their children and are involved in other school ventures. Claire, a HSCL teacher, said "but what I found was when I opened it up to everyone I got loads of people that really didn't need it or that did everything anyway" (FG4, p.6-7. December 2013). Claire talked about the frustrations of trying to get parents involved in initiatives. She spoke of low self-esteem and lack of motivation. She visits a large number of homeless parents who are being temporarily housed in hotels near to the school catchment area. The uncertainty of their lives makes commitment to school initiatives a huge challenge. Keeping a 'target family' on board to continue with *The Storytime Project* was also a concern, as described by another HSCL teacher:

> Aideen: One of them was a target family and she was actually avoiding me, she wasn't in school this morning and her child wasn't in school. So it's a bit sad. I don't mind if she doesn't come [to the induction workshop].
>
> Molly: They are afraid to say it to you and they are afraid that they will let you down.
>
> Aideen: Yes, she wouldn't even reply to the text messages. I would usually send a text on a Wednesday to say 'new book tomorrow - will have for you there'. I think she might have lost some of the books, I don't know, some of the books are missing and she really felt a little bit under pressure about that but I didn't. But it is a bit of a pity that the ones [parents] who you really want sometimes aren't the ones that you get. I think two that I got this year were brilliant. It really opened doors for them. (FG4, p.6.December 2013).

Despite these comments shared at the focus group discussion, 63% of respondents to the questionnaire (or 31 people out of a total of 49) disagreed with the statement that "*The*

Storytime Project does not attract parents who are most in need of help in supporting their children's language and literacy development" (questionnaire section 2, statement h). 30.5% (or fifteen people) agreed with the statement. The focus group of HSCL teachers agreed that it was good to have a mix of 'target' parents and other parents in the group that comes to Marino because 'target' parents become influenced by other parents. "I think it's a really good idea to get the mix because the parents who are doing it [reading with their child] will do it better and the parent who have never even thought about reading a book, something will have rubbed off on her" (FG4, p.9.December 2013). This thinking resonates with the Vygotskian notion of the more knowledgeable other influencing the learner (1978). Although parents are not working in learning dyads together, it is likely that they are influencing one another formally at induction workshops and graduation ceremonies and informally through their own social networks, if those networks exist for them. The mix of 'target' parents also synchronises with Downes' (2014) universal (full population) and selected (a sub-population, identified at a greater level of risk than the general population) populations model, which is designed to target different populations in interventions. There is some evidence that *The Storytime Project* is facilitating the formation of new social networks for parents. Aideen, A HSCL teacher, said "Yes I suppose I feel if I do it with my Early Start morning group, they kind of bond, the parents together. [   ]. They really have formed their own little relationship" (FG 4, p. 16, December 2013). .

One contribution from a HSCL teacher, who works in one of the most marginalised areas in the Northside Partnership area, provided an insight into an *educator's* need to experience success with the project. She was articulating her rationale for mixing the recruitment of parents between 'target' and non-'target' parents -

It can be disheartening if you don't get parents for yourself. You shouldn't pick, maybe, all the marginalised parents because if you don't have any success story, yourself, as a Home School Liaison, if they are not turning up, if they are not reading … (FG4, p.10. December 2013).

Amabile & Kramer, (2011) write about 'the power of small wins' for keeping people motivated with regard to their work −" Of all the things that can boost inner work life, the most important is making progress in meaningful work" (p.72). *The Storytime Project* is overwhelmingly focused on the needs of parents and their children. Those who operate and manage the project also need to be nurtured and professionally acknowledged. A heightened focus on CPD for practitioners might be beneficial in this regard. The planning and CPD workshops for educators, which is held at the beginning of each year at Marino Institute of Education, might benefit from a community-of-practice model. This would be empowering and informative for educators (Wenger, Mc Dermott & Synder, 2002) and support the philosophy underlying *The Storytime Project.*

A fear was expressed by some HSCL teachers and the project director that if the project was *only* attracting parents who were already reading to their children, that this was wasteful of the project's resources. However, findings noted that participating parents in *The Storytime Project* included a combination of 'target' parents and other parents (FG 4, p.2. December 2013). Parents who were reading to their children before they participated in the project still benefitted from their involvement because they learned strategies to encourage their child to talk about the book and about related topics.

This project is a good idea. Even though I have always read stories to my son, it has given me a different perspective on how to do it. And my son has understood this new way and really enjoys it (WE3, p.6. June 2011).

At one point during the focus group discussion with HSCL teachers, there was a sense of discomfort around teachers making decisions about which parents needed or did not need the dialogic reading intervention. There was a concern that teachers' actions would appear "patronising" (FG4, p.7. December 2013). This demonstrates an awareness of deficit thinking (Valencia, 1997) in the group. The following interaction illustrates the view that sharing information about the dialogic story reading process benefits all.

Aideen: But you made that point that while we might think they don't need it, they actually do need it so I didn't feel as bad about it then.

Miriam: Without being patronising about it because a lot of them do read and we can assume that they don't. They are reading, they may not be using the books the way we would like them to.

Geraldine: I think that's the difference, the parents you think are reading actually aren't.

Ps: (general agreement)

Dympna: The parents who are reading are still having their eyes opened to a new way of doing it. A lot of the people aren't doing it this way.

Aideen: We probably never did ourselves this way until we looked at the prompt sheet.

Claire: To be honest I did it this time with my two year old and I wasn't doing it … [the way the project recommends] (FG4, p.7. December 2013).

Further insight into issues around parental confidence can be read in Table 4.4. The comments illustrate a low level of parental confidence.

Table 4.4 Issues Relating to Parental Confidence

Excerpts from the Data
Example 1 (school principal): ...even the very first day, in the car on the way down, there was a lot of nervousness about it. No matter how much you reassure people that it's only just a chat and that nobody is going to be asked any hard questions here, still there was a lot of anxiety around it. It was a huge thing to them. Much more than you would, well certainly than I realised (INT 5, p.2. April, 2014).
Example 2 (HSCL teacher): Yes, their own levels and confidence, you know, they say things like 'oh no, I wouldn't be able to read that' or 'I wouldn't be good enough for that' or 'oh no I'm too old to be reading stories', it's all this kind of thing, they put up barriers straight away (FG4, p. 3. December 2013).
Example 3 (EC practitioner): It's the fear of the unknown I think and if they haven't exactly had positive experiences in education themselves then they find it hard to get beyond that. A lot of parents are still quite wary about even coming into the classroom (Int4, p.4, April 2014).
Example 4 (parent): I am great at talking, which everyone knows, but you put a page in front of me and I'll start reading it and I will start stuttering just because I never had any interest in school at all. I found for me, reading in front of the kids, was making me more confident (FG1, p.9. February 2014).
Example 5 (parent): Roisín: When Ruby did start school she had the most beautiful Teacher, Ms _____, for two years and I did have to approach her but I would be in bits. I would just go back to my own childhood. Miriam: Yes, you go back to your own experience. Denise: Oh yes, I used to be like that as well. Roisin: I used to be in bits. I would break down in front of Ms _____. She must have thought 'what is with this loop case'. I was so terrified and I found that I couldn't get my words across. As the few months went on that did become calmer, then you realise the teachers are approachable. Miss _____ is approachable, the principal is approachable and with Mr _____, Ray, it was him, his way of saying 'we're alright, we can have the laugh'. You could ask him what he did at the weekend (FG1, p.22. February, 2014).
Example 6 (EC practitioner): There is a fear, some parents may have had a bad experience in school themselves or their own literacy mightn't be great and they can get embarrassed. They are asking 'now what does this entail, I'd be embarrassed', so until they get comfortable with it they are not quite sure what they are heading in to so you have to sell it (FG 3, p.20. December, 2013).
Example 7 (HSCL teacher): Sometimes the parents don't think they'll be able to do it or they are nervous about it so you kind of have to sell it to them (FG4, p.2. December, 2013).
Example 8 (HSCL teacher): They [parents] are terrified of coming here [MIE], some of them that they might be asked to speak or they might be asked to say something, but when you do get them down they love it. It's trying to just get them over that in the first place (FG 4, p.3. December 2013).

The disconnect between the culture of institutions and parents' everyday life seems to be at the root of the low levels of confidence experienced by these parents. This could be attributed to a lack of cultural capital as described earlier (p.12).

Parents' relationships with educational settings (sub-division of sub-theme 1).

Some parents reported that they got involved in other school initiatives after their involvement in *The Storytime Project*. This is reflected in questionnaire findings (completed by teachers, EC practitioners and project administrators) - 74.5% of respondents (or 37 out of a total of 49 respondents) reported that some parents have volunteered for other school/EC centre activities after their involvement in *The Storytime Project.* In at least three schools, parents who were involved in *The Storytime Project* subsequently went into the classroom and supported the teachers' literacy hour by reading to groups of children. "I go to Katie's class every Friday for story time with her and they just love it." (INT 1, p.6. March 2014). Another parent described how the HSCL teacher gently cajoled her into reading stories to children in her son's class -

I did the big book and I would never have done that. I explained to him (the HSCL

teacher) that I'm hopeless at reading and he said 'it's nothing, it's in front of your

own son […..]. I told him I would have no confidence in reading and he said 'think about it'. Then he would come back a week later and ask 'are you going to do it?' and I said 'oh go on, I'll do it for you' (FG1, p.23. February 2014).

In an interview with a school principal, the principal commented that she saw *The Storytime Project* as a vehicle to get parents more involved in the life of the school.

It gives them confidence, it gives them more interest in the school. Having been involved in that one thing, very often they would then attend classes that would be on or get involved in the parents' association or involved in events around the school. It's a way of bringing parents in and getting them involved (INT 6, p.3.April 2014).

This concurs with findings from Tellado and Sava (2010) who found that when parents from poor socio-economic backgrounds get involved in school life, it can start to reverse their experience of being excluded from the wider society (p.165). Other research demonstrates that parental involvement in their children's education brings about higher academic outcomes for the child (Jeynes, 2005). Table 4.5 lists samples of data that suggests *The Storytime Project* encouraged parents to get involved in initiatives related to their children's education.

Table 4.5 *The Storytime Project* Encouraged Parents to Get Involved in Initiatives Related to their Children's Education.

Excerpts from the Data
Example 1 (parent): If I hadn't done the story time I would never had done the big book reading. That helped me as well and then you (Miriam) were there at the big book reading so I was saying 'grand I know her' (FG1, p.26.February, 2014).
Example 2 (parent): Annemarie: I do reading in his class on a Friday as well. It's just story time - you go in at 1 o'clock for about 15 minutes. There are only a few parents actually go in. I would say nine times out of ten there are only two of us but when you walk in their little faces just light up and they run over to you. I would be nearly in tears but I do the story the way we did in the project and the teacher does it as well (INT 2, p.12. March 2014).

Example 3 (parent): It helped me to get to know the teachers, to get to know Mr. _____ and then I got involved in the Maths for Fun. I think we're all [i.e. all in the focus group discussion] involved in the Maths for Fun" (FG1, p.20. February, 2014).
Example 4 (school principal): I have seen *The Storytime Project* acting as a springboard for many parents. By becoming involved in the project they then move on to becoming involved in more classes, PA (Parents' Association) meetings and then FETAC courses" (Appendix R, p.3. June, 2013).
Example 5 (parent): Miriam eventually talked another mammy into doing the big book. She was adamant she wasn't doing it but thankfully Miriam was saying 'ah come on Brenda, we'll have a laugh' (FG 1, p.26. February 2014).

Examples 1 and 5 in Table 4.5 indicate that parents are using their own social relationships to support one another in getting involved in schools. The parent in example 5 talks about 'having a laugh' together. There is a sense of comradeship. Although the parents will be in the alien environment of school, their private codes, their intersubjectivity will buoy them along. While they are engaging with the establishment, with the institution of school, laughter allows them to participate yet still remain on the margins. There are resonances with Bakhtin here where laughter becomes an act of subversion, a tool of resistance to oppression and the establishment is temporarily toppled through parodic acts (Denith, 1995). Participating in school culture for marginalised parents might be construed as a sort of 'carnivalistic misalliance' (Fisher, 2011, p.1), where everything which is normally separated, is allowed to connect – "the sacred with the profane, the new and old, the high and low etc" (p.1). Downes (2013), building on Levi-Strauss' examination of structuralist relational frameworks, develops a relational framework which argues for a move from diametric to concentric systems of relation. A diametric model is oppositional (thus the term – 'diametrically opposed'), whereas a concentric model is inclusive. Downes uses an example of two concentric circles, (i.e sharing the same middle point, one circle embedded in another). He notes that the two circles are two separate entities but at the same time they share a space, thus having much in common. Downes uses this visual metaphor to argue for a move from oppositional relations between teacher and student, whereby the teacher regards the student

as 'other' and uses authoritarian teaching methods to keep students in their place, to a more concentric relational space where hierarchies are collapsed and students are listened to. "Mirror image polarites" (Downes, 2013, p.356), that is, the pitting of opposites against one another (e.g. good/bad, powerful/powerless, voice/voiceless), need to be replaced by a more circular, relational space that allows for a coming together instead of a stand-off. This can be extended to relations between teachers and parents. The data have shown that *The Storytime Project* was instrumental in breaking down hierarchical relationships to some extent – parents found they could be "very comfortable, you can have a laugh" (FG1, p. 21. February 2014) with the HSCL teachers; parents and teachers travelled together in cars to induction and graduation ceremonies and got to know each other in their shared space (FG4, p.4. December 2013) and some parents volunteered for in-school activities (FG1, p.26.February, 2014).

Parental knowledge of their children's learning (sub-division of sub-theme 1).

The final section of the category 'parental relationships, confidence and knowledge' is the knowledge component. This section looks at parents' increased knowledge of their children's learning and of literacy practices as a result of their involvement with *The Storytime Project*. It overlaps with theme 3 – Language and Learning, in particular the category called 'Use of Learning Strategies by parents, educators and children'. To avoid discussing this area twice, the focus in this instance will be on parents' discovery of their children's knowledge and ability rather than the specifics of the learning strategies that are shared at the induction seminar, on the DVD and on the tip-sheet.

100% of respondents (all 49 respondents) to the questionnaire strongly agreed (52.2%) or agreed (47.8%) with the statement that involvement in *The Storytime Project* encourages parents' interest in their child's development in reading. This was the only incidence in the questionnaire of a 100% positive response. A sense of surprise, delight and

pride in their children's ability pervades the data relating to parents' knowledge of their

children's learning. Typical comments from parents are outlined in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6 *The Storytime Project* Encourages Parents' Interest in their Child's Development in Reading

Excerpts from Data
Example 1: My child knew more words than I realised (FFGC 2, p.1.January 2011).
Example 2: I didn't know how vivid my child's imagination was! (FFGC 2, p.1.January 2011).
Example 3: Parents couldn't believe what their children knew (FFGC 2, p.1.January 2011);
Example 4: One parent was taken aback at her child's knowledge of language and terminology - words like 'refrigerator' (FFGC 5, p.1.June 2012).
Example 5: A parent expressed surprise at her child's ability to articulate what she would do if she found herself in a similar situation to a character in the story (FFGC 5, p.1. June 2012).
Example 6 (HSCL teacher): Parents were amazed at the insightful and intelligent observations by the children over the course of the project. They were "surprised by the amount of detail noticed by the children and the observations they made about the stories and illustrations" and they were impressed at the children's attempts to read back stories to them (FFGC 1, p.2. 2010).
Example 7 (classroom teacher): Just keep going on this fantastic programme for the parents, to see them come out of their "shells" in relation to all aspects of literacy especially reading is amazing. It gives them the confidence and therefore gives their children great confidence in their ability! (questionnaire, Appendix R, p.6).
Example 8: It has made me aware of the newer books in circulation (FFGC 5, p.1. June 2012).
Example 9: Denis had started using the dictionary so I looked the word up in the dictionary to see what 'disgruntled' meant. I was actually a bit confused myself! (FG 1, p.13. February 2014).

The modus operandi of *The Storytime Project* ensured that parents spent a dedicated time,

daily, dialoguing with their children. This was time spent together that they may not have

experienced before their participation in the project. It is likely as a result of spending this

time with their children and practising the strategies recommended to prompt dialogue, that

parents experienced revelations, like those expressed in Table 4.6 above, about their

children's knowledge and ability.

A parent, Annemarie, spoke about developing shared understanding with children.

She said – "His concept of something is one thing, where you would have assumed that it was

something else, so then you can work in around it like that. We do actually learn from kids"

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(INT 2, p.13.March 2014). When Annemarie says "you can work in around it like that" (p.13), she seems to be supporting her child's developing awareness as he learns alongside her. She is bridging between the known and the unknown for her child (Dorn, 1996; Granott & Parziale, 2009; Rogoff, 2003). The child first experiences a behaviour vicariously through her. He then practices the experience for himself. As he gradually takes control of the action by developing his consciousness of the action and actively participating in the action, Annemarie modifies or regulates her language according to her child's increased understanding for performing the action. This describes the process of Rogoff's guided participation and also Donaldson's theory of the connection between the growth of consciousness and the growth of the intellect (Dorn, 1996, p.16). When Annemarie says "We really do learn from kids"(p.13), she may be reflecting on the process of shared meaning-making that she has undergone with her son. The comment also reveals that Annemarie was surprised that she could learn from her child. She got an insight into her child as a knowledgeable being. The concept of the child as an agentive, whole, knowledgeable being as distinct from 'empty vessel' or work-in-progress-to-adulthood reflects Annemarie's shift to a more contemporary conceptualisation of the child (see, for example, Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999; Malaguzzi, 1998; McNaughton, 2003; Waller, 2005).

Annemarie went on to describe how moved she was by the realisation that her child was an able learner -

When I ask him ask him 'what do you think of this?' or 'what would you do?', it's getting his impression of that story, what he thinks of it, that just makes you feel….wow…because it sort of shows you your child's intelligence when you think of it, or how he would deal with things in that situation. So it sort of makes you burst with pride, I'd be saying 'I'm so proud of you, that's what I would do as well son'.

It's really good because you get their idea. Whereas you just think, common knowledge, this is what you would do and you would never think before to see what a child would think in that situation (INT 2, p.11. March 2014).

This excerpt demonstrates how mother and son are developing intersubjectivity through dialogic engagement and simultaneously strengthening emotional bonds with one another.

A HSCL teacher drew attention to a parent's developing metacognitive awareness of reading in a dialogic fashion to his four-year-old child. The example illustrates the parent's development from intuitive to conscious scaffolding of children during story- reading – "I could hear from how that dad was talking about his experience in it. I'd say he has definitely been very close to doing it [reading in a dialogic fashion] all along but now he is conscious of it" (FG4, p. 9. December 2013). Metacognitive awareness also implies intellectual development according to Donaldson's theory that links consciousness with intellectual growth (Dorn, 1996).

The three remaining sub-themes that fall under the theme of 'Relationships' will now be addressed: 'Building Partnerships', 'Children in *The Storytime Project'* and 'Unanticipated Benefits of the Project'.

Building partnerships (sub-theme 2 of theme 1).

Relationships between parents and their children and parents and educators have been discussed at length. Other relationships developed during *The Storytime Project*, namely between Marino Institute of Education, Dublin's Northside Partnership and Dublin City library and also between teachers and early childhood practitioners. The Northside Partnership administrator spoke about her relationship with the project thus:

I am very happy with the way it's evolved. I hope it's a very positive experience for you and I would be very keen to provide any additional support if there is any lacking. It's a really good fit at the moment. We just seem to work in parallel and it all comes together (INT 8, p. 8. December, 2013).

I love being involved in it and I feel for something that was such a discrete piece it has gathered momentum and it probably doesn't feel that small now that you are researching it but for such a discrete and very achievable project, I feel it does have the potential to deliver a real impact. I really, really do feel committed to it (INT 8, p.12. December, 2013).

In an interview with the administrator from Dublin City Library who has been involved with *The Storytime Project* since 2011, he said that he was "delighted" to be involved in *The Storytime Project*. He said that *The Storytime Project* was valuable to the library. "I think the involvement of the library is very important from our point of view. With any project there is a start and then it finishes, hopefully you have inspired the parents involved to continue" (INT 7, p.4. April 2014).

Good relationships between key partners in *The Storytime Project* are crucially important to the successful roll-out of the project. Duhn, Fleer and Harrison (2016) argue that relationships and a sense of belonging are a key factor to the success of multi-disciplinary networks – " It is through a sense of belonging, moderated by network members' critical engagement with local differences and specificities, that transformative practices which matter in local contexts, emerge" (p.379). Marino Institute of Education, The Northside Partnership and Dublin City Library engage in joint planning and review for *The Storytime Project*. After each roll-out of the project, parents' feedback is discussed and considered in planning the subsequent phase of the project. For example, books are regularly changed or

the induction workshop is modified to better meet parents' needs. Edwards, (2011) describes two key elements that support interagency collaboration – 'distributed expertise' and 'relational expertise'. Distributed expertise is knowledge held by various professionals and practitioners that is distributed across practices and settings. Relational expertise is a professional confidence and competence to engage with other professionals, recognising one's own expertise and the expertise of one's collaborators, trusting that each has a unique skill set, realised in disparate contexts, which will contribute to project cohesion and success. Distributive and relational expertise both require an ability to look and reach outwards to other professionals and organisations (Edwards, 2009). Distributed expertise is exemplified in the way that the project is mediated through the director of the project, through HSCL teachers and through EC educators. Marino Institute and Dublin City library use relational expertise when they collaborate on book selection and on the inclusion of new library branches to the project. The Northside Partnership official has a particularly strong and enduring relationship with practitioners from the community early years' settings because of their engagement with one another in multiple work contexts and because of shared history (and thus shared culture) in the early years' care sector. This has been most helpful in bridging relationships between the Marino Institute project coordinator and early years' practitioners. The strong relationship between the two coordinators (one a former primary school teacher and the other a former early years' professional) seems to facilitate professional boundary crossing and may be instrumental in developing positive relationships between teachers and EC educators involved in *The Storytime Project.*

Interagency collaboration reflects policy at national level, which has, in recent years, emphasized cross-sectoral collaboration. One of the six transformational goals of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* (2014), the national policy framework for children and young people 2014-2020, is "Cross-government and interagency collaboration and

coordination"(p.24). The National Youth Strategy 2015-2020, (2015) contains five references to the importance of interagency collaboration and coordination. Warmington, Daniels, Edwards, Brown, Leadbetter, Martin & Middleton, (2004) write that the rationale for interagency collaboration in relation to the treatment of social inequality is that social problems are multi-faceted and therefore need a holistic, connected approach to their solution. *The Storytime Project's* interagency approach thus resonates with literature on interagency collaboration and with the orientation of current Irish government policy.

Relationships between teachers and early childhood professionals are more complex. One of the project's administrators spoke of how the confidence of EC practitioners improved due to their participation in *The Storytime Project*. They were reluctant to get involved at first but became very enthusiastic about the project (INT 8, p.5.December 2013). They may also have been reluctant to get involved in a project in which HSCL teachers were involved. The relationship between EC practitioners and teachers has traditionally been fraught in Ireland. According to Madden, (2012), this is due to the disparity in pay and conditions, social status and professional qualifications. Teachers are better qualified, better paid and enjoy high status in Irish society (Madden, 2012). A noteworthy feature of *The Storytime Project* is that teachers and EC practitioners work alongside one another, they receive the same professional development in relation to the project and are accorded parity of esteem in every respect. Some practitioners commented on this in focus groups and interviews –

> part of our work is making the transition from early years to primary school which is a
> huge transition for children, making those connections and working with school
> liaison teachers so it's lovely that we are in a project where the two groups meet
> because we're both early educators and you need to evaluate each other's work and

sometimes those experiences aren't always available so it's a lovely opportunity for that (FG 3, p.25. December 2013).

The EC practitioner may have been making a broader point here about the absence of opportunity *in any sphere* to share and critique ideas with teachers about educating young children. The comment could also be interpreted as an indictment of the power or status differential between teachers and Early Childhood practitioners. The words of Cannella and Viruru (2004) are apposite in this context:

> When voice is 'conferred' upon the 'other', when 'they are given voice', without recognising or attempting to alter the inequities that created the original distinctions, the 'giving of voice' or 'listening to' just becomes another colonizing apparatus … Allowing different voices to be heard is not a solution, since it leads only to an unrealistic illusion of a harmonious pluralism (Cannella & Viruru, 2004, p.146-7).

The Storytime Project affords equal status to teachers and early childhood practitioners and this is reflected in the shared *Storytime Project* leadership but it is beyond the remit of the project to address the root causes of the power differential between the two groups.

Another EC practitioner commented that it is nice to at least get to know the faces of a few teachers from *The Storytime Project* so that there can be some recognition of one another when they meet in other circumstances such as the 'Transition to School Project' (*Preparing for Life,* Northside Partnership, May, 2014). This comment shows that the connection between both groups is superficial and tentative and perhaps does not go beyond the fact that both groups are sharing a room and a project together. The following interaction illustrates the challenges and barriers to collaboration among participants.

Yes, it's a start getting them into the same room and then we have, through the 'Early Years Intervention project' and Preparing for life', in addition to my Early Years Practice program, there is now, […] a teaching through play or learning through play approach, which is also Aistear based and is being introduced in junior and senior infant classes. So we are hoping that using Aistear will break down those barriers a little bit and we are working towards getting Early Years Practitioners and Teachers in the same room talking about Aistear rather than talking about the transition. What we have found to date is that they are not talking the same language or they don't anticipate that they are going to talk the same language. (INT 8, p.2. April 2014).

The last comment above that teachers and EC practitioners don't even anticipate that they are going to talk the same language, is telling and calls for the development of Edwards (2009) relational expertise, described earlier. Marino Institute of Education has been running a master's programme in Early Childhood Education since 2014. Its current (2017) student cohort includes an equal balance of EC educators and primary school teachers. The first module on the master's programme explicitly addresses relationships between teachers and EC practitioners using historical, sociological and economic lenses. Students study topics such as the tension between play-based learning and intentional teaching. This gives them an opportunity to interrogate and challenge their professional thinking. Anecdotal evidence suggests that students bond over the two year period and students move from entrenched views of one another as professionals. It is too soon to judge if this will have a broader systemic effect but it appears that this inter-professional learning is breaking down barriers between the two groups of educators.

The quotation from the interview above also refers to the use of Aistear to break down barriers between teachers and EC practitioners. *Aistear* was designed as a curriculum

framework to serve a broad constituency of users such as parents, child-minders, pre-school and naíonra educators and primary school teachers of Junior and Senior Infants. Its reach extends into the infant classes of primary school. In so doing it implies some relationship between EC practitioners and teachers (Aister/NCCA 2009). The researcher is of the view that Aistear has the potential to foster and promote collaboration between EC practitioners and primary school teachers into the future. The number of professional contexts for collaboration between the two groups is growing, most recently in discussions about transitions from pre-school to primary (see for example, O' Kane, 2016; O' Toole, 2016) and in reconfiguring the structure of the primary school curriculum in Ireland (NCCA, 2016). Concomitantly the growing professionalization of the EC sector means there are more EC educators with primary degree and master's level qualifications. These factors may contribute to enhanced relationships between the sectors into the future as traditional boundaries, first in curriculum content (see Aistear) and now in curriculum structure, are reconfigured.

The next section will look at findings in relation to children's experience of *The Storytime Project* as articulated by the collected data.

Children's experience of *The Storytime Project* (sub-theme 3 of theme 1).

It was clear from a focus group discussion with five children that the children were familiar with the selected books from *The Storytime Project*. When discussing some of the books, they used language from the books. For example, one child exclaimed "I can't stand it" when she was talking about the main character's frustration at being unable to sleep in the story *Peace at Last* (FG2, p.4.May 2014).This is a direct quote from the book. It was also clear that the children were used to going to the library. Some claimed to read books in the library; others said they brought them home with them. The children spoke about the adults who read to them. Mothers, fathers, grandmothers and aunts were mentioned. The children

listened to stories at different times: night time, morning time and bed time. It seemed that some adults may have been asking children to identify words as they read to their child because when asked about learning from books, the children mentioned "sound it out" (FG2, p.13. May 2014). This indicates that they were using phonics to try and identify words. The children also talked about turning the page and reading the 'blurb'(FG", p.13. May 2014). This feedback from the children sounds like strategies that they may have learned in their Junior Infant classroom rather than from their involvement in *The Storytime Project*. In an interview with a HSCL teacher (INT 3, p.1-2. March 2014), she claimed that parents who had attended the induction seminar, loved using particular strategies to improve their children's oral language; strategies such as using "I wonder", to create open-ended questions; also predicting and retelling. The children did not mention these strategies when asked about the way Mammy /Daddy/ Granny /Auntie reads them stories. However, it would be challenging for four year old children to speak metacognitively about the reading process. It is likely that children can talk about the reading strategies practised at school because they talk about these strategies in a metacognitive way every day in school.

Other data received in relation to children's participation in the project indicate the following:

First, instances of the children asserting themselves during the story-reading process, for example, parent Annemarie said "Yes, he's the boss, if he'll go, I'll keep going with him and then when he says next page I say 'ok' (INT 2, p.9. March 2014). "He would look at the pictures and tell the story his way and would be telling his sister and brother or ourselves" (WE4, slide 7. January 2012). One parent liked the dialogic reading process because she said it helped to get her child involved "instead of just listening" (WE1, slide 4. April 2010). Another parent said that she liked the idea of children 'having their say'. "They can have

their say and even start acting it out" (WE1, slide 4. April 2010). There are many instances of the children performing the text and this is examined under the theme of Language and Learning and in connection with the literature by Sipe (2002). These examples point to the movement of control from adult to child that is one of the aims of dialogic story-reading (Whitehurst et al., 1988; Whitehurst, Epstein, et al., 1994).

Second, parents' worries about mixed messages from a moral perspective in some of the fairytale stories. For example, a HSCL teacher wrote -

> the children disapproved of Jack's mother rewarding his 'bad' behaviour (stealing the hen etc.) and were concerned at the lack of Garda presence! This version of the story was problematic for children living in this area where robbing and violent behaviours are all too real. (I shared my memory of the original which explained that the giant had stolen the family fortune and the hen from Jack's family and he was just reclaiming them!). (FFGC 1, p.1-2. June 2010).

It is clear from this account that children are identifying with the stories they hear and are positioning themselves in the story. This means they are practising the strategy of projecting into the fictional lives of characters, which is a key strategy, known as a distancing prompt (Whitehurst, 1992), for the development of decontextualized language. Children are also using story to shape and to understand their identity (Bruner, 1996).

Third. parents' desire to include their child in the graduation ceremony and on the visit to the library during school hours (Appendix R, p.3). The project team had discussed including children in these events but felt it counter-productive if they were missing school time in order to attend.

Most of the children claimed that other members of the family (children) were present when a parent was reading the story to them. This is an unanticipated benefit of *The Storytime Project,* that is, other children in the family benefitted from story time as well as the designated children. This emerged strongly in the evaluation and feedback documentation. The following comments from the data below (Table 4.7) illustrate how other family members benefitted from the parent-child story reading. –

Table 4.7 Other Children in the Family Benefitted from the Story Reading Session

Excerpts from the Data
Example 1 (EC practitioner): Because she has two children, they are quite close in age, she has to read the book twice because the older boy tends to speak up for the younger. [ ] So she has to read the book twice so he can get a fair clout at it! But I think she is enjoying the experience (INT 4, p.5, April 2014).
Example 2 (parent): My other son was three at the time and he absolutely loved it. He couldn't wait every night for us to sit down and go through the book. He would take the book off me, flick through it and start telling himself the story by the pictures. It was a lovely time (FG1, p.3. February 2014).
Example 3 (parent): But the youngest fella was always butting in (All laughing). (FG1, p.3. February 2014).
Example 4 (parent): Had his brother and sister listening to it also getting them to read it (WE 4. Slide 7. January 2012).
Example 5 (parent): He would look at the pictures and tell the story his way and would be telling his sister and brother or ourselves (WE 4. Slide 7. January 2012).
Example 6 (parent): Other siblings got involved (FFGC p.1. January 2011)
Example 7 (EC practitioner): Dana: One parent came to me with her little fella – he's three. She's finding it hard with him but her little one that's a year older is loving it. And it wasn't for her that she did the project…..it was for the little fella but she said she's glad now because……. JK: It's working with the four year old? Dana: And now he's starting to come and listen because he sees his sister... (FG 3, December 2013, p.8).

This finding, that as parent and child interact around a story, other siblings get involved, reinforces the social nature of learning.

The next section presents an analysis of drawings created by two children. These drawings were completed following a focus group discussion with five children who

participated in *The Storytime Project*. It could be inferred from the drawings that the experience of having stories read to them is a positive one for children and relationships with adult readers are also positive.

Children's drawings (sub-division of sub-theme 3).

The drawings that follow are from two children who participated in *The Storytime Project*. It is their artistic response to reading with an adult at home. These drawings were done after the closing of a focus group discussion with five children who participated in *The Storytime Proje*ct. The methods chapter (p.100) provides a rationale for the use of drawing as a method of listening to children.

The characters depicted in all five drawings are, without exception, smiling and happy. (See appendix S for all five drawings). Those that are drawn with arms, have their arms open in expansive gestures. Adult care-givers, also positively depicted, feature in four of the five drawings. Drawing two is possibly situated in a bed with the child in a lying position listening to the story. It could be deduced from the drawings that the experience of having stories read to them is a positive one for children and relationships with adult readers are also positive. Dr. Michael Flannery, senior lecturer in Arts Education at Marino Institute of Education, interpreted the drawings further, identifying signs of child agency in drawing 2 and of the child's understanding of text and literacy behaviours in drawing 1.
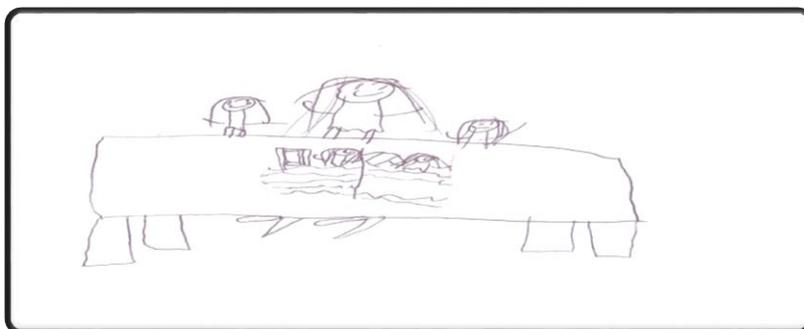
Figure 4.2 Child's Drawing 1

This drawing is interesting in that the book itself is upside down. It faces the viewer. The child hasn't yet conceptualised that the book should face the readers. There is an indication that the centre character is the adult due to size. The children either side are mini versions of the adult. All female. All happy. Story book character appears to be female also. Child understands that books often contain illustrations and text. Same character in both illustrations with slightly amended scenes perhaps indicates awareness of sequence of events within a given location. No ears or hands depicted - could indicate perhaps the reading is mostly a visual experience? (M. Flannery, personal communication, May 18, 2015).
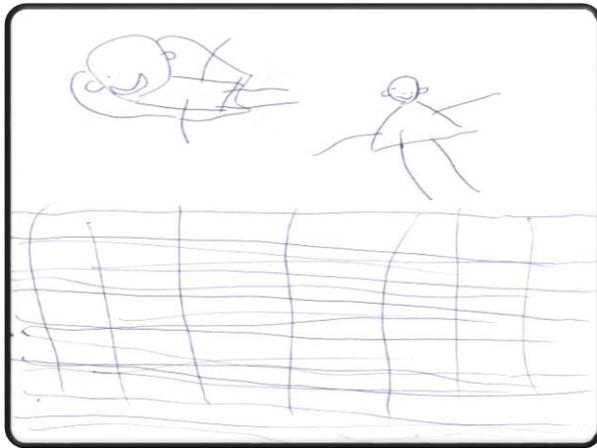
Figure 4.3 Child's Drawing 2

Possible aerial perspective here. Viewpoint looks down onto child figure. Psychological perspective also in that the larger figure is the child as opposed to the figure reading to the child. The focus is on the positioning when being read to by another - probably often told to lie down or else no story! Surmising the patterned shape is the duvet cover - patterned. We have awareness of ears here - perhaps the focus of bed time reading is listening and not so much looking. Both appear to be male characters (M. Flannery, personal communication, May 18, 2015).

Although only two children's drawings are shown here as examples, all five drawings seem to depict warm, comfortable relationships and an engaged common purpose (See appendix S).

Multiple benefits of the *The Storytime Project* have already been presented thus far. There were also other unanticipated benefits of *The Storytime Project* and these will now be considered.

Unanticipated benefits of involvement in *The Storytime Project* (sub-theme 4 of theme 1).

