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Drama in Education, the Key to Unlocking the Door to Literacy

A Study of the effectiveness of the use of Drama in Education in the teaching of reading to fifth class pupils

Norma Jayne Stewart

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UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN
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DRAMA IN EDUCATION, THE KEY TO UNLOCKING THE DOOR TO LITERACY

A study of the effectiveness of the use of Drama in Education in the teaching of reading to fifth class pupils

BY
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A thesis submitted to the School of Education at Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the reward of the Degree of Master in Education

August 2001

DECLARATION

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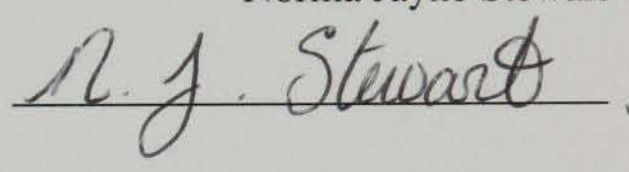

For you Gran… if you're watching.

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ABSTRACT

DRAMA IN EDUCATION, THE KEY TO UNLOCKING THE DOOR TO LITERACY

A Study of the effectiveness of the use of Drama in Education in the teaching of reading to fifth class pupils

Research shows that literacy is needed for full participation in society of the twenty-first century. However, statistics show that Irish children and adults are not reaching the standard of literacy needed to equip then for full participation in that society.

Over the years a variety of initiatives have been introduced by the Irish Government in a bid to address the issue. However, statistics imply that, to date, these have been largely ineffective. The launch of the Revised Curriculum for Irish Primary Schools incorporates a major drive to address the literacy problems. The Curriculum calls for the implementation of creative and innovative teaching methods that will equip children with the necessary literacy skills. The importance of literacy learning in facilitating the development of higher-order thinking skills is highlighted.

In recent years the value of Drama in Education as an approach to teaching and learning has become increasingly well recognised. Drama in Education is a motivating and enjoyable form of classroom instruction. It gives both the learner and the educator access to an educational experience that is emancipatory and fulfilling. This study suggests that through using Drama in Education in literacy learning, students can engage in the activity in a meaningful and motivating manner.

Part One of the study reviews the literature in the areas of literacy learning and Drama in Education. Part Two describes the action research project that involved the development, implementation and assessment of a drama-based reading programme conducted by the researcher with a group of fifth class pupils in a primary school.

The study found that through the employment of a drama-based reading programme the attitude of the children to reading in school improved significantly. As a result of the activity of drama the children engaged with the reading material in a more meaningful way than in the context of traditional teaching methods. Findings show that the co-operation skills, listening skills and higher-order thinking skills of the group improved as a result of the study.

Norma Jayne Stewart
August 2001

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INTRODUCTION

Nineteen ninety nine saw the introduction of the Revised Curriculum for Irish Primary Schools. Taking on board the importance of literacy in society, the curriculum integrates a drive to develop the literacy skills of Irish children. It highlights the need to present literacy as a relevant and purposeful activity drawing attention to the role of motivation in the learning process. The curriculum calls for the implementation of creative and innovative teaching methods that will facilitate the development of the higher order thinking skills needed for the twenty-first centuary. The role of literacy learning in facilitating the development of these skills is emphasised.

This thesis aims draw attention to the need to adopt more creative approaches to literacy teaching at primary level. Through an analysis of data available on the literacy levels of the Irish population, findings will be presented that imply that the schooling system has not succeeded in equipping a significant proportion of the population with the literacy skills needed for full participation in society.

In chapter one a definition of literacy as required for the twenty-first centuary will be outlined. Statistics from national and international studies will be presented illustrating the problem of low literacy standards that we are currently experiencing in Ireland. The role of motivation in the literacy learning process will be highlighted.

Chapter two will highlight the attempts that have been made by the Irish Government to date to address the issue. Particular attention will be given to the revision of the Primary School Curriculum outlining its main aims and principles. The need for innovative teaching methods to ensure its successful implementation will be considered.

Chapter three will consider the potential of Drama in Education as a means of facilitating the development of the skills demanded in the Revised Curriculum. The work and theory of Dorothy Heathcote forms the main basis of the approach advocated in this thesis. The suitability of Drama in Education as an approach to literacy learning and teaching will be examined.

Part two of the study will be based on an action research project based on the development and implementation of a Drama based reading programmed for fifth class students. The programme is grounded in the theoretical principles of literacy learning and Drama in Education.

The first part of chapter four will describe the research methods that were used in the implementation of the study. The second part of the chapter will describe the study as it was implemented.

