



Injecting Creativity in the Second Level School Curriculum in Ireland: An Evaluation of the Potential Contribution of *Fighting Words*

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Core research questions

- Is the infusion of creativity as ‘possibility thinking’ achievable in traditional school systems?
- Is there a suitable model for injecting creativity as ‘possibility thinking’ in to the school system in Ireland?
- What are the constraints in the educational system in Ireland that might militate against such an initiative?

What type of creativity?

‘My desire to venture for the mainland increased rather than decreased, as the means for it seemed impossible. This at length put me on thinking whether it was not possible to make myself a canoe... even without tools... of the trunk of a great tree... This I thought not only possible but easy’. (Defoe, 1919)

‘Fostering children’s possibility thinking can be seen as building their resilience and confidence and reinforcing their capabilities as confident explorers, meaning-makers and decision-makers’. (Craft, 2008, p. 1)

Little ‘c’ creativity as **‘possibility thinking’**

‘refusing to be stumped by circumstances but being imaginative in order to find a way around a problem’

(Craft, 2002, p. 111)



Analysis guided by a critical perspective on creativity

- Education as cultivating development of individuals (*individualisation* rather than *individualism*)
- Creativity as fostering development of individuals (*Liberal* rather than *Neo-Liberal*)
- Ethical conscience accompanying the infusion of creativity (*democratic* concept of creativity and *responsibility* towards *others*)
- *'Acceptable' instrumentalism*: creativity as an educational means and purpose

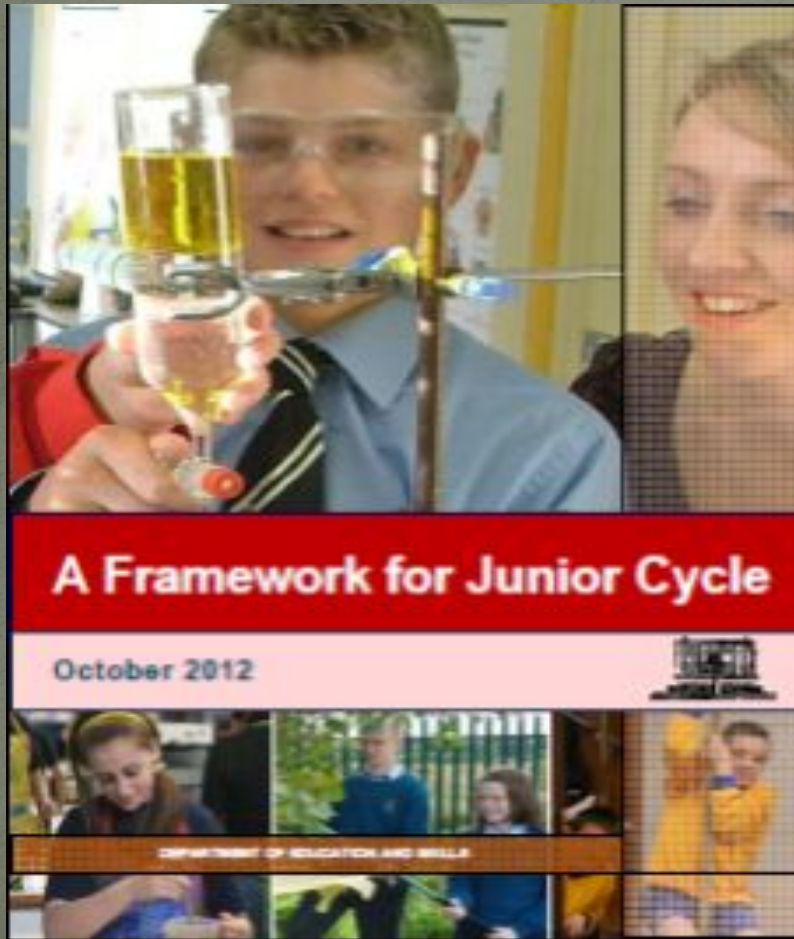
Second level curriculum in Ireland under reform: creativity?