One of the unanticipated benefits of *The Storytime Project* is the positive effect that the project had on some of the educator participants. Many of them spoke about how they learned from the strategies shared at the induction workshop, or from the 'parents tip-sheet' (See appendix T) and also from the '*Storytime* DVD'. Participant teachers and early childhood practitioners reported that this changed their work practices. Participants referred to a level of personal and professional empowerment. One of the EC practitioners embarked on a degree in Early Childhood Education and the topic for her dissertation was 'Developing Relationships with Parents" (FG3, p.18. December 2013). Another EC practitioner expressed interest in knowing more about the theory informing the project's work when she said – "You know that it is good to read but all the tips of why it is good to read are brilliant" (FG 3, p. 18, December 2013). In the excerpt below, a respondent who is an official from Dublin City Library, recounted how his understanding of the importance of oral literacy improved as a result of his engagement with the project:

> In a sense, coming from a book background, the oral literacy aspect of it wasn't as
> clear to me. I felt it was the introduction of children to books because that's where I
> would be coming from but it was actually the engagement from yourself and others in

the project [......] engaging with people who were professionals in that area that I came to understand the importance of the oral literacy. I understood more of the sense of what you had been emphasising, the decontextualized language. That was important for me to understand (INT 7, p.1.April, 2014).

One of the project's administrators spoke about how the confidence of EC practitioners improved due to their participation in *The Storytime Project* (INT 8, p.5. April 2014). She spoke about how the experience of participating in *The Storytime Project* was contributing to EC practitioners' developing professionalisation and that more meaningful engagement with the project was happening as both teachers and EC practitioners became more involved in the project.

It's very hard for me to say I suppose because I'm on the inside. I have noticed a change among the Early Years Practitioners, - they are more confident. They were quite reluctant in the beginning. [.....] I think it's a very real part of the professionalising of their practice and their understanding. I have also seen, I think, as the teachers and early years people are more immersed in it, like we saw today, a much richer level of engagement (p.5-6).

This observation is in keeping with research cited in the literature review (p.13) that found that interventions that prove their staying power and loyalty to a community are rewarded by the confidence and commitment of the community (Bradlow, 2007; Paulin, 2007).

Another unanticipated benefit was that it made parents more positive about public spaces such as the library -

That's a huge thing and they are all people who have negative views of public spaces. They don't feel comfortable and libraries, for some people, fall into that category. Part

of the story time process which is good is that it brings parents to the library in a way where they are made to feel welcome and special (INT 7, p.5. April 2014).

Paulos and Goodman (2004) say that it is the people with whom we share spaces that dominate our perception of those spaces. If there is a perception that only well educated people use libraries or only certain social classes access third level education, that becomes a barrier for people who do not possess high levels of education or who are not members of a particular social class. One of the *anticipated* outcomes of *The Storytime Project* was that the use of Marino Institute of Education as a venue for induction workshops and graduation ceremonies would break down those barriers. An *unanticipated* benefit of the project is that the breaking down of barriers would extend to other public spaces such as the library. This is substantiated by a finding in the questionnaire that "82.6% of respondents reported that they disagreed with the statement that it is unlikely that families will use their local library once they have completed *The Storytime Project*" (p.3).

Summary of Theme 1 - Relationships

To summarise within the overarching theme of Relationships, the data illustrates that as a result of participation in *The Storytime Project,* bonds were strengthened between parents and their children, between parents and educators and in some instances, between parents themselves. Parental confidence increased and prompted some parents to get involved in school life. There were some difficulties in recruiting what HSCL teachers referred to as 'target' parents, parents that teachers felt would benefit from the project. A mixture of 'target' and non-'target' parent participants in the project seemed to benefit all participants. Parental knowledge of their children's learning and parents' knowledge of children's literacy practices improved. Parents were surprised and impressed by their children's language ability, something they discovered as a result of spending dedicated time reading with their children during *The Storytime Project*. Tentative initial relationships seemed to be developing

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between teachers and EC practitioners through their shared involvement and parity of esteem afforded by the project. A suggestion to heighten the focus on CPD for educators was made in order to support educators' work but also to provide an opportunity for educators to share their challenges and learn from one another's experience through a community-of –practice approach. Very positive relationships have developed and strengthened between Marino Institute of Education, Dublin's Northside Partnership and Dublin City Library. This augurs well for the future of *The Storytime Project*. Children's voices were sought and heard in the evaluation. What has emerged is that children's opinions are well represented by their parents through the evaluations but children could be more centrally involved by being physically present at the graduation ceremony. Some unanticipated benefits of *The Storytime Project* were the involvement of other siblings in the family during story reading time; an increase in confidence and professional awareness with respect to some EC practitioners; and an increased confidence in parents' use of public spaces such as the library.

The next section looks at findings in relation to theme 2: the processes practised in relation to *The Storytime Project*.

Theme 2: Storytime Processes

Theme 2 is sub-divided into four sub-themes as follows: Fidelity to the structure of the project, Organisational issues, Future of *The Storytime Project,* and Role of the classroom-based and setting-based educator.

Fidelity to the project structure (sub-theme 1 of theme 2).

This section will examine two issues that arose in the findings: the importance of structure for parents and variations in the implementation of the project by EC practitioners, HSCL teachers and families.

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The structure provided by the project is important to parents (sub-division of sub-theme 1).

Parents reported that the structure of *The Storytime Project* brought added discipline and organisation to families' lives, helping them with bedtime routines (e.g. FFGC 1, p.1; FFGC 5, p.1; FFGC 6, p. 2; Int 1, p.5) and with having a designated time for interaction with their children. Parents seemed to feel, that once they 'signed up' for the project, they were obliged to do it, that is, parameters imposed by the project were taken seriously. There is no evidence, for example, of attrition from the project by parents who attended the induction and graduation ceremonies whereas there is evidence of parents promising to do the project and then failing to turn up to induction and graduation ceremonies (see section on 'target' parents, p.213). Table 4.8 provides examples of how the structure of the project supported participants.

Table 4.8 The Structure of *The Storytime Project* Supported Families

Excerpts from the Data
Example 1 (parent): It gave me the direction I needed to get on track (FFGC 5, slide 4, June 2012).
Example 2 (parent): Found it great for getting back into routine and bedtime stories (FFGC 5, slide 4, June 2012).
Example 3 (EC practitioners): Leah: Yes, one parent said to me 'oh I won't get him to sit down for 10 minutes to read a story' so she was actually shocked. She said she could not believe that he was quite happy. She said that she stuck rigidly to 10 minutes for the first week and I said to her that if he wanted to spend a bit more time with her to do it with him, I just said don't do it to the stage when you are going to…. Ursula: Give up... Leah: Yes and she said she just couldn't believe that he actually calmed down and was so quiet. Every night he would get the story and they had a routine, after the story he brushed his teeth and went to bed. She said she couldn't believe he was falling into that routine as well. Ursula: Yes, and it's lovely for parents to see the importance of routine and structure. (FG3, p.17, December 2013).
Example 4 (parent): Yes, the structure of it and that it was given to her by somebody else, it wasn't just her mammy telling her 'Come on, we'll read a story', because that happens all the time, but because it was given to her by somebody else, she really loved the idea of it" (INT 1, p.2, March 2014).
Example 5 (parent): I did find it very good because it is structure and it's routine and because you feel that you have to do it, not that you have to do it, you do want to do it. For me with Liam and his homework and the baby, you're kind of pushing it aside (INT 1, p.2, March, 2014).

Example 6 (parent responses collated by HSCL teacher): They liked the structured question sheets, [tip sheets] and began to realize that this was how they would naturally proceed with questioning (FFGC 1, p.2, June 2010).

Example 7 (parent responses collated by HSCL teacher): The children were excited by the prospect of reading a series of books with Mammy. The bedtime DVD was happily replaced by the bedtime story…no objections. Children settled more easily to sleep after the story (FFGC 1, p.1, June 2010).

Example 8 (parent): It was great because Katie used to come over and get the books from Mary [the HSCL teacher] with me and she used to be all excited to see which book she would get. I remember that and her little face lighting up. She was all excited to get her book and bring her book back. It was the only book that she really looked after because she knew she had to bring it back to Mary. She loved that" (Int 1, March, 2014).

For some, it was a struggle to continue outside the structure of the project, for example, as one of the parents reported - "But when you are not being told to do it, you're at home saying 'ah no, we'll read tomorrow" (Int 1, p.2, March 2014). However, one example of continuity outside the structure of the project is parents continued use of the library when the project was over (e.g. Int 1, p.3, March 2014). One parent, Miriam, said "So we do actually go to the library and I don't know that we would have had it not been encouraged by the school" (FG 1, p.5, February 2014). Use of the library will be looked at more closely under the sub-theme Organisational Issues. The comment about children settling more easily to sleep after a story is important and is repeated many times throughout parents' evaluation documents and feedback collected at graduation ceremonies (See appendix Q, for example). Sadeh (2007) explored the effects of sleep loss in young children. He listed some well-established consequences of sleep loss and sleep disruption in children including daytime sleepiness and fatigue, reduced alertness, and compromised performance in specific neurobehavioral domains. If *The Storytime Project* is contributing towards better sleep routines for children, it could be said to be contributing to children's well-being in a more holistic way too, for example, in relation to the child's ability to concentrate in school.

Variation in the implementation of the project (sub-division of sub-theme 1).

The literature review (p.102) describes how fidelity of implementation of an intervention leads to gains for children (Hamre, Justice, Pianta, Kilday, Sweeney, Downer & Leach, 2010) and limited outcomes are the result of low quality implementation fidelity (Dickinson, Freiberg & Barnes, 2011). There is some evidence that teachers, practitioners and families interpret the implementation of the project in different ways. A number of examples follow here.

At least two HSCL teachers held meetings with parents whereby they looked at the *Storytime* Training DVD with parents and discussed the strategies used to develop children's oral language. This is recommended but not insisted upon by *The Storytime Project* induction programme. Educators are trusted to act as their context demands. One EC practitioner video-taped her colleagues while they read stories to children at the EC setting. She then invited parents to watch the video material. She spoke about it in a focus group discussion thus:

> What was lovely for the parent was the reaction, we did a gentle piece, using your tips about reading and the sort of books, we had a layout of nice books to pick, but the reaction of the parents to see their child so engrossed with their teacher in the book. They were saying 'God, I've never seen her like that'. They read stories but to see it, one step removed, was lovely. I was thinking to myself why didn't I video more parents, little snippets even, but it was so lovely (FG 3, p.12, December, 2013).

Additional support provided by HSCL teachers and EC practitioners, such as that which has been described above, further enhances the sustainability of the project. The practices could be shared and recommended to other participants.

Other examples of variation in implementation of the project may have a *deleterious* effect on the project if practices diverge from research evidence. Some HSCL teachers and

EC practitioners distributed one book a week to parents as per the guidelines for running the project. Others gave all the books in one consignment to parents.

> I would give them the whole lot. I give them the four books and say to them to take it week by week and not to let the children see the four books. I had one parent who went home with her folder and she had to read the four books every night because the child saw them (FG 3, p. 9, December 2013).

There is widespread evidence in the literature, already reviewed (p.134) which examines the benefits of repeated exposure to the same book, as is the practice with *The Storytime Project*. (See, for example, Biemiller & Boote (2006); Robins and Ehri, (1994); Sénéchal et al, (1995); Sénéchal, 1997; Sénéchal, Pagan, Lever & Ouellette (2008) and Verhallen, Bus, & de Jong, 2006). However, Trivette, Dunst & Gorman (2010) advise that "when a child's interest in the book starts to fade, it is best to try another book or terminate the episode" (p.3). There is also research that attests to the value of exposing children to multiple texts. Wells (1985), for example, found that the number of stories children heard read to them was the single greatest predictor of later success in reading". Data from the evaluation study revealed that parents were asking for more books. This could be because they would like more book choices for their children. The literature review (p.127) found that there is a relationship between choice and motivation (Gambrell, 1996). Another reason why parents might want more books is because they run out of ideas after working with the book for short periods of time. Although the induction workshop focuses on the variety of ways a book can be used as a springboard for conversation, there may be a need for a prolonged engagement with this aspect of parent induction. It is neither expected nor desirable that the parent takes on a teaching role, but if they are given some additional ideas, in relation to talking around the text, (such as changing the ending of the story, inserting oneself into the story as a character,

and continuing the story to speculate what happened to the characters after the story), this may be helpful in keeping the story interesting and the interactions creative. Table 4.9 gives examples of participants' thoughts about issues around books.

Table 4.9 Issues around Books

Excerpts from Data
Example 1: One story per week not enough (FFGC 6, p.1, December 2012).
Example 2: Would like five books at start and more books preferably (FFGC 6, p.1, December 2012).
Example 3: Great selection of books – would have liked more books (FFGC 6, p., December 2012).
Example 4: Rolling it out throughout school - Would question giving more than one book per week as having just one allows more in-depth experience (HSCL teacher, FFGC 6, p.3, December 2012).
Example 5: Maybe if there was a choice of three books per week. The parents could say 'well I know my child won't like that one but they might like this one' (FG 1, p. 27, February, 2014).
Example 6: Perhaps more than one book a week if possible. The parents said the children were a bit bored with reading the same book for the whole week (questionnaire, Appendix R, p.2).
Example 7: …maybe by swapping books over every 3 days or so maybe by giving the parents the 5 books so children don't get bored with the same book so they can swap over (questionnaire, Appendix R, p.3).
Example 8: For the second iteration of the project in the year would it be possible to use 5 different books (questionnaire, Appendix R, p.2).
Example 9: Better versions of fairy tales for children in the early years' settings (questionnaire, Appendix R, p.3).

The data clearly show that participants would like to have more books at their disposal. One reason why the project would be reluctant to provide more books is that it might deter parents from deep and sustained engagement with texts. However, if participants were given more choice in relation to the texts that they could engage with, it may improve the possibility of sustained engagement with texts of choice. *The Storytime Project* needs to consider increasing numbers of books for participants.

Some parents did not read to their children for short periods nightly as recommended by the project. One parent described her experience in a focus group discussion as follows:

It started off on the first night it was about 10 minutes, read the book, then after about a week it was going over an hour and I was saying - 'ok we have to finish the book now and we'll do it again tomorrow'. They would still be asking questions. 'Are we going to do it again tomorrow mammy?' 'Is Denis going to do it?' 'Is Nick going to do it?' 'Can we get a different book?' 'I don't like that book; can we get a different book?' I'd have to 'shhh' them to go to sleep (FG 1, p.12, February 2014).

There is conflicting research evidence in relation to some of the issues raised by the parent above. On the one hand, when children experience 'flow' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), that is total immersion in an activity to the exclusion of other thoughts or activities; they are capable of sustained engagement. On the other hand, Trivette and Dunst, (2007) found that reading sessions lasting 15 minutes or less were more effective than sessions longer than 15 minutes. Wells (1987) found that the frequency with which children had books read to them best explained the differences in their subsequent achievement. Trivette, Dunst & Gorman's (2010) meta-analysis reported that the majority of its twenty-one studies reported reading episodes of 10 minutes. Other research shows that it is the quality of the reading experience that matters more than the sheer amount of reading (e.g. Schickedanz & McGee, 2010; Trivette and Dunst, 2007). *The Storytime Project* recommends a 10-15 minute engagement over a maximum of five nights based on best information from research findings. Nightly short engagements ensure there is a routine and a structure to the project. Findings already discussed demonstrate that parents used the structure and routine of the project to discipline themselves to continue with the work.

The multiple responsibilities imposed by their jobs may mean that educators are less involved in supporting parents than they wish. One HSCL teacher, when asked if her set of parents were using the strategies modelled and explained at the induction workshop, replied

that some parents were and others were not. She added that it was an achievement just to get the parents involved in the project at all (Int 3, p.2, March 2014).

Two parents described the support they received from their HSCL teacher or EC practitioner thus: "She just let us get on with it" (Int 1, p.5, March 2014). "He was saying 'Here, if you have any problems come back and give me a shout in the morning when the rush is gone', but it was grand" (Int 2, p.11, March 2014). Another parent commented "My child loves reading anyway so it was nothing strange for him, just normal day stuff with new books to read" (WE 6, p.4, December 2012). There was a fear that the perceived simplicity of the project would make participants blasé about its implementation. The factors that make dialogic story-reading successful over other forms of story-reading are the focus on interactions (these interactions are clearly described through the PEER and CROWD sequence (Whitehurst, 1992) which have been adapted in the *Storytime* DVD and tip-sheets), and the focus on the power relationship between adult and child, where there is an emphasis on dialogue and reciprocity rather than didactic instructional practices (e.g. see literature review p.35 and p.43). If these factors are ignored, *The Storytime Project* could become just another generic story-reading project, applied without rigour and therefore possibly reducing the potential of improved oral language development outcomes for children.

The findings showed that there were frequent instances of a number of parents who wished to participate in *The Storytime Project* but for various reasons could not attend the induction workshop. When this happens, the HSCL teacher or EC practitioner collect books for the parent and agree to initiate the parent into the process. It is difficult to ascertain the level of fidelity to the structure and procedures of *Storytime Project* received by those parents. Often the teacher or practitioner is happy just to get the parent to take the books and read them with their child.

Some of the variations in the implementation of the project may bring positive results for parents and teachers and practitioners. The project is informed by a socio-cultural perspective and this perspective emphasises the importance of context. Clearly some teachers and EC practitioners have been adapting the project to suit their particular set of circumstances and this is necessary in many instances. Educators are professionals and there is no desire to interfere with educator autonomy. Analysis of a HSCL teacher's diary showed that the HSCL teacher was dealing with multiple minor issues 'unlegislated for' by the project and resolving those situations sensibly. For example, one of the parent participants told the HSCL teacher that her child hated the book for week three and asked could she revert to the book for week two which the child had loved. He said that was a good idea and reassured the parent that she was correct not to force her child to read a book he disliked (DA 1, p.8. November 2012).

It is important, however, that in order for the project to be effective in developing children's decontextualized language, that the research-based modus operandi of the project be followed. Mol, Bus and de Jong, (2009) found that the most effective interventions were those that were highly controlled and executed by researchers. There is a tension for project administrators between the desire to ensure that recommended guidelines are followed by participants and allowing participants to interpret their particular needs, informed by the project guidelines. When the *Doodle Den* project (an after school literacy intervention in Tallaght, Dublin) was being replicated in Limerick, the project administrators noted that "an initial looseness changed in time to a rigorous adherence" (Rafferty & Colgan, 2013, p.13). They found that the community-of-practice meetings that were held to discuss issues around the project often discussed quality assurance such as project fidelity and these meetings were instrumental in getting across the message about the importance of fidelity. Perhaps by holding more CPD meetings for educators, fidelity can be discussed and emphasised in

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relation to *The Storytime Project.* However, notwithstanding the examples provided here, there is no evidence emanating from the data that there is any major deviation from the modus operandi of *The Storytime Project.*

Organisational issues (sub-theme 2 of theme 2).

Organisational issues include the following: Initiating participation in *The Storytime Project;* maintaining contact with participants; training parents; induction and graduation events; recruitment of new teachers and EC practitioners; CPD work with teachers and EC practitioners; decisions regarding changing the location of the induction workshop; how the library books are collected and returned; use of resources such as the graduation certificate, photographic exhibition at induction and graduation events, DVD, tip-sheet, library and training of parents to become mentors for *The Storytime Project.* It is not possible to consider all the data that this section embraces. Therefore the issues that drew the most comment in the data will be analysed. These include the choice of Marino Institute of Education as a venue for induction and graduation events and use of resources.

Marino Institute of Education as a venue for the induction workshop and graduation ceremony (sub-division of sub-theme 2).

There were mixed views on the value of Marino Institute of Education as a venue for the induction workshop and graduation ceremony. Some respondents referred to the fact that the venue excluded some parents from participation because of a lack of confidence and a fear of the unknown, others were of the opinion that Marino as a venue was crucially important to the project. There were significant data indicating that Marino Institute was an important choice of venue for *The Storytime Project* because it served to empower parents who might feel excluded from education or educational opportunities. One parent in a focus group simply said "I loved going up to the college" (FG1, p.5, February 2014). An EC practitioner said "It's lovely that it's in Marino too, because, as you say, it's different.

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You're going out of your environment to a special place" (FG 3, p. 22 December 2013). A principal teacher, formerly a HSCL teacher who participated in *The Storytime Project*, felt strongly about the importance of Marino as a venue for the project -

> The impact of that on parents was huge. It's something that you wouldn't always appreciate fully, how much it meant to them to be brought into a third level college, which most of them had never set foot in in their lives and to be treated respectfully and well and valued as they were and particularly at the end, at the celebration day, a lot of effort went in to making a big deal of them (INT 5, p.2, April 2014).

He continued -

> It was the same every year because there were different parents every year and the same experience repeated itself right through and I just thought that was very interesting. [.......] I remember one of the reviews you had yourself , I think --------- was probably there, and we were looking at how it [the project] was going to go on and what changes should be made and all of that. I'm pretty sure I wasn't the only one that made the point; people did say how important it was that they would get the experience of Marino, just seeing the college and seeing how that world operates which is totally different to anything that they would have experienced before (INT 5, p.2, April 2014).

Schools may have an additional interest in keeping Marino Institute of Education as a venue for the project. They may welcome the opportunity to have an active link with a third level college. It facilitates parent and teacher CPD for schools and it streamlines their involvement to two, albeit crucially important, roles - parent recruitment and parent support. It is likely that schools also appreciate the educational value of the project and its value in terms of supporting parents. *The National Literacy and Numeracy strategy 2011-2020* requires

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schools to engage with parents in relation to their children's education. *The Storytime Project* fulfils this remit.

The trip to Marino to attend the induction seminar was an insurmountable hurdle for some parents. A HSCL teacher reported -

> Once you give them the books they were fine but for coming here to Marino, they would promise you that they would come, that they would be there ready in the morning and we would all go in the car, then they wouldn't be there and the phones would be off. Sometimes even the child wouldn't be in school that day because they were trying to avoid you that much. That happened to me a couple of times and I would be left with one or even no parents coming down [to Marino] (FG4, p.3, December 2013).

This point relates to issues of power and educational disadvantage as previously explored in this chapter.

An issue that came up in the HSCL focus group was that some parents found it difficult to evaluate their experience of *The Storytime Project* 'on-the-spot' at the graduation ceremony (FG4, p.11, December 2013). It was suggested that the list of prompt questions provided at each table should be circulated in advance of graduation day. This would give parents more time to consider their responses. It would also remove the element of the unknown from the feedback session, There was also concern amongst parents that they might be asked to speak publicly at the induction or graduation workshops. Whilst parental public speaking contributions are most welcome, there is no onus on or pressure put on parents to speak publicly. Reassurance from HSCL teachers and EC practitioners might alleviate anxiety for some parents.

They are terrified of coming here some of them, that they might be asked to speak or they might be asked to say something, but when you do get them down they love it. It's trying to just get them over that in the first place (FG4, p.3, December 2013).

Suggestions to change the venue of the workshop emerged from the data. One suggestion was to move the induction workshop to community venues such as the local school or library (questionnaire, Appendix R, p.6; FG 3, p.3, December 2013). There was much discussion about the advantages and disadvantages of Marino as a venue in focus group discussions with the educators (FG 3, p.3-5, December 2013; FG 4, p.4-6, December 2013). Consensus emerged from the discussions that it was important to retain Marino as a venue for the graduation ceremony but that it might be worthwhile using a community venue for the induction workshop to see if that would attract more of the marginalised parents.

Storytime training DVD and parents tip-sheet (sub-division of sub-theme 2).

Two key tools to support learning about dialogic story reading in *The Storytime Project* is a *Storytime* Training DVD and a tip sheet for participants. Findings from the questionnaire indicated satisfaction with these resources. 83.3% of respondents (41 out of a total of 49 respondents) reported that they strongly agreed (33.3% or 16) or agreed (50% or 25) that the *Storytime* DVD clearly demonstrates how to support their children's talk about stories and their related life experiences. Parents too were positive about the role of the DVD in supporting them to implement strategies they learned at induction - "Yes, it reminded me to talk about other stuff, not just what was in the story" (FFGC 3, p.5, June 2011). "Yes, explained how to read to my child and when to stop and let my child explain the story to me" (WE 1, p.6, April 2010). "Yes. Because it taught me lots of different things to do every week with the books so my child could enjoy me reading them" (WE1, p.6, April 2010). "took and used ideas from DVD" (WE1, p.4, April 2010). "Helpful to give ideas about how to ask the child questions" (WE1, p.6, April 2010). Classroom teachers and EC practitioners who work

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in settings but do not attend the induction and graduation workshops said that it would be helpful if they were given copies of the DVD. Table 4.10 lists sample additional comments made by parents about the DVD.

Table 4.10 The Training DVD for *The Storytime Project*

Excerpts from the Data
Example 1: Yes, it was very helpful as it was my first time to actually speak about the story and pictures (WE 1, p.5, April 2010).
Example 2: Yes, I thought it was helpful because I would have just read the book and not asked my daughter any questions (WE 1, p.5, April 2010).
Example 3: Used ideas from it (WE 1, p.5, April 2010).
Example 4: Helped show me when to stop and pause (WE 1, p.5, April 2010).
Example 5: Instead of just reading the story with my child listening, he got more involved and we chatted a lot more about pictures and predicted what would happen next (WE1, p.5, April 2010).
Example 6: Yes, it reminded me to talk about other stuff, not just what was in the story (FFGC, p. June, 2011).
Example 7: It was just what I would have done anyway so it was helpful to know I was doing it right (FFGC, p. December, p.3, 2012).
Example 8: It helped me to listen to what my son had to say and to make up his own story (FFGC, p.3, December 2012).
Example 9: I went to the meeting up in the institute the first time, the introduction meeting and I got the DVD as well but I never looked at the DVD. I felt that the meeting was sufficient (FG1, p.11, February, 2014).
Example 10: Yes. Gives me ideas on what to ask from the story (FFGC 3, p.5, June 2011).

It is clear that the DVD is effective in reinforcing ideas introduced to parents at the induction workshop. Educators are given as many copies of the DVD as they request. Some watch the DVD with parents again and others give parents copies of the DVD for their own use. There are also anecdotal reports of schools using the DVD for their own training purposes.

Parents reported learning much from the tip sheet – "Those hints that you gave were great" (FG1, p.11, February, 2014). "When you have that little tip sheet it shows you, it was very good "(Int 1, p.2, March 2014). "Parent X felt the tip-sheet was a big help" (DA 1, p.6,

November, 2012). The survey did not ask any question about people's experience of or opinions on the tip sheet. Yet, the tip sheet is mentioned many times in other data, particularly graduation day feedback and the weekly evaluations that were used in the first few years of the project. Comments such as the following were typical –

> When you gave us the sheets that said to ask questions or to do the big words, that encouraged me to start getting her more involved. Before that I would have just read it, closed it, book done! We started interacting with the tips (FG 1, p.10-11, February 2014).

The reference to doing the 'big words' in the excerpt above refers to point 6 on each tip-sheet which asks parents to discuss word meanings of challenging words in the story. Each tip-sheet provides a list of challenging or interesting words that occur in the story to which the tip-sheet refers. The tip-sheet supports the user by supplying sample sentences Another word for 'disgruntled' is _____. The opposite of 'idle' is _____. This support for parents in encouraging vocabulary development is important; given that a criticism of dialogic story-reading in the literature is that there is little emphasis on explicit vocabulary instruction (Silverman et al., 2013). The use of the tip-sheet, therefore, ensures that there is an explicit focus on vocabulary instruction in *The Storytime Project*.

The tip-sheet (see appendix T for a sample tip-sheet) and DVD carry the same message with regard to the use of strategies. They refer specifically to three important strategies: connecting the story to the child's life, using open-ended questions and explicitly teaching new vocabulary. Parents thus hear the same messages in three different ways: they get face-to-face training at the induction workshop, they have the use of a DVD and each book they receive is accompanied by a tip-sheet. This triple reinforcement of the methodology of dialogic story-reading enhances the chances of parents' fidelity to use of the

recommended strategies to support their children's oral language development. The training

methods used to induct parents to *The Storytime Project*, i.e use of video and face-to-face

coaching, are endorsed by the literature. For example, Arnold et al's (1994) study using video

tape instruction to train adults in the use of dialogic reading found that at the end of a four

week intervention, children in the video training group had greater expressive vocabulary

scores than did children in the regular reading group. Huebner & Meltzoff, (2005) found in-

person instruction to be more effective than self-instruction. *The Storytime Project* uses both

video training and in-person instruction when working with parents.

Graduation certificate and photographic exhibition (sub-division of sub-theme 2).

The questionnaire revealed that 97.7% of respondents reported that they strongly

agreed (63.6%) or agreed (34.1%) with the statement that the graduation event at Marino is

important because it engenders a sense of pride and achievement in parent participants for

having completed the project. The *tangible* tools used to engender that sense of pride are a

graduation certificate, a rosette[32] for each participating child and a photographic exhibition.

A graduation certificate is awarded to parents at the graduation ceremony and is often

presented by a dignatory such as a local TD.[33] Examples from the data reveal that the

graduation certificates are highly prized. Photographs are taken of every graduate and then

become part of the extensive photo exhibition that is mounted for every induction and

graduation ceremony. Copies of photographs are given to parents via the Northside

Partnership office. An EC practitioner commented that the photographs, when circulated,

acted as a catalyst for recruitment for the following iteration of the project (FG 3, p.12,

December 2013). The efficacy of the graduation certificate and photographs as tools of

empowerment for project participants is borne out in samples from the data in Table 4.11.

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[32] Rosettes were introduced to the graduation ceremony in December 2013. They will not be discussed as part of this evaluation as they were not introduced until after the period of the evaluation.
[33] TD – Teachta Dála, an elected representative in the Irish parliament

Table 4.11 Comments about the Graduation Certificates

Excerpts from the Data
Example 1 (HSCL teacher): The positive benefit the project has on parents who participate, should be examined. Attending Marino College of Education and receiving a certificate acknowledging their efforts has given many parents a huge confidence boost which further encourages them to work with their children improving literacy (questionnaire, Appendix R, p.2).
Example 2 (principal): D: I remember coming home one year in the car and they had their certificates and one of them said to me that was the first certificate she had got since she was in secondary school herself and she would have left after the.. JK: Inter Cert as it was called? D: Yes, probably the Inter Cert then, it might have even been the Group, I'm not sure but that was the first certificate she had ever got since, for anything. It was a huge thing for her. I would be pretty confident that if you went down to that house now that's sitting in a frame up on the wall (Int 5, p.3, April 2014).
Example 3 (HSCL teacher): But they love getting the cert themselves that's why I think it's nice for them to come here (FG 4, p.15, December 2013).
Example 4 (HSCL teacher): The cert is a good selling point for the course, I think any course that has a cert is a big thing (FG 4, p.15, December 2013).
Example 5 (HSCL teacher): Yes some of them asked me to laminate the certificate for them (FG 4, p.15, December 2013).
Example 6 (EC practitioner): They see the value in it at the end and the pride in what is simply a piece of paper and they are so delighted that they have committed and you can see it. It's a very important part of it (FG 3, p. 17, December 2013).

The library (sub-division of sub-theme 2).

Dublin City Council library joined *The Storytime Project* in 2011. Participants in the project prior to 2011 therefore did not experience the library as part of the project. Data from the questionnaire found that 63.1% of respondents agreed that parents develop a positive relationship with their local library as a result of their participation in *The Storytime Project*. 82.6% disagreed that it was unlikely that parents would use the library once they completed the five weeks' of *The Storytime Project.* Important issues related to the library included making parents feel welcome and reducing potential anxieties in relation to library usage (by giving parents personal tours of the library and explaining its systems); simplifying the process of joining the library and reducing the requirement for documentation such as household bills; supporting parents in filling out the library application form; provision of

amnesty for parents who have been black-listed by the library for non-return of books and

finally, providing a cup of tea for parents at the end of the library introduction. A Christmas

puppet show was also staged at Coolock library for participants in the Autumn/Winter

iteration of the project. This was well received by parents and children (Int 9 & 10, p.2-3,

April 2015). The data shows that parents were surprised at the extent of the services provided

by the library, that parents borrowed books for themselves as well as for their children and

that library staff were extraordinarily kind and helpful to participants of *The Storytime*

Project. Table 4.12 lists sample comments in relation to this.

Table 4.12 Comments about the Library

Excerpts from the Data
Example 1(HSCL teacher): I feel the link with the Library has been a great development for *The Storytime Project* but many parents are not confident enough to go alone and collect the books in the library. In conjunction with the HSCL teacher or E.C practitioner, it worked best to go during the final week of the project to the Library (questionnaire, Appendix R, p.3, June 2013).
Example 2 (parent): And yes, we use the library a lot more than we used to (WE 6, p.4, December, 2012).
Example 3 (HSCL teacher): The library for me was brilliant as well. I went with three parents. […] They were so nice down there. Paudge, one of the guys there, brought us around. One of the parents that I thought would have literacy problems, she took out two big thick books that I would never read! It was brilliant. We were going through the different sections of the library and I got lost in the psychology section and one got lost in the cookery section and the other went off somewhere else and he was saying 'oh we're losing you bit by bit'! But we got to see what was attracting each person and everyone came out with an arm full of books. I had a very young mam there and she had craft books because she's really enjoying craft things, and that other parent had the two big books and the other parent was into a particular author that I had never heard of, so Paudge took her aside and gave her special treatment. She wanted to know what the order sequence of the books was. He took her to the computer, printed out the whole thing for her. He didn't have the one she was looking for so he ordered it in for her. He rang her the other day to say it was in and she couldn't believe it (FG 4, p.15, December 2013).
Example 4 (HSCL teachers): Aideen: One thing that was really good was I brought them all to the library with the kids. Claire: I must do that. Aideen: I invited all the kids, not just the *Storytime* kids, all the Early Start, we had 15 in the Early Start, I told the parents to meet us there. The librarian was amazing, he read the stories to them. He did it last year as well. JK: Was this _____[name of library]? Aideen: No, he was in _____, Robert. He signed everybody up straight away, he didn't look for ID so they thought this was amazing. They were delighted with themselves. People who weren't in *The Story time Project* were asking 'how come they are getting *The Little Lion* book?' (All laughing) JK: Great, that's what you want (FG 4, p. 14, December 2013).

Example 5 (HSCL teachers):
JK: Have you seen the amnesty working at all? We kind of kept that quiet.
Aideen: Oh I saw that working.
Dympna: He did say that, that kind of special treatment, being part of the project really means that 'you are our special people' so he said 'don't worry' so make sure we mention Paudge, so if we have any problems.
Aideen: One of my parents did lose two books and the librarian never mentioned it to her, he just said 'don't worry, that's fine'.
JK: That's great because you don't want to turn a parent off or frighten a parent over a book (FG 4, p.15-16, December 2013).

Example 6 (HSCL teacher): About 50% of my parents have joined the library. Sometimes I take the books out for them and give them the books. One time a parent came to me and thanked me for getting the books for her, saying I picked good ones. Then she returned the library books herself, got fresh ones for her child and returned books belonging to me as a favour to me! (Int 3, p.1, March 2014).

Example 7 (principal): In particular, there was a visit to the library involved the other day and Molly (HSCL teacher) was telling me about two very young parents and she said that they were fascinated, how they didn't realise the opportunity that was there for the use of the library and all the things that might be happening in the library so it opened up a whole other aspect for the parents. She thinks now that they will be bringing the children to the library as a result of that and it's something that the parents wouldn't have had the opportunity to experience before maybe (Int 6, p.1,April 2014).

Example 8 (principal):
JK: Actually Molly (HSCL teacher) told me a story about a parent who I presume was from here or it might have been from _____ but the parent lives very close to here. She actually lives across the road from the library and had never been in it. So she did *The Storytime Project* and was brought in and introduced to the library, had a tour and all of that. Then, she told her mother about it - this is the grandmother now! The grandmother thought it was the greatest thing that you got free internet and everything. (laughing) (Int 6, p.1-2, April 2014).
Maeve: Yes, all the different facilities that are provided there that people don't know about. So it's a way of getting it out into the community as well.
JK: It's just so interesting, the grandmother then became a fanatic for the library and it was never intended that grandmothers would be pulled into it (Int 6, p.1-2, April 2014).

Example 9 (librarian): There has been a problem of integrating the library into the project. HSCL teachers and EC workers have mediated by distributing and collecting back the books for the project, but there has always been a problem when it comes to collecting the last book from the library for some parents. If induction workshops and other meetings were held in libraries there might be more of a chance of barriers coming down before the end of the project (questionnaire, Appendix R, p.6, June 2013).

Two comments in Table 4.12 above, examples 1 and 9, refer to the system of collecting the last book. Parents are required to visit the library on week five to collect the final book for the project. The other four books have been given to them by their HSCL teacher or EC practitioner. The point of the exercise is that they will transition to using the library and continue to do so after the project finishes. There have been some difficulties getting some parents to collect the final book. Educators have often stepped in and collected

the fifth book for parents but this means that parents have not visited the library and there is no guarantee that they will do so once the project is finished. As previously found, once the structure of the project is removed, some parents find it difficult to continue the habits developed by the project. There is no easy solution to this problem. Library personnel feel if the induction workshop was held in libraries, it would mean parents are using libraries from the outset (questionnaire, Appendix R, p.6, June 2013). As mentioned previously, changing the venue for the induction workshop may be worth pursuing (See this chapter, p.237).