Chapter five will present and review the findings from the research project. Chapter six will give a synopsis of the main conclusions drawn form the implementation of the study and outline recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 1

LITERACY AND IRISH SOCIETY

Electronic innovation is changing the literary landscape. Society is dominated by fast moving images and hi-tech graphics. From a very young age children are exceptionally literate in deriving meaning from highly sophisticated forms of symbolic communication.[1] Less emphasis is placed on traditional forms of reading and writing as pen and paper is replaced with more sophisticated and elaborate methods of information transference. Valentine Cunningham, professor of English at Oxford, contends that the role of "print media" has become "more and more overtaken by...electronic rivals....the book gives way to the personal computer, the diary to the electronic notepad, the broad sheet to the web-site."[2] He suggests that as the role of reading in society changes, "the reader with the book in her hand becomes a more and more singular phenomenon and less and less a sign of something automatically regarded as a good thing," and that "public libraries become places where computers and not books are housed."[3]

Through the medium of the television, computers and games consoles, companies have harnessed the most advanced of technological innovation, not to "enlarge consciousness,"[4] but in a bid to persuade the consumer that their product is essential to live a fulfilled and complete life, and to add to their profit. Information is presented in the form of cleverly

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[1] Mary Hilton, *Potent Fictions, Children's Literacy and the Challenge of Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 1996), 12.

[2] Valentine Cunningham, "Reading Now and Then," in *Literacy is Not Enough*, ed. Brian Cox (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 10.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid., 12.

orchestrated images that handicap the ability of the individual to think critically.[5] Little more is required than reading three or four words on a screen, written in large print similar to what might be found in a preschooler's storybook.[6] Kress suggests that this has resulted in "young humans" with "the attention span of a flea." [7]

Cunningham, contends that "it is one of the greatest ironies of our time that as the means of writing production get more and more sophisticated, modern reading gets more and more play school."[8] The brain becomes passive. It appears that thinking is no longer a requirement, it is an optional extra.

1.1 The importance of literacy in society

Research shows that despite the influence of technology on modern living, society still demands, and assumes a certain standard of literacy.[9] At a functional level it is needed to perform simple day to day tasks such as filling in forms, reading instructions or deciphering a timetable. However the benefits of literacy are considered to be further reaching in terms of full participation as a member of society. Research reveals that literacy levels have a significant influence on an individual's employment prospects. In 1995 an International Adult Literacy Survey conducted in twelve OECD countries revealed that "people with the lowest literacy skills are between four and twelve times as likely to be unemployed as

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[5] For further discussion see Jane M. Healy, *Endangered Minds, Why Children Don't Think-and What We Can Do About It* (New York: Touchstone, 1999).

[6] Ibid.

[7] Gunther Kress, *Rethinking the Paths to Literacy* (London: Routledge, 1997), 4.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Department of Education and Science, *A Language for Life, Report of the Committee for Inquiry appointed by the Secretary of State for Education and Science under the chairmanship of Sir Alan Bullock FBA* (London: HMSO, 1975), 277.

people with high literacy skills."[10] While people have adapted to operating without literacy skills and may find jobs that do not require them, employment options are restricted. The OECD survey concluded that, employment and unemployment are strongly related to levels of literacy proficiency. Persons who are more literate are more likely to have better jobs, have higher level of productivity and earnings and are less vulnerable to long-term unemployment. [11] Data collected also indicated that low literacy levels were equated to lower wages and more frequent periods of unemployment.[12]

In 1998 Ireland was reported as having the fastest growing economy in Europe.[13] Over one thousand new companies considered Ireland as "the best location from which to serve international markets."[14] If, as a nation, we wish to continue to compete with more economically developed countries and maintain the boom that is currently being enjoyed, the skills required in the workplace must be incorporated into the Education system. The IALS reported that the best way to exploit the new economic environment is "to strengthen the capacity of firms and labour markets to adjust to change, improve their productivity and capitalise on innovation."[15] Their results identified the literacy levels of a population as the most accurate indicator of a country's ability to facilitate this

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[10] National Adult Literacy Agency, *Read, Write and Spell Know How* (Dublin: NALA), 2.

[11] OECD, *Background Information on the IALS: Literacy Skills for the knowledge Society* ,http://www.nald.ca/nls/ials/ialsrpt2.ials2/backe.htm, 1

[12] Ibid.

[13] 'Job Opportunities in Ireland's Booming Economy' *Parent and Teacher Magazine*, November/December 1998, 14.

[14] Ibid.

[15] OECD, *Background Information on the IALS: Literacy Skills for the knowledge Society*, http://www.nald.ca/nls/ials/ialsrpt2.ials2/backe.htm, 1

development.[16] Consequently the examination of current literacy levels, as provided through participation in the IALS in 1995, enables assessment of the capacity of the Irish population to facilitate further economic progress.