- Junior Cycle presently under reform
- Senior Cycle under ongoing review since 2002
- Over-emphasis on summative assessment:

‘the curriculum must place a strong emphasis on developing skills and competences associated with creativity, problem solving and decision making... for many learners, the senior cycle experience is too often based solely in the absorption and understanding of existing, received knowledge’ (NCCA, 2002, p34).
- Recognition at policy level of need for critical and creative thinking
- Translation to subject specific syllabi somewhat limited

Subject		Creativity	Creative
Art	Syllabus	0	1
	Guidelines	No Guidelines available	
Biology	Syllabus	0	0
	Guidelines	0	0
Business	Syllabus	0	0
	Guidelines	0	0
Chemistry	Syllabus	0	0
	Guidelines	0	0
Design & Communication Graphics	Syllabus	2	14
	Guidelines	1	3
Engineering	Syllabus	1	0
	Guidelines	No Guidelines available	
English	Syllabus	0	4
	Guidelines	1	8
French	Syllabus	0	0
	Guidelines	3	6
Geography	Syllabus	0	0
	Guidelines	0	1
Maths	Syllabus	0	5
	Guidelines	No Guidelines available	
Music	Syllabus	4	0
	Guidelines	1	6

Opening a Door to Creativity?



Key Principles

Quality

Wellbeing

Creativity and
Innovation

Choice and
flexibility

Engagement
and
participation

Inclusive
education

Continuity and
development

Learning to
Learn

NCCA

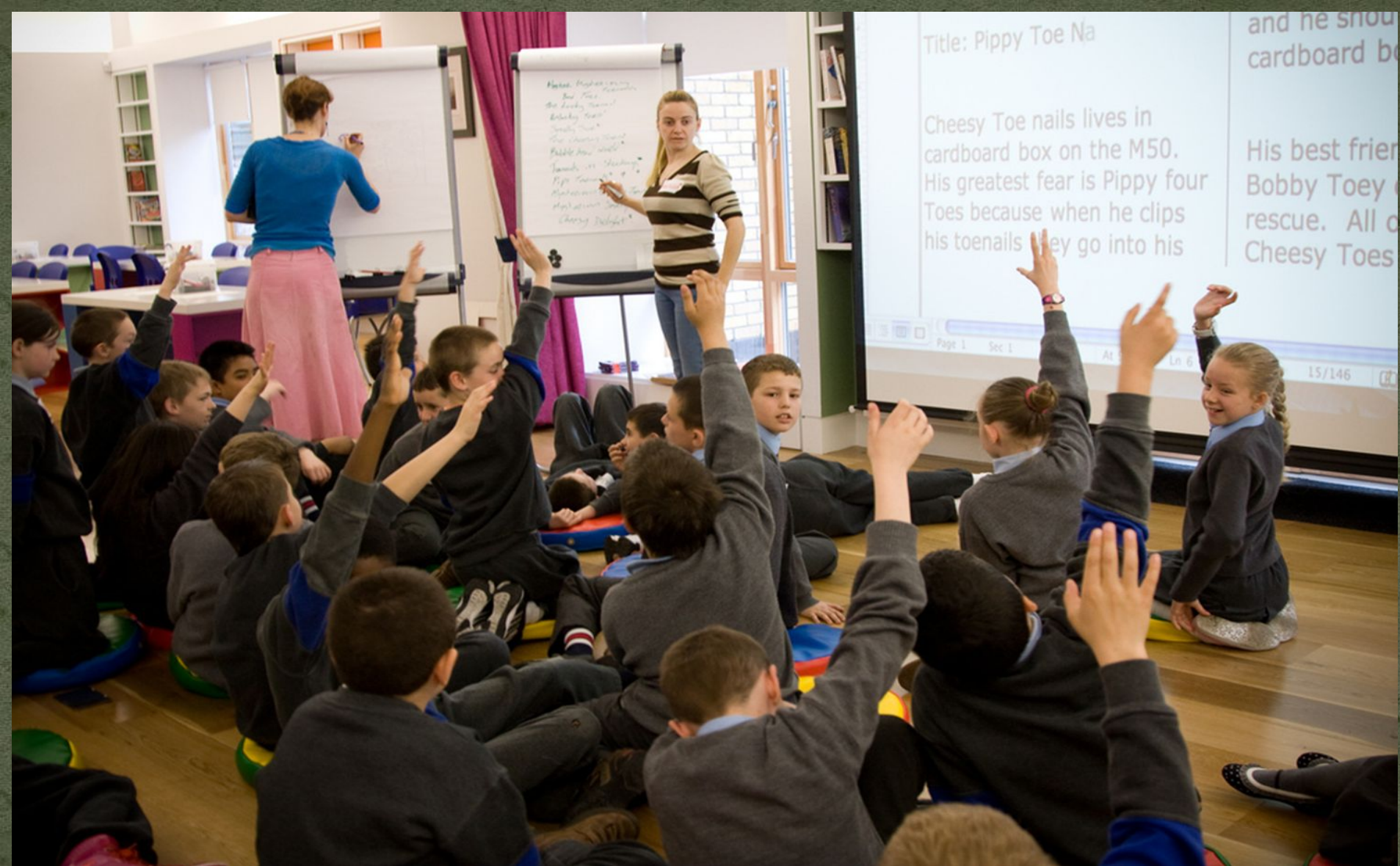
Innovation
& Identity
Schools developing Junior Cycle