Example 3 in Table 4.12 above demonstrates that parents were borrowing books from the library for themselves as well as for their children. This could be interpreted as an example of empowerment. An excerpt from a HSCL teacher's diary describes how one of the parents she was working with, a mother, got back into the habit of reading when she joined *The Storytime Project* –"She gets up at six in the morning and reads before the children wake. She loves the peace and quiet and time to herself" (DA 2, p.16, November 2012). This finding that some parents were borrowing books for themselves and getting back into the habit of reading, is an important one. Mol, de Bus and Smeets' meta-analysis of sixteen studies (2008) found that at-risk groups did not benefit as much from dialogic reading as groups who were not at-risk. The authors speculated that parents may need to have a strong educational background in order to be able to practise dialogic story-reading effectively. If a by-product of *The Storytime Project* is that some parents are reading more for themselves, this may be an additional support for them in practising dialogic story-reading with their children.

63.1% of respondents reported that they agreed with the statement that parents develop a positive relationship with their local library as a result of their participation in *The Storytime Project.* The Dublin City Library official involved in the project felt that 36.9% is a

high percentage of people to be undecided or in disagreement with this statement. He felt that despite the introduction of an amnesty on fines, parents are still afraid that they will lose books. There is evidence in the data that some parents would rather buy books for their children (e.g. FG 1, p.27, February 2014) because they do not have to keep track of those books and worry about having to return them to the library. The problem with buying books is cost and parents do not get guidance in buying books in a shop in the same way that they might when borrowing books in a library.

Finally, a comment made by a school principal in relation to the library, that "it's a way of getting out into the community as well" (Int 6, p. 2, April 2014) highlights the point that parents who are marginalised economically, socially and culturally may not have the wherewithal to access their own community services. The library, if used, is a resource for life-long learning and the project's library liaison person feels that even if a small minority of parents take up library membership, it is an achievement for the project because "the impact on those individuals can be huge" and "when somebody in the community achieves something special, that has a ripple effect around the community" (Int 7, p. 12, April 2014). It seems that the same difficulties beset libraries in attracting parents as beset educators in trying to recruit 'target' parents to *The Storytime Project*.

The third sub-theme of theme 2, the future of *The Storytime Project*, will now be considered.

Future of *The Storytime Project* (sub-theme 3 of theme 2).

Findings from the questionnaire showed that 86% of respondents reported that they strongly agree (48.8%) or agree (37.2%) with the statement that they intend to stay involved with *The Storytime Project* for the foreseeable future. This means that approximately 14% of respondents may be thinking of leaving the project. However, it could be interpreted that

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those respondents who intend to leave the project are leaving to set up a version of *The Storytime Project* in their own educational setting (See the finding that 14.05% of respondents reported that they strongly agree (4.7%) or agree (9.35%) with the statement that they intend to leave *The Storytime Project* and run a version of it in their own schools). The director of the project has found that some non-DEIS schools have become interested in the project. They tend to join for one or two iterations and then once they have learned how the project operates, they no longer attend training or graduation events but set up similar systems back in their own schools. They do not need the external supports of the project that were specifically set up with parents from marginalised communities in mind.

87.8% of respondents reported that they strongly disagreed (46.3%) or disagreed (41.5%) with the statement that they intend to leave *The Storytime Project* as it is difficult to recruit parents. This statistic could be interpreted as indirectly revealing the numbers of educators (12.2%) who have difficulties with parent recruitment.

Comments from participants reflected a desire to expand the project and to use past participants as ambassadors and possible mentors for future iterations of the project (FG 4, p.17, December 2013). Moving training to schools was also mentioned (questionnaire, Appendix R, p.4, June 2013). This requires careful consideration between those who manage and operate the project. Fourteen iterations of *The Storytime Project* have taken place to date (December 2016). It is time to begin conversations on how the future of the project should be shaped. Findings from this internal process evaluation will inform that process.

Role of the classroom-based and EC setting-based educator (sub-theme 4 of theme 2).

Two teachers of Junior Infant classes who were interviewed said they were aware of *The Storytime Project* but knew little about it. Both teachers said they would like Junior

Infant teachers to be kept informed about the project and to know what children in their classes were participating in *The Storytime Project*. The teachers said they would like to be familiar with the DVD (Int 9 & 10, p.2, April 2015) in order to be able to talk to the parents who were doing the project about the contents of the DVD and reinforce its messages. Neither teacher could comment about any changes in the literacy behaviour of children in their class doing the project because they did not know which children were involved and had not discussed the project with the HSCL teacher (Int 9 & 10, p.2, April 2015).

The data show that some HSCL teachers actively involve classroom teachers in recruiting parents for the project. For example, one HSCL teacher said "I think it is good to talk to the teacher because they know the children" (FG 4, p. 3, December 2013). Another HSCL teacher said "I gave a short questionnaire to our Junior Infant teachers when we were doing our own *Storytime* at the end of it. They all say that they noticed the children who had done it" (FG 4, p. 18, December 2013).

An EC practitioner, Noirín, who was based in an Early Start setting and not directly involved in *The Storytime Project*, was au fait with the project and its modus operandi. She was in close contact with the HSCL teacher, assisted the HSCL teacher in distributing and collecting books and visited the library with the HSCL teacher and her whole class group. Noirín was aware that her Early Start group practised literacy behaviours such as 'pretend reading', pointing to words and pictures, turning pages and holding books the correct away around but she said she couldn't distinguish between behaviours exhibited by children doing *The Storytime Project* and other children in the group.

Classroom teachers and EC practitioners that do not attend Marino for *The Storytime Project* also said that they would also like to see more children benefitting from *The Storytime Project* (questionnaire, Appendix R, p.5, June 2013). They said that if settings-

based educators had more knowledge of *The Storytime Project*, that practices recommended by *The Storytime Project* could be used in their classrooms and early childhood settings (questionnaire, Appendix R, p.5, June 2013).

Summary of Theme 2 - Storytime Processes

Theme two comprised four sub-themes: Fidelity to project structure, Organisational issues, Future of *The Storytime Project* and Role of classroom-based and EC setting-based educator. The sub-theme Fidelity to project structure was sub-divided into 'the importance of structure for parents' and 'variations in the implementation of the project by EC practitioners, HSCL teachers and families'. The sub-theme Organisational issues was sub-divided into 'Marino as a venue for the induction workshop and graduation ceremony', 'DVD and tip-sheet', 'the graduation certificate and photographic exhibition' and 'the library'. Sub-themes three and four had no sub-divisions.

In summary the data found that the project structure served to keep parents to a routine that they found helpful and ensured they had designated 'quality time' with their children. There were some variations in the way that the project was implemented by educators and parents. This led to recommendations that there be a greater selection of books for the project and a stronger focus on how to engage with books in a variety of ways on a nightly basis. There was a recommendation that community venues such as the local library or school be used, on a trial basis, for the induction workshop and to retain Marino Institute of Education as the venue for the graduation ceremony. Resources such as the DVD, tip-sheet, graduation certificate and photographic exhibition were found to be extremely useful in supporting the aims of *The Storytime Project*. With regard to the future of the project, suggestions were made to extend the project to all children in Junior Infant classes and to train parents who have completed the project to be mentors or ambassadors for the project.

HSCL teachers and EC practitioners might also be given CPD to become workshop facilitators at community venues. It was also suggested that classroom-based and EC settings-based educators be given more information about *The Storytime Project,* that they be given copies of the resources such as the DVD and that they be more informed about the children in their care who are participating in the project. Some settings-based educators also expressed a desire to attend the *Storytime* induction workshop.

Theme 3: Language and Learning

Theme three, Language and Learning, is the final theme to be examined in the data. It has three sub-themes – 1.Use of learning strategies to promote children's use of language by parents, educators and children; 2. Sharing the underlying rationale informing *The Storytime Project* and 3. Issues around books. The largest sub-theme in theme three is sub-theme 1: Use of learning strategies to promote children's use of language by parents, educators and children. It is further divided into a section on decontextualized language and a section on parents' and children's attempts to perform the text. The second sub-theme, sharing the underlying rationale informing *The Storytime Project*, has no sub-divisions. It is a discussion on the perceived need to foreground the theory and academic learning that informs the project. The third sub-theme - Issues around books - has already been examined under theme 2, sub-theme 1 (see pages 175-177 of this chapter). It was discussed as part of the section called 'variation in the implementation of the project' and will not be revisited in this section.

Use of strategies to promote children's use of language by parents, educators and children (sub-theme 1 of theme 3).

In this section there will be an examination of strategies used to promote language by all participants. This includes children's attempts to perform the text as well as adults use of the particular strategies, including dialogic strategies, to encourage children's use of

decontextualized language. There will also be a separate section on decontextualized language, which is a specific aim of *The Storytime Project.*

When parents were asked if they had tried out any of the strategies learned at the induction workshop, some of the responses received were as follows: "We loved the illustrations and loved to talk about them for ages. Although there were some big words in the story, by the end of the week my child understood them" (FFGC 4, slide 24, January 2012). The reference to repeated use of new words resonates with the literature that says children need at least 20 exposures to a novel word to incorporate it into their expressive vocabulary (Childers and Tomasello, 2002). Another parent reported "Reading with more expression, was doing strategies without realising. Made more effort to predict and connect. Gained confidence. Pre-read books" (FFGC 6, p.1, December 2012). These comments demonstrate this parent's increased metacognitive awareness of the strategies. She is now aware that she is using the strategies when interacting with her child. She also pre-reads the books. This would allow the parent to think in advance about ways of extending her child's language through interactions. Denise, a parent, commented thus about the strategies -

> The hints are in my brain now, I wouldn't even have to look at the page. Obviously I won't remember all of them but it's more to get them to interact with it. The hints were very helpful. They'd be [the children] looking at you saying 'Oh Mam, I never even thought of that' (FG 1, p.17, February 2014).

In an interview with parent Annemarie, she was asked if she had used oral language strategies (such as asking questions, extending the sentence, re stating the point made) when story-reading *before* she participated in *The Storytime Project* -

> JK: Yes, but you might have done that kind of thing anyway without *The Storytime Project?*

A: No, I wouldn't have known about the questions before, to me it was just a story. We'd read the story and that was it, just close the book and then do another one. Whereas since the project, first with John [EC practitioner] and then with yourself it was more 'oh yes, I could ask that question'. (INT 2, p.8, May 2014).

The literature review (p.86) describes how Trivette, Dunst and Gorman (2010) found that the learning strategy with the strongest effect on children's literacy development came from relating the book to the child's experiences and secondly from positive feedback from parents during the reading episode. After that, on equal scores, came expansions, (i.e. elaborating with or helping the child to elaborate on his/her utterances), open-ended questions and 'follows the child's interests'.

A parent, Miriam, described her effort to relate the book to her child's interests:

Miriam: Now my child, he wants to work for a bin company. He wants to be a bin man. [All laughing] So I brought him out to ------------ bins (name of bin company).

JK: Did you? You're great.

Miriam: Yes, I rang them and they gave us a trip, a day in the yard and he taped it on his phone, I got a picture of him sitting in the bin truck. They put the high vis and gloves on him and he was able to wash out the bins, so he had a blast. So Ms _____ (his class teacher) said to me to get him stuff on bins so I went around to the library and got two books. I got one on the refuse collector and one on recycling. He adores bins, - that's all we talk about. I have to follow bin trucks. The bin men are looking at me, signalling me to go around and I'm shouting out 'no we're watching!' (FG 1, p.18, February 2014).

Additional comments in relation to use of strategies are recorded in Table 4.13.

Table 4.13 Comments about the Use of Strategies to Develop Children's Oral Language

Excerpts from Data
Example 1 (EC practitioner): Yes I think after the talk they were delighted with the practical tips. They know and they understand about telling the story and of the importance of leaving time for the child to notice the picture or time for them to respond. You can hear them talking and saying that they are marching on through rather than allowing time. So it's lovely that way because it's nicely, gently done. It's not like 'oh you have to do this and then you do that'. So it makes sense to them and when they put it into practice you hear them talking. So that's what I love about it, it's very gentle, it's very important but it's done in such a nice way that they are saying 'oh I never thought of that and the child saw it' (FG 3, p.11, December 2013).
Example 2 (HSCL teacher): The list of strategies, they could nearly do a 'tick off' after the session and say which ones did they actually use (FG 4, p.10, December 2013).
Example 3 (parent): Yes, that's the part that I found brilliant because I wouldn't really look at the pictures. Automatically when you just start reading you are reading the words and that's it but when I started that project, I had her looking at the pictures and she could nearly tell you the story through the pictures because obviously their little minds can't read yet. I would never have thought of asking what's happening in the picture but now I do and she can tell you the story by what's happening in the pictures alone (Int 1, p.4, March 2014).
Example 4 (parent): Worked' at it for the whole week, rather than skimming through any of our own books as can be the tendency (FFGC 6, p. 5, December 2012).
Example 5 (parent): He was able to ask lots of questions and talk about his own little experience to relate it to the book (WE 6, p.3, December 2012).
Example 6 (HSCL teacher):   Claire: And your parent was good, she was saying that she took it for granted that the child understood.   Molly: And she didn't…   Claire: Yes, she didn't understand the words at all.   Molly: Even, she said, some quite basic words that she assumed the child knew because how could you not, and I was saying to her that you forget you have to teach them that so she said she was not going to assume anymore (FG 4, p.10, December 2013).
Example 7 (parent): Was interested and asked 'why' questions e.g. 'Why is the dinner on the floor' (Magic Doctor) (WE 4, slide 7, January 2012).
Example 8 (parent): Child enjoyed strategy of looking at the cover (FFGC 6, p.2, December 2012).
Example 9 (parent): It made her talk about her own teeth and going to the dentist (Harry and the dinosaurs say Raah!) (WE 3, p.3, June 2011).
Example 10 (parent): We planted seeds to see if a beanstalk would grow (WE 2, p.3, September 2010).
Example 11 (parent): She liked the pictures and could finish off a lot of the sentences (WE 3, p.2, June 2011).

It is clear from comments in Table 4.13 above that parents were employing strategies and were becoming conscious, or metacognitively aware of the strategies (see example 2). The examples show that parents were supporting children to relate the story to their own lives

(example 5), to project into the lives of the characters (example 6) and to expand on topics (example 10). Teachers and EC practitioners noticed that parents were learning the strategies too (see examples 1, 2 & 7). Parents repeatedly reported that some of the strategies were revelations to them (see example 3, 4, & 7) and they changed their reading practice to accommodate the new strategies.

One parent described how she devised her own strategy, of pretending she could not remember the plot, in order to get her child to retell the story. This prompted her child to tell her the story. This strategy is similar to using "I wonder..." Both strategies empower the child by giving them control of the narrative process, which is an aim of dialogic story-reading (Whitehurst, 1992). What is more interesting about this anecdote is that the parent in question has begun to describe her own, self-devised, strategies. It demonstrates that she has become conscious, or metacognitive, about learning strategies and has reached a stage where she can generalise her learning to create new knowledge. This mirrors Rogoff's theory of learning of apprenticeship, guided participation and participatory appropriation (2008). The parent was an apprentice as she participated in the induction workshop; she was further guided through the processes of dialogic reading by the HSCL teacher and the DVD. She has now reached the stage of participatory appropriation whereby she has been transformed by the learning experience and is managing her own learning. It is not the child alone who experiences a learning process but all participants in *The Storytime Project.*

At one point in the focus group with parents, the group digressed to chat about the struggles their children were having with learning to read. One parent talked about how her child loved to hear stories but got very frustrated when he had to try and read a book himself. The exchange demonstrated that the parent had a sophisticated understanding of her child's

reading difficulties - she could speak metacognitively about the reading process. She commented –

> . . . what I'm finding is that he is concentrating so much on his reading that he can't concentrate on the comprehension so we are reading it but he might as well be reading anything because when I ask him a question, he hasn't the foggiest (Miriam, parent focus group, February 2014).

This resonates with the literature on comprehension. "If students put too much mental energy into sounding out the words, they will have less mental energy left to think about the meaning" (Pardo, 2004, p.273).

A comment in one of the weekly evaluations revealed that some of the children were making intertextual connections. "They were comparing it to other stories they had read and saying some of the characters in the book looked like previous books we had read (Magic Doctor)" (WE 4, slide 5, January 2012). This is also an example of children using decontextualized language because in talking about books and making comparisons with other books, complex thought and complex abstract language is called upon. There is a comment in relation to transfer of learning (e.g. "Parents are applying their learning with other books" (FFGC 2, p.1, January 2011). Research by Huebner and Payne (2010) shows that when parents learn dialogic reading strategies, it has an enduring effect.

The aim behind the use of the strategies described here is to improve children's oral language, particularly decontextualized language. Findings in relation to decontextualized language will now be examined.

Decontextualized language (sub-division of sub-theme 1).

The use of decontextualized language by children is one of the core aims of *The Storytime project*. A close look at some of the accounts of parents and educators working with children revealed that decontextualized language was being practised to some extent. For example, Leah, an EC practitioner, describes how, since she started working with the project, she is more likely to have discussions around the meanings of words:

> Leah: I found now, and it was only from tips from yourself and watching the video for myself, large words that I would have came across in stories for children, I would bring them down to what they would understand. Now I ask them 'what does that mean?' and it's amazing some of the answers you get. [...] I remember one day, I can't remember the story, but there was something like 'he was very ambitious' and I asked 'what does that mean?'

> Ps: (laughing)

> Leah: One of them said 'he's good' and they were asking 'is that what that means?' and somebody else said something else and then one of them said 'he's good at doing his job'.

> Ps: Wow – it just shows you….

> Leah: But the conversation between them all was amazing. What I was fascinated with as well was that they all stopped and thought about it, they didn't just jump in. If you ask a question like 'what are you getting from Santa?' they all shout 'I'm getting….' But we eventually worked it out between us.

> Linda: That's brilliant (FG3, p.15, December 2013).

The interaction above also illustrates the EC practitioner's realisation that, given an opportunity to have an open-ended discussion, children use higher order thinking and decontextualized language. In the example above, the children were involved in a highly abstract, decontextualized discussion. In another example, parent Denise describes how her older son got involved in conversations with her younger son about the plot -

> Yes, because normally I would be thinking let's just read it and get it over and done with, ten minutes, that's it! Now it could go on for an hour and as I said, Denis would be joining in. He'd say 'no, that's not the answer to that' and I'd ask him 'well what is the answer to that?' They would probably end up having an argument over it but they would still end up talking to each other about it (FG 1, p.17, February 2014).

There are many reported incidences of the use of strategies such as predicting, speculating and projecting. The practice of these strategies involves decontextualized language. Table 4.14 provides examples of children's reported use of decontextualized language.

Table 4.14 Children's Use of Decontextualized Language as Described by Their Parents

Excerpts from the Data
Example 1 (child): If Goldilocks was a boy, he wouldn't have run away (WE 1, slide 1, April 2010).
Example 2 (parent): She loved the pictures and wondered was the story about the 'olden days' because everyone looked poor (WE 3, p.2, June 2011).
Example 3 (parent): She made connections between the book and home life (WE 3, p. 2, June 2011).
Example 4 (parent): She talked about what she would do if she got locked in (WE 3, p.3, June 2011).
Example 5 (parent): We had a chat about bullying after reading the story 'Little Lion' (FFGC 6, p.3, December 2012).
Example 6 (parent): I loved the way she used to think of what she would do if she was in the story (Alfie gets in First) (WE 5, slide 3, June 2012).

Example 1 in Table 4.14 is a quote from a discussion between a parent and her son. He expressed disgust at Goldilocks' cowardice and there was a long (decontextualized) conversation about Goldilocks' options and which option would constitute a morally correct stand.

One parent, while discussing the strategies she liked to use to encourage her child to talk said that if she were to do the project again, she would "extend the time digesting the words he (her child), already knew" (WE 3, p.4, June 2011). This comment brings to mind Marie Clay's phrase 'roaming the known'. This is a process whereby the child, before he embarks on new learning, dwells upon and explores what he already knows (Dorn, 1996). At the end of this process, the child is more secure with the knowledge she possesses "and is able to generalise this knowledge for constructing new literate activity" (p.17). This comment demonstrates an intuitive knowledge on the part of the parent in relation to her child's learning needs.

Children's/parents' attempts to perform the text (sub-division of sub-theme 1).

The final element of sub-theme 1, theme 3 is a consideration of children's and adults' attempts to perform the text. Anecdotal feedback from the story-reading performance at the induction workshop indicates that many parents did not adopt voices for different characters in the story or did not 'perform' the text, feeling embarrassed or that it was somehow not appropriate. As examples 1,3,4, 5 and 9 in Table 4.12 indicate, *The Storytime Project* 'gave parents permission' to become performers of the text. In the words of Sipe (2002), they became interpretive performers of the text (p. 477). Sipe's typology of expressive engagement. It talks about the different way that children react and participate in stories. They dramatise the text, talk back to it, critique or control the text, insert themselves in the text and use the text as a springboard for developing their own

fantasies (Sipe, 2002, p. 477-478). There are many reported incidences of these behaviours

throughout parents' feedback at graduation ceremonies and through their weekly evaluation

sheets. See Table 4.15 for examples.

Table 4.15 Children's/Parents Attempts to Perform the Text

Excerpts from the Data	Sipe's (2002) Analysis
Example 1 (parent): We have to do all the voices and everything so he loves that. [ ]. I start it off 'I am the Gingerbread Man' and then he'll say 'Run, run as fast as you can'. He sort of does the story for me then. (Int 2, p.6, March 2014).	Child inserts himself in the text
Example 2 (parent): When we were reading Jack and the Beanstalk he wanted to be Jack so the story became Cian and the Beanstalk! (FFGC2, p.1, Jan. 2011).	Child inserts himself in the text
Example 3 (parent): L: When you actually get into it with the child and let the child get involved, that is the way to read a story. Even at home, with Luke's book, Warren, my husband, he works all the time so he wouldn't even know where I would be on Fridays or anything so when I'm reading a story he is looking at me saying 'you're mad'. JK: (laughing) L:'What are you reading like that for?' He goes. He thought the way I thought a year ago before I did this project, you just read. End of story and that's it (Int 1, p. 7, March 2014).	
Example 4 (parent) : Yes, if you are just going to sit there and read blah-blah- blah, the kids are not going to be interested. Whereas if you do the animation and the funny voices, you try to use your body, all the actions and everything, it does make the child more interested (Int 2, p.4, March 2014).	Child dramatizing the text
Example 5 (parent): Yes, because everybody needs a few tips. You forget how to, and we wouldn't have read that way years ago. It shows you how to actually read to your child because you do need to change your voice and you need to be expressive with them or they are not interested. It definitely did teach me how to read a story (Int 1, p.4, March 2014).	
Example 6 (parent): When we went to collect the kids from [name of setting], John would be reading the kids a story the way you had read the story, animated, so when we were reading the stories I did do it like that. [ ]. We used to watch him in the window, he was hilarious (Int 2 p.4, March 2014).	Child dramatizing the text

Example 7 (EC practitioner Noirín): N: …for some reason this year there has been a huge take up in our morning session, when we introduced puppets and props, even when they are playing and everything is available to them, they are still going back to the little basket and are taking out the *Three Billy Goats Gruff* and they are taking out the bridge and I have a little troll thing that I got in Prague years ago and re-enacting. They'll set up the theatre and they want to be the puppet master and they'll set up the whole thing. JK: Wow! So there is huge enthusiasm among the kids for the props? N: Yes, particularly this year they have just really taken to using the props and re-enacting the stories (Int 4, p.10, April 2014).	
Example 8 (parent): When he was playing he would act out the story from all the books (WE 1, p.3, April 2010).	Child dramatizing the text
Example 9 (parent): He enjoys making up some of the story before it happens in the book (WE 3, p.3, June 2011).	Child wresting control of the text and inventing his own narrative
Example 10 (parent): Loves me to change my voice for effect for the three bears - got a great laugh at that (WE 2,p.3, 2010).	Dramatizing the text
Example 11 (parent): He enjoyed Jack and the Beanstalk, especially the repetition. After reading it twice, he was able to predict when these parts were coming and he would jump up and say them (WE 5, slide 2, June 2012).	Dramatizing the text
Example 12 (parent): They [the children] can have their say and even start acting it out (WE 1, slide 4, April 2010).	
Example 13 (parent): He made up a lot of stories starting like this one (*Peace at Last*) did (WE 3, p.2, June 2011).	Child wresting control of the text and inventing his own narrative
Example 14 (parent): Loved shouting Raah!!!!!! (FFGC June, 2012, slide 23).	Child dramatizing the text
Example 15 (parent) : He was making sneezing noises (From the story -The Donkey who sneezed) (FFGC June 2012, slide 12).	Child dramatizing the text
Example 16 (parent): She loved acting out the different character's voices in the story (FFGC June 2012, slide 3).	Child dramatizing the text

The behaviours described in Table 4.15 are demonstrably interactive, they locate control of the narrative in the child's sphere and they are the source of great pleasure and mirth for the child (Sipe, 2002). A playful approach to children's literacy has been found to be most successful for young children (e.g. Dickinson, 2001; Harris, Golinkoff & Hirsh-Pasek, 2011; Roskos, Christie, & Richgels 2003; Weisberg, Zosh, Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff,

2013) so it is important for the children to experience pleasure and mirth as they engage with story.

The literature review (p.105) discusses how children whose teachers were identified as using a performance style had the best vocabulary outcomes when they were in primary school (McKeown & Beck, 2006). Haden Haden, Reese and Fivush (1996) found that reading style may significantly influence children's later literacy success. It is therefore important that modelling good reading performance continues to form part of the induction workshop. This is in conjunction with, not instead of, other forms of modelling, such as the demonstration of a co-constructive style to prompt children into higher-order thinking. The final section to be discussed in this analysis is sub-theme 2 of theme 3 – sharing the underlying rationale of *The Storytime Project.*

Sharing the underlying rationale informing *The Storytime Project* (sub-theme 2 of theme 3).

In interviews with the liaison personnel at The Northside Partnership organisation and Dublin City Library, conversation returned to the aims of the project. It was felt that there needed to be a re-focus on decontextualized language and on ways of building conversations so that the child and the parent is challenged to think. The librarian said he was under the misconception that the emphasis in *The Storytime Project* was on books rather than on oral language until he attended a seminar dedicated to oral literacy and began to make connections with what he heard there and what he was hearing at the induction workshop of *The Storytime Project.*

M: In a sense, coming from a book background, the oral literacy aspect of it wasn't as clear to me. I felt it was the introduction of children to books because that's where I would be coming from but it was actually the engagement from yourself and others in

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the project and then in the *Birth of Literacy*[34] seminars, engaging with people who were professionals in that area that I came to understand the importance of the oral literacy. I understood more of the sense of what you had been emphasising, the decontextualized language. That was important for me to understand (Int 7, p.1, April 2014).

JK: Yes, in other words we are using books as a vehicle…

The potential of the induction workshop could be extended further to include a role play exercise to demonstrate the challenges of extending the child's talk around the book and development of 'oral literacy'. This would give participants the opportunity to practise decontextualized language themselves and to experience the challenges of that type of conversational exchange.

There is a strong emphasis on dialogic reading strategies in the induction seminar, on the DVD and on the tip-sheet, especially on those strategies identified in Whitehurst's CROWD sequence, i.e completion prompts, recall prompts, open-ended prompts, 'Who', 'What' 'Why' – question prompts and distancing prompts. (See literature review p. 79-81 for description of these prompts.) There was abundant evidence in the data that parents were practising those strategies with their children. Perhaps the focus now needs to be more holistic - on interactions rather than strategies. Whitehurst's (1992) PEER sequence is more explicit in relation to the nature of an interaction: 1. prompt the child to say something about the book, 2. evaluate the child's response, 3. expand the child's response by rephrasing and adding information to it, and 4. repeat the prompt to make sure the child has learned from the expansion. *The Storytime Project* emphasises reciprocity in the interactive relationship too

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[34] The Birth of Literacy seminar was an initiative of the Labour Party Lord Mayor, Oisin Quinn. The seminar took place in November 2013. The event focused on the value of oral language development in children in the early years, and the role that communities and families play in supporting and encouraging communication.

which is important to preserve the dialogic, as opposed to didactic, nature of the interaction.

The conversation around re-focusing the project continues in an interview with the

administrator from The Northside Partnership. See Table 4.16 for excerpts.

Table 4.16 Sharing the Rationale Informing *The Storytime Project*

Excerpts from Data
Example 1. (Librarian): Also with the parents, I know going through the strategies with them, without going into the academic side of it, you're making them do the things that will help the oral literacy but I wonder whether being a little more open with them and saying exactly what you are trying to do might actually focus them as well (Int 7, p.1, April 2014).
Example 2: The librarian suggests intellectualising the project a little more –   JK: It's interesting, what your suggesting really is that I bring into central focus the whole notion of decontextualized language, that is abstract language that doesn't happen in day to day conversations like 'where's my coat?' or 'did you brush your teeth?'. So it's more about discussions around the abstract and that's exactly what talking about a book does.   M: Yes, from the birth of literacy seminars, I don't want to go on about it too much…   JK: No, please do!   M: It had the impact on me that I could see these links. Another thing from that was the idea that the conversation could be an object and that if you had interesting objects around the city for instance you could stop and ask 'what does that look like?' and just start a conversation. Obviously you don't want to talk about decontextualising too much to people who might be put off by such a strange sounding word, but the idea of talking to your children and using the strategies that they are using with reading (Int. 7, p.2, April 2014).
Example 3 (Northside Partnership official): Maybe we could do a bit of role play or something. Just to coach a little bit. One of the strategies we are using in the Early Years Practice Programme is coaching and within coaching you can really get a sense of how faithful people are being to the model that you are using and how dilute…(Int 8, p.9, April 2014)
Example 4: (Northside Partnership official):   E: Maybe doing some working in pairs, checking our understanding, what are we saying are the components of the model, what we need to be looking for when we are supporting parents.   JK: This is part of my study, video training and coaching one to one are the most effective ways…   E: Yes that's the basis of our Practice Program, that's exactly what we said. We only bring them in to the classroom setting once every month and then we are out with them in the setting and we are actually demonstrating and coaching because that's exactly it, 80% of what you see being done or someone is coaching you to do, you will retain Int 8, p.9, April 2014).

The suggestion to practise one-to-one coaching at the induction workshop (Table 4.16,

examples 3 and 4) is worth considering because it would make understandings around what

might happen in a parent-child interaction more explicit. It would be important not to be

overly didactic about interactions because it could cause a natural relationship to become

stilted. On the other hand, the learning phase of an activity is often stilted. It is because

consciousness has entered the fray. Consciousness leads to control over one's thinking and intellectual development is the outcome of control over thinking (Donaldson, 1978). Suggestions such as those made by project administrators from The Northside Partnership group and Dublin City Library may succeed in making the purpose of *The Storytime Project* clearer to all participants.

Summary of Theme 3 - Language and Learning

This theme comprised three sub-themes 1.Use of learning strategies to promote children's use of language by parents, educators and children; 2. Sharing the underlying rationale informing *The Storytime Project* and 3. Issues around books. Sub-theme 1 was further sub-divided into a discussion on decontextualized language and children's/parents' attempts to perform the text. Findings indicate widespread use of learning strategies by parents and children leading to practice of decontextualized language and to instances of children and parents interpreting books in a performative manner (Sipe, 2000). Suggestions to use coaching in the induction workshop to work closely on improving parent-child interactions will be followed up on. Steps will also be put in place to ensure that all participants are aware that the clear, unambiguous focus of *The Storytime Project* is on the development of children's decontextualized language. The final chapter will discuss recommendations arising from the analysis of the findings in this chapter.

To conclude, the internal process evaluation of *The Storytime Project* has found that the project is highly valued by participants, that its processes are operating well and that stakeholders look forward to continuing to work with it.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

This internal process evaluation study explored the experiences of parents, teachers and educators as participants in a dialogic story-reading project called *The Storytime Project.* The project has been running since April 2010[35] and its target group are parents and children living in areas designated as socio-economically disadvantaged in the north side of Dublin city. The aim of the study was to evaluate the significance of the project to participants and to gain insight into how the project might be improved by investigating the processes involved in operating the project. The focus of the evaluation was primarily formative, that is, it set out to identify strengths and weaknesses of the project with a view towards building on strengths and resolving any problems. The evaluation study was informed by a socio-cultural theoretical perspective, which acknowledges the role of social interaction and culture in informing how people learn.

The rationale for undertaking the formative evaluation of *The Storytime Project* was that it had been in operation for almost three years and it was timely to establish if there was a case for continuing the project, which, at the time of writing (December 2015), has just held its twelfth graduation ceremony at Marino Institute of Education.

The concluding chapter is structured as follows: There is a summary of the key findings and a focus on recommendations for *The Storytime Project*. The role of *The Storytime Project* in relation to the achievement of social justice is discussed. The implications and limitations of the evaluation study are subsequently outlined. This is followed by recommendations for further study and an epilogue. It begins with a summary of findings.

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[35] The evaluation process commenced in June 2013, when the questionnaire was disseminated. The evaluation study reviewed the project's operation from April 2010 to December 2012.

Summary of Findings

The project was found to have had an important and notable influence on participants in a number of positive ways: It initiated parents into the practice of dialogic story-reading using decontextualized language and taught them how to use strategies to encourage their child's active participation in story-reading. Strategies such as the use of open-ended questions and the adoption of different voices for characters in the story seemed to transform the quality of the literacy experience for the children. Using the dialogic story-reading strategies also made parents more metacognitively aware of the learning processes at work. They were able to observe and then articulate how the strategies influenced their children's learning. Participation in the project had the effect of deepening bonds between parent and child and parent and teacher. It developed parents' confidence in relating to the school and some parents got involved in other school initiatives as a result of their participation in the project; it enabled parents and children to join their local library, to become confident in using the library and to develop a particular relationship with the library staff as participants in *The Storytime Project*.

The findings from this study have already been discussed under three main themes which emerged from the complete data set – Relationships, Storytime Processes and Language and Learning. Each theme yielded a number of key findings, with benefits and challenges for the participants of *The Storytime Project*. A summary of these benefits and challenges is now presented, followed by a number of recommendations.

It could be said that on the shadow side of every benefit, a challenge lurks. For example theme one – Relationships - revealed that parental confidence increased as a result of being involved in *The Storytime Project*. The shadow side of this was the challenge experienced by educators in trying to recruit parents who are marginalised. Difficulties with

recruitment had a dispiriting effect on some educators, many of whom made strenuous attempts to support parents. However, given research findings that suggest a 'top-down' rather than an egalitarian attitude by some schools towards marginalised parents, it is hardly surprising that parents might be circumspect regarding attempts by schools to recruit them into interventions. Findings from the evaluation show that those parents who did get involved in *The Storytime Project* experienced warm and reciprocal relationships with educators. Parents and educators got to know one another as they shared car journeys to induction and graduation events at Marino; they shared funny stories with one another and enjoyed one another's company. Improved relationships with individual teachers helped parents to find voice and to dispel anxiety about school. This is an important finding.

The evaluation found that *The Storytime Project* provided a context for the development of relationships between teachers and EC practitioners which could potentially benefit transitions for children from early childhood settings to school. *The Storytime Project* offers shared professional development to the two groups. This is an opportunity to get to know one another and to engage around ideas to improve children's language and literacy development. Apart from the professional development workshop, interaction between the two sets of educators has been minimal, confined to sharing a common space and exchanging greetings. Professional development workshops therefore need to provide opportunities for deeper engagement between the two groups, facilitating inter-professional learning. Perhaps a community-of-practice model can address this. This would be empowering and informative for educators (Wenger, Mc Dermott & Synder, 2002) and it would be an opportunity to develop relational expertise, whereby mutual trust and confidence in one another's particular professional skill set is developed. The project director will discuss with educators the possibility of holding more regular professional development workshops during the year. The practice to date has been to hold one session annually.

Theme two – Storytime Processes – revealed a strong appetite for the continuation of the project. Future iterations of *The Storytime Project* will retain the project's resources used to convey information about dialogic story-reading strategies, i.e. the DVD, the tip-sheet and the induction workshop. These resources were highly praised in the data.

Programme fidelity was identified as a challenge. There was recognition of a tension between the need to operate the project according to best practice as identified in the literature and a need to respect educators' ability to adapt the project's modus operandi to particular contexts. The structure of The *Storytime Project* was beneficial to parents but some parents found it a challenge to continue to read to their children once the structure of the project was removed. Some parents found it challenging to work with the same book for five nights and there were many requests for more books. While giving children more books is to be recommended, it is clear that if parents are running out of ideas in relation to working with the same book for five nights, the induction workshop needs to focus more deeply on this. Findings under theme three –Language and Learning- indicated that parents were using the strategies mediated at induction. They enjoyed, for example, discussing new words, performing the text, predicting, speculating questioning, talking about the illustrations and relating the events of the story to their lives. Theme three identified a need for a more detailed focus on interactions and on decontextualized language at induction but also at professional development workshops for educators. There were important unanticipated findings too, which are worth re-visiting.