1.2 Towards a definition of literacy

Despite the fact that a large field of research surrounds the area there is no single "set in stone" definition of the term literacy. [17] According to Kevin McGarry, visiting tutor at the University of North London and former lecturer in the field, it is "not a coherent study with definable boundaries."[18] In *A New Partnership in Education*, Walshe suggests that "just when we seem most in need of stability, literacy is turning out to be highly unstable."[19]

Literacy, like language is constantly changing and evolving.[20] In the 1800s to be literate meant having the ability to read and write your name in order to be able to sign the marriage register if you lived in Britain, or being able to read the scriptures in Lutheran Sweden.[21] In Ireland in the late 1800s literacy was gauged on the basis of which school reading book an individual had completed.[22] In 1950 the Ministry of Education in Britain defined being

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[16] Ibid. It should be noted that this survey was confined to Western nations.

[17] Angie Packwood, "The Reading Debate: the Write Weigh to do it" in T*he Meaning and Value of Literacy*, eds. Keith Barker and Ray Lonsdale (London: Taylor Graham, 1994), 19.

[18]Kevin Mcgarry, 'Meanings and Definitions of Literacy in Skills for Life' T*he Meaning and Value of Literacy* Ed. Keith Barker and Ray Lonsdale (London: Taylor Graham, 1994), 4

[19] Walshe, *A New Partnership in Education*, 2.

[20] Angie Packwood, *The Reading Debate*, 19.

[21] Kevin Mcgarry, 'Meanings and Definitions of Literacy' 4-5

[22] John Coolahan, *Irish Education, It's History and Structure* (Dublin; Institute of Public Administration, 1981), 25.

literate as being "able to read and write for practical purposes of daily life."[23] Reflecting the inevitable changes that occur in society this definition was soon extended. In 1951 U.N.E.S.C.O proposed that "a person who is literate can with understanding both read and write a short and simple statement on his everyday life."[24] A decade later the definition was adjusted to state that, "a person is literate when he has acquired the essential knowledge and skills which enable him to engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning in his group and community."[25]

Definitions of literacy have continued to be modified and expanded. They are based on what society requires of its members at any given time and progressively demand more of the person who is to be defined as literate. Society today requires more than the instrumental skills of decoding print.[26] It incorporates the ability not only to 'break the code' but also to engage in a meaningful interaction with text.

Literacy is an active, meaning-making process, based on a relationship between reader and text.[27] Readers are constantly involved in "an intricate creation of meanings reflecting an interweaving of their own ideas and those suggested by the text."[28] During the reading experience the reader extends and elaborates upon her prior knowledge by drawing on the learning and experiences of the writer. The process can be equated to the construction of a new building. The writers are the architects envisaging plans for others to follow. The readers are the builders. They respond to the plans, bringing together the materials needed

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[23] Department of Education and Science, *A Language for Life* (London: HMSO, 1975), 10.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid., 19.

[26] Margeret Meek, *On Being Literate* (London: The Bodley Head, 1988), 17.

[27] Gunther Kress, *Rethinking the Paths to Literacy*, xix.

[28] Robert Tierney, "Redefining Reading Comprehension" in *Educational Leadership*, March 1990 37.

to begin the construction work and putting them together.[29]

A significant body of research now supports the view that not only do children "learn to read," but also "read to learn."[30] The reading-learning process not only offers the reader access to the world of print but also facilitates cognitive development. As learners become more skilled at reading, attempting to make meaning from print, they are "gaining control of their own behaviour, bringing all their sense of probability to bear in discovering how to make sense of arbitrary conventions-they are predicting, testing and correcting as they go."[31] The reading process becomes, as Tierney suggests "flexible orchestration of problem-solving activities in conjunction with the thoughtful consideration of ideas."[32]

Literacy involves the creating, refining and rethinking of meanings.[33] It requires the evaluation of meaning, the exploration of possibilities, the adaptation of various perspectives, experimentation with ideas and the discovery of new insights.[34] It incorporates and facilitates the development of the kind of open minds required for today's "enterprise culture."[35] These skills are known as higher order thinking skills. The *Green Paper in Education* informs us these are the skills that employers of the twenty-first century demand; the ability to think critically, the capacity for self-reflection, co-operation skills, and the ability to transfer learning.[36] Literacy learning promotes the development of

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[29] Patricia Cunningham, and others, *Reading and Writing in Elementary Classrooms-Strategies and Observations*, (New York: Longman, 1995), 93.

[30] Eric Lunzer "From learning to Read to Reading to Learn" in *The Effective Use of Reading* eds., Eric Lunzer and Keith Gardner (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1979), 7.

[31] Holdaway, *The Foundations of Literacy*, (Gosford: AshtonScholastic, 1979), 91.

[32] Robert Tierney, Redefining Reading Comprehension, 37.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid., 39.

[35] Department of Education, *Education for a Changing World, Green Paper on Education* (Dublin; Stationery Office, 1992), 11.

[36] Ibid.

such skills, providing Ireland with "people with wide open well-trained minds."[37] Assessing the ability of the population to provide these skills can therefore be deduced from a close examination of the nation's literacy skills. Various national and international studies conducted over the years can be used to provide a clearer picture in this regard.