An tSraith Shóisearach do Mhúinteoirí
JuniorCYCLE
for teachers

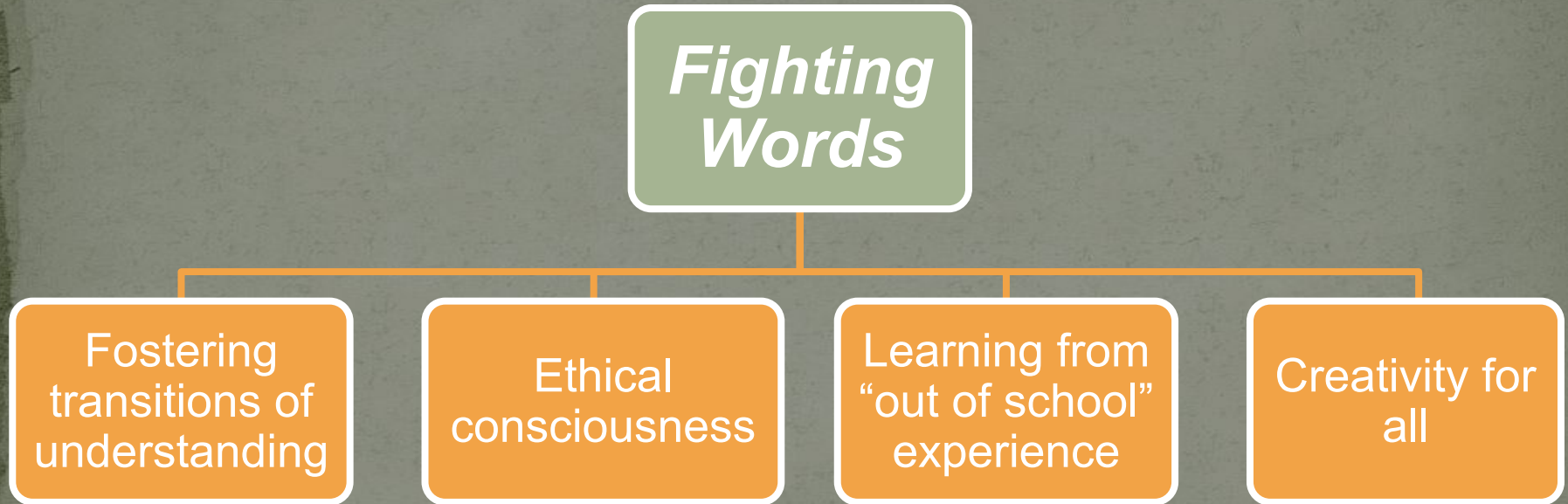


- Imagining
- Exploring options and alternatives
- Implementing ideas and taking action
- Learning creatively
- Stimulating creativity using digital technology





Why Fighting Words?



Methodology

A qualitative case study

The following data collection methods were used for triangulation purposes:

Interviews:

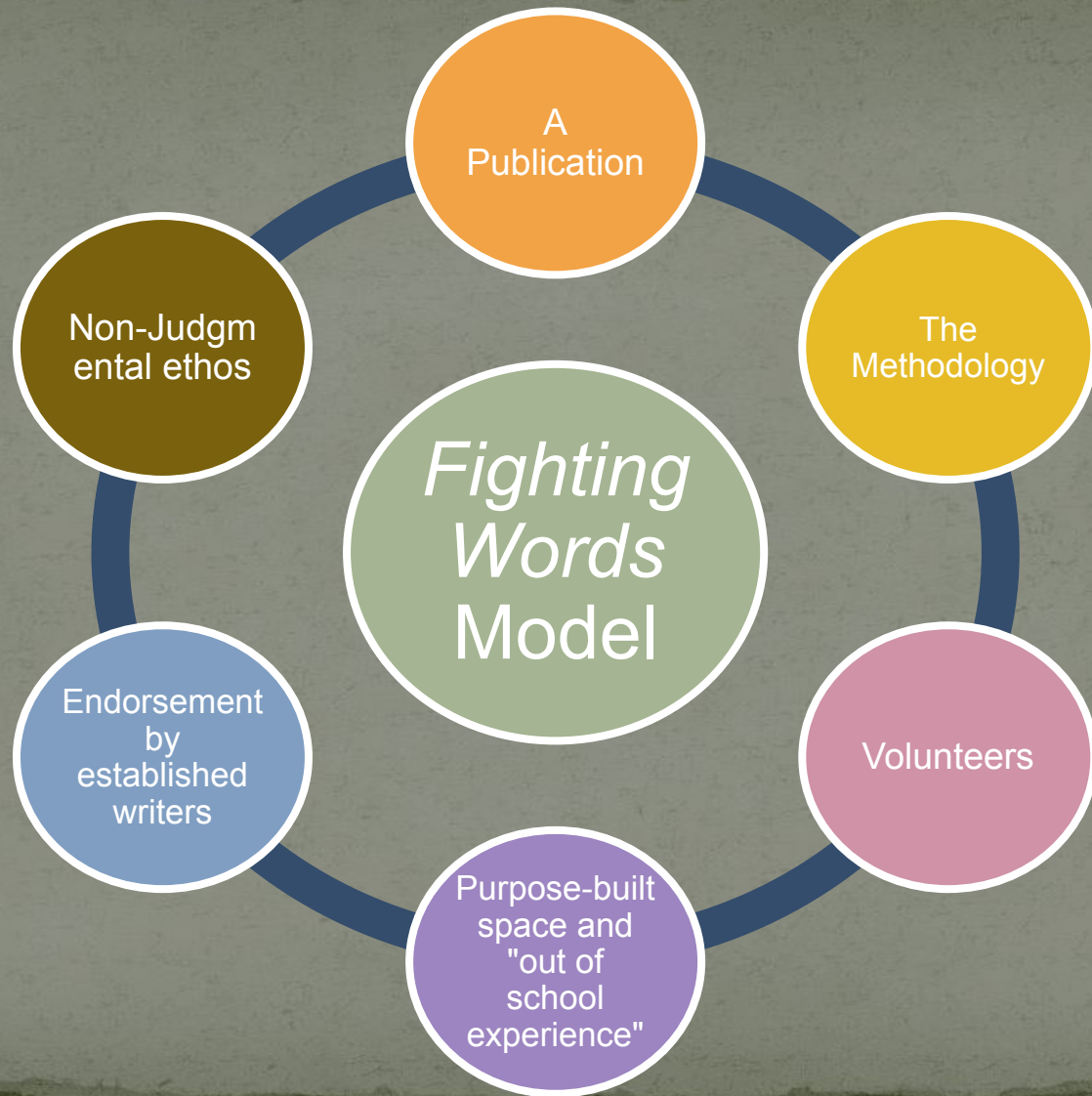
- Manager and founder of *Fighting Words*, Séan Love
- Artistic Director and founder of *Fighting Words*, Roddy Doyle.
- Chief Executive Officer of National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA)
- 6 principals of schools
- Radio extracts of interviews with various FW stakeholders

Questionnaires:

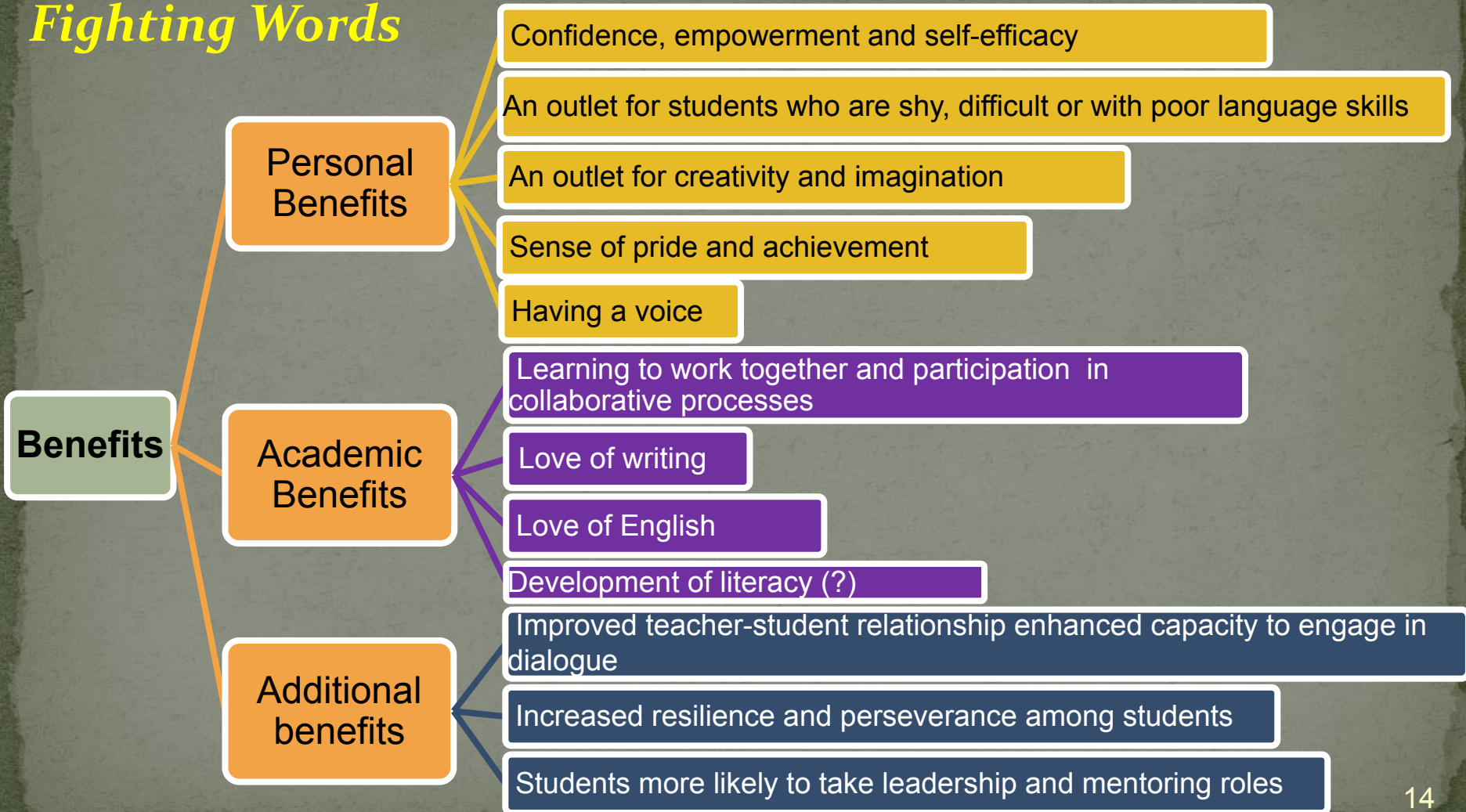
- 256 students (56% response rate)
- 7 teachers (5 out 7 ; 71% response rate)
- 41 *Fighting Words* volunteers (32% response rate)

Observations:

- 6 Workshops
- 1 Tutor Training Session

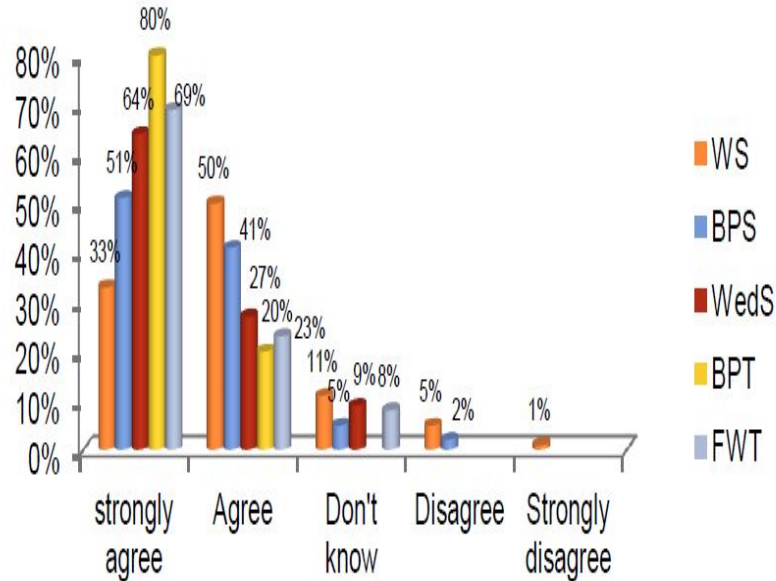


The findings: the benefits derived from participation in *Fighting Words*

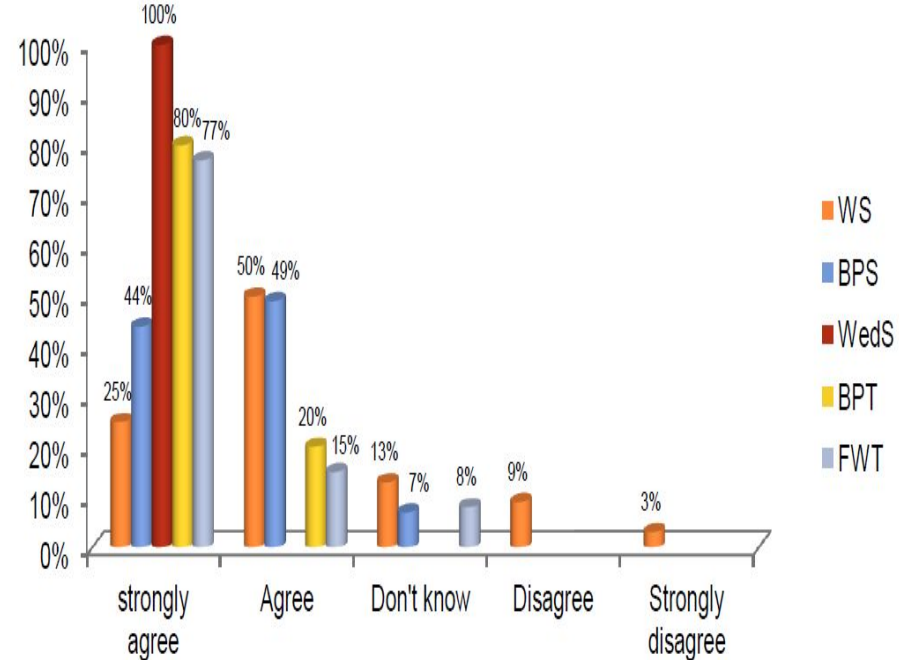


'Transition of Understanding'