One of the standards used to meta-evaluate aspects of this evaluation study - the Utility standard - emphasised the importance of the evaluator being alert to unexpected but relevant sources of information from a variety of sources. The following unexpected, relevant findings were revealed in the data: The positive effect of the project on siblings of

participants – who also got involved in the story-reading; the effect the project had in improving children's sleep routines; the conquering of adults' fear of public spaces such as the library; parents' metacognitive awareness of literacy practices and parents' cultivation of peer support structures around *The Storytime Project.* The development of parents' metacognitive awareness around literacy practices is particularly heartening. It is an indication that a deep processing of the dialogic story-reading strategies has taken place. Having a metacognitive awareness of the dialogic strategies may also mean that parents can put them to use in other contexts, perhaps in helping with their child's homework or being better able to communicate with their child. It also gives parents a shared professional context with educators. The literature review noted that intellectual powers cannot develop unless a person has a measure of control over his thinking. Metacognitive awareness is an indication of control over one's thinking.

The findings under the three themes are thus summarised. Recommendations specific to the continuation of the project will now be addressed. Recommendations include the need to -

- Continue to focus on parental empowerment through induction and graduation workshops and through the maintenance of close connections between educators and parents

- Continue the practice of recruiting a mixture of 'target' and 'non-target' parents through a relational approach to parents

- Support HSCL teachers and EC practitioners in recruiting parents, perhaps through sharing ideas with one another in professional development workshops using a community-of-practice model

- Organise the provision of more books for children in order to allow them to make reading choices

- Include parents in selecting a suite of books for the project by setting up a picture-book club and recruit parents as mentors for the project through the book club.

- Re-focus the induction workshop and practitioner professional development to emphasise parent-child interactions and decontextualized language

- Include coaching, perhaps in the form of role-play, on parent-child interactions as part of the induction workshop

- Initiate a discussion with practitioners about programme fidelity versus the need to interpret project guidelines according to particular circumstances

- Organise an induction workshop in a community setting

- Consider ways of supporting 'target' parents who completed the project to continue to read to their children and to continue library usage

- Ensure that classroom-based and EC settings-based educators should be given more information about *The Storytime Project*. They should be given copies of the resources such as the DVD and tip-sheets and they should be more informed about the children in their care who are participating in the project.

Further consideration of some of the recommendations above is merited and follows now.

Professional Development

A stronger focus on professional development in the area of dialogic reading for early years educators, home school liaison teachers and early years primary teachers was a key recommendation from the participants in this study. There is a need to give these educators a forum to develop their knowledge around emergent literacy, decontextualized language and

dialogic reading. They also need opportunities to discuss the rationale and processes as well as the challenges and opportunities in relation to dialogic reading.

Issues around professional status for early childhood practitioners affect their identity. This issue cannot be resolved by *The Storytime Project* but by providing the same CPD for teachers and EC practitioners, it provides an opportunity to share ideas and develop relational expertise (Edwards, 2009). The focus group with EC practitioners provided some evidence that EC practitioners gained professional knowledge from the project. This was also the case in relation to the HSCL teachers. The project may, therefore, have been instrumental in improving the professional practice of educators.

The vulnerability of educators revealed itself at times in focus group discussions and this brought home the point that those who operate and manage the project need to be nurtured and professionally acknowledged. Some educators became down-hearted when parents who promised to turn up to induction and graduation workshops, did not do so. Educators were sometimes inclined to blame themselves rather than see this as a consequence of the debilitating effect of social marginalistion. Those educators asked for help with recruiting 'target' parents. Over time there could be a gradual deconstruction of the notion behind 'target' parents. When educators are in a position of trying to support a group that are less advantaged than themselves, it can be easy to fall into the trap of paternalism instead of the lap of empowerment.

The data asked for more focus on the 'why' of the project rather than continually reinforcing the 'how'. A CPD workshop can address the content knowledge around oral language and can look at the reasons for some of the choices made for *The Storytime Project.* CPD might also bring a closer lens to the quality of adult-child interactions and discuss how this might be practised, via role-play or one-to-one coaching, at the induction workshop. In

order to really interrogate the dialogic relationship, some discussion around intersubjectivity and co-construction of meaning would be valuable. An area worth re-visiting might be – what exactly does co-construction of meaning look like? The list of twenty-three learning strategies identified in this study and sourced in research literature (see p.59-62 literature review) are central to answering this question. Dickinson and Tabors' (2001) list of activities used in a co-constructive approach, is also a valuable resource. It is imperative that this work begins with the teachers and early childhood practitioners and this will, in turn, affect the quality of support they provide for parents and children. A finding in the recent *Learning from the evaluation of DEIS report* (2015) found the quality of interactions between adults and children as significantly influencing student outcomes (p.81).

Given the research on the importance of vocabulary development and of using explicit instruction to teach vocabulary, the work-shop might put further emphasis on this area. One of the criticisms of dialogic story-reading in the literature was the lack of focus on explicit vocabulary instruction (Silverman et al.,2013). This criticism is not valid in relation to *The Storytime Project* because there is a *specific* focus on vocabulary instruction. One piece of advice on the tip-sheet for parents is to focus explicitly on particular words in the story, discuss their meaning and find their opposite meaning, as appropriate. Data from parental feedback at graduation ceremonies consistently referred to new words learned by children. Parents also consistently expressed surprise at the extent of their children's vocabularies.

The current professional development provision for educators comprises one meeting, held at the beginning of each year at Marino Institute of Education. The number of meetings could be expanded, with the consent of the EC practitioners and HSCL teachers, who are already committed to the project. It is crucially important to obtain the consent of EC practitioners and HSCL teachers before putting extra demands, however well-intentioned, on

them. The director of *The Storytime Project* is mindful of the continued voluntary support of HSCL teachers and EC practitioners and of the work stresses they may experience in other aspects of their jobs. Van Loon (2015) found that public service employees who have a strong public service ethic tend to sacrifice themselves to maintain a high standard of work but this may burn them out in the long run. Tummers (2013) found that when public employees feel increased work pressure from various sources, this can cause them to reduce their work effort and lead them to leave their jobs.

Changing the Venue of the Induction Workshop

In relation to the suggestion to move the induction workshop to a local community venue, it is important to ease access to the project for participants who otherwise would be daunted by participating in a project set in a third-level institution. Reference was made earlier to Paulos and Goodman (2004) who said that it is the people with which we share spaces that dominate our perception of those spaces. If parents are more comfortable coming to their local community hall or school, and that would be a factor in their decision to attend an induction workshop, it is worthwhile to use a community venue on a trial basis. Of course, and legitimately, it could also be a simple matter of convenience for parents. The graduation ceremony will continue to be hosted by Marino Institute of Education at the institute. Having gone through the induction process at the community venue and having met and become familiar with *The Storytime Project* administration team, it will be interesting to see if Marino Institute of Education continues to appear to be a barrier for some parents.

One of the key findings in the evaluation study was the issue of empowerment. *The Storytime Project* invested significant thought and resources into its efforts to facilitate the empowerment of parents. One of the *unanticipated* benefits of the study was the empowerment of educators too. The next section considers the role of *The Storytime Project*

as a vehicle for the achievement of social justice. Parental empowerment is a key element in the process.

The Storytime Project and Social Justice

The Storytime Project cannot eliminate structural inequality but it aims to empower by facilitating language development which ultimately may give rise to the emergence of voice. One of the aims of *The Storytime Project* is parental empowerment (see Introduction, p.4). The data revealed examples of how this manifested itself for parents, by their increased knowledge of literacy practices and, for some parents, a move towards involvement in school activities. Freire's raison d'être was to use education as a tool to liberate and empower people by facilitating them to develop acritical consciousness (Freire,1996). The literature review (p.59) looked briefly at the hallmarks of Freirean thinking on family literacy programmes, such as: maintenance of participant control, the use of dialogue as a key pedagogical process, content that focuses on critical social issues from participants' lives and the creation of plans of action for social change (Caspe, 2003). *The Storytime Project* fulfils the first two of the four criteria above. It was not set up to raise participants' political consciousness. However, The *Storytime Project* is motivated by a sense of social justice and not a charitable impulse. It can be argued that charity is paternalistic and there is inequality in relationships of power between the giver and the receiver. Freire calls the attempt to "soften" the power of the oppressor "false generosity" which conceals and maintains the unjust social order behind it (Freire, 2005, p44). *The Storytime Project* benefits from philanthropy through The North-side Partnership project. It does not eschew support from such sources and neither does it impugn the motives of those who give that support. But it aims for agency and autonomy for its participants rather than dependency. In dialogic story-reading, the child gradually takes over the story-telling from the adult. It is also hoped that parents will

gradually take over the running of *The Storytime Project* by becoming mentors to new participants and ambassadors for the project.

The Storytime Project could be seen as a pragmatic response to problems of societal inequality. Racionero and Padros (2010) argue that the move towards dialogism does not eliminate inequality in society – indeed neoliberalism and the information society have created new inequalities (p.144) but people are increasingly claiming the right to dialogue. The "de-monopolization of expert knowledge" (p.144) means that 'experts' are expected to justify their position. Pedagogical relationships are changing to embrace a more dialogic approach. *Aistear'*s guidelines for good practice encourage partnership with parents, learning and developing through interactions, learning and developing through play and supporting learning and development through assessment (NCCA, 2009, p.5). *The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Young Children 2011-*2020, (DES, 2011), advises that "engagement with parents should be a core part of the literacy and numeracy plans of schools and ECCE settings" (p.19-20) because partnership with parents and families plays a central role in nurturing the development of children's language and emergent literacy and numeracy skills (p.19). These changes may not eliminate structural inequality but if it works towards giving voice, then eventually progress towards a more egalitarian world may be made politically, socially and economically. Raffo, Dyson, Gunter, Hall, Jones & Kalambouka (2007), writing from a socially critical stand-point, claim that in order to address inequality, a change in underlying structures and power relations is required. The underlying structures might be "in the classroom, in the relationship between marginalised groups and public policy, or in fundamental social structures" (p.46). In its work with educators and with parents, *The Storytime Project* may be making a modest contribution to addressing inequality.

It is no surprise, given its brief to empower and to promote dialogic, horizontal rather than vertical relationships between adult and child, that both *The Storytime Project* and the evaluation study is informed by the theories of Freire and Bakhtin, as well as socio-cultural theory and other influences (See p. 158-159). Freire's emphasis on dialogue and his concern for the oppressed and Bakhtin's emphasis on dialogue, Heteroglossia (context), polyphony (a plurality of voices) and Carnivale (inversion of authority) make them suitable bedfellows on which to base the framework for this thesis. A brief return to the theoretical framework of the study is merited in this, the final chapter. On this occasion it will focus on the image of the child as a learner.

The Theoretical Framework and its Connection to Co-construction of Meaning

The overarching theoretical framework for the study, a socio-cultural perspective with Freirean and Bakhtinean influences, embraces the concept of multiple realities. The implication of this thesis is that there is no fixed meaning or no singular truth. That is why the term 'co-construction of meaning' fits with *The Storytime Project* – it implies that meaning is co-created between people and that it is particular to the context in which it finds itself. But what about the learner who is involved in the process of co-construction of meaning? How does the image of the learner relate to the theory informing the evaluation study? The co-constructive approach outlined in the study leads one to see the learner as continually in the process of constructing and reconstructing herself through interaction with others and with the culture but it never reaches an end point. This view is also articulated by Bakhtin in his theory of unfinalizability (1984), that is, dialogue is never complete. There is always the possibility of more to be said.

By affording children and their parents the opportunity to interact around a book the child is learning about herself and her parent, the parent is learning about herself and her

child. They are developing intersubjectivity as they work collaboratively. Dunphy (2008) maintains that the co-construction of knowledge is supported by intersubjectivity and collaboration (p.17). The image of the child as continual constructor and re-constructor means the child is active and agentive as a learner, not passive, not a vessel to be filled with knowledge. She is continually in the making as a social and cultural being, never arriving at a fixed point. This is the picture of the child at the heart of *The Storytime Project.*

Implications of the Study

Research indicates that parental involvement in their children's learning has a much greater influence on children's learning than school (Swain, Brooks & Bosley, 2014) and this should increase the demand for projects like *The Storytime Project*. An examination of other literacy projects currently running in Ireland, conducted in this literature review, indicates that this dialogic story-reading project designed for use by parents, with a focus on the development of decontextualized language and using a particular set of language development strategies, is unique and merits wider attention, especially if one considers the recommendations of the NCCA's commissioned research report (Shiel et al., 2012). The research report outlined a set of principles that should underpin future language development curricula. These include - the implementation of strategies for dialogic interaction (e.g. repetitions, recasts, expansions, prompts and questions), modelling and scaffolding of decontextualized language and the inclusion of parents as adults who can support and develop children's oral language competence (pp.30-31). Given that *The Storytime Project* embraces all of these principles and given the positive findings from this evaluation study, particularly in relation to the positive experience of parents as well as children, an approach will be made to the NCCA to include the support strategies and story support sheets in the Support Material section of the new Primary Language Curriculum (2015). The material

would support teachers in implementing dialogic story-reading in the classroom but crucially, it provides teachers with a toolkit to involve parents in dialogic story-reading with their children at home. This coincides with a time where there is a policy focus on home-school relationships (See *Aistear* and *The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Young Children* 2011-2020, (DES, 2011), and an emphasis on parental involvement in their children's learning. *The Storytime Project* has great potential as a model to conceptualise, implement, adapt, design and deliver other projects. It is a model that can be used by researchers or other personnel planning similar projects. It makes an important contribution to knowledge in this respect.

A noteworthy feature of *The Storytime Project* is its multi-agency approach. A third level institution (Marino Institute of Education) combines with a community support agency (The Northside Partnership) and Dublin City Library to administer and implement the story-reading project. This ensures that parents, children and educators are facilitated appropriately at project training level at Marino, at their local library when they are welcomed and assisted in identifying reading material and with The Northside Partnership where educators are supported with the day-to-day running of the project through regular news bulletins and recruitment support, as necessary. The combined effort invested by the three organisations facilitates project development. The three parties support and motivate each other through a shared vision and shared responsibility. This interagency approach could serve as a model for future educational support initiatives with communities.

Limitations of the Study

A process evaluation does not measure outcomes so there is no definitive measurement of how children's oral language improved, if at all. In considering limitations of the study, it is important not to blame a process evaluation for being a process evaluation.

The internal process evaluation provided many insights and indicated, under the themes of Relationships, Storytime Processes and Language and Learning that relationships developed were rich and rewarding, that the project's processes worked very well and that parents used the strategies designed to support their child's oral language development. There were many reported incidences of the use of decontextualized language, but whether this use produced improved oral language outcomes for children will have to be answered by further research.

The reliability and validity of data may have been further improved if observations of parents and children engaged in dialogic story-reading had been recorded. However, it was felt that recorded observations might have put parents under stress; affected the quality of the interactions between parent and child and been contrary to the raison d'être of a process evaluation. Because the evaluation relied on parental reports of parent-child interactions, it was difficult to gauge parents' fidelity to the dialogic approach. However, comment at the graduation ceremony and weekly evaluations have given consistent feedback which indicates fidelity to strategies such as the use of open-ended questions, relating the story to the child's life and explaining and discussing new words. A study that examined parent-child interactions during story-reading by Barnyak, (2011) found when parental self-report on interactions was compared with recorded observations of interactions, the data was almost completely aligned.

It is likely that there was a social desirability factor (Dickinson & De Temple, 1998) in relation to participants' responses. Parents know that it is considered a good thing to read to their children and they may thus frame their answers to show themselves in a positive light. However, it is arguable that a social desirability factor is impossible to avoid, regardless of the type of research conducted.

The difficulty in recruiting parents for a focus group discussion is another limitation of the study. It may be the case that parents who felt most favourably disposed towards *The Storytime Project* made themselves available for interview while more marginalised and disaffected parents did not volunteer for interview. This raises a question in relation to how representative were the views of those parents who volunteered for interviews or focus group discussions.

The role of the director of the project as researcher might also be considered a limitation. There is a desire to see positive outcomes in relation to the project and despite strenuous efforts at triangulation, (questionnaire, written evaluations, oral feedback at graduation ceremonies, focus group discussions, interviews and two diary narratives); there may have been some unconscious effects on participants when interviewed by the project's director, despite assurances, to answer honestly rather than pleasingly. The quantitative data gathered through the questionnaire afforded participants an opportunity to respond privately to questions about the project as did evaluations and there were many robust critiques of book choices in particular. There was no major difference, however, between the tenor of the data collected through quantitative and qualitative means.

Recommendations for the Future of the Study and for Further Studies

Based on analysis of the findings, the future of *The Storytime Project* seems to be secure. 86% of participants want it to continue but it will continue with a renewed focus on professional development and a commitment to moving the project's work gradually into the hands of parents, supported by administrators and educators. This move will promote parents' voice in their children's education.

The study might look at how other aspects of literacy might be incorporated into the project in an attractive way for children. The literature review noted the symbiotic relationship between oral language, reading and writing. It may be timely to think about ways of including aspects of reading and writing to the project, while keeping in mind that parents are not teachers and that children need to continue to find the time spent with parents enjoyable. It would be beneficial to the project to conduct an impact study, focusing purely on the development of children's literacy behaviours. This process evaluation has indicated an improvement in literacy behaviours. An impact evaluation would augment these findings. Instead of observing and recording parents reading and engaging dialogically with their children, the evaluator could provide parents with a video recording device and ask parents to record themselves. This will give parents more control over the data collection process.

It would also be interesting to look at how working relationships might be developed between teachers and early childhood educators through inter-professional learning and relational approaches developed and fostered at CPD at Marino Institute of Education. This will be important, given the plans by the NCCA to integrate the curriculum of children between the ages of three and six years (three stage model) or between the ages of three and eight years (two stage model) (NCCA, 2016).

Discussions with the NCCA with a view to including resources for dialogic story-reading on its Primary Language Curriculum website – Support Material section – should ensure wider dissemination of dialogic story-reading to schools. This would address the omission of dialogic story-reading from the new Primary Language Curriculum (2015).

The literature review looked at research by Swain, Brooks and Bosley, (2014) that indicates that when parents learn how to support their children's learning there often springs an interest in improving their own literacy. Parents might be interested in taking part in a

picture book reading review club where they would be invited to take part in assessing the suitability of picture books for *The Storytime Project*. Currently this work is done by the director of the project. A large number of books have been reviewed using carefully considered criteria. The process could be shared with parents and has the potential to develop critical thinking and further promote parents' voice in their children's education.

Marino Institute of Education is an associated college of Trinity College Dublin. Trinity College's Access Programme (TAP) is interested in facilitating a nation-wide roll-out of *The Storytime Project*. It seems likely, therefore, that the university will be involved in conversations about the future of the project. *Storytime* project administrators have given presentations to early childhood groups in other parts of Dublin City and as a result of this the Ballyfermot/Chapelizod Partnership is now running *The Storytime Project* in collaboration with Dublin City Library. The collaboration between Dublin City Library, the Northside Partnership and Marino Institute of Education is of paramount importance in the successful wider dissemination of *The Storytime Project*. Each partner in the relationship has its own independent network of relationships and some cross-pollination is beginning to occur. For example, the Northside Partnership has shared information about the project with its equivalent body in South and West Dublin. Dublin City library Cabra branch has alerted other Dublin library branches to the existence of the project and new library branches are joining the project. This interagency model will continue to be nurtured and will be used to develop new relationships with other jurisdictions.

Final Word

This internal process evaluation fulfilled its purpose. Valuable knowledge was gained about the experiences of participants and the modus operandi of *The Storytime Project* was examined closely. One of the EC practitioners who attended a recent induction workshop

with a cohort of parents from her EC setting had participated as a parent in a previous iteration of the project. It seems that the plan to use parents as mentors for the project has already begun to happen organically.

This evaluation study will improve *The Storytime Project* for participants, which should increase the possibility that children will be more able to use decontextualized language and will be more positively disposed towards books and reading than they were before they embarked on *The Storytime Project.* The project can influence children's learning and parental involvement in their children's learning. It is a resource that can be used in the early years' classroom as well as in the community where it has been found to strengthen relationships between school and community. It can serve as a model to be used by others interested in developing similar interventions.

The fifteenth graduation ceremony of *The Storytime Project* took place today, March 15th 2017, seven years since the project began in 2010. Feedback from parents at the ceremony was consistent with findings in this evaluation study and consistent too with feedback given at other graduation ceremonies since the period of the evaluation 2010-2013. Parents commented on the positive impact of the project on their relationship with their children; the value of the structure of the project to support parents' story-reading routine; children's vocabulary acquisition; the success of the dialogic story-reading strategies in eliciting more conversation from children; children's improved ability to settle to sleep after story-time and their surprise and delight at discovering their children's ability to articulate their opinions. Perhaps one of the greatest things about the dialogic story-reading process is the joy for parents in discovering their own children as conversationalists. There is a particular delight too in hearing your child savour a new word, trying it out in a new context, perhaps incorrectly at first and gradually integrating the new word into their lexicon. There is

great potential to deepen and enrich the parent-child bond when parents are really listening and engaging with their child and building on the child's utterances, as recommended by dialogic story-reading practice. Listening to parents recount their experiences of *The Storytime Project* this morning, I am more convinced than ever, seven years into the project's operation, of its value. *The Storytime Project* facilitates children's oral language development but it supports parents and children in many other important ways too.

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Appendix A: Description of Induction and Graduation

Induction

Induction begins with a story reading workshop for parents at Marino Institute of Education. Parents are accompanied to Marino by the HSCL teacher or the EC practitioner. The induction workshop is consciously and deliberately held at Marino Institute of Education in order to add status and significance to the project. During the planning stages for the project in 2009, teachers felt that by situating the project in a third level environment, it would give parents an opportunity to come to a venue that they may never previously have visited and that it might 'break down barriers' for them. The chapter on findings looks more closely at these issues. The room for the induction workshop is designed to be welcoming and unintimidating for parents. The walls are decorated with photographs of previous participants receiving their graduation certificates. Many of the parents are acquainted with people who have already participated in the project. When they recognise faces of their neighbours and acquaintances in the photographic exhibition, it may engender a sense of pride or connection to the project or a sense of the history of the project. Round tables are used, which are conducive to conducting small group discussions. The size of the cohort varies but usually consists of forty to fifty-five people. Refreshments are served on arrival and the researcher meets every parent participant.

Workshop format

The workshop format is as follows: Welcome reception, introduction and description of the modus operandi of the project with a focus on the particular strategies that are used in dialogic reading. The introduction provides a rationale for the project, discussing the importance of oral language development for children, explaining the term 'decontextualized

language' and how decontextualized language can be practised using the particular strategies that are used in dialogic reading. The project director then asks the group's permission to read them a children's story in order to demonstrate how parents might stop to discuss parts of the plot with their child, study a picture together, speculate as to the motives of characters, predict events and so on. One of the primary purposes of the story-reading is to demonstrate that a story can be 'performed' by changing tone, using different voices or accents for different characters and pausing before or after an epiphanic moment in the story. This reading is conducted by Joan Kiely, the project director. The reading usually triggers some light-hearted exchanges and parents give their reaction to the story-reading experience.

The focus then moves to the particular strategies used in dialogic story-reading, many of them demonstrated in the reading of the story. Parents are given a sheet with various dialogic story-reading strategies listed. The director of the project describes the strategies, emphasizing the following: How to ask an open-ended question, beginning with "I wonder…" These questions are usually speculative, for example, "I wonder what would happen if…" or "I wonder why"; connecting the events of the story to the child's life, e.g. "Did you ever feel like that? Did that ever happen to you?"…; projecting into the child's life e.g. "What would you do if you were in that situation? What would you do if you were Goldilocks?..; repeating what the child says and expanding on the child's utterances; mulling over word meanings together and explaining words as appropriate, asking 'WH' questions (Who, Why, What, Where, When), making predictions and making inferences. Parents then view the *Storytime* training DVD. The DVD demonstrates use of the strategies for developing children's oral language. The strategies on the DVD are demonstrated or modelled by teachers, the director of the project and also by volunteer parents and children from the Northside Partnership area, some of them neighbours of the project participants. All demonstrations feature an adult and child working together as envisaged during Storytime.

After this there is a small group discussion about the content of the DVD. It takes place at each table initially and then in plenary session.

The Tip-Sheet

The tip-sheet/support sheet is then introduced and explored with parents. A copy of a tip-sheet is given to each parent. Bespoke sheets are designed for each book that is distributed to parents. It is designed to help parents work dialogically with their child. Parents are told that they do not have to use the tip-sheets/support sheets but they might be helpful if parents run out of ideas. The sheets contain six points as exemplified below in relation to the story - *The Three Billy Goat's Gruff:*

1. Find a quiet space for you and the child.

2. Begin by looking at the cover of the book and wondering aloud what the story is about.

3. Read the story, pausing at times to look at pictures and talk about them.

4. As you read the story, discuss questions like - I wonder what the 3 Billy goats are thinking…

    I wonder what would happen to baby Billy goat if he fell into the river… I wonder what the troll will do when he hears the Billy goat on his bridge…

5. Relate events to the child's life - Did you ever cross a bridge? What would you do if you met someone mean like the troll?

6. Discuss word meanings such as 'gnashed', 'trotted', 'monstrous', 'pastures'…
    Another word for 'pastures' is 'meadows', 'fields', 'grasslands'.

When discussion on the tip-sheet concludes, books are distributed along with library application forms. This brings the workshop to a close. Within a week of the workshop being held, the project commences. Parents are given one book per week over a five week period.

They are also given a copy of the DVD (produced by MIE), mentioned earlier, which reinforces literacy strategies modelled live during the induction workshop.

After the five week project has been completed, parents visit Marino for a second time to attend a graduation ceremony. At this time they review the project orally and listen to one another's accounts of their experience of implementing the project. They are also awarded a certificate of completion. After each project phase concludes, parental and educator feedback is jointly considered by Marino Institute of Education, The Northside Partnership and Dublin City Library personnel and changes, as appropriate, are implemented for the subsequent roll-out of the project.

Graduation Ceremony

The graduation ceremony is usually held in the same room that the induction workshop was held. The project is reviewed orally and locally at each round table. Parents are usually enthusiastic to share their experiences of working with their child with one another. The feedback discussion is chaired by the HSCl teacher or EC practitioner at each table. There is a period of about fifteen minutes whereby local round table discussion takes place. The meeting then moves to a plenary session and each table gives some account of their feedback. Sometimes the HSCl teacher or EC practitioner gives the group feedback and sometimes a parent elects to do so. This is usually a very good-humoured session with many funny anecdotes. A member of Marino administrative staff is present and takes some notes of the feedback. Parents are then awarded a certificate of completion and a rosette (introduced in December, 2013) to be given to their child. Children do not attend the graduation ceremony because it was decided by the HSCL teachers and EC practitioners that the project should not disrupt children's attendance at their various educational settings. This decision is reviewed periodically because it is not a unanimously held opinion of the group. This will be discussed in the findings chapter. On some occasions a local politician or dignitary presents the

certificates on graduation day. Photographs are taken as each group of parents are presented with their certificate of completion. The graduation ceremony then comes to a close.

Appendix B: Participating Schools and Early Childhood Settings

Schools in Northside Partnership Area of Dublin Participating in *The Storytime Project.*

Deleted for the purposes of confidentiality

Early Childhood Settings in Northside Partnership Area of Dublin Participating in *The Storytime Project*

Deleted for the purposes of confidentiality
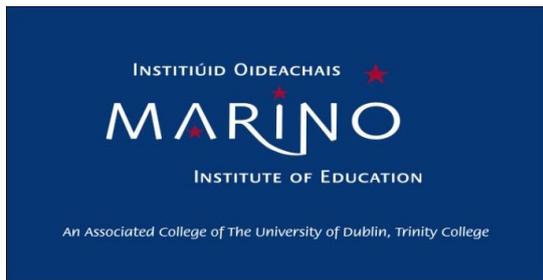
The Storytime Project

A story reading initiative by Marino Institute of Education and The Northside Partnership.

Questionnaire

I am interested to learn more about your experiences of *The Storytime Project* and your views and impressions of this initiative by Marino Institute of Education and The Northside Partnership. For this reason I would appreciate it if you could complete this questionnaire.

The questionnaire is designed to take about **15 minutes** to complete and contains four sections.

1. Your role, workplace and work experience
2. Your views on the impact of the project on the participants involved
3. Your views on the induction workshop, the DVD, the graduation ceremony and the future of the project.
4. Your suggestions for ways in which the project might be improved.

The data will be used to evaluate the extent to which *The Storytime Project* is having a positive effect on participants and to establish what can be done to improve the project. The data will also be used for academic research purposes. All information that you provide will be treated confidentially.

Please note: Your completion of this instrument confirms that you understand the purpose of this study and that you freely consent to participate in it.

Joan Kiely

Marino Institute of Education

June 2013

_____

Section 1: Your role, type of workplace and work experience

Please fill in the relevant box like this ✆

_____

1.   Are you a :

HSCL teacher   O

Early Childhood (EC) Practitioner   O

Principal   O

Classroom teacher   O

Northside Partnership employee   O

Dublin City Library employee   O

Learning Support teacher   O

2.   How many years' experience do you have as a: Teacher, Early Childhood Practitioner, Principal, Member of Dublin City Library, or Member of The Northside Partnership?
(If you are a principal, state how many years you have been working as a principal. If you are a HSCL teacher, state how many years you have been in any teaching role).

  O   O   O   O
1-3 yrs   4-6 yrs   7-10 yrs   >10 yrs

3.   State whether you work in a DEIS Band 1, DEIS Band 2, Non-DEIS school or in an Early Childhood (EC) centre. (Skip the question if it does not apply to you).

  O   O   O   O

DEIS B.1   DEIS B.2   Non-DEIS   EC centre

4.   State how long you have been involved with *The Storytime Project*

  O   O   O   O
<1 yr   1-2 yrs   2-3yrs   >3yrs

_____

Section 2: Your views on the impact of *The Storytime Project*

Below are statements relating to *The Storytime Project*. Read each one and decide on the extent to which you agree or disagree with it.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
a) Children who have participated in *The Storytime Project* show an increased interest in listening to stories.	O	O	O	O	O
b) Children are more confident in choosing their own books in the school/EC centre library than they were before their participation in *The Storytime Project*.	O	O	O	O	O
c) Children are better able to discuss characters in a story than they were before their participation in *The Storytime Project*.	O	O	O	O	O
d) Children are better able to use language to clarify their thinking about a story than they were before their participation in *The Storytime Project*.	O	O	O	O	O
e) Children are better able to relate stories to experiences in their own lives than they were before their participation in *The Storytime Project*.	O	O	O	O	O
f) I see **no improvement** in a child's literacy behaviour[36] after their involvement in *The Storytime Project*.	O	O	O	O	O
g) *The Storytime Project* is just another initiative that takes a lot of teacher/EC practitioner time for little gain.	O	O	O	O	O
h) *The Storytime Project* **does not** attract parents who are most in need of assistance in supporting their children's language and literacy development.	O	O	O	O	O
i) Involvement in *The Storytime Project* helped me to improve interpersonal relationships with participating parents.	O	O	O	O	O
j) *The Storytime Project* helps to eliminate negative feelings about school for parents.	O	O	O	O	O
k) Some parents have volunteered for other school/EC centre activites after their involvement in *The Storytime Project*.	O	O	O	O	O
l) Involvement in *The Storytime Project* encourages parents' interest in their child's development in reading.	O	O	O	O	O
m) Involvement in *The Storytime Project* has **no** impact on parents' attitude towards school.	O	O	O	O	O
n) Involvement in *The Storytime Project* has **no** impact on the child's academic progress at school.	O	O	O	O	O
o) Parents develop a positive relationship with their local library as a result of their participation in *The Storytime Project*.	O	O	O	O	O
p) It is **unlikely** that families will use their local library once they have completed *The Storytime Project*.	O	O	O	O	O

[36] By' literacy behaviour' I mean the child's ability to choose his/her own book, to listen and comprehend a story, to use pictures in the story to aid comprehension, to discuss the plot and characters and to relate events in the story to their own lives and to recognise text.

Section 3: Your views on the induction workshop, the DVD, the graduation ceremony and the continuation of *The Storytime Project*

Below are statements about the different elements of the *The Storytime Project*. Read each one and decide on the extent to which you agree or disagree with it.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
a) The induction workshop at Marino gives parents good ideas on how to get their children talking about stories	O	O	O	O	O
b) Teachers/EC practitioners could do this work with parents **without** an induction workshop	O	O	O	O	O
c) *The Storytime Project* DVD clearly demonstrates how to support your children's talk about stories and their related life experiences	O	O	O	O	O
d) The graduation event at Marino is important because it engenders a sense of pride and achievement in parent participants for having completed the project.	O	O	O	O	O
e) The graduation event is a waste of teachers'/EC practitioners' time	O	O	O	O	O
f) The graduation event is of little benefit to parents	O	O	O	O	O
g) I intend to leave *The Storytime Project* as it is difficult to recruit parents	O	O	O	O	O
h) I intend to stay involved in *The Storytime Project* with Marino and The Northside Partnership for the foreseeable future	O	O	O	O	O
i) I intend to leave *The Storytime Project* and run a version of it in my own school	O	O	O	O	O

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Section 4: Suggestions for Improvement of *The Storytime Project*

1. Do you have any suggestions for how *The Storytime Project* might be improved?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. Is there anything else about the project that you would like to be examined as part of an evaluation of *The Storytime Project*?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. Do you have anything else to add?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THIS QUESTIONNAIRE
YOUR COOPERATION IS MUCH APPRECIATED

Appendix D: Description of Attempt at First Focus Group with Parents 26-11-13

I contacted the HSCL teacher in -------- NS in order to organise a focus group of parents for the 2011-2012 cohort. Five parents were duly contacted and they agreed to meet at a time (9.15am) and a date (26-11-2013) and a venue (-------- NS) of their choice. A colleague acted as my focus group assistant. We arrived at the school thirty minutes early and set up the room in a way that was inviting and informal. I had gifts (books) for the children of the parents who were attending, a large box of sweets and the HSCL teacher kindly provided tea, coffee and biscuits. One parent arrived at 9.15am with her seven month old baby. Another arrived and said she would return after she had done an errand. We waited until 9.40am for the other parents but they did not appear. The HSCL teacher then rang the parents' homes and personally contacted one parent who was on the school premises but who decided, on the spur of the moment, to do a pottery workshop with her daughter's class instead. The other two parents informed the HSCL teacher that they wouldn't be able to attend. At this point the woman who had turned up with her baby was getting restless as her baby needed a bottle. The HSCL teacher heated up the baby's bottle and Lorraine, the mother (not her real name) agreed to do a one-to-one interview with me instead. I adjusted the consent form as necessary and discussed the form in depth with Lorranine. Lorraine signed two copies of the consent form and we then proceeded with a one-to-one interview. We had established a bond during the first twenty minutes of the morning as we waited for the other parents to turn up. The interview went well and Lorraine's baby was contented on her lap throughout.

The second parent, Amanda, (not her real name) arrived as the interview with Lorraine was coming to a close. There was some friendly banter between the two parents, my colleague and myself. Then Lorraine left and I proceeded to conduct an interview with

Amanda, having adjusted the consent form to suit the changed circumstances and having discussed same with Amanda. The interview was informative and rich and went on for about thirty minutes.

Before we left the school we thanked the school principal and the HSCl teacher who commiserated with us on the non-appearance of parents. The principal said this was a valuable experience that should be documented as part of the project evaluation.

Appendix E: Interview Schedule – Children

Date: ....

Location of interview: ....

Interviewer: Joan Kiely

Interview code: ....

Notes:

Consent Confirmation:

Remind the children that they should join me only if they wish and they may go to another group if they wish, either now or later if they choose to do so. I will tell the children that their parents/guardian and class teacher gave me permission to work with them but if they don't feel like doing so, that is all right. I will thank them for agreeing to work with me.

<u>**Introduction:**</u>

I will go to another classroom space with the children accompanied by an adult appointed by the principal. I will begin by asking the children's permission to record the interactions. Then I will ask the children if they enjoyed the story that I just read to the whole class and what in particular they liked about it. I will tell the children that I am going to show them a short video (approx. 4 minutes) of me reading a story to a two year old girl. When the video has been shown, we will then speculate together as to what is happening and how the little girl feels about the process. For example, I will ask "What was happening in the video? What was the adult doing? Do you think the little girl liked the story? How do you know?" These questions will then lead in to me asking the following:

1. I wonder does anyone remember when you sat with Mum/Granny/Dad/ Auntie for a story...........
2. Anyone want to tell me about what you remember?
3. What was good about it?
4. Any bit that you did not like?
5. I wonder do Mammies/Daddies like reading stories? I wonder do they do it differently to the teacher? How is it different?
6. I wonder do you like having a chat about the story that Mum/Dad reads to you?
7. I wonder when is the best time for Mum/Dad to read a story? After school? After dinner? At bed-time? In the morning?

Questions 8-10: checking children's understanding of what reading is

8. I wonder do you like listening to stories?
9. Would you like to read your own story?
10. I wonder what you do when you are reading?