1.3 Literacy levels in Ireland

The responsibility for teaching of reading to the Irish population lies with the primary education sector. Spanning across the decades, a wide range of policies has been employed in a bid to ensure the literacy levels required for society.

1.3.1 Literacy in Ireland until the 1960s

From the time of the establishment of the Irish National School system in 1831 until the 1920s, English reading was considered the most important aspect of the child's education. Mirroring the trends that were seeping across Europe mass literacy was considered the main aim of the provision of free education. English reading retained its position as the most vital part of the child's schooling until the introduction of the New Programme of Instruction for Primary Schools in 1922 when Ireland gained status as a Free State. A number of moves brought in by the Irish government resulted in children in Irish primary schools being taught through Irish, rather than English, which was the mother tongue of the

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[37] John Walshe, *A New Partnership in Education-From Consultation to Legislation in the Nineties* (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 1999), 1.

majority of the population by that time.[38] Inadequate attention was given to training teachers in the teaching of English reading and fewer resources were directed into the area. Regardless of the patriotic motives behind these initiatives, Irish children were denied the opportunity to fully develop as literate members of society where English was the predominant language of the population. In 1966 Father John MacNamara reported in his study *Bilingualism and Primary Education* that Irish children were not achieving the same standard in English as British children of the same age.[39]

The curriculum remained essentially unchanged until 1971 when the 'New Curriculum,' as it become known was launched. The importance of enabling the child to become literate in his/her first language was given due recognition. The Teacher's Handbook stated that "The ability to read is perhaps the most important skill that the school has to impart to the child. To regard reading as either a subject of instruction or as a tool for learning is to minimise its importance: it is both these things and it is also a most important aid to the child in fulfilling himself as a child, an aid without which his personal and educational development cannot proceed very far."[40] While the importance of developing literacy in the English language was now accepted, little attention was given to the consideration of the underlying principles of teaching and learning.[41] Inadequate in-service for teachers, lack of resources and difficult teaching conditions "seriously impeded the full implementation of the radical

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[38] "First National Programme of Primary Instruction 1922" in *Irish Educational Documents*, eds. Aine Hyland and Kenneth Milne (Dublin: Church of Ireland College of Education, 1992), 95.

[39] Father John, MacNamara, *Bilingualism and Primary Education* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1966).

[40] Department of Education, *Primary School Curriculum, Teacher's Handbook, Part 1* (Dublin: The Stationery Office, 1971), 81

[41] Ibid., 81-112.

programme."[42] The ineffectiveness of the 1971 curriculum in addressing the literacy skills of the nation is reflected in the results of a number of small-scale studies conducted in the area. In 1961, a group of teachers came together out of concern for the high illiteracy rates in the country, as was reported in McNamara's survey, which was referred to earlier. This voluntary group of Dublin teachers formed the Teacher's Study Group. In 1964 the group conducted a study of Irish literacy standards. Using a standardised test that had been in use in Britain since 1955, reading standards of eleven-year-olds in Dublin City primary schools were tested. When compared to pupils of similar age, results of the study showed that Dublin pupils were twenty-six months behind English and Welsh students.[43] The study was repeated in 1969 and showed no improvement in results. The study was repeated a further three times between 1969 and 1984. While initially the difference in literacy standards between the Irish and British children began to narrow, results showed that by 1984 the rise in standards amongst the Irish children began to even out.[44] During the early 1970s the Department of Education began to conduct studies into the literacy standards amongst the country's school going population. Using the same test that had been used by the Teachers Study Group, nationwide studies were conducted with eleven-year-olds in 1972, 1980 and 1988. Although the results showed an increase in scores between 1972 and 1980, further research has been less positive. In 1993 and 1998 further studies were conducted with pupils of the same age using tests specifically developed for the task by the Educational Research Centre. The findings of these studies report that the "mean level of

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[42] John Coolahan, "Educational Policy for National Schools 1960-1985" in *Irish Educational Policy, Process and Substance*, ed. D.G Mulcahy and Denos O'Sullivan (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 1989), 53.

[43] INTO, *Literacy in the Primary Classroom*, 1.