I am/students **more confident** in
my/their **ability to be creative**

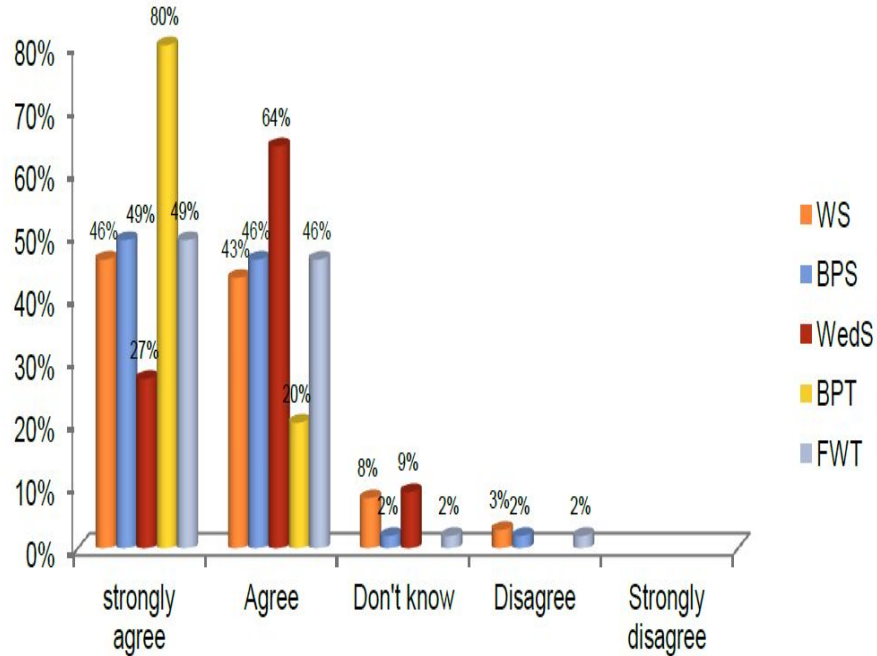


I am/students are **more confident**
in my/their **writing abilities**

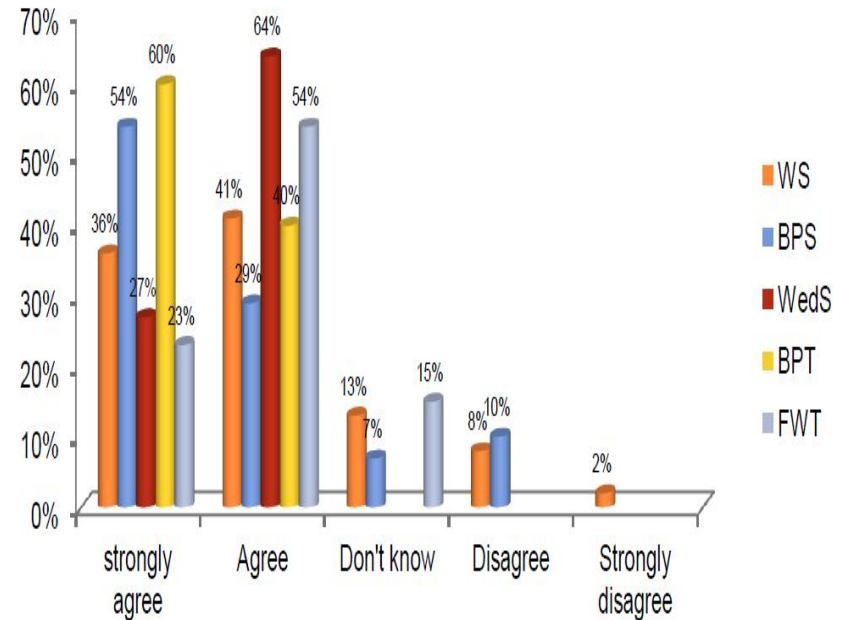


‘Transition of Understanding’

I am/students are more respectful of other people's ideas

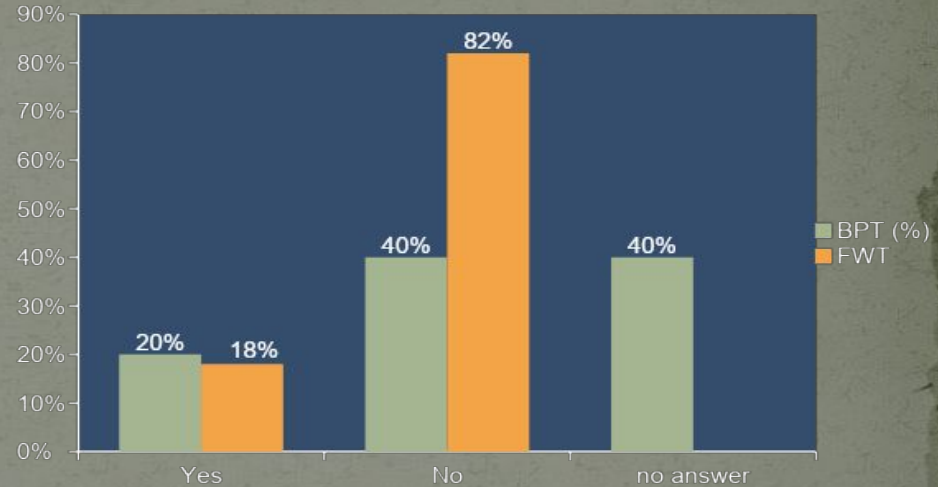
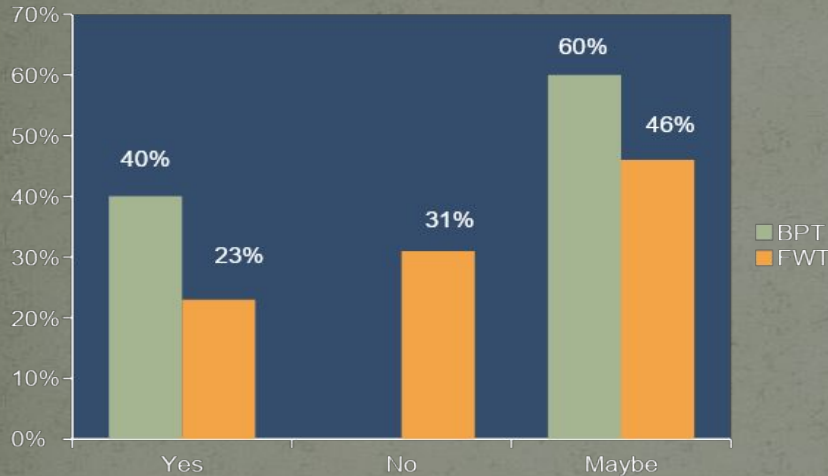


I am/students are more comfortable working with others



Building 'the space' in the curriculum

'creativity is not always expressed in school-appropriate ways' (Starko, 2005, p.11)



- Can the *Fighting Words* model be transferred to the formal school environment without compromising the integrity of the model? (Teachers and Volunteer tutors' responses)

- Can the *Fighting Words* model be transferred to the formal school environment without modifications? (Teachers and Volunteer tutors' responses)

'Much of the beauty of it is difference from the norm of school... so maybe a specific 'creative room' would need to be set aside in the school so that students don't view it just as another class.' (Questionnaire, Volunteer tutor)

The challenges



Working within current constraints

The method

- Training and post-training support for teachers

Volunteers

- Recruitment and training of local volunteers to support teachers

Purpose built space and out of school experience

- Use of local libraries, community centres and art galleries to generate "out of school experience"