Questions 11-12 about the library

11. Was anybody here ever in a library with Mum or Dad? What do you do in the library? Does the library have good books? Anything you don't like about the library?
12. Do you go to the library often with Mum/Dad?

Concluding questions

13. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about reading stories with Mum/Dad?

Appendix F: Interview Schedule – HSCL and EC Practitioners

Date: ....

Location of interview: ....

Interviewer: Joan Kiely

Interview code: ....

Notes:

Consent Confirmation:

Remind the participants of the voluntary nature of participation in the evaluation process, and that at any time they may ask to move to another question, or ask for the recorder to be turned off. On the record, confirm written permission via the Informed Consent For.

<u>**Introduction:**</u>

Thank-you for agreeing to be involved in this evaluation process. Like I have already explained when I spoke to you before, and as you have read on the information sheets, I am interested in finding out about your experience of being involved in The Storytime project. I will start by asking you some questions about how and why you got involved in the project and then I will ask you some questions about what happened during the project and about your opinions on the project's effectiveness and how it might evolve.

1. The results of the survey tell me that 38% of you have been with this project for more than 3 years, 21% for 2-3 years, 25% for 1-2 years and 17% for less than one year. That means that 83% of you are well used to the project. Can we begin by talking about why you got involved?
2. What do you think works well about the project?
3. Anything that does not work well for you?
4. Any suggestions for how it might change direction?
5. How do you feel about including the library visit and joining the library as part of the project?
6. Tell me about how you have supported parents while they have been participating in the project.
7. Do you think that parents use the strategies recommended at induction? Any evidence that demonstrates they are/aren't using the strategies?
8. Do you feel that the project is attracting parents who need this support?

9. Did involvement with the project change your relationship with participating parents in any way?
10. Did you discuss the children's progress formally or informally with the class teacher? Any changes?
11. Did participation in the project inform or influence *your* thinking or practice in any way, for example.............. the strategies to promote children's involvement in the story........anything new in that for you?
12. If you were to pick one significant thing that you learned from participating in *The Storytime Project,* what would that be?
13. Do you think the project should continue in its current form?
14. Anything you would like to add?

Appendix G: Interview Schedule – Principal Teachers

Date: ....

Location of interview: ....

Interviewer: Joan Kiely

Interview code: ....

Notes:

Consent Confirmation:

Remind the participants of the voluntary nature of participation in the evaluation process, and that at any time they may ask to move to another question, or ask for the audio-recorder to be turned off. On the record, confirm written permission via the Informed Consent For.

<u>**Introduction:**</u>

Thank-you for agreeing to be involved in this evaluation process. As you have read on the information sheets, I am interested in finding out about your experience of the Storytime project. I think you may have filled out a questionnaire last year. I don't want to duplicate the questionnaire here. What I would like to do is to give you an opportunity to expand on thoughts you might have about The Storytime Project. I will share some of the results of the questionnaire with you and that might shape our conversation. I will start by asking you some questions about how you heard about the project, then we will talk about your involvement in the project and your opinions on its effectiveness and how it might evolve.

1. Can you begin by telling me what you know about *The Storytime Project?*
2. Have you had any conversations with others, such as the HSCL teacher, or classroom teacher about the project?
3. Have you spoken to any parents who are involved in the project? If so, can you tell me anything about what you discussed?
4. Have you heard about the induction day at Marino Institute of Education?
5. Have you seen the DVD designed to help parents in reading to their children?
6. Have you noticed any effects of the project on participating parents?
7. Have you noticed any effects of the project on participating children?

8. Have you noticed any effects of the project on participating teachers?
9. How do you feel about the involvement of local libraries in the project?
10. I would like to share some of the suggestions from principals that came back in the questionnaire. You are unique in that you were involved in the project. I am interested to see what you think of their suggestions:
    • Open the project to all infants
    • Base the training day in a school
    • Introduce a train the trainer programme
    • Increase the number of participants in the project
11. Would you like to see the project changed in any way?
12. Is there anything you would like to add?

Appendix H: Interview Schedule – Parents

Date: ....

Location of interview: ....

Interviewer: Joan Kiely

Interview code: ....

Notes:

Consent Confirmation:

Remind the participants of the voluntary nature of participation in the evaluation process, and that at any time they may ask to move to another question, or ask for the audio-recorder to be turned off. On the record, confirm written permission via the Informed Consent For.

<u>**Introduction:**</u>

Thank-you for agreeing to be involved in this evaluation process. Like I have already explained when I spoke to you before, and as you have read on the information sheets, I am interested in finding out about your experience of being involved in the Storytime project. I will start by asking you some questions about how and why you got involved in the project and then I will ask you some questions about what happened during the project and if it had any effect on you or your child after the project.

1. It is _____years/months since you took part in the project. Can you tell me about your memories of being part of it?
2. What happened when it was over? Did you miss it? Did you continue to read to your child? Where did you source the books?
3. Did you use the library at all after the project? Any reason why/why not?
4. What about how you got on with your child? Any changes? Anything different happen during or after the project?
5. I want to ask you about the helpful hints for getting your child to talk that are in the DVD. Do you remember hints such as.....pausing to let your child comment or ....connecting the story to your child's life or ....allowing your child to finish your sentence? Did you try out any of those hints when you were reading to your child?
6. Do you have other young children? What did they do while you were reading to your child? Did they join in, for example?

7. What about the HSCL teacher, the class teacher and the school in general ; also other parents - Did you get to know any of them better because of the project?
8. **Did the project change *you* in any way?** For example, the way you tell stories, the way that you chat with your child, the way that you feel about books, the way you feel about yourself?
9. Is there anything you would recommend that we should change about the project?
10. What about Marino as a venue? Do you like going there or would closer to home be handier?
11. Would you like any contact with us after the project, may-be to do some other project with your child, like, for example, writing together?
12. How do you think your child is getting on in school now? Did *The Storytime Project* help at all, do you think?
13. If you were to pick one significant thing that you learned from participating in *The Storytime Project,* what would that be?

Appendix I: Interview Schedule – Settings-Based EC Practitioners and Junior Infant Teachers

Date: ....

Location of interview: ....

Interviewer: Joan Kiely

Interview code: ....

Notes:

Consent Confirmation:

Remind the participants of the voluntary nature of participation in the evaluation process, and that at any time they may ask to move to another question, or ask for the audio-recorder to be turned off. On the record, confirm written permission via the Informed Consent For.

<u>**Introduction:**</u>

Thank-you for agreeing to be involved in this evaluation process. I am interested in finding out about your experience of the Storytime project. I will start by asking you some questions about how you heard about the project, then we will talk about your involvement in the project and your opinions on its effectiveness and how it might evolve.

1. Can you begin by telling me what you know about *The Storytime Project?*
2. Have you spoken to or liaised with the HSCL teacher or the principal /manager or any parents who are involved in the project? If so, can you tell me anything about what you discussed? Would you like to see more contact between the HSCl and the classroom teacher /ECE practitioner around *The Storytime Project?*
3. One of the results from the questionnaire was that 100% of respondents felt that involvement in The Storytime Project encourages parents' interest in their child's development in reading. Have you noticed those effects or any other effects of the project on participating parents? For example, more involvement in the school/ECE setting more involvement in the child's homework, increased confidence in helping their child?
4. Have you noticed any effects of the project on participating children? For example, any changes in their literacy behaviours or practices?
5. How do you feel about the involvement of local libraries in the project? Do you use the local library with your class or would you consider doing so?

The DVD

6. Have you seen the DVD designed to help parents in reading to their children? If so, do you think it is useful for parents?

7. A respondent to the questionnaire suggested sharing the DVD with classroom teachers/ECE practitioners so that they would know what is being said to parents and they could reinforce those messages. What do you think of that idea?

8. Do you think the dvd might be useful to your work? For example, the strategies for encouraging child talk such as connecting to the child's life, pausing to wait for the child's comment – was there anything useful there for you?

9. Is there any other aspect of the Storytime Project that you think might be useful to your work in the classroom/ECE setting?

10. Would you like to see the project changed in any way?

11. Is there anything you would like to add?

Appendix J: Interview Schedule – Library Personnel

Date: ....

Location of interview: ....

Interviewer: Joan Kiely

Interview code: ....

Notes:

Consent Confirmation:

Remind the participants of the voluntary nature of participation in the evaluation process, and that at any time they may ask to move to another question, or ask for the audio-recorder to be turned off. On the record, confirm written permission via the Informed Consent For.

<u>**Introduction:**</u>

Thank-you for agreeing to be involved in this evaluation process. Like I have already explained when I spoke to you before, and as you have read on the information sheets, I am interested in finding out about your experience of the Storytime project. I will start by asking you some questions about how you heard about the project, then we will talk about your involvement in the project and your opinions on its effectiveness and how it might evolve.

1. How did you hear about the project?
2. What is your current understanding of what the project involves?
3. Have you had any conversations with others about the project? For example, the HSCl teacher or the Early Childhood practitioner or a visiting parent to the library?
4. If so, can you tell me anything about what you discussed?
5. Have you heard about the induction day at Marino Institute of Education?
6. Have you seen the DVD designed to help parents in reading to their children?
7. If you have seen the DVD, is there anything in it that you feel adds to your knowledge?
8. Did you participate in the welcome to the library day for parents participating in the project?
9. How did that go?
10. Have you noticed any changes in library behaviours on the part of parents involved in The Storytime Project?

11. Have you noticed any changes in library behaviours on the part of children involved in The Storytime Project?

12. How do you feel about the involvement of your library in this project?

13. Would you like to see the project changed in any way?

14. If you were to pick one significant thing that you learned from participating in *The Storytime Project,* what would that be?

15. Is there anything you would like to add?

Appendix K: Interview Schedule – Northside Partnership Personnel

Date: ....

Location of interview: ....

Interviewer: Joan Kiely

Interview code: ....

Notes:

Consent Confirmation:

Remind the participants of the voluntary nature of participation in the evaluation process, and that at any time they may ask to move to another question, or ask for the audio-recorder to be turned off. On the record, confirm written permission via the Informed Consent For.

<u>**Introduction:**</u>

Thank-you for agreeing to be involved in this evaluation process. As you have read on the information sheets, I am interested in finding out about your experience of the Storytime project. I am interested in talking about your involvement in the project and your opinions on its effectiveness and how it might evolve. I don't intend duplicating the questionnaire that you have answered. This is an opportunity to have a conversation that is particular to your context.

1. Can you tell me your role in The Northside Partnership organisiation.
2. Would you mind describing your current involvement in *The Storytime Project?*
3. How long you are in involved in *The Storytime Project?*
4. Have you witnessed any changes in the project since you started? Have you any comments about those changes?
5. Given your role as Early Childhood director, would you have had conversations with Early Childhood practitioners about the project? If so, can you tell me anything about what you discussed?
6. What do you think of the partnership with Marino Institute? Does it work? Would you like to see it evolve in a particular way?
7. Would you like to see the project changed in any way?
8. Is there anything you would like to add?

Appendix L: NVIVO Code Book

Note: The reader may note some slight re-wording from the raw dataset to later iterations of the data. Titles were changed to reflect the content more accurately. Meanings were preserved.

Phase 2 - Generating Initial Codes (Open Coding) 77 Codes Developed	Sources Coded	Units of Meaning Coded
use of strategies	20	71
decontextualized language	5	12
Connecting story to life	12	22
feelings about the value of The Storytime Project	20	68
Library visit	18	52
Amnesty	3	4
comments about the books	17	44
Parent-child bonding	13	35
parental confidence levels	9	32
Recruitment strategy	9	31
Fidelity to modus operandi of project	12	29
Influence of project on one's professional development	13	25
Target parents	9	23
DVD	16	23
Induction training	5	20
misunderstanding the induction	1	2
future plans for The Storytime Project	5	20
Marino as a venue for STORYTIME	5	19
Tip Sheet	9	17
parents discovering new information about their child	8	17
What happened when the project was over	8	16
Running a version of storytime independently	8	15
importance of performance style	8	14
Relationships with parents	8	13
Relationship with teachers or ECE practitioners and with the setting	2	11
relationships between ECE pracs and teachers	4	7
relationships with ECE practitioners	1	2
relationship between MIE and Northside Partnership	1	1
Support from project leaders for CPD of HSCLs and ECE practitioners	1	12
Observed changes in children's lliteracy behaviours	7	12
Recruitment difficulties	3	11
importance of certificate and rosette	6	10
involvement of other children in the family in the reading session	5	10
Sipe 2002 Typology of expressive engagement	5	10
Comparing stories	1	8
Spreading the word about the project	6	8
importance of emphasizing academic or theoretical aspect of the project with teachers and ECE practitioners	3	7
Talking in the car with parents	4	6
parents' feelings about coming to Marino	4	6

Phase 2 - Generating Initial Codes (Open Coding) 77 Codes Developed	Sources Coded	Units of Meaning Coded
parents repeating the project with different children	4	6
Dilemma about working on a book the children are bored with	4	6
concepts of print	2	6
ECE practitioners' confidence levels	2	6
graduation ceremony	5	6
awareness of project by outsiders	3	6
knowledge of classroom teachers about the Storytime Project	1	6
Understandings of the purpose of the storytime project	3	5
debate around giving parents a choice of books or working on the same one all week	3	5
Child takes the lead	4	5
gender issues around stories	4	5
Dad's involvement in Storytime	3	4
Evaluating each book	3	4
photographs at induction and graduation	4	4
learning difficulties and The storytime Project	1	4
developing a sense of ownership of and loyalty towards the project	4	4
introduce a train the trainer programme	2	4
Separating Storytime from homework	3	3
Parents' perception of themselves	2	3
feedback better when parents are mixing at tables	1	3
How ECE settings are chosen for The Storytime Project	1	3
Frequency of reading sessions during the project	3	3
Intertextuality	2	3
Link with the classroom teacher	2	3
Children pressurising parents into reading to them	1	2
changeover of books	2	2
Giving feedback on graduation day	2	2
suggestion to interview classroom teachers	1	2
learning about the theory behind the project	2	2
including class teachers and ECE practitioners in induction and in the SP project in general	1	2
Use of props while storytelling	2	2
parents' interest in their child's literacy dev	2	2
What the classroom teacher thinks	2	2
Doing the project but missing the induction workshop	1	1
attrition of HSCLs and ECE practitioners from The Storytime Project	1	1
bilingual use of books	1	1
Time of the day for Storytime	1	1
What the children think	1	1

Phase3 - Searching for Themes (Developing Categories)	Category Definition (Rule for Inclusion)	Sources	Units of Meaning Coded
Unforeseen Benefits	Benefits derived, some unforeseen from the SP	25	201
organisational issues	processes related to the running of the SP	23	188
learning strategies	strategies parents use to encourage their child to discuss the book	24	105
Criticality of parent role	importance of parent in SP and consideration of parent's approach to and feelings about SP	15	103
Books	Matters related to books for SP	18	53
Theory	Theory informing the project and informing strategies for the project	15	40
Importance of system	Fidelity to SP processes	17	37
Future of Storytime Project	What happens next?	5	20
Children as agents	Children making choices in SP	8	10
Teacher Talk	Engaging with pedagogues involved in SP	4	7

Phase 4 - Defining & Naming Themes (Data Reduction-Abstraction - Developing a Thematic Framework)	Sources	Units of Meaning Coded
Relationships	26	372
Unanticipated benefits of The Storytime Project	25	201
Unforseen Benefits	*25*	*201*
Parental relationships, confidence and knowledge	22	148
parental confidence	*14*	*52*
Parent-child bonding	*15*	*41*
Knowledge of children's learning	*13*	*29*
Relationship with educational setting	*8*	*13*
Educator-parent relationships	*8*	*13*
Building Partnerships	8	13
Relationships with parents	*8*	*13*
Children's experience of The Storytime Project	8	10
Children's drawings	*8*	*10*
Language and Learning	26	258
Use of learning strategies by parents, educators and children	24	165
learning strategies	*24*	*105*
Decontextualized language	*13*	*34*
Children's and parents' attempts to perform the text	*12*	*26*
Issues around books	18	53
Books	*18*	*53*
Underlying rationale informing The Storytime project	15	40
Theory	*15*	*40*
Storytime Processes	23	217
Organisational Issues	23	120
The Library	*18*	*52*
DVD and tip-sheet	*17*	*31*

Marino as a venue for the induction workshop and graduation ceremony	*7*	*25*
The graduation certificate & photographic exhibition	*7*	*12*
Fidelity to the project structure	12	58
Importance of structure for parents	*12*	*29*
Variation in implementation of the project	*12*	*29*
Future of The Storytime Project	5	20
future plans for The Storytime Project	*5*	*20*
Role of the setting-based classroom teacher and EC practitioner	6	19
knowledge of classroom teachers about the Storytime Project	*2*	*7*
Separating Storytime from homework	*3*	*3*
Link with the classroom teacher	*2*	*3*
including class teachers and ECE practitioners in induction and in the SP project in general	*1*	*2*
What the classroom teacher thinks	*2*	*2*
suggestion to interview classroom teachers	*1*	*2*

Appendix M: Plain Language Statement and Informed Consent – Parent/Guardian

Introduction to the research project

My name is Joan Kiely and I work in the area of Early Childhood Education at Marino Institute of Education. I am currently studying for a doctorate in education at St. Patrick's College of Education, Drumcondra. As part of my studies, I am conducting an evaluation of a literacy project that I initiated in September 2009. It is called *The Storytime Project*. The project aims to support parents in reading to their young children (3-5 year olds) and to develop their children's oral language. It involves parents and children in the Northside Partnership area of Dublin. The aim of this evaluation is to assess the effectiveness of the project and to investigate how it might be amended to better suit the needs of the participating parents and children.

What does the study involve?

Parents who have participated in the Storytime project since 2010 will be interviewed as well as some children, teachers, early childhood practitioners, principal teachers and library personnel.

You will be invited to take part in an interview or a Focus group discussion conducted by me at a time and place that is suitable for you. The interview will last no longer than forty minutes and it will be about your experience of taking part in *the Storytime project*. You do not need to do any preparation for the interview.   With your permission, I will record the interview because I will need to have a record for the purpose of data analysis. Of course you have the right to decline my request to record the interview.

Is participation in this evaluation voluntary?

Involvement in this evaluation process is completely voluntary. You do not have to answer any question you don't wish to, you may terminate an interview at any time and withdraw from the evaluation process at any point. If there is a particular question that you would rather not answer, you are free not to provide an answer. If you wish to stop your involvement in the interview at any time, you are also free to do so.

What are the benefits to participants involved in the study?

The benefit of the study is that the project should work better for parents and children in the future. That means it will help children's language development and children's interest in books. This, in turn, should support children in being ready for school and to be more at ease with school life. Participants will not be paid for their involvement in this evaluation study.

What procedures will be used to protect confidentiality?

Every effort will be made to protect participants' confidentiality. Interviewees will be given a code name. The data collected will be analysed by the principal researcher (me) alone. Interview notes will be held by me and stored in a secure location that is password protected. When the evaluation is completed, the data files and transcripts will be permanently deleted. The evaluation report itself will comprise the final and only document. Data collected will be used for this evaluation study only.

How do I find out more about the study?

If you have any questions or wish to discuss any part of the evaluation study, please contact

Dr. Michael O' Leary,
St. Patrick's College of Education,
Drumcondra, Dublin 9
Tel: (01) 884 2000

If you have any questions or worries about the evaluation and should you wish to talk to an independent person, please contact:

The administrator, Office of the Dean of Research and Humanities,
Room C214,
St Patrick's College,
Drumcondra, Dublin 9.
Tel: (01)884 2149 **Confirmation of Understanding:**

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

Have you read or had read to you the plain language statement?   Yes No

Do you understand the information provided?   Yes No

Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss the study?   Yes No

Have you received satisfactory answers to all your questions?   Yes No

Informed consent:

I am aware that if I agree to take part in this study, I can withdraw from participation at any stage. There will be no penalty for withdrawing before all stages of the evaluation study have been completed. I have read and understood all the information in this form. The researcher has answered my questions and concerns, and I have a copy of this consent form. Therefore, I consent to take part in this research project.

Signature...

Name in block capitals...

Witness...Date................

Appendix N: Plain Language Statement and Informed Consent – Children
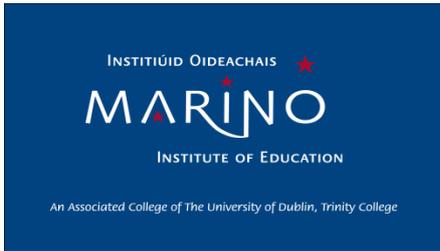
Introduction

My name is Joan and I work with people who are studying to be teachers. I am trying to find out how I can help you to learn, using storybooks. I asked your Mammies and Daddies to read you stories. Do you remember *Peace at Last* and *Alfie gets in First* and *Love from Louisa*? I would like to show you a short film of me reading to a little girl and then I would like to ask you a few questions about the film and about the times that your Mammy or Daddy read you a story. I would love to chat with you but if you do not feel like talking to me, you do not have to. You can go back to your teacher anytime that you want.

What is the study about?

I will come to your school one morning and read a story to your whole class. After that I will invite you and four other children to watch the film of me reading to a little girl. I will ask another adult from the school if they would like to watch the film with us. When the film is over I will ask you a few questions. If you don't mind, I will record what you say on my phone. This is because I want to be able to play it again later to remind me of what you said. If you do not want me to record you, you can tell me and I won't do so. You will be away from the rest of your class for twenty-five minutes altogether. I will bring you back to your teacher when our chat is over.

Is participation in this evaluation voluntary?

Yes it is, you do not have to watch the film and you do not have to talk to me if you do not want to. If I ask you a question that you do not want to answer, you do not have to answer. You can go back to your teacher anytime you want.

What is good about helping me out?

I will listen carefully to what you tell me and then I will learn how to help children learn better.

Will everybody know what you said?

People will hear your voice but they won't know who you are or anything else about you except that you helped me with my study and your Mammy/Daddy read stories to you.

How do I find out more about the study?

Talk to your Mammy and/or Daddy. I asked them if I could talk to you and they said 'yes' but only if you want to.

Confirmation of Understanding:

Do you understand that we are going to watch a short film of me reading a story and then we are going to have a chat about it?   **YES   NO**

You can say **NO** if you do not want to do this.

Will you draw a smiley face for me if you would like to watch the film?

Can you sign your name here to say that you would like to watch the film?

Informed consent:

Signature...

Name in block capitals...

Witness..Date........................

Appendix O: Plain Language Statement and Informed Consent – Others
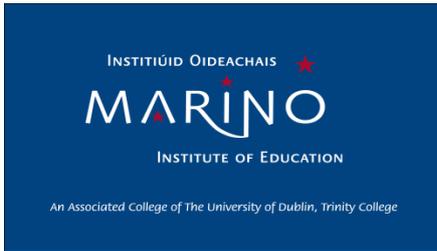
Principal teachers, HSCL teachers, Classroom teachers, Early Childhood Education practitioners, Northside partnership personnel and library personnel.

Introduction to the research project

My name is Joan Kiely and I work in the area of Early Childhood Education at Marino Institute of Education. I am currently studying for a doctorate in education at St. Patrick's College of Education, Drumcondra. As part of my studies, I am conducting an evaluation of a literacy project that I initiated in September 2009. It is called *The Storytime Project*. The project aims to support parents in reading to their young children (3-5 year olds) and to develop their children's oral language. It involves parents and children in the Northside Partnership area of Dublin. The aim of this evaluation is to assess the effectiveness of the project and to investigate how it might be amended to better suit the needs of the participating parents and children.

What does the study involve?

Interviews and/or Focus group discussions will take place with all those who have participated in the project since 2010 – school principals, Home School Liaison teachers, class teachers, Early childhood practitioners, library personnel and participants from the Northside Partnership. The views of parents and children will also be sought during the study. You will be invited to take part in an interview or Focus group discussion conducted by me at a time and place that is suitable for you. The interview/ focus group will last no longer than forty minutes and it will be about your experience of taking part in *the Storytime project*. You do not need to do any preparation for the interview or discussion. With your permission, I will record the discussion because I will need to have a record for the purpose of data analysis. Of course you have the right to decline my request to record the interview.

Is participation in this evaluation voluntary?

Involvement in this evaluation process is completely voluntary. You do not have to answer any question that you do not wish to; you may terminate an interview at any time and withdraw from the evaluation process at any point. If there is a particular question that you would rather not answer, you are free not to provide an answer. If you wish to stop your involvement in the interview at any time, you are also free to do so.

What are the benefits to participants involved in the study?

The benefit of the study is that the project should work better for parents and children in the future. That means it will help children's language development and children's interest in books. This, in turn, should support children in being ready for school and to be more at ease with school life. Participants will not be paid for their involvement in this evaluation study.

What procedures will be used to protect confidentiality?

Every effort will be made to protect confidentiality. Interviewees will be given a code name. The data collected will be analysed by the principal researcher (me) alone. Interview notes will be held by me and stored in a secure location that is password protected. When the evaluation is completed, the data files and transcripts will be permanently deleted. Findings of the evaluation study will be shared with colleagues in the field of literacy, at academic conferences and in journal articles. In any discussion on the findings, the identity of participants in the evaluation will not be revealed.

How do I find out more about the study?

If you have any questions or wish to discuss any part of the evaluation study, please contact

Dr. Michael O' Leary,
St. Patrick's College of Education,
Drumcondra, Dublin 9
Tel: (01) 884 2000

If you have any questions or worries about the evaluation and should you wish to talk to an independent person, please contact:

The administrator, Office of the Dean of Research and Humanities,
Room C214,
St Patrick's College,
Drumcondra, Dublin 9.
Tel: (01)884 2149

Confirmation of Understanding: Please complete the following (Circle Yes or No for each question)

Have you read or had read to you the plain language statement?   *Yes No*

Do you understand the information provided?   *Yes No*

Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss the study?   *Yes No*

Have you received satisfactory answers to all your questions?   *Yes No*

Informed consent:

I am aware that if I agree to take part in this study, I can withdraw from participation at any stage. There will be no penalty for withdrawing before all stages of the evaluation study have been completed. I have read and understood all the information in this form. The researcher has answered my questions and concerns, and I have a copy of this consent form. Therefore, I consent to take part in this research project.

Signature..

Name in block capitals...

Witness...Date...............................

Appendix P: Sample Feedback A

Four parents and HSCL (Dympna)

June 2010

General observations:

- The children were excited by the prospect of reading a series of books with Mammy. The bedtime DVD was happily replaced by the bedtime story…no objections. Children settled more easily to sleep after the story.

- Night time (bedtime story) was preferable to any other time of day for the story reading.

- The selected books were popular but the less known stories (Magic Doctor and The Donkey) were preferred. This may have been due to the fact that the familiar Fairytales were inconsistent with the traditional version (endings different, style of characters clothing etc.) and this confused the children.

- Parents were irritated at the inconsistency of the Fairytales from the original 'known' version. They found it hard to address some of the observations made by the children (particularly in Jack and the Beanstalk).

Children's feedback:

- Parents were amazed at the insightful and intelligent observations by the children over the course of the project.

- The Pied Piper – they liked the promise at the end to be good.

- The children didn't like the ending to the Goldilocks story. Not a happy resolution. She looked like a 'tomboy' in this version, very different to the original!

- Jack and the Beanstalk – the children disapproved of Jack's mother rewarding his 'bad' behavior (stealing the hen etc.) and were concerned at the lack of Garda presence! This version of the story was problematic for children living in this area where robbing and violent behaviours are all too real. (I shared my memory of the original which explained that the giant had stolen the family fortune and the hen from Jack's family and he was just reclaiming them!)

- No 'Once upon a time…' or '…happily ever after'.

- The illustrations provided a lot of language development opportunities. Children liked the detail.
- Some children were able to 'read' back the stories after a few days.

Parents comments:

- It was a great bonding experience. They enjoyed the quality time together. Delighted to replace the DVD bedtime routine.
- They liked the structured question sheets, and began to realize that this was how they would naturally proceed with questioning.
- Suggest mixing original Fairytales and 'Top Ten' most popular books for children of this age group. Didn't like the different version of a good original tale.
- Surprised at the amount of detail noticed by the children and the observations they made about the stories and illustrations.
- Parents impressed at the children's attempts to read back the stories to them.
- Parents thoroughly enjoyed the process and learned a lot by their involvement.

Appendix Q: Sample Feedback B

<u>Northside Partnership Discussion 12/12/12 6th iteration</u>

1. ***<u>What did you like about the experience?</u>***
   Quality time- child's excitement and anticipation
   I liked it because it got me to get my son to sit down for story time and I couldn't before
   Quality time with child. Great choice of books. Loved the topics covered. Could really relate to child's life. Lots of chat and questions

2. ***<u>What did you think of the choice of books?</u>***
   Good
   I would have liked more pictures and colours
   Very funny, but could use the books to talk about serious issues, bullying, safety, dentist etc….

3. ***<u>Any moment of revelation about your child – did you discover something about him or her that surprised you?</u>***
   Level of concentration during story telling – looked forward to bedtime.
   Just making up his own stories while I was reading him the story, that I loved to listen too.
   We looked forward to bedtime and story reading. He knew more about things than I realised. Great imagination, predictions from cover.

4. ***<u>How did the library experience work for you?</u>***
   I loved the library my son loves going so I bring him now when I can
   Loved the library and quiet time / space. Peaceful, enjoyed picking new books

5. ***<u>Did you try out any of the ideas for getting your child to talk, for example, beginning your question with "I wonder" or asking your child what he/she will happen next?</u>***
   Tried just about all – all worked well
   I read the story to him and the then I asked him where in the picture is? where are the magic beans and he'd know
   Reading with more expression, was doing strategies without realising. Made more effort to predict and connect. Gained confidence. Pre read books.

6. ***<u>What would you change about the project for the next time?</u>***
   Story sacks
   I would like for the book to be a bit bigger with more pictures, bit more of a story to tell
   Earlier in the term. December is busy!!

Evaluations 12/12/12

What story did your child like best? Why?

- Love from Louisa, they thought it was very funny and the pig was very cheeky.
- Love from Louisa, my daughter liked that Louisa 'posted' letters to Farmer Giles
- Love from Louisa, because she liked Louisa writing letters to Farmer Giles to clean up
- Little Lion – it was funny
- Three Billy Goats Gruff, she loves animals and found the daddy goat funny
- Jack and the Beanstalk, because of the magic beans he got for selling the cow and because the little boy got to help his mammy in the end
- Five Minutes Peace, the 3 bears / he thought it was funny
- Jack and the Beanstalk because of the beanstalk and he liked the giant
- She liked all of them, I think Goldielocks and the 3 bears was her favourite
- He liked all the books we had
- Alife get in First and Little Lion. The pictures were good and the stories were funny
- Harry and the bucketful of Dinosaurs because he loves dinosaurs and loved the idea of having to carry her them in a bucket
- Peace at Last. I think it was because the bears in and no matter where the bear went she couldn't sleep

Stakeholders who were invited to complete the questionnaire

- HSCL teacher
- Early Childhood (EC) Practitioner
- Principal
- Classroom teacher
- Northside Partnership employee
- Dublin Library employee
- Learning Support teacher

HSCL teacher (12)

Do you have any suggestions for how the Storytime Project might be improved?

DVD is very good resource, I have put on a very basic hp sheet of ideas I think are important to focus on while reading with your child. Maybe a <u>very brief</u> bullet pointed one/two worded tip sheet. Maybe a bookmark could be given to help parents focus on what/how to read with their child. Current tip sheet is good but a shorter version might be useful as a quick guide when reading.

An event for all the participating parents and children in the Library during the week as I think this would encourage attendance from all parties.

Both parents, students and HSCL really enjoyed being involved in this project. It is worthwhile and a pleasure to be involved in.

I think it should be run with more parents – maybe in a slightly different format. We run it with all junior infant parents in our school.

I think if Marino drafted an invitation letter to the infant parents it might generate more interest than just another school note. For the second iteration of the project in the year would it be possible to use 5 different books.

I feel the link with the Library has been a great development for the Storytime Project but many parents are not confident enough to go alone and collect the books in the library. In conjunction with the HSCL teacher or E.C. pract it worked best to go during the final week of the project to the Library.

Perhaps the induction could take place in the library – parents could sign up there and then.

Perhaps more than one book a week if possible. The parents said the children were a bit bored with reading the same book for the whole week. Perhaps give ideas to HSCL's on how parents are recruited for the project.

Maybe thinking larger scale, long term, school wide expansion of the basic storytime message in all participating schools. Having all trained parents run the initiative in schools or at least act as mentors for school parents.

Is there anything else about the project that you would like to be examined as part of an evaluation of The Storytime Project?

Big wonder!! Is it possible to do something similar with older children – something along the lines of novels particularly for children who are reluctant/weak readers? We do similar work in school but to have the association and connections to a project outside of school would/could have great potential for struggling readers.

I think it would be interesting to see how many families did use the library after the project however this may be in breach of Data Protection.

In schools where a small number of parents and children are involved it would be good to compare these children with those who were not involved.

Advice/techniques for recruiting targeted parents who would benefit most. A brochure or pamphlet describing the project, a little blurb about each book and a list of storytime techniques might be useful in selling the project.

The positive benefit the project has on parents who participate should be examined attending Marino College of Education and receiving a certificate acknowledging their efforts has given many parents a huge confidence boost which further encourages them to work with their children improving literacy.

Overlap of methods at induction and watching DVD.

Follow up work with past participants using their experience to promote the Storytime Project. To reach as many as possible in the community. i.e. Community Storytime Mentors;

Do you have anything else to add?

Thank you for all the work, commitment and dedication to families in our care. It is a great success and a fantastic way as HSCL to work positively and pleasantly with parents. I had a waiting list for the programme this year, certainly a first for me. Word is getting out there about the success.

I really enjoyed taking part in the Storytime Project; it gives me great opportunity to meet the parents involved.

I think the DVD is very useful and very well done! I use it in my school every year with all junior infant parents.

I found it very difficult to find willing parents. The ones that did sign up were parents that often join things, not the parents that really need support in the area of storytime. I run my own storytime project in the infant classes in Sept/Oct (4 weeks) and I feel I reach more

parents that way when I make the reading "homework". The children pressure parents into reading to them so they don't feel left out in class. We talk very positively about the books in school.

I have seen the story project acting as a springboard for many parents. By becoming involved in the project they then move on to becoming involved in more classes, PA meetings and then FETAC courses. The bond between the parent and child is also enriched. Parents also use their needle skills to make story sacks using books from the Storytime Project.

Very valuable programme.

I found the project very worthwhile. The parents I worked with really enjoyed it. They suggested perhaps allowing children to go to the library to visit or even perhaps to go to the award ceremony.

An annual Storytime event for all past participants of the project to get on going feedback on reading activity, library etc...

Early Childhood (EC) Practitioner (12)

Do you have any suggestions for how the Storytime Project might be improved?

By having more age appropriate books, maybe by swapping books over every 3 days or so maybe by giving the parents the 5 books so children don't get bored with the same book so they can swap over. The project was an excellent way of getting parents and children to spend some quality time together.

I enjoyed it very much. I think it is a great project for both parents and children.

Maybe parental involvement to E.C. practitioners – feedback about stories

Better early years provision of books used for project, the books chosen for the primary junior infants are the ones we would use here in the Early Education Centre. Good versions of the fairy tale mat assist, e.g. try the "3 Little Pigs" by Richard Johnson, "Hip up" by Childs Play, Goldilocks and the 3 Bears and Three Billy Goats Gruff also in the same series

Location!

Not really – very happy with it.

Is there anything else about the project that you would like to be examined as part of an evaluation of The Storytime Project?

This is the only thing I would change, the parents and children have really enjoyed the project. It has helped parents with relationships with other parents and supports each other. They have enjoyed both the introduction and the graduation. Very Nice events – Well presented.

Location of meetings, find parents want to get involved and eager but unwilling to travel so far. Could the local schools involved be used to relocate meetings and help parents and children in the transition into these schools?

Only the books for the pre - schoolers were a little old and scary for the smaller children.

Have it in their own area, make it accessible to more parents.

Do you have anything else to add?

The programme was a great opportunity to encourage children to speak up and improve their speech and language and their confidence.

I think it is a great project for both parents and children. It supports the child to talk about the story and what is going on around them.

Maybe more fairytale books instead of xxxxxxxx ones. Don't find the children pay interest in them for too long and go into too much detail.

Found the Storytime Project excellent for both children and parents relationships, as well as parent and childcare staff relationships.

Excellent programme, well valued here by the service and by the parents. Keep up the good work, roots planted now will sew new seeds well into the future.

I feel the introduction part and the certificate ceremony is very important for parents, it is an incentive for parents to get involved and give up their time.

No, only thank you!

It is often difficult to get parents to engage with the programme.

It is very difficult to get parents involved in the Storytime Project.

Principal (11)

Do you have any suggestions for how the Storytime Project might be improved?

Open it up to all infants

Exploration of the possibility of having school based training to encourage/facilitate participation of more parents in each school. Introduction of a "train the trainer" programme.

Perhaps increase the number of participants.

Is there anything else about the project that you would like to be examined as part of an evaluation of The Storytime Project?