[44] Ibid.5.

performance in English reading has not changed since 1980."[45] It reported that two and a half per cent of children tested had very serious reading problems with a further sixteen-percent having inadequate reading skills for their class levels.[46] The study found that "pupils coped best with tasks that require the application of mechanical skills of reading. They were less successful in dealing with the comprehension of continuous text, both narrative and expository, in their skills of location and utilisation of information in documents; and in the application reading skills."[47] It also highlighted that between 1980 and 1998 there had been a significant increase in resources to reading-related areas.[48] Through out the time when these surveys were conducted, the need to address the literacy skills within the context of the education sector became an increasingly prominent and evident concern for those involved. In 1985 the Curriculum and Examinations Board, set up in 1984, emphasised the importance of reading as "prerequisite to success in virtually all aspects of education."[49] The paper called for a major review of the Primary School Curriculum, highlighting specifically the need to address the role and teaching of literacy.[50] In 1987, Mary O'Rourke as Minister for Education set up a Review Body for Primary Education. *The Report of the Review Body* published in 1990 acknowledged that "there is evidence of reading and writing problems among some of our young adults and adolescents, particularly in the lower socioeconomic groups."[51] While the Irish literacy problem was

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[45] Cosgrove J, Kellaghan T, Forde P. and Morgan M, *The 1998 National Assessment of English Reading* (Dublin: Educational Research Centre, 1998), 2.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Ibid., 1.

[49] Curriculum and Examinations Board, *Primary education, A Curriculum and Examinations Board Discussion Paper* (Dublin: The Curriculum and Examinations Board, 1985), 15.

[50] Ibid.

[51] NCCA, *Report of the Review Body on the Primary Curriculum* (Dublin: NCCA, 1990), 25.

evidently becoming increasingly well acknowledged, there were individuals who considered that the full extent of the problematic issue was not recognised. One such individual was the late Dr. Daniel Murphy. In the *Reservation on English* [52] he states that, "I feel it [the chapter dealing with English in the Primary School] does not go far enough in identifying the extent of literacy problems among primary school leavers, nor does it sufficiently indicate the measure being taken to deal with them...The proportion of entrants to all second-level schools who could be classified as backward readers was estimated at thirty per cent by remedial teachers in a survey published in 1985...These figures point to a very serious literacy problem amongst primary school leavers."[53]

While acknowledging that these problems could be attributed to a number of causes, Dr. Murphy considered that the "the most effective measures that can be taken to alleviate these problems lie within the scope of the schooling system."[54]

1.3.2 The IEA Reading Survey.

Between 1989 and 1992 Ireland participated in the International Association for the evaluation of educational Achievement (IEA) Reading Survey. The study aimed to identify factors that are important in learning to read, a description of voluntary reading activities, and the provision of a national baseline data that would be "suitable for monitoring changes

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[52] Ibid., 101.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid., 102.

in reading literacy over time."[55] The survey was initially conducted in thirty countries. The study tested literacy levels of students at nine and fifteen years of age. In order to take account of the complex nature of what literacy involves, participants were tested in three areas of literacy skills; narrative prose, expository prose and documents. In Ireland the Educational Research Centre carried out the study. Results showed that of the twenty-seven countries that participated in the study, Ireland scored just above the international average.[56] With regard to the results of the nine year old population eight countries had mean scores that were significantly higher than Ireland, eleven countries scored around the same as Ireland and seven countries had mean scores that were significantly below the mean for Ireland. These latter countries were the Netherlands, Cyprus, Portugal, Denmark, Trinidad and Tobago, Indonesia and Venezuela. The results from the fourteen-year-old population were similar. Eleven countries scored significantly better than Irish children did with nine countries having scores that were significantly lower than that for Ireland. The study reported some interesting and significant results regarding the teaching of reading in Ireland. Irish teachers were reported as giving relatively low rating to the development of critical thinking. This is supported in the 1998 National Assessment of Reading which reports that children are less able to cope with reading that requires the skills of comprehension, location and utilisation of information in documents.[57] The IEA study found that children engaging in voluntary reading is a "potentially valuable way of

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[55] Mark Morgan and Michael O.Martin "Reflections on the IEA Literacy Study" in *Reading Development to Age 15: Overcoming Difficultie,s* eds. Gerry Shiels, Ursula Ní Dhálaigh and Bryan O'Reily (Dublin: Reading Association of Ireland, 1994) 244.

[56] Ibid., 245.

[57] Cosgrove J, Kellaghan T, Forde P. and Morgan M, *The 1998 National Assessment of English Reading* (Dublin: Educational Research Centre, 1998), 2.

enhancing reading achievement."[58] However, results showed that Irish children read less frequently than children in other countries despite having access to a reasonable number of books.[59] The results from the study drew attention to the deficit in Irish reading instruction in preparing children to engage in the level of literacy needed in society. Reporting on the results of the study, Martin and Morgan emphasised that further attention was required on the development of higher-order thinking abilities emphasising the need for the identification and implementation of appropriate instructional activities that would facilitate their development.