Access to established writers

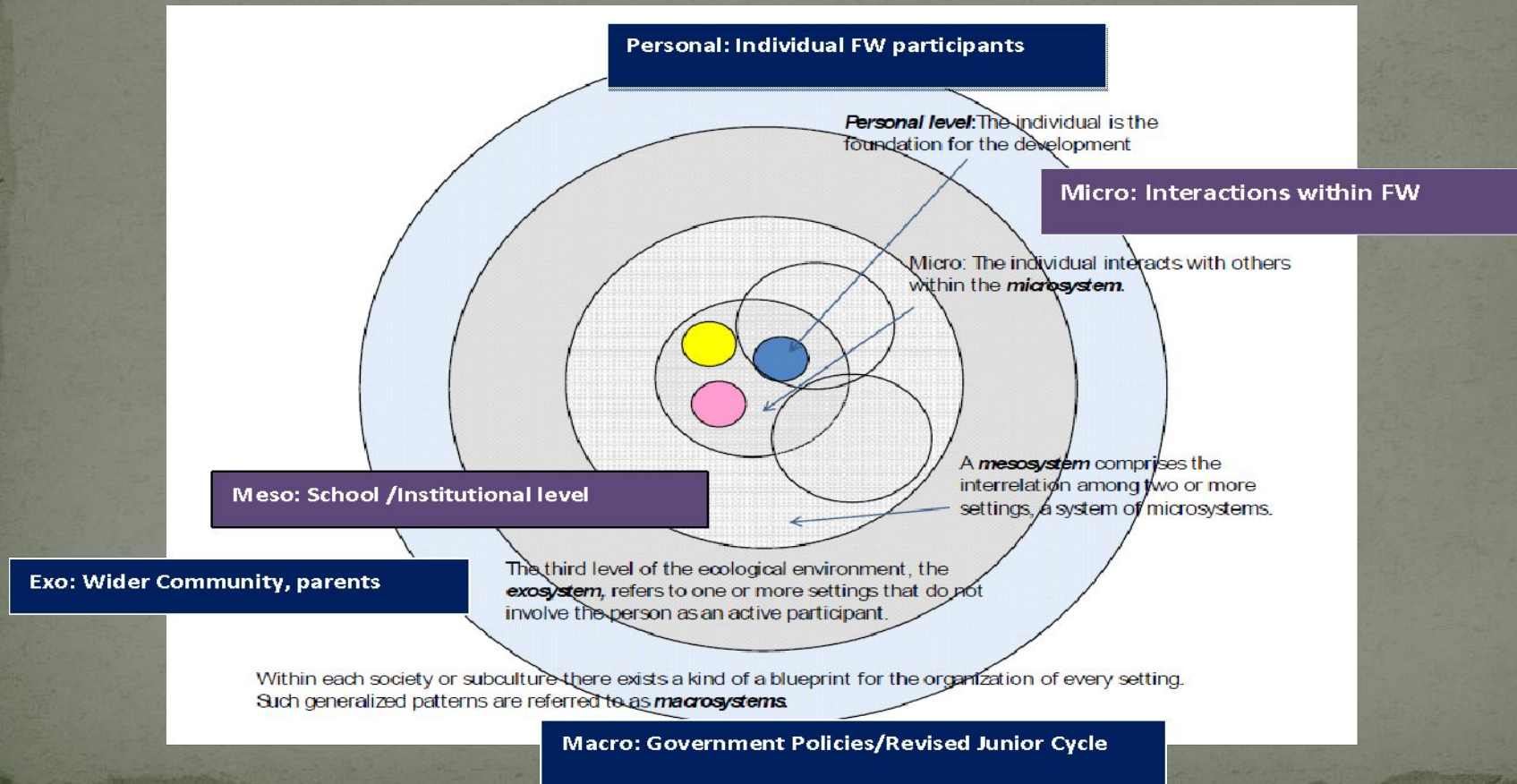
- Establish a network of locally based established writers willing to support and endorse students' work

A Publication

- School-based publications
- Local and community based newspapers

Implications of an ecological model of innovation education

(Jonsdottir and MacDonald, 2008)



Future directions

- Can a creative model - which is more readily suitable for translation in English as a school subject - be successfully translated in other subjects?
- Would the mainstreaming of the model impact negatively on its effectiveness?
- Could the elimination of summative assessment help reshape teacher-student roles and offer a more hospitable environment for creativity?
- What measures, if any, can be devised to further the outcomes which have emerged from this qualitative research study (for instance: investigation of impact on literacy development, identification of indicators of improved resilience, permanence and engagement in educational systems)?

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