Maybe an in-depth analysis of projects influence on parents and on their ability to help their children with literacy at home.

The benefit to parents in terms of self-esteem, realisation of their impact on their children's education and their value to the school as a vital support.

Do you have anything else to add?

We have adapted the Storytime Project for our school and give a talk to junior infant parents every September. We are delighted with it. Thank you very much for the opportunity to participate.

New Principal in the school. Aware the project was running and that it had a positive effect on those involved

It is a very worthwhile project which benefits parents and children. Parents develop more confidence in supporting their children's learning where literacy is concerned.

Think it is a great initiative, how something seeming so simple had such impact on whole families – Well done!!!!!!

I see the real value of the project more in terms of parents than children. Early Start staff will do storytime anyway. The real impact is on the parents and on their relationships (not just educationally) with their children.

I am delighted to have this programme running in my school. Continued success!!

Classroom teacher (11)

Do you have any suggestions for how the Storytime Project might be improved?

There could be some integration/links between class teacher's work and the Storytime Project. Assessment of children's knowledge of stories would be more precise.

It would be helpful if school staff had access to the Storytime Project DVD to foster understanding of how the parents/volunteers are trained and how we can aid them by supporting their work.

Perhaps involve all children – nice to do the whole class.

Make it into a class event.

Some in-school work with whole classes might be beneficial. Also more encouragement from the libraries involved for students to apply for membership.

Is there anything else about the project that you would like to be examined as part of an evaluation of The Storytime Project?

Opinions from children who have taken part in the project would give further insight into the benefits gained by those participating in the project.

Examine the use of more stories.

Just keep going on this fantastic programme for the parents, to see them come out of their "shells" in relation to all aspects of literacy especially reading is amazing. It gives them the confidence and therefore gives their children great confidence in their ability!

Our HSCLT was fantastic at explaining the project to parents and teachers and the project would not have run as well without her.

Dublin City Library (1)

Do you have any suggestions for how the Storytime Project might be improved?

The induction workshop is very important in setting the tone for the project and for giving parents ideas and tips. The workshop could be tighter, shorter and more focussed. For instance the video could be broken up into very short snippets to illustrate points rather than play in full, where it loses impact. Tip sheets are a great idea and the workshop could focus more on them. Elements in the workshop could be referred continually to the Tip Sheets – making it clear what the goal is and why you are asked open questions etc and noting how the question on the tip sheet reflects this. The workshops could be carried out locally – using community venues. This will be necessary if the programme rolls out to other areas. Making the induction tighter would facilitate it being rolled out to other venues and other presenters without compromising integrity. Involvement of the library is important if parents are going to continue the habits. Many areas do not have a good bookshop and books can be expensive if you are to provide a child with a continuing supply of quality books. There has been a problem of integrating the library into the project. HSCL teachers and EC workers have mediated by distributing and collecting back the books for the project, but there has always been a problem when it comes to collecting the last book from the library for some parents. If induction workshops and other meetings were held in libraries there might be more of a chance of barriers coming down before the end of the project. Also libraries could work in cooperation with Marino to select a range of follow on titles and provide tip sheets and branding. This has been done to some extent already, but could be developed further

Is there anything else about the project that you would like to be examined as part of an evaluation of The Storytime Project?

It would be interesting to hear how parents fared after the project. Did they continue to read to their child? Did their child continue to be interested in books? Did they use the library? If not what was the obstacle? Fines on overdue books? Inconvenience of visiting?

Do you have anything else to add?

The great thing about Storytime is its simplicity. It is easily understood by parents. It does not require them to do more than enjoy the company of their child. The benefits are immediate – the pleasure of parent and child. And longer term – the increased vocabulary and facility to speculate and extrapolate, the confidence engendered from parental attention and so on. That simplicity means that it should spread and it should continue where it is.

Learning Support teachers (2)

Do you have any suggestions for how the Storytime Project might be improved?

We ran the Storytime Project in school for Junior infants initially and later we extended it to senior infants. We ran a meeting for Junior infant's parents in November. We used parts of the DVD and LS. Teachers spoke about the project.

It would be great if schools were provided with materials with which to continue the project without the involvement of Northside/Marino. Notes, questions etc... to be used with other books.

Is there anything else about the project that you would like to be examined as part of an evaluation of The Storytime Project?

After the 5 week programme parents filled in an evaluation. Most parents asked for the project to be continued.

I would recommend giving a presentation to all infant's parents so as to encourage more disadvantaged parents to participate in the project. An initial in-school presentation may ignite interest among all parents (other than a chosen few)

Do you have anything else to add?

Before Easter we acquired another two sets of suitable books for the Storytime Project. Teachers devised support sheets for each book following the format of the support sheets from Marino. My role was mainly organiser of the project. This was easier to do in school than having to go to Marino. Our school doesn't have a Home School Teacher. We expect to continue with the project next year. We made up our own certs for the Junior and Senior infant pupils.

I think the support of Marino/Northside Partnership is vital in disadvantaged communities, where awards and meetings are necessary. However in Non-deis schools this is a project which can be implemented without much intervention from outside agencies.

Appendix S: Children's Drawings

The drawings that follow are two drawings from two of five child participants in *The Storytime Project*. It is their artistic response to reading with an adult at home. Alison Clarke wrote that there are many ways of eliciting research responses from children, one being through the medium of drawing.

> Because of its co-constructed and playful nature, as well as its lack of dependence on linguistic proficiency, participatory drawing emerges as a highly efficient and ethically sound research strategy that is particularly suited for work with children and young people across a variety of cultural contexts. The analysis of drawn images, complemented by a subsequent discussion of these drawings in the context of their production, has the potential of revealing a more nuanced depiction of concepts, emotions, and information in an expressive, empowering, and personally relevant manner (Literat, 2013).

Neu and Berglund (1991) state that children use writing and drawing to "test and stabilize their feelings and to think about and explore their surroundings" (p.147). Levin and Bus (2003) see drawing as one aspect of children's 'representational-communicative system'. The characters depicted in all five drawings are, without exception, smiling and happy. Those that are drawn with arms have their arms open in expansive gestures. Dr. Michael Flannery, senior lecturer in Arts Education at Marino Institute of Education, interpreted the drawings further, identifying signs of child agency in drawing 2 and of the child's understanding of text and literacy behaviours in drawing 1. See appendix S for all five drawings.

Drawing 1
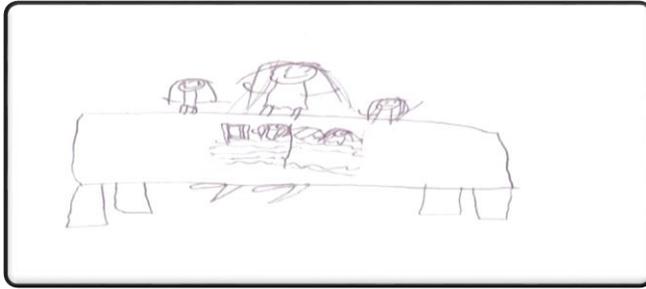
This drawing is interesting in that the book itself is upside down. It faces the viewer. The child hasn't yet conceptualised that the book should face the readers. There is an indication that the centre character is the adult due to size. The children either side are mini versions of the adult. All female. All happy. Story book character appears to be female also.

Child understands that books often contains illustrations and text. Same character in both illustrations with slightly amended scenes perhaps indicates awareness of sequence of events within a given location. No ears or hands depicted - could indicate perhaps the reading is mostly a visual experience? (M. Flannery, personal communication, May 18, 2015).

Drawing 2
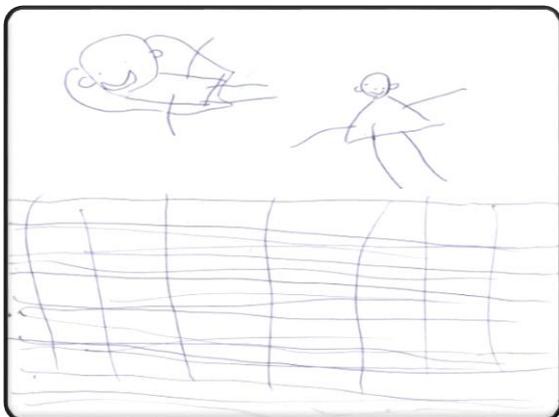
Possible aerial perspective here. Viewpoint looks down onto child figure. Psychological perspective also in that the larger figure is the child as opposed to the figure reading to the child. The focus is on the positioning when being read to by another - probably often told to lie down or else no story! Surmising the patterned shape is the duvet cover - patterned. We have awareness of ears here - perhaps the focus of bed time reading is listening and not so much looking. Both appear to be male characters (M. Flannery, personal communication, May 18, 2015).

<u>Drawing 3</u>
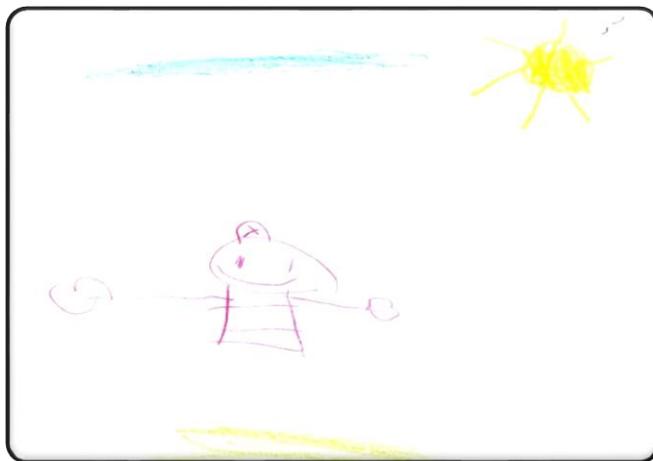
Emergence of base line and sky line. Awareness of space locating sun high and figure below.

Each object is denoted by one colour only: Sun - yellow , Figure – red, Ground – green, Sky – blue. Awareness of pattern and motion - sun rays, jumper design and hat logo. Expression is happy and positive. Ah factor ! (M. Flannery, personal communication, May 18, 2015).

Drawing 4
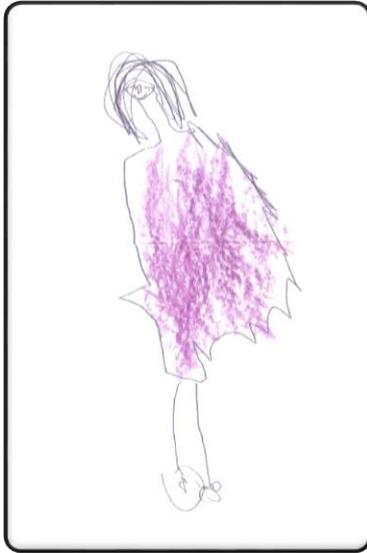
Focus of this drawing seems to be a detailed drawing of a key person who reads to them. Attention given to clothing - might it be a cloak that conceals arms. Usually arms would be denoted at this point especially when one sees the detail given to the eyes and nose shapes. Would love to know who this person might be. Colour could be random. Could be wrong but the colouring looks more like a rubbing indicating that the crayon was applied flat as opposed to tip down for part of the shading. Great level of attention given to hair (M. Flannery, personal communication, May 18, 2015).

Drawing 5
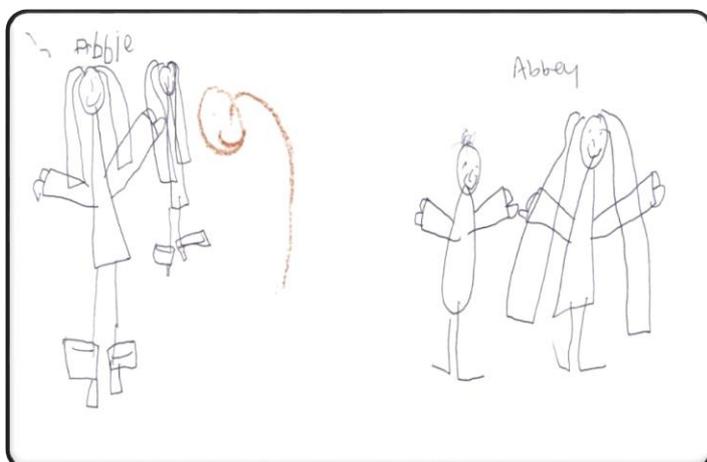
Inclusion of text. Child's name? Different penmanship. Has an adult spelled it one way and child consequently corrected the adult by spelling it correctly? Doesn't form 'b' correctly. Learned to capitalise. Two female characters in high heels. Older female figures perhaps. Alongside another male and female figure - children denoted by having no high heels and scale. As you mentioned Joan. All smiling. Nothing more to add here. Awareness of hands/ fingers. Arms extend from body as opposed to shoulder joints. No awareness of elbows knees etc (M. Flannery, personal communication, May 18, 2015).

Appendix T: Screen Shot of Sample Tip-Sheet

The 3 Billy Goats Gruff

1. Find a quiet space for you and the child.

2. Begin by looking at the cover of the book and wondering aloud what the story is about.

3. Read the story, pausing at times to look at pictures and talk about them.

4. As you read the story, discuss questions like –
   I wonder what the 3 Billy goats are thinking…..
   I wonder what would happen to baby Billy goat if he fell into the river..
   I wonder what the troll will do when he hears the Billy goat on his bridge…

5. Relate events to the child's life -
   Did you ever cross a bridge?
   What would you do if you met someone mean like the troll?

6. Discuss word meanings such as gnashed, trotted, monstrous, pastures…….
   Another word for pastures is meadows, fields, grasslands.

Jack and the Beanstalk

1. Find a quiet space for you and the child.

2. Begin by looking at the cover of the book and wondering aloud what the story is about.

3. Read the story, pausing at times to look at the pictures and talk about them.

4. As you read the story, discuss questions like –
   I wonder what Jack's mammy will say when he comes home with the magic beans….
   I wonder what the giant would do if he caught Jack….
   I wonder what Jack and his mammy will do with the giant's gold…

5. Relate events to the child's life -
   Did you ever climb a tree or a wall or a gate?
   What would you do if a beanstalk grew in your garden?
   What would you do with the giant's gold?

6. Discuss word meanings such as market, chopped, lulllabies, snatched, snoozing
   Another word for snoozing is dozing or napping or sleeping.

Introduction & Interview

(M = Malachy) This is a pseudonym

JK: Hello again Malachy! Thank you very much for agreeing to do an interview to help me with the evaluation of the story time project. I just wanted to start with recapping on the Northside story time project.   We know what it is but I have a question here on your understanding of what it is about.

M: My understanding is that it's about developing the oral literacy of children in the early years and doing that through the engagement of the parent and the child. The means of that engagement is a book and a story.

JK: Yes, that's beautifully and concisely put.

M: I have to say my understanding wasn't always quite that clear.

JK: That's interesting.

M: In a sense, coming from a book background, the oral literacy aspect of it wasn't as clear to me. I felt it was the introduction of children to books because that's where I would be coming from but it was actually the engagement from yourself and others in the project and then in the birth of literacy seminars, engaging with people who were professionals in that area that I came to understand the importance of the oral literacy. I understood more of the sense of what you had been emphasising, the de-contextualised reading. That was important for me to understand.

JK: Yes, in other words we were using books as a vehicle.

M: That was something that deepened my understanding of it. I understand it much better now which I have to confess, I didn't at the beginning.

JK: There is no confessing at all. That is something that has become more apparent to me as well. It's interesting because at an interview I did with the Northside Partnership personnel recently, the exact same comments were made. She said that the emphasis on decontextualized language was very interesting and that it had deepened awareness as well. Really what I need to do is go back and look at sharing that academic focus with the Teachers and with the Early Childhood Practitioners but not necessarily with the parents. This is what came up in conversations, that there needs to be a deeper engagement around that and also a deeper engagement around the fidelity to the project.

M: Yes, I think that's correct. I would agree that it would be of great benefit to re-emphasise that to the professionals involved. They may well have been more aware of that aspect of it. That is very important, to re-emphasise that. Also with the parents, I know going through the strategies with them, without going into the academic side of it, you're making them do the things that will help the oral literacy

but I wonder whether being a little more open with them and saying exactly what you are trying to do might actually focus them as well.

JK: Yes, sorry that might have sounded a bit condescending, that we don't have to bother parents with that, that wasn't really my intention, it was more trying to keep the whole thing as uncomplicated as possible.

M: I understand that. I suppose the birth of literacy seminars brought me into contact with other people working in the field who have a much deeper knowledge and so on. What we were looking at from that was a campaign around oral literacy, some kind of way that we could highlight it across the city. One of the things that somebody said at the meeting was 'just talk to your child'. It was that message of the conversation. It made me see that and the importance of that. Maybe talking to parents and saying that it's that conversation with your child that increases their oral literacy into their life and has profound impacts on their life and their future. The story time project is doing that through this very intimate conversation which you develop around a story from a book. Going deeper into it might help parents to see the benefits of it as well.

JK: Yes and it might encourage them to go beyond just the reading.

M: Absolutely, to carry it on.

JK: Yes into everyday conversation, dinner time, 'what did you do today?' 'how would you feel if such and such happened?'

M: Exactly yes.

JK: All the speculative language.

M: Yes, you're right. You can use the same decontextualising around the dinner or the breakfast table as well.

JK: It's interesting, what your suggesting really is that I bring into central focus the whole notion of decontextualized language, that is abstract language that doesn't happen in day to day conversations like 'where's my coat?' or 'did you brush your teeth?'. So it's more about discussions around the abstract and that's exactly what talking about a book does.

M: Yes, from the birth of literacy seminars, I don't want to go on about it too much…

JK: No, please do!

M: It had the impact on me that I could see these links. Another thing from that was the idea that the conversation could be an object and that if you had interesting objects around the city for instance you could stop and ask 'what does that look like?' and just start a conversation. Obviously you don't want to talk about decontextualizing too much to people who might be put off by such a strange sounding word, but the idea of talking to your children and using the strategies that they are using with reading.

JK: Yes, that they can be brought outside of that.

M: Yes.

JK: Yes, even if you met primary school Teachers and you asked them how they develop decontextualized language in the classroom, some of them would answer you but others would not be familiar with that term either. So it's not just about parents shying away from that, it's professionals as well. We probably do need to engage more deeply like we did at the birth of literacy seminar and that's going to happen hopefully in September when the Teachers and the Early Childhood Practitioners come in.

M: I think that would be good, especially for the Early Childhood Practitioners.

JK: Yes, what was very interesting on the day they gave the feedback, two days ago was that the parents came in and they wanted to have several books at their disposal all the time so that if their child said on a particular night 'I don't like that one, I don't want to talk about it anymore' that they could pull another one out of the pack. There was a very interesting debate on that because I kept talking about the research that says deeper engagement with one book is better because children need that kind of exposure to the same word like 'disgruntled' from Love from Louisa. If they don't have the repeated exposure to it, it won't be embedded. The research also shows, which we all know and we all know from life, practice makes perfect so if a parent is reading the same book three nights in a row, they will more than likely read it better the third night than they'll read it the first night. There are lots and lots of reasons for holding onto the same book for a couple of nights and not bombarding the child because then their attention becomes dispersed.

M: Yes, I think that sounds correct. I obviously don't have the academic background but that makes sense to me. I know children like repetition and there is a reason for that. It's a familiarity that they have which is comforting to them. It reinforces their learning. They can see that they know the next thing that's going to happen. They know what that word means because they have heard it two nights in a row and now on the third night they know what it means and their understanding of it is much better.

JK: It also relies on the ingenuity of the adult, that they don't repeat it in a very pedestrian way because the last thing we want is for children to become genuinely bored with just the same thing being trotted out every night. Then they become disaffected and that's the opposite of what we are trying to achieve. I think what's emerging from the research as well is that we need to talk to parents more about how you can do it differently every night with the same book. There needs to be more of an emphasis on that as well. It's all a learning process but it's very interesting, ah now… I'm interviewing you and here I am…(laughing).

M: It is interesting because as you say that I am thinking how do you make the same book interesting? One way, as you always say, is to give space to the child to intervene, to question. The question might be different on the third night that it was on the first because the understanding is deeper so maybe the question is deeper.

JK: That's right. It's fascinating.

M: How you encourage that or leave the space for it.

JK: Yes. The other thing is that every child is different.

M: Absolutely.

JK: That's what Teachers learn in their training to become Teachers, how do we differentiate for all the different needs for all the different children? Your son or daughter will react completely differently to somebody else's son or daughter so it's requiring a lot of the parent in a way. What's good is that parent knows their child inside out and they will know what buttons they can press.

M: It's an interesting question really.

JK: You might know your son is very interested in fishing for example and you might be reading a particular book and see a way that you know will get him talking whereas I wouldn't know that if I wasn't talking to you.

Anyway we will move on to talk about the involvement of Dublin City Library. I was going to ask you how do you feel about the involvement of the library at this stage?

M: I think the involvement of the library is very important from our point of view. With any project there is a start and then it finishes, hopefully you have inspired the parents involved to continue. The library is a point which can be a support as a child progresses. They might look for different types of books and if staff are there to help parents choose the right book, the right level of book for the age group or the interest that the child has. Obviously the other aspect is that it's a free supply of books. Hopefully if you are inspiring children to become readers you want to be able to supply them with books and you don't want it to be an expense that becomes a problem.

Obviously from the library's point of view, we want to inspire young people to enjoy reading and to love books. Not just to love books but to feel comfortable in the space that is the library because that can be so very important not for just getting information and getting literature for pleasure reading but also as they get older they will be researching projects for school and if they feel comfortable in the library and if they feel that it's a friendly space then it will be much easier for them to go to the library, to ask questions for books and feel comfortable about it. It provides a study space for many children who, perhaps, don't have adequate space at home.

JK: Or heat.

M: Or heat, yes.

JK: I wonder if children use the public libraries and then go on to do third level, does that make them feel more comfortable using the academic libraries in college as well.

M: Yes, I think it has to. I always remember my own experience of going to University and being given a brief tour of the library and being very intimidated in going into this

big academic library and not really feeling comfortable about finding things or asking questions and showing my ignorance and so on. Whereas if I had a much better experience of public libraries as a child that might not have been the case. Had I known people who understood how the library worked and how I could find information easily and alternative forms of information. That's one of the things, people go to the library and they have a reading list and everybody is looking for the same book on the reading list, whereas the library is full of lots of books, lots of information and journals and so on. To be aware of the breadth of information and to know that you don't have to read just one book or one paper, there are lots of alternatives.

JK: That's interesting. We could probably map those feelings of insecurity that you would have had at your third level library and I certainly had when I was a young student to a parent coming into a public library for the first time.

M: Absolutely, yes.

JK: Particularly if they had literacy difficulties themselves in school.

M: That's a huge thing and they are all people who have negative views of public spaces. They don't feel comfortable and libraries, for some people, fall into that category. Part of the story time process which is good is that it brings parents to the library in a way where they are made to feel welcome and special.

JK: Yes, gently.

M: Yes, they are eased into it. Meeting a friendly face and being shown where the books for your child are so that you can come in and you know where you are going. It's very good.

JK: Yes, it is very important. We have had so many stories from Teachers and from parents about discovering local libraries and feeling that it's not a bad place or that it's a nice place even. From initial pieces of research from the questionnaire that you would have completed last Summer, 63% of respondents reported that they agreed with the statement that parents develop a positive relationship with their local library as a result of their participation with the story time project, 34% were undecided. 63% is a nice healthy figure, that they developed a positive relationship, I was going to ask you to maybe speculate on the undecided.

M: 34% is quite a high percentage to be undecided. I know that by no means do all of the parents come to the library event or in some cases they don't go to the library to pick up the fifth book and that is a concern.

JK: That is a concern and parents didn't fill this out, it was Teachers, you filled it out, Northside Partnership, the Home School Liaisons, the Early Childhood Practitioners and the classroom Teachers so they would have been aware that they were the ones who were going to the library to collect the books, in some instances.

M: I know the one big negative thing for people in libraries are the fines on overdue books. You will often find, with participants in story time as well, that somebody will

have been a member of the library several years ago and there will be two or three books that are still on the card that weren't returned and there'll be a high level of fines on the card as well. Although the fines might not be very high in absolute terms, the accumulate and for many people it is an obstacle, €15 might be far too much out of their budget so the simple thing that happens is they just stop using the library. That's a policy decision which is really a debate inside Dublin City Libraries but it's not a policy I can change overnight. We have tried to have an amnesty for people in the story time project. They come down, they may have had a previous membership with some of those issues, fines, overdue books and we forget that. It's written off and they start again with a new slate. Once somebody has that experience, it is a negative. Personally I think that might be the biggest obstacle. Even if they are given an amnesty, somebody might say 'I know I'll forget to return the books'.

JK: Yes, they are afraid of their own lack of organisation.

M: Exactly.

JK: I think you have really hit on something there. I'm not sure if there is a whole lot of people that come to The Story time Project who owe money but what I do think is that they fear that the book will get lost and then they will be in trouble, so it's that kind of thing. When I interviewed parents, that did come up, they said 'I'd rather buy the book and then if anything happens it I won't be in trouble'. Then in buying the books, they may not be getting guidance, I suppose if the child picks them that's one good thing but the expense is huge.

M: In terms of buying books, I am all for parents buying books, it's great to have books of their own as well, but it can sometimes depend on the place from where they are buying the books. In many places there aren't always book shops so you are buying books in Newsagents and Supermarkets, the selection is poor, the quality of the books are poor, they are just cheap, cheaply produced.

JK: So the repertoire?

M: The repertoire, they are not getting the quality, they may not be suitable. They may often be advertising vehicles for TV programs or toys or that sort of thing. It's very interesting with your conversations with parents that you are confirming that because that is something, from my experience on the desk, I know parents are turned off by that. It is an obstacle.

JK: Do you think there are other issues? The Home School Liaison Teachers are so invested in the project they will facilitate parents if they can't go to the library and they end up going to the library, getting the fifth book, bringing it back to the parents. Even if you saw the graduation ceremony two days ago, Mags went away with her arms full of books. In some ways I actually think the books for the story time project do come back, they might come back later, those parents who don't go to the library, they give them back to the Home School Liaison Teacher. I even had a set of books that I hadn't given you back from the previous one and I gave them to Mags this time. I would say over all, it might be six months later, but you are getting the books back (laughing).

M: Yes, there is a certain amount of loss.

JK: Attrition?

M: Attrition yes which is fine we are happy to cope with that, it's not a huge cost to us. The problem for us is that we want people to continue to use the library. If people are not bringing back books or visiting the library at all, that's a concern from our point of view.

JK: One can speculate on parent disinclination, it happens even with the parents coming to the induction seminars. The Teachers and the Early Childhood Practitioners would say that they had got people who had said 'yes, I'll be there, I will go to the induction' and then on the morning of the induction they don't turn up, so there is that. I think the library suffers from that as well.

M: Oh absolutely.

JK: It's either a fear where they go to the brink and just can't make themselves go or else life gets in the way.

M: Yes, life gets in the way. In somewhere like the northside area, around Coolock Library, there are massive estates of houses and it can be quite a trek to get to the library if you don't have transport and that obviously puts people off.

JK: It does, yes.

M: If you live nice and close to the library or you have good transport, your own car, it mightn't be such a difficulty. Even in a well organised family it can be quite difficult to say 'right lets jump in the car and we are all going to go down to the library' because somebody will say 'no I have to do this' and it can be a problem.

JK: Yes. The amnesty is something that is mentioned at all the induction seminars and usually a little 'titter' goes out through the group, have you noticed that? (laughing)

M: Yes, everybody recognises the guilty conscience.

JK: 82.6% of respondents said that they disagreed with the statement that it's unlikely that families will use their local library once they have completed the project. In other words 82% are quite happy that families will continue to use the library. You are situated here so you couldn't have a personal experience of new parents turning up but it would be interesting….

M: Yes, we have tried to…

JK: Measure?

M: Measure, yes. Part of the thing is that some of the people who participated would already have memberships so they couldn't be recorded as new members as part of the story time project. It's difficulty to put that into the measure. But, 82%, that number or level of participants are not continuing to use the library or starting to use

the library afterwards. I think if you ask people 'are libraries a good thing?' they will say yes but using it is a different thing and that is the challenge for us. I think the fines and the overdue system is a big obstacle and that is something that could be changed. A decision in terms of people saying 'we will forego the income that comes from that'.

JK: You probably don't make a lot of money on fines do you really?

M: Well it's a debate. There is a certain amount of income that at times a forego is welcome but obviously there is a debate in maximising income and actually providing a service.

JK: Maybe we shouldn't be having this kind of conversation in the interview but I do feel it helps to develop the citizen. Everything in life has consequences. It helps you to know the system and that this is fair.

M: Yes, that is the argument. The other side of the argument is that if people have lots of ways that they can renew books if they can't get to the library. We have been giving them all of these opportunities, the responsibility is theirs and they should be able to organise it. The reality is that lots of families don't. Obviously with well-heeled families it isn't a problem, it might be an inconvenience and they don't want to pay €5 to the library because they are a couple of weeks late but they can do it and they will continue to use the library so it's not an obstacle in that sense. Everybody fails sometimes, all of us do. The problem is if it becomes an obstacle because you don't have the cash to pay that fine.

JK: Yes. Just to ask you one thing about the graduation, there was a huge response, 97% of respondents said that the graduation event at Marino was important because it in-genders a sense of pride and achievement in the participants. You have been at the graduation where they get a certificate and there is a little bit of feedback and now, more recently, we have started giving out rosettes, I don't know if you saw those?

M: Yes.

JK: There is a little bit of debate about people suggesting that maybe we could run the induction at local centres rather than in Marino. That is another conversation that needs to be had, do you think that the graduation should continue? If so would you also see that it should be held at local centres or do you think there is some merit in bringing people into Marino for the graduation ceremony?

M: I think the graduation ceremony is important because it does give people that feeling that they have achieved something and allows them also to share what they have achieved. I think giving the feedback is very important as well at that event because that allows people to say….

JK: I hated the book!

M: Yes, or I discovered these things about my child. You can see that people are bursting with excitement to say these things and the wonderful experience that they have had. That's really positive and…

JK: Valuable?

M: Yes, valuable, it really is because even just saying that out loud to other people makes you feel proud and makes you want to go back and continue it. So I think it should, definitely, continue. The other side of it is that if it is dispersed, it loses part of that impact, a lot of that impact actually, that would be the main argument against. The other side of it is that it might be more convenient for some people. I think there is a value in it and I think the attendance at it is fairly high.

JK: There is. When we run the project in September there is always a high attendance at both the induction and the graduation and but when we run the second traunch there has sometimes been a reduction so we were expecting a reduction this time but we had 50 people at the induction and 50 people at the feedback session two days ago so it's interesting.

M: I think the second one, the Spring one as it were, is always more difficult because you are challenged as to when to start it or when to finish it.

JK: That's right, between Easter and Summer.

M: In Autumn term it's easier, as long as you don't get too close to Christmas you're ok.

JK: Also Teachers are more, now I'm not sure about the Early Childhood Practitioners, but they are more alive, more energetic, more enthusiastic.   Whereas Teachers are tired at this time of year. They are tired so I think that's an issue (laughing)!

M: No, I know. Obviously you have to give it a little bit of time after Christmas for people to get back into routines and so on but it would be good if you had a date almost set for after Christmas before you actually break up for Christmas so then all the Teachers come back and they know.

JK: It's in their heads.

M: It's in their head and it's in their diary.

JK: That's interesting. I often have with Emily. Myself and Emily have it arranged but haven't shared it so I think you are dead right, we should put it out there with Teachers well in advance because the Home School Liaison Teachers need to know that stuff. They need to be able to plan their academic year. In fairness they take your breath away with their dedication to their job, I think above and beyond other Teachers. They seem to be a particular group that dedicate themselves to the cause if you like!

        Ok Malachy I don't want to hold you too much longer. There is this thorny thing that keeps coming up and I would like your view on it. 30% of respondents reported that they did not think that the story time project attracts parents who are most in need of assistance in supporting their children's language. So, in other words, there are 30% of us out there, who are involved in the project, that think the parents who are coming in are not the ones we really want for whatever reason, that they are not the most

needy. Now 70% of people think that yes, we are bringing in those parents but again I thought 30% was a significant negative response.

M: It's interesting. Obviously, the people who are involved have some form of commitment and have made a decision. There is an awareness in them of the importance of doing this or the advantage of doing it. Obviously the people who most need it aren't aware of it at all, that it's necessary or that there is a benefit in it. It's a question of how do you get to them? I don't think of the target I see at the story time project at the moment, that those people are wasting our time.

JK: I would agree.

M: It's making an impact and I think the feedback shows that. But, there is probably a much bigger group below that of people who we are not getting to and who are probably more in need of it. It's how you recruit those people and if you do recruit those people, for instance in terms of the library there is in an issue with people using the library, collecting the last book from the library and so on at the moment, if you were dealing with people…

JK: Who actually had problems completing the project themselves, yes, I know. I think we did have that conversation at the very beginning, a couple of years ago, where we said that we wouldn't target the most needy, in other words we wouldn't target people who were rehabilitating from drug problems or who were just coming out of prison and that sort of thing because basically they were using all their energy just to cope with life. So we really wanted people who had moved on a little bit from there, that they had the strategies to cope with life and that then they would have the strategies to cope with the project.

M: Yes.

JK: I still think that was a sensible decision.

M: Oh yes. Obviously to be involved in something like this you have to have a certain level of organisation and well-being, that you have enough leisure to do it, you are not stressed out by it. In general I think it is a problem of how you engage with people who most need it because they are the people who least realise.

JK: Yes and are less likely to put themselves forward.

M: Exactly.

JK: You just hope that there is a little bit of talk in neighbourhoods or talk at the school gate. Every time one person is pulled in, there is a possibility that they will pull someone else in.

M: It sort of occurred to me, I don't know how you might do it but it occurred to me from some of the feedback that you get from the parents that it might be useful for some of those parents to recruit other parents rather than it coming from the Teachers or somebody who is in that kind of position, if it was coming from…

JK: The community, yes, within the community, that's a very good idea and I think that might have been happening informally but we could ask them to become ambassadors.

M: Yes.

JK: Yes, 'would you be willing to become an ambassador for the project?'

M: Maybe some of them, it wouldn't have to be everybody. It's hard to know exactly how you would organise that. Obviously if they become an ambassador they could do it totally informally by talking to people in the community and maybe that's the best way to do it rather than to get them to talk to a group.

JK: Oh I know yes, it depends on the parent. I am going to wrap up now but before I do there was one more question in terms of the tip sheets we have for the books. I was wondering has your involvement in the story time project and finding out about all of these other strategies, has that affected any aspect of your work? Have you maybe used those tip sheets in other contexts, and you are more than welcome to so don't feel that you have to admit to it or anything like that! I am very happy for all of that stuff to go wherever it needs to go. Has that had any effect?

M: To tell you the truth we haven't developed it but it was one of those things that I wanted to do, to develop our own tip sheets, basically adapting what you had done to different titles and to make them available to whoever needs them or wants them. But we haven't got around to it yet.

JK: It's on the 'to do' list!

M: It's on the 'to do' list. We need people to sit down and go through a book and do that. There have been changes in the Children's Department and we had one longstanding member retire and she would have been perfect to do something like that. She has been replaced by somebody else who is much younger and working her way and doing very well.

JK: But may not be ready to do that?

M: Yes but it is something that people in branches could do as well so I must go back to it.

JK: Oh I'm not trying to give you an extra job, I'm just interested.

M: Oh I know, I am just thinking, it's reminded me because it is useful to anybody reading a book. Also it would be useful to people in the story time project coming back if they used the tip sheet on the project and now see other tip sheets.

JK: Yes. Is there anything that you feel that you didn't get a chance to say during our conversation that you would like to share or add?

M: No, I think we have covered a lot of issues there. I would like to deepen the role of the library but I think one of the obstacles is the issue of overdue books and fines and all of those kind of things but that's a battle….

JK: Yes, when we started the conversation in 2011, we predicted a lot, we knew it was going to be difficult but I think it's worth sticking with, don't you? Or do you?

M: I do because I think if we can get people to use the library in terms of developing the literacy of the children, that's where the resources are, the payoff for those people is enormous. For those children, right through their life, if they want or have the urge to study, they have a resource there in the community which they can use. Many children don't get that opportunity and if story time kick starts a child and parent together along a certain route then….

JK: You have achieved something.

M: Yes. It might only be a very small minority but the impact for those individuals can be huge.

JK: That's right. Every time we run the project, if we got three parents, we would be doing very well.

M: Absolutely. When somebody in the community achieves something special, that has a ripple effect around the community.

JK: Thank you so much and thank you for your involvement. I think we are at least three years together at this stage. It has been so valuable for me so thank you so much for your involvement.

M: I'm delighted.

JK: And for your involvement today as well.

M: Ok, thank you.