Between participating in the IEA study and the publication of the results was a time of unrest and change in Irish Education. Having already published the Report of the Review Body on the Primary Curriculum or the Quinlan report in 1989, the wheels of change for Irish Primary schools had been set in motion. In 1992 the Green Paper for Education-Education for a Changing World, was published. It took the Quinlan Report into account and reflected the need for educational change at all levels. It acknowledged that there was "a widespread consensus on the need for a radical reappraisal of traditional approaches to education policies, to take account of the completers of modern living and the extension of education to all and for a longer period of life."[60] The Green Paper acknowledged that 'there was a number of people who fall within the lower and middle range of literacy scales...who are unable to participate fully in the economic and civic life of today's

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[58] Mark Morgan and Michael O.Martin *Reflections on the IEA Literacy Study in Reading Development to Age 15: Overcoming Difficulties* (Dublin: Reading Association of Ireland, 1994) Eds. Gerry Shiels, Ursula Ní Dhálaigh and Bryan O'Reily, 247.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Department of Education, *Education for a Changing World, Green Paper in Education* (Dublin; Stationery Office, 1992), Foreword.

advanced nations.'[61] The Paper considered that "available evidence indicates that a minority of students do not achieve their potential in literacy by the end of their primary schooling."[62] Bearing in mind that results were already available at this stage from the studies conducted by the teacher's Support Group and from within the Department of Education between 1964 and 1988 that suggested more than a minority of school going children demonstrated difficulties with literacy, the Government at the time may be accused of glossing over the problem or failing to acknowledge that which was already known. The Paper proposed to "commission a national survey...to assess competency levels in reading and writing, including communicative and interpretive skills."[63] The result was that at the request of the Department of Education, the Irish Educational Research Centre became involved in the International Adult Literacy Survey conducted by the OECD when the opportunity arose to do so two years later.

In 1994 a survey of adult literacy was conducted in seven OECD countries, Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland and the United States. After the publication of the results, five more countries, including Ireland joined the survey. The results of the survey are an invaluable source for data for a variety of different sectors of society including the Department of Education. In order to understand the seriousness of the literacy issue in Ireland a closer look at the data that the survey reported is necessary.

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[61] Ibid., 212.
[62] Ibid., 88.
[63] Ibid., 212.

1.3.3 International Adult Literacy Survey

The IALS defined literacy as, "the ability to understand and employ printed information in daily activities, at home, at work and in the community, to achieve one's goals and to develop one's knowledge and potential."[64] The report examined the question '*how well do you read?* Acknowledging that literacy could not be considered as "a single skill that enables people to deal with all types of text,"[65] respondents were tested on three categories of literacy, prose literacy, document literacy and quantitative literacy.

Prose literacy was defined as "the ability to understand and use information from texts such as editorials, news, stories, poems and fiction."[66] Document literacy was defined as "the ability to locate and use information from documents such as job applications, payroll forms, transportation schedules, maps, tables and graphs."[67] Quantitative literacy was defined as "the ability to perform arithmetic functions such as balancing a chequebook, calculating a tip, or completing an order form."[68] Adults from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds with a wide range of abilities were tested. Scoring was divided into five broad literacy levels. Level one implied "very low literacy skills."[69] Level two indicated that "respondents can deal only with material that is simple, clearly laid out and in which the tasks involved are not too complex."[70] Level three was considered "the minimum desirable threshold in many countries while acknowledging that 'some occupations require higher

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[64] OECD, *Highlights from the Second Report of IALS: Literacy Skills for the knowledge Society*, http://www.nald.ca/ials/ialsrpt2/ials.

[65] OECD, *Background Information on the IALS: Literacy Skills for the knowledge Societ,y* http://www.nald.ca/nls/ials/ialsrpt2.ials2/backe.htm, 1

[66] Ibid.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Ibid.

[69] OECD, *Highlights from the second Report of International Adult Literacy Survey*.

[70] Ibid.

skills."[71] Levels four and five signified "increasingly higher literacy skills requiring the ability to integrate several sources of information or solve more complex problems."[72]

Twenty five per cent of Irish adults scored at level one. This suggests that one quarter of the Irish population possess only the most basic of literacy skills. A further twenty-five of the population scored at level two, enabling them to deal only with simple material. The indication is that half of the adult population do not reach 'the minimum desirable threshold' of literacy required to cope with "the rising demands of modern life and work in the knowledge economy," as defined by the OECD.[73] It must be taken into account that at the time of the survey only forty five per cent of the Irish adult population had completed secondary education in comparison to between seventy and eighty five per cent in the majority of the other countries surveyed. However, when compared to adults in other countries who had not completed secondary education, Irish adults still "do worse that their counterparts."[74]

The results of the Irish study have become a cause of great concern for all involved in Irish Education. Where before it is evident that politicians had glossed over the problem and failed to take accounts of the views of individuals such as Dr.Murphy who attempted to draw attention to the situation, the figures show very clearly that this cannot continue. The research conducted, both in small-scale studies and in the international study conducted by the OECD, point to the fact that radical change is required in the education system and in society at large. The findings present us with the information that is needed to assess

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[71] Ibid.
[72] OECD, Background Information on the IALS, 2.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid.

where attention is required in literacy teaching and awareness policies for the country.