END

(Ps = Participants) All names are pseudonyms

Introduction:

JK:	Folks, I just want to say one or two things before we start. Basically this is just a chat amongst yourselves and I am going to try to keep myself out of it except for throwing in the odd question and then letting you at it, ok, so you are probably going to be talking to one another. Do you know each other?
Some Ps:	Yes.
JK:	Ursula, Linda.
Leah:	Leah.
Dana:	Dana.
Leah:	I know Ursula, I don't know anybody else.
JK:	So there would be no other occasion when you would meet each other?
Ursula:	Linda is from Moatview. Leah would see Susan, Susan is in Priorswood.
Dana:	I'm in Doras Bui.
Ursula:	What's your name again, I'm terrible with names.
Dana: Dana.	
JK:	Dana. And Dana who else is in with you is it Teresa?
Dana:	Yes, Teresa had a baby.
JK:	So she's on maternity leave?
Dana:	No she did have a baby and they asked me to take over doing The Storytime Project because she couldn't do it anymore.
JK:	Susan was involved as well was she? Susan Sheehan?
Ursula:	No Susan's in Moatview.
Linda:	That's with me, that's Moatview.
JK:	Oh sorry I'm getting mixed up.

Dana:	No there was just myself and Teresa and I've been doing it for the last two years.
JK:	Three years?
Dana:	Two years.
JK:	Two years, ok, and Ursula, you have been doing it for the last two years as well haven't you?
Ursula:	Since you started it. Since you opened it up, was that two years?
JK:	It's actually three years now.
Ursula:	Yes that's what I thought, were you the same Leah?
Linda:	Ailish did it the first year and I did it the following two years.
JK:	What happened was we started off a bit smaller because we were just starting off and it was with the Home School Liaison Teachers. Then Emily, who is the Director of Early Childhood, she very quickly once the project got on its feet said 'now will we open it up to the Early Childhood Centres' and I was absolutely delighted because the younger you get the kids the better, our research tells us that so that's when you would have come in then Ursula and Leah you were there in the early days as well weren't you? You would have been there from the beginning as well?
Leah:	Yes I think so because we're beside St. Francis's in Priorswood and it was Emer….
JK:	Yes that's where it started with Emer. So that means you were there in 2011?
Leah:	Yes.
JK:	And you haven't been there for the last couple of ….
Leah:	No, last year I didn't get parents for some reason.
JK:	Yes.
Leah:	I think most of them were working as well.
JK:	Yes and you see they do it in the primary school as well, they do it with the whole class in Junior Infants. Actually, Fran who is the Home School Liaison there, she doesn't come to Marino anymore because she actually runs the whole thing from her own school so that might have had an effect on you as well.
Leah:	Yes, and the other thing that I find as well is that a lot of parents of the kids we would have don't have transport and they found it difficult to get down.

JK:	Oh right to get down to Marino?
Leah:	Yes at that hour of the morning.
JK:	Yes, that's interesting now, that's an issue.
Leah:	Yes that was one of the things. A couple of the parents did come back and say that they would have been interested in it had it have been more local. I know that it's local enough but if you don't have transport and I don't drive either so I couldn't offer lifts.
Some Ps:	Yes.
Ursula:	Yes, most of the time we were bringing them down in our cars.
JK:	Yes, were you driving Ursula?
Ursula:	Yes and I'd say 'Come on, we'll all go down in my car', so that's hard if there's no transport.
JK:	Yes, I suppose in Marino I could always find out if there's a few bob to get taxis, I don't know if that's possible.
Leah:	Yes, we'll I've done it. The first time my husband brought me down and picked me up because he was around at the time to do that but with work commitments….
JK:	Yes, I hadn't thought of that at all.
Leah:	That was just one thing, as I say, that came back to us and that was a couple of parents who were interested but then a lot of our parents were working, some of them actually did pass a comment that if it was evening time they might have been able to. There's no set time to keep everyone happy.
JK:	Yes that's the thing, if you change the project for those very good, valid reasons, then you are equally discommoding others so…
Leah:	Exactly.
JK:	The whole time you are trying to find the middle way that will attract the most parents.
Dana:	I think that evening time would be even harder because they will say they can't because they have no babysitters. So I think that would be harder.
Ursula:	You can't keep them all happy.
Linda:	You can't keep everyone happy.

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Leah:	I kind of do feel myself, now I'm not criticising parents, but I did have a parent the previous year that came on board, she job shared but she managed to get there.
Ursula:	You can do it if you really want to.
JK:	Yes, it's funny now because I am doing a focus group again on 12th December when we are doing our graduation. I'm doing that with the Home School Liaison Teachers and that issue has come home. A lot of the Teachers have said 'we'll be happy to stay back but what will we do about the parents?' because they're nearly all bringing the parents with them so there will be a big fleet of taxis, that's what we'll have to do on the day to bring parents home. So it's funny because you know the questionnaire you filled out just before the Summer, some people were saying that it's really important that the graduation and the induction are held in Marino because it makes the parents feel special.
Ursula:	Oh they do, I really think it does make them feel special.
JK:	Then the other side of it is, as Leah said, if it was held more locally, people would be able to walk to it.
Linda:	But it's only twice.
Ursula:	Yes it's only twice, maybe the taxi is the thing so if the finance was there.
Linda:	But it is only twice, it's not as if it's a weekly thing so it shouldn't be a problem and they have plenty of notice as well.
Dana:	Now some parents did come to the first session but couldn't come back.
JK:	Yes, they couldn't come to the graduation?
Dana:	Yes, but they did the project.
JK:	Yes, sometimes as well what happens is one of you might come along without the parent or without the two parents and then you would pass the books on, where the parent might never…..has that happened?
Ursula:	Once.
Linda:	One parent.
Dana:	None of my parents turned up the last time.
Linda:	Really?
Dana:	No, and I have to say when I went back, all the excuses, the excuses were strange and I heard one of the parents saying 'I just couldn't be bothered'. But I got the books for them and I gave them to them but trying to get the

information out of them was very hard as well. But this group is great, every one of them turned up.

JK: Did they yes? And do you think you'll go to the graduation?

Dana: Oh definitely. They're after asking me loads of times 'What time is it on?' 'What date?', will I let them know.

Ursula: They love it.   I found it hard this year, I have two and I normally fill the four. I think you can just have a group of parents and they….

Dana: Yes, last year they just ……

Leah: It must have been a bad year last year because I was the same.

(all laughing)

Linda: This year I had seven parents and the seven of them are coming back to me with great feedback.

Ursula: Isn't that fantastic?

Linda: I'm delighted with them.

JK: You know the parents who didn't come to Marino and who didn't do the graduation but they still did the project, did you get any feedback from them?

Dana: I had to drag it out of them, I would ask the child and they would say, 'sometimes I read it, sometimes'.

JK: You probably didn't have, or did you have the opportunity to say to those parents 'this is what you have to do'.

Dana: Oh I went through everything with them but anyway! Sorry, one parent last year was very good, she couldn't make it but she ended up coming to the graduation and she did a video then after it.

JK: Oh that's right.

Dana: Daphne.

JK: Daphne yes, was she one of yours?

Dana: Yes.

JK: Did you see that?

Ps: Yes.

JK: It was on the Northside…

Dana: Yes, she came to the graduation and then she called me and I said 'go on, do it' and she said 'alright' (quiet tone).

JK: She was wonderful, she did a lovely job. I must show it to you Jocelyn when we go back.

             Ok folks, I wanted to say before we started that was really valuable information Leah about the lifts and having a problem actually just getting to Marino.

             I just want to say, now you probably know this yourselves, there are no right or wrong answers. I'm going to throw out about four questions now, there are no right or wrong answers and I'm not looking for you to say the story time project is the greatest thing since sliced bread, I'm looking for critical, either positive or negative, whatever your opinion is, just give that.

             Also, talking to one another rather than talking to me, you might get into a debate with one another and that's absolutely fine. The questionnaire has already been done, I don't know Leah, you probably didn't get a chance to do the questionnaire?

Leah: No.

JK: We sent out a questionnaire during the Summer and I have feedback on that and what you thought so I have a fair bit of information on what you thought of the effects of the project on children and things like that, so these ones are more about you in a way. I was going to start with that question there (showing document) for you to talk about your experience of the process and if you just say why did you decide to get involved in it first of all, so why did you decide to get involved in it and then what do you do in the process.

             I know you go to Marino, you hear me doing the workshop and then what happens after that? Do you give the books out on the day? Do you get to chat to the parents at all? Again there are no right or wrong answers, I am just interested to hear and see if it resonates amongst you and to see if there are any problems with it. Is there any part of it that drives you mad, that you can't do? So that's the first question and there are three others after that.

             Just to give you a 'heads up' on the kinds of questions, that's the first one. The second one is going to be about your own knowledge, did you learn anything on the story time project, about literacy, that you wouldn't have known? The Teachers, for example, always come up to me and say 'Oh God I never knew that' in terms of some of the strategies that I use on the DVD and then they bring them into use in their classroom. That may or may not be your experience.

             Two other questions, one is relation to your own personal and professional development, in other words, did your involvement in it make you go off and do other courses or did you do other courses because of it or were you doing

them anyway? Did you do any further professional development? Did it have any effect on your career?

Then the last question is did it have any effect on your relationships? I don't mean at home, I mean with one another…

Linda: The parent.

Interview:

JK: Yes, with one another, with parents and maybe the Teachers. Traditionally there has been a lot of, we'll say, the Early Childhood sector and the school sector wouldn't really have much to do with each other and I'm just wondering if there was any development with schools because of it? That's really it, so will we start at the beginning, I'll just throw out a question – Why did you get involved in the story time project? Were you asked, were you approached, what was the story? And then tell us a bit about your experience of running it. So Leah do you want to start?

Leah: I'm trying to think, I can't even remember now who actually introduced it, I don't know whether it was Sandra from Siolta that introduced it to us?

JK: Or Emily?

Linda: Her name was Emily, I think it was Emily anyway.

Leah: It might have been Emily.

JK: She would have made a phone call.

Leah: I got involved just to help the children and to encourage the parents to read with their children. As I say, I did find it difficult in the beginning to get parents to come on. Now when I did the first year, four of them came on board.

JK: Did they start telling one another about it in the community then?

Leah: Yes, they did.

JK: Yes, there are some places now and a lot of the parents in the community know about it and they're saying 'oh I think I'll do that because so and so did it'.

Leah: A few parents did come back and ask about it and I did say to them I put notes up in the hall, I handed them out all little notes that I had done myself, I spoke to them about it and you will still get the parents who say 'oh I didn't know about that' and I did say to them well I did explain the whole situation to you and what it was all about.

                But I think the parents that did take part in it did benefit from it.

JK:	That's good. Did everyone get involved because of Emily?
Dana:	Well I got involved, as I said, because of Teresa. She was doing it before me and I didn't actually know about it because she works upstairs and I work downstairs. But when she went out for her maternity leave I was asked to take over. So I started from last year. I asked the parents individually. I spoke to every parent about it. Like that, at first I found it very hard to get the parents on board, but this year I had loads wanting to do it.
JK:	Did you?
Dana:	Yes. They were great and all getting involved and every day they come in I ask them how they are getting on with it.
JK:	Do you? And would they tell you the problems they are having?
Dana:	I was just saying to the girls there, one parent came to me and her little fella that she actually did it for, he's three, she's finding it very hard with him but her little one that's a year older is loving it. And it wasn't for her she went, it was for the little fella but she said she's glad now because…
JK:	It's working with the four year old.
Dana:	And now he's starting to come and listen because he sees his sister.
JK:	That's one thing I suppose that wasn't emphasised at the workshop, if you have a couple of kids, they can all sit up, the more the merrier. If there are two in the family benefiting from it, all the better. So she was dead right to focus on the four year old and let the three year old see what's going on and then he/she might join in.
Dana:	There's another little fella and he is a bit distant and I really wanted his mother to do it and he's all talk now, every day, about Jack and the Beanstalk. We were doing planting last week and he said to me 'is that plant actually going to grow now Dana? Do you think it will go like Jack and the Beanstalk? Like the big plant in the book.
(laughing)	
JK:	That's brilliant.
Dana:	I actually found that doing the books with the parents, we have great chats. Whereas some of the parents would never talk to and now they are speaking to you and asking you questions..
JK:	So they use the fact that they're involved in the story time project to have a chat and then they might go on to other things.
Dana:	Yes and then they'll talk about other things, so it's great.

JK: So it gives you something in common?

Dana: I've got to know the parents more through it which is great.

JK: That's very good.
               So would they be coming to you saying 'that didn't work' or would they say
               things to you like 'I tried asking him did that ever happen to you and he didn't
               know what I was talking about'. Does that ever happen?

Ursula: Well I have one now, I actually have two sisters, I found it hard this year to
               get the four, usually I would get them. One of the parents said to me 'You're
               good at getting people, their arms up their back! But then we're glad
               afterwards!' But she was saying that she had the nursery rhyme ones and one
               of the books, I think it was 'Alfie gets in first', he just really didn't like it. I
               was saying 'that's ok, it's fine to tell me he doesn't like that book, it's no harm
               to get another book'. She was saying all the other ones he loved, he just really
               didn't like that book. He loves Leah, is it Leah, the pig??

JK: Louisa!

Ursula: Louisa that's it and I said that's fine sure that's what it's all about, nobody
               likes the same books. There were two sisters and one had the two different
               sets, one had the fairy stories and the other had the primary school books.
               They are very different and the two children are at very different stages so it
               was interesting. I would give them the whole lot, I give them the four books
               and say to them to take it week by week and not to let the children see the four
               books. I had one parent who went home with her folder and she had to read
               the four books every night because the child saw them.

               I would ask them every week 'how did it go?', maybe once or twice a week,
               now not every day. They would let me know if they liked the books or not
               and if they were going to the library, that would come up.

Linda: Yes actually a lot of my parents have actually joined the library for the first
               time.

JK: Isn't that brilliant?

Linda: Yes, that was brilliant.

Ursula: Yes, fantastic.

Linda: There was the Five minute….

Ursula: Five minutes peace.

Leah: I was just going to talk about that, I had a parent, now I have to say Five
               minutes peace is my favourite story, but this parent had to go out and buy the
               whole series of stories after because the little one loved it that much. She

actually came back and asked me 'Leah where did you get those books?' and I told her I thought Easons or one of the big book shops and I actually went on line. Easons had it but it was one big story, one big book with them all in it and she ordered them from that because the little one just loved it.

Ursula: It's lovely that their parents love it, they see the humour of it, the pictures.

Linda: They can relate to it as well.

Ursula: They can relate to it, so you are getting something for the kid and the parent which is lovely.

Linda: One of the parents came into me and she said that her little boy loved, we just give one book out a week and when the parents come in to change their book that's when we have our discussion about how the book is going and how the children area enjoying it and then maybe other children who are younger or older are loving it as well. One of the parents was saying that her little boy didn't really like 'Five minutes peace', not that he didn't really like but he just had no interest because he loved the fairy tales. He absolutely loved them. She said if they were walking down the road or if they drove by a bridge he would be saying 'oh that's like the bridge in the 'Billy Goats Gruff' so he was relating it but he had no interest in 'Five minutes peace' because he had more interest in the fairy tales. But you are getting more feedback off them when they come in to swop the books. So it is good.

Dana: My parents, they just took the whole folder. They just took them and said 'thanks', but they said they read them. I know the most popular one was the 'Five minutes peace' out of the books I had anyway.

Linda: I think the girls like that, the girls seem to really like that and some of the boys, it was just this particular boy and he was fascinated with the other ones, he just had no interest in 'Five minutes peace'. I think it's a lovely book.

JK: So generally what you do is you put the responsibility on the parents, you say 'there's the folder of books now, off you go and we'll chat about it as I see you and if you have any bother with it, get back to me' but you basically give them the five books and you tell them it's one a week?

Ursula: Yes and check in.

Linda: I just give one book.

Dana: I think some of the parents go home and showed the books to the child and then they picked the book and they start.

JK: Oh that's lovely, let the child pick where they want to start.

Dana: What was the last book? I forgot to ask them?

JK: 'Little lion' is the one I think that's in the library.

Some Ps: Oh yes.

JK: It's the one about the two boys and their Dad brings them home a lion, he thinks it's a dog.

Dana: It was only the other day actually and the parents were saying to me that they only went to pick up the last book and I just forgot to ask which one it was.

JK: Do you think any of the parents struggled? What I was trying to do was, the research is saying that you really need to focus in on one book and spend about ten minutes a night for five nights or four nights and then go on next week to the next book. A lot of people have said things to me before about the book, 'oh sure I had it all done in two nights and I really wanted to go on to the next book'.

Linda: A lot of the parents said to me that they thought doing it for the week was great because by the next day and then the day after, the children were able to tell them what was in the book. They were able to say 'oh I know what happens next' or 'wait until we get to this part'. So I think you kind of need the four or five days to do that. If you swop over, they would probably forget quicker.

JK: And a small period of time, ten minutes a night for four nights is better than half an hour one night and then not doing it any more, because I think revisiting it is really important.

Linda: Yes, it's consistency.

Ursula: Yes I think after the talk they were delighted with the practical tips. They know and they understand about telling the story but the importance of leaving time for the child to notice the picture or time for them to respond. You can hear them talking and saying that they are marching on through rather than allowing time. So it's lovely that way because it's nicely, gently done. It's not like 'oh you have to do this and then you do that'. So it makes sense to them and when they put it into practice you hear them talking. So that's what I love about it, it's very gentle, it's very important but it's done in such a nice way that they are saying 'oh I never thought of that and the child saw it'.

Linda: Actually the last time we were up in Marino the parents were saying things like 'oh I never knew that' or 'you would never think that', you know they have to hear a word so many times before they can use it, and the parents were saying 'oh I never would have thought of that', so they did gain a lot of things with regard to that I think.

JK: Yes, I like that idea that you feel that it's gentle. One of the things that I'm afraid of is, what we're doing is dialogical reading because the child is talking and the whole idea is that at the end the child nearly grabs the book off you and says 'I'm the story teller now', that's the idea. The one thing I would hate to happen is for parents who were reading all along to start whipping

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themselves saying 'I was doing it wrong and now this is the proper way'. I don't want that to happen. I want them to try out the strategies that I am talking about but I don't want to inhibit them. So I'm really glad to hear that Ursula, that it's not coming across like that.

Ursula: Oh no, very gentle, I think it's very gentle. This time, I did a little piece, using your CD, to do story time, to open it up. As I said I was having a problem getting the four, I only got two so I thought I would do a little piece with all of the parents, invite all of the parents. I did a morning and afternoon session about reading and story time. I had about six in the morning, it was very poorly attended and I'd say about seven in the afternoon. I took videos of the Teacher reading a story, one to one with their child. It was interesting, of course the ones that I had used as samples, the parents that I used as samples, they all came of course, so if you want them to come (laughing), take a video, sounds terrible! But what was lovely for the parent was the reaction, we did a gentle piece, using your tips about reading and the sort of books, we had a layout of nice books to pick, but the reaction of the parents to see their child so engrossed with their Teacher in the book. They were saying 'God, I've never seen her like that'. They read stories but to see it, one step removed, was lovely. I was thinking to myself why didn't I video more parents, little snippets even, but it was so lovely.

Linda: It's a good idea actually.

Ps: Yes (all agree).

Ursula: I was only raging that you didn't get the attendance that you would want but a lovely reaction from one of the fathers who came. He went home and was saying 'it's story time and we're going to do….' and he was all excited about it so that was lovely.

JK: So they were absolutely encouraged by seeing the Teacher work with their own child in your setting?

Ursula: Well they can see their involvement in the story and with the Teachers of course it's their natural strategy. It's very natural in the early years that you stop and let them talk, so that's very natural for our practice. For them they were kind of watching thinking 'oh….' and to see their engagement, maybe a child was very active, being totally engrossed in a story, so it was lovely.

JK: That's very good. They will probably go off and tell other people about that as well.

Ursula: I found over the three years, it was easier on the second group, you know, you are starting off in September but the second one is always easier because the first ones had told them about it and they know not to be afraid of it. You know the way sometimes parents can feel intimidated, what's this going to be about and that kind of thing.

JK: Yes, so if they can find out in advance what's going to happen?

Ursula:	Yes, or if the pictures have gone up, the photographs of the ones previous.
JK:	Do you actually get those photographs? I know Jocelyn has a library of photographs that we put up in Marino.
Ursula:	Well Emily always sends them out.
JK:	Does she?
All Ps:	Yes.
JK:	That's good. I was just going to ask you about your own literacy knowledge. Linda you mentioned earlier that it was good for the parents when they went to the workshop and they learned that a child has to hear a word twenty times before it really becomes a part of their own vocabulary. The problem with people like us as educators is that we do have a lot of information and we are not even aware that we have it, so I suppose what I'm trying to find out is, was there anything you noticed at all from doing the project that you kind of thought 'yes, I actually hadn't thought about that in that way before' or 'I didn't know that, I'm going to put that into my practice'.
Linda:	Yes, well we read the book now. When we are doing our story, we do one story a week for story time. Now they have book time at different times but when we do our actual story, we take one a week and then coming to the end of the week, we pick a different child and let them tell the story. So they sit at the top and they are sitting on the chair, going through the pictures and they are telling the story.
JK:	Oh right, that happens in your setting?
Linda:	Yes, it's nice and it just goes to show that having the week to read the book, they do remember it more and they enjoy it then because they are getting to tell the story themselves so they feel like the Teacher.
Dana:	When we have a large group we read a book as well and you would have the children who are doing the project saying 'that's my book, I have that book with my mammy'.
All Ps:	Yes.
Dana:	We have a thing called 'The child's favourite book' and each week a child gets a turn to bring in their favourite book. I thought it was wonderful though when you said it gives time for the mother and child together.
JK:	Yes, the bonding time.
Dana:	The bonding time, yes.

JK: It is important.   There was one thing that I learned when I was starting to study up on it because when we were doing this project it all had to be evidence based. In other words there is no point in running a project that hasn't been proven to work. So when I was doing the research, one of the things I learned that I didn't know before is, it's a big word, called decontextualized language. Basically decontextualized language is language other than….it's what we're doing here, it's talking about something that's not in front of us, so if I'm saying 'here's a cup, I'm having a cup of tea', that's not decontextualized language because it's in front of me. 'Here are my glasses and they are brown', but if I'm asking 'what do you think of the state of the economy?' and then we have a conversation about the state of the economy, that is decontextualized because it's not in front of us.

           All the research shows that small kids are good at contextualizing, 'mammy, may I have a cup of tea?' or 'I need to go to the toilet', but then if it comes to talking about 'what would you do if you weren't able to cross the road and there were no adults around?', that's much more difficult for a child to say 'well I probably would look around to see if there was anybody else there and if there wasn't then I would wait until somebody else was crossing'. That's decontextualized. What the research says is when a child is reading a book with a parent, that's full of decontextualized language because it's not the 'here and now', it's the pretend world of the story. That is the kind of language children need for school because when they go to school, they move into the symbolic. They move into talking about numbers, reading and writing is this 'mad' thing that happens at school, it's decontextualized as well.

           So that was definitely something that I learned just from starting the project, that the whole reason that story reading is so important for kids is because it is full of this decontextualized language that they need to have for their school life. So I thought that was very interesting.

All Ps: Yes.

JK: Dana you were saying that you picked up on a child saying, you see that tree there it was like Jack and the Beanstalk.

Dana: Yes, we were doing planting and he was asking 'oh is that going to grow real big like Jack and the Beanstalk?' We were putting seeds in for our planting time. I was saying to myself that it's amazing the way they make the connections.

JK: So what your child was doing then was, he had learned in the decontextualized experience of the book about Jack and the Beanstalk and then he was bringing it back into his own life again.

Dana: Yes.

JK: It's like the story I was telling at the induction workshop about my nephew. Do you remember I was saying he is mad about Postman Pat? Was I saying that at the last induction?

Ps:	No.

JK: My dad has a van, a red van that he transports his dogs in and my little nephew James saw him coming and he was thinking about Postman Pat and he said 'Here comes Grandad in his trusty red van'

All Ps: (laughing)

JK: That's a line straight out of Postman Pat, straight out of it!

Leah: I found now, and it was only from tips from yourself and watching the video for myself, large words that I would have came across in stories for children, I would bring them down to what they would understand. Now I ask them 'what does that mean?' and it's amazing some of the answers you get. As you said, with constant conversation with them, you will eventually get the answer from somebody. They will work it out between themselves at some stage.

I remember one day, I can't remember the story, but there was something like 'he was very ambitious' and I asked 'what does that mean?'

Ps: (laughing)

Leah: One of them said 'he's good' and they were asking 'is that what that means?' and somebody else said something else and then one of them said 'he's good at doing his job'.

Ps: Wow – it just shows you….

Leah: But the conversation between them all was amazing. What I was fascinated with as well was that they all stopped and thought about it, they didn't just jump in. If you ask a question like 'what are you getting from Santa?', they all shout 'I'm getting….' But we eventually worked it out between us.

Linda: That's brilliant.

Leah: So that was one thing that I came away with.

JK: That's a magic moment.

Leah: It is yes.

JK: When you actually see the kids minds working and going 'it could be this' or it 'could be that' because that is speculative thinking.

Leah: We have a book called 'Billy don't be a bully', and some of the girls were saying 'we don't like using that word bully' and I was saying just put it out there and see what comes back from them. They are eventually going to come across the word bully and by God were they able to tell her what a bully was!

Ps: Yes (agreeing).

Leah: She was a bit concerned thinking 'God I'm bringing this word in and I'm
            going to frighten them' and I said no, put it out there and see what happens.
            They came back and they knew exactly what it meant.

Ursula: Yes.

JK: So you were using the strategy of wondering with the kids.   'Ambitious, I'm
            not too sure what that means, it could be…', yes that's good.
            Anything else?

Ps: (quiet)

JK: I just love those moments.

Leah: I did and as I said, I would break that word down for them and say 'this is
            what it means'.

JK: Ok folks, will I move on to the next one? I have two more questions and one
            is just anything to do with your own development in relation to the project. I
            am not claiming that the story time project is this magical thing that suddenly
            changes people's lives but sometimes you get involved in something and it
            kind of makes you say I wouldn't mind trying a bit of that. So I'm just
            wondering, and it's fine if the answer is no, did it have any effect on you,
            personally or professionally. Now I know Dana you talk a lot about
            relationships and that's the next question because I think that's coming
            through very strongly from the questionnaires as well that it affected
            relationships but I just want you to think about yourself at the moment.

            You are probably very used to doing these kinds of projects, I don't know, so
            I'm just throwing it out there anyway.   Did it affect you in any way personally
            or professionally?

Ursula: I suppose the only thing I would say is that we have always had the parent's
            library there so they have been using it for a long time as a resource for
            themselves. But what you do see is the benefits to the parents. Some of the
            things that we are taking for granted, that we do very naturally and it's not
            until you sit back and think. The parents are taking out the books and they are
            using the library quite well but the story time project gives that extra benefit.
            The children are really getting that quality time with the story time and the
            parents are getting to see the real value of it.

Leah: Yes, we're not just telling them a fairy tale, we're not just reading a story with
            a happy ending.

JK: So it's the detail of it?

Ursula: Yes it's the detail and you know books are important, it's something as simple
            as that, and it's said so nicely, it's not preaching. Everybody knows that

reading with your child is going to be good but it kind of gives them the reasons why and the can see, and it's in a nice way. So it can add to the value. You know it's valuable and you know you're doing it all the time and the Teachers do it all the time but you added that extra richness to the parents' experience of it. What's lovely is that it is a way of connection with the parents, we work a lot, we're getting the parents in but also to see the joy in the parents from taking part. They see the value in it at the end and the pride in what is simply a piece of paper and they are so delighted that they have committed and you can see it. It's a very important part of it. Because it's a way of saying well yes you do spend your time doing it so it's nice.

Linda: Also the quality time that the parents are having with the child as well because even if it is just 10 minutes or 20 minutes, it is just them if it is just one child they have or however many they have. They just sit down and have their quality time with them just reading.

Ursula: The other thing is that there are so many children now with televisions in their rooms and DVDs. It's kind of scary in some ways so it kind of brings them back to the value of books. You won't go to sleep if the telly is on.

Leah: Yes, one parent said to me 'oh I won't get him to sit down for 10 minutes to read a story' so she was actually shocked. She said she could not believe that he was quiet happy. She said that she stuck rigidly to 10 minutes for the first week and I said to her that if he wanted to spend a bit more time with her to do it with him, I just said don't do it to the stage when you are going to….

Ursula: Give up..

Leah: Yes and she said she just couldn't believe that he actually calmed down and was so quiet. Every night he would get the story and they had a routine, after the story he brushed his teeth and went to bed. She said she couldn't believe he was falling into that routine as well.

Ursula: Yes, and it's lovely for parents to see the importance of routine and structure.

Linda: Yes, definitely.

JK: Yes and what the story time project does is it offers a structure to parents. I was talking to parents last week and they were saying to me that it was great because they said they would do the project that they felt that they had to do it because they committed themselves to it and that made them do it. Then when they were doing it, they realised that it was great but a few of them did say that when it was over they forgot all about it again but it was interesting that they said when they actually did it they saw the benefits of it.

             We are probably all the same in some ways. Unless you join something and decide that you are going to do it, you don't do it on your own, you need a structure.

I think all throughout our conversation today we have been talking about relationships. I think it was Dana or maybe Ursulasaid that a parent would come in and they would start talking about a project and then other subjects would come up.

Dana: Yes, you get a chance to talk to them about more stuff.

JK: Yes, so you really get an 'in' to the parent so to speak?

Leah: Well I have to say for me, I know this is probably nothing to do with this part, but I didn't even know Marino College was down there which was good for me because I didn't realise it was even there and it's actually a beautiful place. For me, to even see the way the story time works, I am going to try it with my own granddaughter, she's only a few weeks old but eventually I think it will be nice.

JK: Well it's never too early, you could just to stuff where you are literally just talking to her.

Leah: I have been talking to her, if I'm even putting her down to make the dinner, I'll be telling her 'I have to go and make the dinner now' and she's looking at me and I'm singing a song to her at the moment and she loves it. We are actually doing it in our group over there, it's about a turtle and I'm doing all the little things (making actions) with her and she's just staring at me as if to say 'is my nanny mad?'.

(All laughing)

JK: You know the way they go through a stage of nearly eating the books, you know those lovely cardboard ones with pictures of different animals and their mumbling away, that's the start of it, it's really important that they are doing that.

Leah: I'm after saying it to my daughter now and she's asked me to get her a book so that she can start reading it to the baby and every day I come home she asks me 'what song did you learn today mam because I want to teach it to the baby myself'.

Ursula: That's lovely.

Linda: I'm actually in my final year of college so I'm doing my dissertation next year and I didn't know what I wanted to do it on but I'm actually doing it on parental involvement, the strategies for parental involvement in early years. But your story time project initiative did actually encourage me to do that because it highlighted the importance of it and I just think it's brilliant. It's not until next semester that I will be doing it but I just think it's brilliant and like that I have learned new things as well on the importance of reading. I have a nine year old daughter as well and I want to encourage her to read, just from tips that I have learned from here, things that you wouldn't have known. You

know that it is good to read but all the tips of why it is good to read are brilliant.

Dana: And the different ways to read.

Linda: Yes, the different ways to do it.

JK: The best of luck to you, you're in your final year now are you?

Linda: Yes, I'm in fourth year.

JK: And working full time?

Linda: Yes, so it's tough, it's really tough now.

Leah: But it will be worth it in the end.

Ursula: It's so much to be working full time but to be studying as well, it's very hard.

Linda: It is, I have a couple of assignments due in and then my exams in January but next semester we won't have so much work on because we'll be just concentrating on our dissertation and doing interviews and things like that. So that's what I'm going to do it on because some places are small, around in Moatview we haven't got the space to have parent groups or coffee mornings or whatever, we don't have the space. But even to involve parents in things that they can do at home with their children, that they don't actually have to come in if you haven't got the space, it's just the fact that they are involved in something.

JK: So are you writing about the importance of a connection between Early Childhood Centres and parents or are you going to pick a particular thing.

Linda: Just the importance of parental involvement and how it benefits the children and then parents and some strategies that we could use to try to encourage them to do it more.

JK: Because it is empowering.

Linda: Yes, there is lots of research that says how important it is and the benefits of it.

Ursula: The other thing too is that sometimes we need to respect that we might be looking for parental involvement and when they don't we have to respect that the parents might be exhausted. It can be that they'll participate in something but in a different way. Maybe we have to allow for different ways for parents to do their bit.

Linda: Yes, that they can get involved in different ways.

Ursula: Not to make them feel that they're not doing it if they can't get involved, because if you are working full-time, have three children and have to get home to make a dinner.

(All chattering together – agreeing)

Linda: But even things like this that they can do at home, you are still involving them. They can come in the morning and just have a quick little chat about what they're doing if they want but then they are actually doing it at home. Just things like that.

JK: Well, best of luck with that.

Linda: Thanks.

JK: So overall you would think that there is some connection between you, you pick the parent don't you or do you issue a general invitation?

Ursula: No, you put it out for everybody.

JK: Yes, and then whoever comes along is it?

Ursula: Yes, whoever you can twist the arm of (laughing)!

Dana: Sometimes it is like that.

Ursula: I told you that one of the parents said to me 'Ursulayou're very good at getting the arms twisted but then we are glad afterwards'

Dana: Then you have some parents who just don't want to do it.

Ursula: Yes, they want their five minutes and I suppose that's the thing do – do you want your three hours peace and yes that's ok, you're allowed to do that too.

Dana: When I was asking parents some of them were throwing their eyes up to heaven when I was talking to them and sighing.

Ursula: There is a fear, some parents may have had a bad experience in school themselves or their own literacy mightn't be great and they can get embarrassed. They are asking 'now what does this entail, I'd be embarrassed', so until they get comfortable with it they are not quite sure what they are heading in to so you have to sell it.

JK: Would you say things like 'you don't have to be a super duper reader yourself' because they are the kinds of parents we are trying to get.

Dana: That is something that I have come across, one of the parents last year, barely tried to get involved and I actually didn't know, I found out after, she couldn't read or write and that's why she didn't do it.

Ursula:	Yes and there are a lot more of those than we think.

(All agree)

Leah:	Yes there are a lot more because we had a parent and you have to sign them in…
Ursula:	You can see the look of palpitation on their face..

Leah:	And this parent never signed in and one of our leaders was saying this is disgraceful blah blah and I said right. She must have went on about it because one day the parent came into me and said 'Leah would you mind signing me out' because I used to be saying to them if they were rushing, don't worry I'll sign them out and she asked (quiet tone) 'you wouldn't mind would you?' and I said 'not at all' and she had twins and she asked (quiet tone) 'would it be ok if you would sign them in, in the morning?' and I said 'not a problem', the penny just dropped!

Ursula:	You have to be aware.

Leah:	You do.

Ursula:	Actually there was another parent who didn't get involved, not with this project now but with the parent library. Basically there is a little rota when we introduce it first, just to be there for 15 minutes or something, and I was looking for volunteers, twisting a few arms as I do, but this poor woman came to me and she was very embarrassed, like that, coming in (quiet tone) 'Now I could do that library but…' and she got very embarrassed…..'it's just that I'm spending all my money on the clothes for the children and I'm really embarrassed' and sure you forget. Who's thinking it? I never thought it, but she was thinking it.

Dana:	Yes, 'I'm not that bit glamorous or I'm not….'

Ursula:	Yes and I just said to her 'don't be worrying nobody has to do it'.

JK:	So she felt she wouldn't be glamorous enough to come in to the library.

Ursula:	Yes, she was in her tracksuit and telling me money is tight because she is putting the money into minding the children, the children are immaculate.

Leah:	Yes, she just didn't feel presentable.

Ursula:	Exactly, she felt 'if I was standing out there for 15 minutes' because I would be telling them to 'sell it', you would think the literacy was an issue, but she was embarrassed about how she would look.

JK:	Would you say things like 'you don't have to get dolled up to come to this thing', that it's not formal?

Ursula: Yes. I would always say it's only a bit of fun and you're reading stories and you are only committing to doing it four or five times and you're selling it. You only have to do a few minutes and it's lovely, you meet other women that are going to be there, and the tea and cakes, gorgeous cakes!

(all laughing)

You know you are selling it so you are telling them that everything is lovely. But once they do it, they feel special. It is lovely that it's in Marino too, because, as you say, it's different. You're going out of your environment and to a special place.

Leah: Yes it's lovely.

JK: Would they have that sense of…. because you were saying a lot of them would have had difficulties in school themselves, they are going into a third level, they are going into a college…is that significant for them do you think?

Ursula: I think when they go first they don't know where they're going. I think they think Marino is like Fairview Tech.

Leah: I had to even explain to them that I didn't know where it was. I was even saying when I came here 'I didn't know it even existed, this is lovely'.

Linda: It's good to have them in the college as well to see, some of them bring their kids or their babies and they have the opportunity to do that as well.

JK: That's fine. You know at the beginning when I say 'this is a college of education and what we do is train students to become Teachers here', that's probably big news to them then is it?

All Ps: Yes.

Dana: A lot of them said to me that they thought that was really interesting.

Linda: And the fact that they were in a big college like that.

JK: Can I just go back to one of the things you were saying about parents who can't, or who have difficulty reading and that we mightn't be able to reach out to them, what if we included a book on it that had no words, one that was just a picture book? If they came into Marino we would talk about how the would talk about a book without necessarily reading. There are several books out there which are just full of pictures. You can see obviously by looking at it yourself what the story is about. There's a story about a child moving house and you can see them, their moving van is on page one and then page two is about them driving along on the countryside and page three is about them arriving at the new place so it's very easy to make up….

Leah: To make up the story.

Dana: Yes, so they wouldn't be worried about not seeing the words.

JK: Now there's a bit of a disadvantage to that as well because if you are a reader, you have a comfort in words. So if I'm reading a story, if I had a picture book I'd be thinking 'oh God now I have to make it up'.

Ursula: Do you know the book 'Bears in the night'? Dr Seuss, 'Bears in the night'?

Leah: I've heard of it yes.

Ursula: It's kind of very simple. In bed, out of bed, to the window, at the window, down the window but the graphics are something else. You can just see it.

Ps: Yes.

Ursula: If you had very simple words and very exciting. It's so exciting just through the visuals.

Dana: When I'm reading a book in the class, I have to hold it up, the children have to see, I have to go through all the pictures with them so I think that would be great as well.

JK: So to use a picture book maybe?

Dana: Yes.

Leah: If parents do have that issue or they can't read, they would probably be used to making up stories if the children did want to read a book. They are probably used to making up stories because that's what they've always done so it won't be as difficult for them.

Ursula: It goes back to the value of the fairy tales, who doesn't know Goldilocks, The Three Little Pigs, Red Riding Hood.

JK: That's exactly why I have kept the fairy tales. Now I know a lot of people don't have the books…

Ursula: It's the versions though.

JK: Yes it's the versions. I didn't want to go into versions then that had a lot of language in them because I was afraid I would alienate those parents.

Ursula: The funny thing is thought, if they were those books, as you said, it could get over those if you were following the pictures, because everybody knows The Three Little Pigs.

Linda: So it's easier for them.

Ursula: No matter how much language, it's interesting, I'm doing a little bit of research on the fairy tales at the moment, the kids are even loving the different

versions, does he eat the pigs in this one? He doesn't eat the pigs in this one! They love it. Even the staff ask 'did he eat the pigs when you told it or did he not?'

(all laughing)

Ursula: One book has it that he eats them, then the next one has it that the wolf's stomach gets bigger. The whole thing for the parents getting involved in that was great, asking each other, 'when you were reading it which one did you have? Did he eat them or not?

            So there have been lovely ways on every level, for the children, for the staff, for the parents, to look at and remember.

All Ps: Yes.

JK: Ok folks, I don't want to be keeping you too long. We have chatted for about an hour now and I just want to summarise what's been said. We talked about our experience of running the project and how it worked. We talked a lot about the parents and how our relationship with parents deepened. We talked about magic moments, Leah you had a lovely magic moment with 'ambitious' where maybe one of the strategies worked.
            We talked a bit about our personal and professional development and you might have got an idea from the story time project to bring in to your own dissertation you were saying Linda. Then we talked a bit about the books and just how using the books draws the parents in and having an opportunity to talk about other things and to talk about the books so there is kind of a common topic between parents, staff and also with the kids as well.
            We also talked about that lovely moment you had when you decided to video tape the children and how parents became very enthused about the project when you did the video tape with them, Ursula, and that they wanted to go home then and practice it when they saw how absorbed the kids were in the video.

            Is there anything I have left out? Does that generally summarise what we've been talking about?

Ps: Yes – I think so.

JK: Is there anything anyone would like to add or anything you felt 'I'm definitely going to say this when I'm in there' and then you didn't get a chance to say it? Is there anything at all that was on your mind and you thought 'I must mention that when I go in'?

Ursula: It's only me and I've said it 150 times, the versions of those fairy tales, can we just get an answer (laughing)?

JK: We are going to change the version of the fairy tales.

Is there anything else? Is there anything else that we at the story time project can do, Leah you mentioned something very important much earlier about the difficulty in parents getting to Marino and I can go back and see if there is a little bit of funding, if I was able to say we can pay for a taxi for you to come in for the induction and the graduation, I don't know if that will be possible.

Leah: Yes I know, I understand that perfectly, it was just one issue that did come up.

JK: Ok well that's one thing that we can take back and consider.

Folks, thank you so much. It's been so valuable and all I can say is that this will all be put into the mix and hopefully we'll get a better project out of it.

It's very enriching for me I have to say and I think Jocelyn will feel the same.

Jocelyn: Oh God yes.

JK: What it is affording for me is developing relationships with you and that's very important. I do the 'other job' as they say, as well, and I might only see you twice a year. I know your face but I'm asking 'who are you again?' but coming to chat you helps me get to know you and that's really good. It's really beneficial for everything, for us and for the project as well so I just really want to thank you from the bottom of my heart really for giving me your time, I deeply appreciate it so thanks very much.

Ursula: And I think that's a lovely piece too because part of our work is making the transition from early years to primary school which is a huge transition for children, making those connections and working with School Liaison Teachers so it's lovely that we are in a project where the two groups meet because we're both early educators and you need to evaluate each other's work and sometimes those experiences aren't always available so it's a lovely opportunity for that.

Ps: (all agree)

JK: Sorry now, I'm just going to prolong you there, is it just putting a face on the names in the schools or do you get to have a chat or is it when your kids are moving on in to school you can say 'oh I know you from…'

Ursula: Well I think we were all involved in the transition to school project as well so we're doing that but you also have faces now so when you go to the story time project now maybe you know the School Liasion, I'd know this school, this school, this school but I wouldn't know that school and I find that we're in an area where they could be six or seven schools that the kids are going to but you'll know the three or four main ones and maybe you have a child going in there so it's good to have that face.

JK: Also if you have a parent who has a child that's moving into school and they have done the story time project, I don't know if it could happen but if you

were able to say to the Home School Liaison, 'do you remember that parent..'.
I don't know if informal introductions happen.

Ursula: Well I met a parent that did it in ours and then was doing it in National School
so that shows you how much she was enjoying it! She was doing it a second
time.

Dana: Yes, we were the same, we had a parent and then she went and did it again in
Brigid's.

JK: In Killester?

Dana: Yes.

JK: That's brilliant.

           Ok I'm going to turn off the tape folks, thanks a million.

END

Appendix W: Utility Standards

Utility Standards (Yarbrough, Shulha, Hopson & Caruthers, 2011, p.3-65).				
Name of standard	**Description of standard**	**Implementation of utility standards**		**Comment by evaluator on evaluator credibility (U1)**
		Recommendations for implementing U1	**Evaluator's comment on implementing U1**	
U1 Evaluator Credibility	Evaluations should be conducted by qualified people who establish and maintain credibility in the evaluation context.	1. Credentials such as qualifications	Conducting the evaluation as part of ED.D qualification.	Stakeholders' trust and confidence in the evaluator is high because of relationships built up between stakeholders over a three year period before the evaluation of the project began. Relationships are non-hierarchical, professional and reciprocal and educators work together in the model of a community of practice. Clarity, fairness, transparency and disclosure (standards P4 &P5) have been established through consultation and regular feedback at induction and graduation ceremonies and
		2. Become an active member in a community of practice	Evaluator is an active member in a community of practice with evaluation stakeholders	
		3. Stay current with research that informs evaluation	Actively involved in evaluation research as part of ED.D qualification.	
		4. Include a statement in proposals and reports describing qualifications and experience as an evaluator.	Not experienced as an evaluator but supervised as part of the doctoral supervision process.	
		5. In large-scale evaluations, clarify role of various evaluators	NA	
		6. Have the evaluation plan reviewed by another evaluator whose credentials are acceptable to the client	The actions of the evaluator were supervised as part of the doctoral supervision process.	

		7. Build good working relationships and listen, observe and clarify.	Huge effort was invested in this not only during the evaluation but in the years before the evaluation was conducted. See comment by evaluator.	at the educators' CPD workshop.
		8. Learn about and remain sensitive to cultural norms so that you are aware and respectful of stakeholders' perspectives, daily rhythms and duties	The evaluator is a former primary school teacher with extensive classroom experience. She is also research-informed in relation to the lives and perspectives of other stakeholders in the evaluation.	
		9. Keep evaluation moving forward while maintaining sensitivity to stakeholders' concerns. Enthusiasm and sustained effort establishes and maintains credible interactions.	Evaluation was carried through to a conclusion.	
		10. Become methodologically versatile and match methods to questions rather than restricting the evaluation to a limited methodological comfort zone.	A Mixed Methods (pragmatic) approach was used. Children were included in the evaluation and represented their opinions through drawings as well as participating in a focus group.	
U2 Attention to stakeholders	Evaluations should devote attention to the full range of individuals and groups invested in the program and affected by its	**Recommendations for implementing U2**	**Evaluator's comment on implementing U2**	**Comment by evaluator on attention to stakeholders (U2).**
		1. Attend to stakeholders in ways that are sensitive to organisational and cultural	EC practitioners' focus group was held at a venue familiar and convenient for them (The Northside	"Stakeholders who feel respected by the process and who can identify with

evaluation	norms	Partnership office board-room). Refreshments were provided and as it was close to Christmas, the evaluator gave some gifts to focus group participants after the focus group was completed. Matters such as EC practitioners' relationships with teachers and EC practitioners' professional development were approached with sensitivity and were discussed without difficulty. Parents were interviewed at venues of their choice, usually their local school.	the information and methods used in the evaluation are more likely to invest in evaluation activities and ultimately use the processes and findings" (Yarbrough, Shulha, Hopson & Caruthers, 2011, p.24). This was kept in mind at all times when working with various stakeholders.
	2. Let the processes supporting the determination of the evaluation purposes help identify stakeholders.	All project stakeholder groups (parents, children, HSCL teachers, EC practitioners, Dublin City library and Northside Partnership) were consulted in the evaluation through a mixed methods approach.	
	3. Develop strategies for probing the programme context for important and less visible stakeholders. Focus on individuals or groups who may be directly or indirectly affected by the evaluation and its findings	Programme context continually explored during professional development workshops with educators, meetings with Northside Partnership, and Dublin City Library and also at induction and graduation ceremonies for project participants. Parents and children are central to the project and the evaluation. Not sure if there are stakeholder groups that are 'less visible'.	

		4. Consider groups or communities whose perspectives are typically excluded because they are perceived as having only "special interests".	The project and the evaluation focuses on parents who are marginalised due to socio-economic factors. The group includes people who might be further marginalised due to ethnicity.	
		5. Create conditions for stakeholder engagement that are safe, comfortable and contribute to authentic participation.	Parents who participated in the evaluation chose the venue. All parents chose to be interviewed in a private space in their children's school. Refreshments were provided at all meetings and an informal interviewing style was used. EC practitioners' focus group was held at a venue familiar and convenient for them (The Northside Partnership office board-room). Refreshments were provided and as it was close to Christmas, the evaluator gave some gifts to focus group participants after the focus group was completed.	
U3 Negotiated Purposes	Evaluation purposes should be identified and continually negotiated based on the needs of stakeholders.	**Recommendations for implementing U3**	**Evaluator's comment on implementing U3**	**Comment by evaluator on attention to stakeholders (U3).**
		1. Differentiate wants from needs and be clear about the priorities for addressing specific needs.	Data from the evaluation revealed project needs and they will be prioritised for implementation. Project director will make a	Evaluation purposes were clearly identified based on the stated aims of the project and the needs of

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				distinction between 'wants' and 'needs' and will then bring proposals to stakeholders for ratification.	stakeholders as identified through feedback from parents at graduation and educators from CPD workshops. The evaluation purposes were not negotiated beyond this.
			2. Probe even the most explicitly stated purposes for the evaluation to be sure that the most important purposes have been named and clarified.	The purposes of The Storytime Project are clear and well considered. This makes the purposes of the evaluation clear.	
			3. Help stakeholders develop ways to talk about evaluation and develop with stakeholders a shared understanding of the evaluation language necessary for negotiating purposes, such as the distinction between formative and summative uses of evaluation.	The language of evaluation has not been formally shared. In fact the language of evaluation has been eschewed in favour of descriptions of the evaluation in 'layman's' terms. Stakeholders are aware, however, that a summative evaluation has not taken place because discussions took place at the planning stage about how children's improvement in the area of oral language could be measured and whether this was viable at present.	
			4. Before or during early stages of the negotiation of evaluation purposes, clarify the nature of evaluation work using tools such as needs assessments, program descriptions, logic models and evaluability	A program description was written by the project director, a logic model (Rossi, Lipsey & Freeman, 2004) was used and instruments to evaluate were as follows: questionnaire, focus groups, diary analysis, individual interviews, children's drawings, feedback from	

			Evaluator's comment	
			parents during various iterations of the project.	
		5. Clarify any ambivalence that may exist about reasons for conducting the evaluation.	No ambivalence in evidence. Stakeholders were in favour of the evaluation and supportive of it.	
		6. Look for the expression of competing evaluation purposes among stakeholder groups and help to prioritise these purposes.	My rationale for a process evaluation was shared with stakeholder groups and they agreed that a process evaluation was worthwhile for now, but an impact evaluation should be planned for the future. There were no dissenting voices.	
		7. Help stakeholders understand the feasibility and value of addressing specific evaluation purposes at specific times in the program life cycle.	This was done at a CPD meeting for educators and again at a meeting with parents in early 2013 by the project director. An internal process evaluation was considered feasible and worthwhile by stakeholders.	
		8. Communicate the purposes and goals of the evaluation and the needs these purposes are intended to serve in ways that are understandable and meaningful to all stakeholders.	This was done at a CPD meeting for educators and again at a meeting with parents in early 2013 by the project director.	
U4 Explicit Values	Evaluations should clarify and specify the individual and	**Recommendations for implementing U4**	**Evaluator's comment on implementing U4**	**Comment by evaluator on attention to stakeholders (U4).**

		cultural values underpinning purposes, processes, and judgments.	1. Learn what stakeholders value about the program, how strongly these values are held and the degree to which these values converge or conflict.	What stakeholders value about the program has always been clear since the project began in 2010. Feedback from parents was carefully read, analysed and stored and used to bring about project changes. Parents value the time and structure the program gives them to spend with their children reading. They value the books, the strategies modelled and the tip-sheets with prompts. This internal process evaluation study will give an opportunity to glean more information and richer information.	The evaluation is informed by socio-cultural theory which argues that human learning is a social process and that it is influenced by culture. The theory manifests itself in practice during the conduct of the evaluation by including all stakeholders in the evaluation process; using mostly qualitiative methods that allowed for rich description of contexts and interactivity (e.g. focus groups) as a means to gather data. Participants chose the time and venue for their individual interviews and the focus group venues were decided to suit the majority of participants. Great care was taken to use clear, unambiguous language in all interactions; to explain processes clearly and to ensure that participants knew that they could withdraw from the evaluation process at any time.
			2. Reflect on the implementation of specific, strongly held values for evaluation processes and activities	The evaluator continually reflected on evaluation processes to ensure that values such as inclusivity and respect were upheld.	
			3. Facilitate opportunities for individuals and groups to come together to examine evaluation plans. Bring together those program participants who are normally	Evaluation plans were not shared with stakeholders. Stakeholders agreed that an evaluation would take place but they were not involved in the planning. They participated in the evaluation.	
			4. Remain sensitive to body language and tone of voice. The ability of evaluation participants to communicate their values	As an evaluator I am sensitive to body language and tone of voice. I trained as a professional actor and that training made me keenly aware of the multiple ways that	

		is, in part, a function of their experience in making their needs and preferences explicit.	communication takes place.	
		5. Respect the contributions of stakeholders regardless of their status within the program structure. An evaluator who attends to all involved stakeholders makes it clear that examining the values at work in the program context is important regardless of who is expressing them.	An attitude of egalitarianism and respect for others pervades The Storytime Project. A comprehensive photograph exhibition is mounted for each iteration of the project. The induction room is decorated to look inviting and refreshments are served to all participants. The same CPD is delivered to educators, mixing graduates of degree programmes with non-graduates.	
U5 Relevant Information	Evaluation information should serve the identified and emergent needs of stakeholders.	**Recommendations for implementing U5**	**Evaluator's comment on implementing U5**	**Comment by evaluator on attention to stakeholders (U5).**
		1. Keep the selection of information bounded by the evaluation purposes and the stakeholders focused on the specific questions but be open to renegotiation as needed.	This was not always achievable with focus groups where the evaluator is 'hands off' and in the individual interviews which were semi-structured. Some rich data was collected when participants went off topic but equally data pertinent to the evaluation was not collected. E.g precise details of the nature of parent-child interactions are scant.	Valuable information was gathered during the evaluation process but gaps were also identified after the process was completed. For example, there was insufficient detailed description of the interactions that took place between parent and child.
		2. Remain open to unexpected but pertinent sources of	The evaluator was open to unexpected but pertinent sources of	

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		information from a variety of sources.	information and gathered rich data about unexpected matters, e.g. the effect of the project on siblings of participants, the effect the project had in improving children's sleep routines and the conquering of fear of public spaces such as the library.	
		3. Remain sensitive to the fit between evaluation data and emergent evaluation purposes. Review and make changes as needed.	The programme was evolving even as the evaluation was being conducted. Changes were implemented based on feedback from parents at graduation ceremonies	
		4. Be prepared to focus on issues where there is the greatest need for information and on the information with the highest relevance	Unsure if the evaluator wholly succeeded in this regard.	
		5 Retain responsibility for the usefulness of information used in the evaluation. The quality and relevance of information must be assessed with vigilance.	Responsibility retained by evaluator who is also director of the project evaluated.	
U6 Meaningful Processes and Products	Evaluations should construct activities, descriptions, and judgments in ways	**Recommendations for implementing U6**	**Evaluator's comment on implementing U6**	**Comment by evaluator on attention to stakeholders (U6).**
		1. Know the stakeholders, know what they do in the program and what they contribute.	The programme director knows all stakeholders except parent participants very well. The educators involved in the	

	that encourage participants to rediscover, reinterpret, or revise their understandings and behaviors.		programme know the parent participants.	
		2. Implement processes that are worth the investment of time and resources needed to support them.	The programme structure took a lot of time and thought. It is still being tweaked according to emerging needs	
		3. Adapt essential processes and products in ways that address diverse stakeholders' needs while not compromising the primary purposes of the evaluation.	This is continually being attempted. It is sometimes difficult to address stakeholders' needs without compromising the evaluation (e.g. see the debate about providing more books for parents and children)	
		4. Regularly revisit stakeholders' evaluation needs and expectations. Doing so engages stakeholders in meaningful ways, thus enhancing opportunities for evaluation use.	Every time that feedback is provided by parents, it is typed up and put into presentation format. It is then shared at the PD workshop with educators and decisions are made there about changes to be implemented. Book titles are regularly changed based on feedback from parents, for example. So too does the modus operandi around distributing and collecting books as well as arrangements for going to the library. This feedback documentation formed part of the data used in the evaluation.	
U7 Timely and Appropriate	Evaluations should attend to the	**Recommendations for implementing U7**	**Evaluator's comment on implementing U7**	**Comment by evaluator on attention to stakeholders**

Communicating and Reporting	continuing information needs of their multiple audiences.			(U7).
		1. Be sensitive to the contextual and cultural patterns that shape both when and how information is shared.	Interviewees chose their own meeting venues, teachers and ECE practitioners were in separate focus groups, children were given opportunity to express their feelings about the project through drawings.	The evaluator continued the good communication practice used in the project into the evaluation. Both formal and informal communication was practised. The evaluator is still in the process of mediating findings to stakeholders and groups of stakeholders are making decisions on changes to be made based on the findings. Some changes have already been implemented, e.g. book choices and book numbers; more emphasis on strategies and decontextualised language at induction.
		2. When possible, embed communication and reporting into existing program structures through such mechanisms as bulletin boards, intranet lists, and meeting agendas but avoid so much information that everything is ignored.	During the operation of the project, communications are very structured. The director of the project communicates with the Northside Partnership executive,The Northside Partnership executive is responsible for all communications with educators and educators communicate with parents. For the evaluation, all communications were initiated and conducted by the evaluator, except when some HSCL teachers recruited parents for interview and focus groups. who is also director of the project. Therefore, existing programme structures were not used for the conduct of the evaluation.	
		3. Supplement formal with informal and interactive communications as part of a carefully designed communications plan.	This happens during the project. Important information is given formally and is concise and clear. The tone of the workshops is informal. During the evaluation	

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			process, structural and procedural matters are dealt with formally but interactions between people in interviews, focus groups and feedback sessions are informal.	
		4. Be sensitive to the broader social implications of the evaluation by planning when and how to interact with community members, social networks and the media.	Stakeholders will be invited to a seminar /social occasion where findings will be shared and discussed.	
		5. Plan time for explaining technical language in reports, for follow-up discussions and activities and for help in interpreting findings.	A meeting has already been held between the project director, Dublin City Library and the Northside Partnership. (June 2016) Another meeting was held to mediate findings to the educators involved in the programme (October 5th, 2016).	
		6. Make written reports functional and responsive to decision makers' needs for relevant evaluation information without over-whelming them.	This will be done in time. To date, reporting to stakeholders has happened through meetings using power-point presentations and one-pager handouts.	
U8 Concern for Consequences and Influence	Evaluations should promote responsible and adaptive use while guarding against	**Recommendations for implementing U8**	**Evaluator's comment on implementing U8**	**Comment by evaluator on attention to stakeholders (U8).**
		1. Identify both formal and informal communication	Email is used to communicate between project director and	

	unintended negative consequences and misuse.	mechanisms that connect stakeholders, so that individuals, groups, and organisations can integrate and channel their learning along established pathways of influence.	stakeholders. The telephone is also used. Educators tend to text parents with information and arrangements. They also make telephone calls. Educators have their own network too which, I think is a Whatsap group.	
		2. Assess formally and informally the consequences of evaluation activities for stakeholders as soon as possible after they are completed.	Some changes wrought by the evaluation will mean more contact between educators and parents. Although it will mean more time commitment for the educators, it is not extensive – once a week for five weeks.	
		3. Be assertive and appropriately engage stakeholders who appear to be sabotaging the evaluation. At times the personal and political agendas of stakeholders may run counter to the purposes of the program and the evaluation.	There were no efforts to sabotage the evaluation to the knowledge of the evaluator. The only issue of concern is that some educators who are new to the project have failed to turn up for CPD sessions about the programme and get the information second-hand from other educators who attend. There is a concern that they will treat the project like a generic story-reading programme and that they will not understand the specifics of The Storytime Project. The programme director will consider suggesting that participation in the programme is contingent on attending the CPD	

			workshop. This has to be discussed with other stakeholders.	
		4. Selectively revisit previous evaluation sites for evidence of linkage between the evaluation and subsequent policies or practices	This was partly done as part of the evaluation process whereby the evolution of the programme from inception was charted.	

Adapted from Yarbrough, Shulha, Hopson & Caruthers, 2011, pp 15-65

Strategies to support your child's language development

1.	**Setting the scene**	E.g. I wonder what this is about …. Look at author, illustrator…..
2.	**Checking the child is 'with you'.**	E.g. It's a beautiful blue sky and there are no cl----.
3.	**Connecting to life experience**	E.g. There's a cat. Do you have a cat?
4.	**Connecting picture to text.**	E.g. It says "the clown was unhappy". There he is in the picture looking a bit sad all right….
5.	**Eliciting comments by questions, especially open-ended questions**	E.g. I wonder…….
6.	**Discussing new words, phrases**	E.g. He's pulling my leg – what does that mean? Another word for 'fib'?
7.	**Supporting, echoing, sustaining**	E.g. You're dead right! Oh, I see, and did he ……?
8.	**Listen to what your child says and build on that. Elaborate.**	E.g.You think there might be a dinosaur in the story as well? Mmm. There could be. Why do you think that?
9.	**Pause to allow your child to offer a comment.**	……………………………………………
10.	**Recasting**	E.g. Child: He thrun the ball Adult: Did he? He threw the ball?
11.	**Revoicing /Checking / Clarifying**	E.g. I see…Let's see if I understand what you're saying…do you mean…?
12.	**Repeating what your child says**	Did the wolf die in the end? I think he might have. Let's see if there are any hints in the pictures.
13.	**Re-read the story**	
14.	**Child re-tells the story**	
15.	**Summarising**	E.g. So far Goldilocks has broken the chairs, eaten the porridge, slept in the beds……
16.	**Predicting**	E.g. I wonder what will happen?
17.	**Speculating***	E.g. I wonder if the wolf will become a good wolf. He might change and turn into a kitten…
18.	**Make inferences/deducing/finding clues in the story to get answers***	E.g. Mmmm – he's getting red in the face there – he must be feeling annoyed or embarrassed or maybe he's just hot…
19.	**Projecting**	E.g. What would you do if you were Red Riding Hood?
20.	**Informing, explaining**	E.g. A pumpkin? It's a vegetable. You can eat it. It's round and orange. It grows in the ground.
21.	**Put on special voices for different characters**	
22.	**Thinking out loud**	
23.	**Draw attention to 'reading' by tracking**	E.g. Those are the words. Will I read what it says?

*The difference between speculation and making an inference is – Making an inference is drawing a conclusion from something that might be true (e.g. The roads are very icy this morning in town and the roads are closed so we'll probably have a day off school); whereas speculation could be a wild claim, not based on anything true (e.g. I wonder why Mom is home early – she might have won the lotto).

Appendix Y: The Program Evaluation Standards

(Yarbrough, Shulha, Hopson & Caruthers, 2011)

Summary of the Standards

Utility Standards

Standard	Description of standard	Comment by evaluator
Ul Evaluator Credibility	*Evaluations should be conducted by qualified people who establish and maintain credibility in the evaluation context.*	Not experienced as an evaluator but supervised as part of doctoral supervision process. Stakeholders' trust and confidence in the evaluator is high because of relationships built up between stakeholders over a three year period. Relationships are non-hierarchical, professional and reciprocal and educators work together in the model of a community of practice. Clarity, fairness, transparency and disclosure (standards P4 &P5) have been established through consultation and regular feedback at induction and graduation ceremonies and at the educators' CPD workshop.
U2 Attention to Stakeholders	*Evaluations should devote attention to the full range of individuals and groups invested in the program and affected by its evaluation.*	All project stakeholder groups (parents, children, HSCL teachers, EC practitioners, Dublin City library and Northside Partnership) were consulted in the evaluation through a mixed methods approach.
U3 Negotiated Purposes	*Evaluation purposes should be identified and continually negotiated based on the needs of stakeholders.*	
U4 Explicit Values	*Evaluations should clarify and specify the individual and cultural values underpinning purposes, processes, and judgments.*	
U5 Relevant Information	*Evaluation information should serve the identified and emergent needs of stakeholders.*	

Standard	Description of standard	Comment by evaluator
U6 Meaningful Processes and Products	*Evaluations should construct activities, descriptions, and judgments in ways that encourage participants to rediscover, reinterpret, or revise their understandings and behaviors.*	
U7 Timely and Appropriate Communicating and Reporting	*Evaluations should attend to the continuing information needs of their multiple audiences.*	
U8 Concern for Consequences and Influence	*Evaluations should promote responsible and adaptive use while guarding against unintended negative consequences and misuse.*	

Feasibility Standards

Standard	Description of standard	Comment by evaluator
F1 Project Management	*Evaluations should use effective project management strategies.*	
F2 Practical Procedures	*Evaluation procedures should be practical and responsive to the way the program operates.*	
F3 Contextual Viability	*Evaluations should recognize, monitor and balance the cultural and political interests and needs of individuals and groups.*	
F4 Resource Use	*Evaluations should use resources effectively and efficiently.*	

Propriety Standards

Standard	Description of standard	Comment by evaluator
PI Responsive and Inclusive Orientation	*Evaluations should be responsive to stakeholders and their communities.*	
P2 Formal Agreements	*Evaluations agreements should be negotiated to make obligations explicit and take into account the needs, expectations, and cultural contexts of clients and other stakeholders.*	
P3 Human Rights and Respect	*Evaluations should be designed and conducted to protest human and legal rights and maintain the dignity of participants and other stakeholders.*	
P4 Clarity and Fairness	*Evaluations should be understandable and fair in addressing stakeholder needs and purposes.*	
P5 Transparency and Disclosure	*Evaluations should provide complete descriptions of findings, limitations, and conclusions to all stakeholders, unless doing so would violate legal and*	

	propriety obligations.	
P6 Conflicts of Interests	*Evaluations should openly and honestly identify and address real or perceived conflicts of interests that may compromise the evaluation.*	
P7 Fiscal Responsibility	*Evaluations should account for all expended resources and comply with sound fiscal procedures and processes.*	

Accuracy Standards

A1 Justified Conclusions and Decisions	*Evaluation conclusions and decisions should be explicitly justified in the cultures and contexts where they have consequences*	
A2 Valid Information	*Evaluation information should serve the intended purposes and support valid interpretations.*	
A3 Reliable Information	*Evaluation procedures should yield sufficiently dependable and consistent information for the intended uses. .*	
A4 Explicit Program and Context Descriptions	*Evaluations should document programs and their contexts with appropriate detail and scope for the evaluation purposes.*	
A5 Information Management	*Evaluations should employ systematic information collection, review, verification, and storage methods.*	
A6 Sound Designs and Analyses	*Evaluations should employ technically adequate designs and analyses that are appropriate for the evaluation purposes.*	
A7 Explicit Evaluation Reasoning	*Evaluation reasoning leading from information and analyses to findings interpretations, conclusions and judgments should be clearly and completely documented.*	
A8 Communication and Reporting	*Evaluation communications should have adequate scope and guard against misconceptions, biases, distortions and errors.*	

Evaluation Accountability Standards

El Evaluation Documentation	*Evaluations should fully document their negotiated purposes and implemented designs, procedures data and outcomes.*	
E2 Internal Metaevaluation	*Evaluators should use these and other applicable standards to examine the accountability of' the evaluation design, procedures employed, information collected, and outcomes.*	

E3 External Metaevaluation	*Program evaluation sponsors, clients, evaluators, and other stakeholders should encourage the conduct of external metaevaluations using these and other applicable standards.*	

Appendix Z: Prevention and Early Intervention Network – Research

Name of project	Focus	Is it dialogic?
Triple P Research Longford/ Westmeath	Parenting project	NA
Odyssey – Parenting your teen (Northern Ireland)	Parenting teenagers	NA
Childhood Development Initiative (CDI) Tallaght 8 projects, one with a focus on literacy – Doodle Den	Doodle Den is an after school literacy project for 5-6 year olds. Based on the Balanced Literacy framework. The programme involves 90 minute sessions, three times a week, after school, for 32 weeks over a school year. Each session covers key literacy learning objectives that are taught through games, arts and crafts activities, drama and PE (Rafferty & Colgan, 2013).	NA
Archways Incredible Years parenting programme	Programme on social and emotional behaviour	NA
CDI - Early Years Service - Tallaght	2 year service for pre-school children. Focuses on children's well-being, developing positive dispositons .	NA
CDI – Healthy Schools programme	Improving children's health and well-being.	NA
CDI- Mate Tricks programme	For 9-10 year old children. Aims to reduce anti-social behaviour and build self-esteem.	NA
CDI – Early Intervention Speech and Language therapy service	Speech and language therapy for 2-4 year olds	NA
Rialto learning community Out-of -school time	The Rialto Learning Community Out of School Time (OST) supports 11–14 year olds to better manage the transition from primary to secondary education.	NA
Centre for Effective Services (CES).	Based in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Tries to influence government policy in relation to services for children, young people and the community. Works on projects to influence policy and systemic change.	NA
Archways Incredible Years Classroom Management	Classroom Management for children 4-7 years.	NA
Preparing for Life (PFL) Preparing for Life research	Preparing for Life (PFL) is a home-visiting mentor support service working with families and children in North Dublin. They provide parents with one to one support on child development and parenting from pregnancy so that parents can help their children be ready for school and achieve their potential.	NA
Young Ballymun	Literacy initiative using a shared reading initiative called *The*	Incredible

Write Minded Project	*Incredible Book Club*. Parents also make story sacks to help mediate stories to their children and they attend a breakfast club called *Breakfast Buddies* bi-monthly for 90 minutes where they learn literacy activities so that they can help their children (3-12 year olds) with reading , writing and oral language work that they do in school.	book club is similar to dialogic story-reading.
Young Ballymun Mental Health	Mental Health initiative for 12-22 year olds.	NA
Young Ballymun Literacivic project	"Literacivic is a bursary scheme to support groups with unique ideas, events or actions that contribute to learning and wellbeing in Ballymun and that demonstrate civic literacy. By civic literacy, we mean our ability to understand our world at every level; our capacity to shape and influence the systems that govern our lives; and the communication and celebration of our stories" (http://www.pein.ie/research/young-ballymun-literacivic-project).	NA
National Early Years Access Initiative (NEYAI)	Improving early years' services for 0-6 year olds. Oral language initiatives focus on The Hanen project, a speech therapy initiative.	NA
Young Ballymun 3>4>5 learning years	This service provides active training, mentoring and coaching for the implementation of Síolta quality standards and High Scope curriculum in early years' services in Ballymun.	NA
Young Ballymun Incredible Years	Builds children's socio-emotional competence through a school-based initiative. Involves parents, children and teachers.	NA
Young Ballymun Ready Steady Grow	Pre-natal, infant and toddler parent support service	NA
MCI initiative	Set up to support those affected by domestic abuse.	NA
Lifestart Foundation Research	Child parenting programme and home-visitation service for parents with children (0-5 years). It helps parents to support the child's physical, intellectual, emotional and social development and promote 'school readiness'. Increases parenting skills and competence, and aims to improve outcomes for children (http://www.pein.ie/research/life-start-foundation-research).	NA

Appendix AA: Additional Data (Feedback from graduation ceremony, June 2012).

Re-reading, repetition and telling back the story

Alfie gets in First – really enjoyed this story my son wanted me to **read it over and over again** (FFGC, June 2012, slide 28)

She wanted it **read over and over again**, she also read the story back to me nearly word- for- word (*Billy Goats Gr*uff) (FFGC, June 2012, slide 2)

Enjoyed **repeating the story** at other times during the day and then pointing out bits they had missed later when reading (FFGC, June 2012, slide 23).

He loves dinosaurs, so he wanted to look at the book himself after we read it. **He told the story to me from looking at each page** (*Harry the Dinosaurs say Raah*) (FFGC June 2012, slide 17).

My child really enjoyed this book by the end of the week **she knew every word** (*Peace at Last*) (FFGC, June 2012, slide 21)

Walking around the house talking and **telling me parts of the story for the whole week** we were reading it, and still talks about it now. (FFGC, June2012, slide 11)

She knew most of the lines by heart by the end of the week and told lots of other people the story FFGC, June 2012, slide 8

She was able to repeat the story herself by the end of the week (FFGC, June 2012, slide 3)

He liked us to read it to him and anyone who came to our house had to be told the story (*Pied Piper*) (FFGC, June 2012, slide 7).

He really listened to this story and asked me to read it again, he was very involved looking at the pictures (*Billy Goats Gruff*) (FFGC, June 2012, slide 6).

By the end of the week she was reading the story herself (Jack and the Beanstalk) (FFGC, June 2012, slide 2).

She really enjoyed Goldilocks and she asked me to read it again (FFGC, June 2012, slide 4).

Relating story to 'real' life

The book made him interested in hearing mammy's stories about dentist visits I had as a child, which then lead to the facts about teeth and how to clean them and what happens if we don't clean them properly. This lead on to false teeth which led to nanny having to take hers out. They loved this book!!!! (*Harry and the Dinosaurs say Raah*) (FFGC June 2012, slide 26).

My children wanted to know what happened to them when they were younger (Alfie gets in First) (FFGC June 2012, slide 17).

What he would do if he was locked in - get my tool box and open the door (FFGC June 2012, slide 23).

During the week my son asked was I going to the shop on my own because I needed five minutes peace (FFGC June 2012, slide 16).

She related the story to her own house and mammy's situation (*5 Minutes Peace*) (FFGC June 2012, slide 23).

She related very well to this story and enjoyed saying what she would do if she were Alfie (*Alfie gets in First)* (FFGC June 2012, slide 19).

We talked about times when she found herself in a similar position. She enjoyed relating to the story. (FFGC, June 2012, slide 2).

Had a lot of comments about what they would do if Goldilocks ate their breakfast (FFGC June 2012, slide 11).

Really enjoyed this story. Telling me how they would be able to climb the beanstalk. Related to it very much (FFGC June 2012, slide 5).

Discussing word meanings

He liked discussing different **meaning of the words** such as muttered etc.(*5 Minutes Peace*) (FFGC, 2012, slide 21)

Reading illustrations

Surprised at how my child could spot **minute details in the illustration** and in the story, which were relevant to the questions I was asking (FFGC, 2012, slide 27)

We loved the illustrations and loved to talk about them for ages, although there were some big words in the story by the end of the week my child understood them. (*Love from Louisa*) (FFGC, 2012, slide 24)

He like to look at all the details in the pictures (*Billy Goats Gruff*) (FFGC, June 2012, slide 12).

She enjoyed explaining the pictures in the book to me (FFGC, June 2012, slide 3).