A common thread that runs through the findings of the studies referred to is that where populations scored particularly high it was because they engaged in voluntary reading activities. As was mentioned above, the IEA study of reading reported that leisure is a potentially valuable way of enhancing reading achievement but that Irish children read "rather less frequently than children in other countries."[75] The 1998 National Assessment of English Reading also reported that "pupil's reading achievement was higher if they spent time in voluntary reading and liked to read."[76] While the IALS did not directly address the issue of leisure reading, it did report a high correlation between low literacy skills and television viewing.[77] The results reported that many Irish workers are heavily involved in literacy activities in the work place although less so than workers in other countries. It noted that participants in higher status occupations were especially likely to engage in literacy activities. The study reported that the frequency of involvement of participants in literacy activities at work was modestly related to participation in literacy activities in everyday life.[78] This implies that where literacy activities are seen as a relevant and purposeful activity people will engage in the activity. Each of these findings suggests that where there is motivation to read, learners will engage in the activity voluntary thus improving reading skills. This implies that in order to improve the literacy skills of Irish children a serious look must be taken at how literacy is currently being presented to the Irish population. There is a need to consider if current practises have been revised to

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[75] Mark Morgan and Michael O.Martin, *Reflections on the IEA Literacy Study* 247.

[76] Judith Cosgrove et. al., *The 1998 National Assessment of English Reading*, 1.

[77] Education 2000, *International Adult Literacy Survey Results for Ireland, Summary* (Dublin: Education Resource Centre, 2000), 12.

[78] Ibid., 8.

compete with alternative activities that attract the attention of members of today's society, particularly children, in such a way as to draw people back to print, presenting it as an activity that is both highly enjoyable and beneficial to the individual and the community at large.

1.4 Motivation and the Reader

The findings reported above imply that little has been done, particularly within the education sector to address the changing trends in literacy teaching and learning. It appears that our education system has failed to evoke the level of interest and motivation needed in literacy to pursue the activity outside the context of the classroom in a relevant and enjoyable way. This is turn has had a detrimental effect on the overall literacy skills of the population.

While the field of literacy teaching may be divided on a range of issues, contemporary leaders in the area such as Richard Anderson,[79] Brain Cambourne,[80] Edward Fry,[81] and Rand Spiro[82] agree that motivating children read is key to the literacy learning process.[83] Research shows that highly motivated students become more responsible about reading and are more likely to read regularly.[84]

Motivation stems from the value assigned by a learner to a given task.[85] It is concerned

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[79] Co-author of the National Report Becoming a Nation of Readers (1985).

[80] Author.

[81] Author of the Fry Readability Graph.

[82] Author and editor of research books in the literacy area.

[83] Rona F.Flippo, "Points of agreement: A display of professional unity in our field" in *Reading Teacher, Vol.52, No.1* September, 1998.

[84] Marie Carbo, "Reading Styles Times Twenty" in *Educational Leadership*, March 1997, 38.

[85] Suzanne Barchers, *Teaching Reading from Process to Practice* (USA:Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1998), 205.

with students' desire to participate with a learning task. It involves the "goals or reasons that underlie...involvement or non-involvement" in learning activities.[86]

Motivation can be defined as "the impetus to create and sustain intentions and goal-seeking acts,"[87] and concerns "emotional states such as stimulation...enjoyment and enthusiasm."[88] Kress asserts that "children act energetically, perceptively, out of their interests."[89] It is the responsibility of the teacher to harness this natural enthusiasm of the child to make sense out of his world. There is a need to draw a distinction between motivating and blackmailing children with promises of fun and games. Holdaway contends that "one of the saddest things about schooling has been our loss of faith in the possibility of honest and intrinsic motivation-we fool children with workbooks covered in monkeys or fairies holding up vowels walking hand in hand or waving wands over magic 'E's. We so deeply believe that the pill of learning will be nasty that we cover it with garishly coloured and thinly applied lolly. Such deceit is not only inefficient in sustaining literacy learning; it is both unnecessary and insulting to the intentions and abilities of ordinary children."[90]

Where this principle is adhered to and subject matter is presented as useful, and relevant to their lives, children are motivated to learn.[91] A key task of the teacher is to spark that motivation and desire in the child to read. Mary Hilton, senior lecturer in primary language and literature at Homerton College Cambridge, states that skills can be "learned and

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[86] Linda S. Lumsden, *Student Motivation to Learn* Eric Digest, no. 92, Eric Clearing House on Educational Management, 1994, 1.

[87] Karen Yeok-Hwa Ngeow, *Motivation and Transfer in Language Learning* (Eric Clearinghouse on Reading English and Communication, 1998), 1.

[88] Gerad Coles, "Literacy, Emotions and the Brain" Reading Online International Reading Association, March 1999, 1.

[89] Kress, *Rethinking the Paths to Literacy*, 113.

[90] Don Holdaway, *The Foundations of Literacy*, 165.

[91] Barchers, *Teaching Reading*, 205.

unlearned quite easily, depending on the meaning structure and the motivation of the learner."[92] Without it, literacy learning becomes a prosaic task to be endured. While the learner may assimilate the basic technical skills it is doubtful if the process will ever extend beyond the simple processing of print to an active engagement with the text·

Conclusion

Despite living in a world where it appears that literacy is becoming a redundant skill, data gathered from the IALS demonstrates that it is vital for full participation in society. Both from a point of view of economic success as a nation and personal fulfillment as individuals, literacy is essential. Worryingly, literacy levels in Ireland, when compared to those of International Counterparts are clearly a cause for concern. As a result the question of how this has happened must be raised. While there are historic reasons that account for some of the neglect this is no longer an excuse. If the education system is to equip its participants in an appropriate and complete manner, literacy learning and teaching must be given priority. Attempts have been made and are currently being made to address the problem.Chapter two will take a closer look at what is being done in the Irish context to address the need to draw children back to books and consider the success that has been achieved this far.

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[92] Mary Hilton, *Potent Fictions,* 8.

CHAPTER 2

ADDRESSING THE LITERACY ISSUE; EFFORTS SO FAR

The figures presented in chapter one clearly show that the education system, where the majority of Irish children receive their first experiences of formal literacy instruction, has failed to equip a significant proportion of the population with the level of literacy required for full participation in a changing society. The role of literacy in facilitating the development of the higher-order thinking skills required by employers was considered. Acknowledging the key role of motivation in any learning process and the need to present literacy as a relevant and enjoyable activity was highlighted.

While policy makers and educators alike are aware that there is no magic cure for low literacy standards, a number of intervention strategies are available that can contribute to finding a solution. Chapter two will consider the key initiatives introduced by government bodies in response to the literacy crisis that, according to the figures, has unfolded in Ireland. The initiatives are currently being implemented, both in schools, and in the wider community. The importance of the changing face of education in relation to literacy skills and the development of higher order, creative and critical thinking skills will be highlighted.

2.1 Remedial Education

Since 1963, one of the main strategies employed in Ireland to address the issue of literacy learning difficulties in school children is the provision of a remedial education service. Currently about fifty five thousand pupils at primary level receive some sort of remedial

support, mainly in literacy instruction.[1] The dominant approach adopted to the provision of such services in the Irish education system is the withdrawal model.[2] This involves children being taken out of the mainstream classroom, generally in small groups, and being offered more specific assistance in the area where difficulty is demonstrated. However, recent research questions the long term effectiveness of this model of remediation favouring programmes that involve the teaching of children with learning difficulties within the mainstream classroom. With such models the child still receives learning support from a specialised teacher but within the mainstream classroom. A study conducted by Pijl and Meijer in the early nineteen nineties concluded that the segregation of pupils with special needs is problematic and called for fully integrated education.[3] Benefits were identified to both the cognitive and social development of the special needs pupils.[4] In support of these findings, the *Guidelines on Remedial Education* recommend that remediation is provided within the context of the mainstream classroom.[5] However, the *Study of Remedial Education in Irish Primary Schools* conducted in 1998 reported that "this format of remedial teaching occurs only occasionally."[6] According to the report remedial teachers spend eighty five per cent of their time extracting pupils from the mainstream classroom.[7] The INTO discussion document on literacy in the primary school suggests that only five

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[1] Richard BrutonTD, "The Challenge of illiteracy" in *Parent and Teacher Magazine*, November/December 1999, 4.

[2] Ibid., 7.

[3] For further discussion on this study see Cor Meijer, Sip Jan Pijl and Seamus Hegarty, *New Perspectives in Special Education-A six country study of Integration* (London: , 1995).

[4] Ibid.

[5] An Roinn Oideachas, *Guidelines on Remedial Education* (Dublin: The Stationery Office, 1989), 2.

[6] Gerry Shiel and Mark Morgan, *Study of Remedial Education*, 37.

[7] Richard BrutonTD, 'The Challenge of illiteracy' in *Parent and Teacher Magazine*, November/December 1999, 4.

per cent of remedial teachers worked with classroom teachers in the classroom.[8]

While the government continues to channel money into a remedial education system that is based on the withdrawal model there are questions that must be raised regarding its efficacy. The literacy figures referred to in Chapter one demonstrate that despite considerable efforts children continue to leave school with serious literacy problems.

2.2 Intervention Programmes

A study conducted by Snow, Burns and Griffin indicates that "early intervention is...vital in preventing reading difficulties in later life."[9] Acknowledging the benefits of early intervention in successful literacy learning, the Department of Education and Science has set up a number of such programmes that cater for children and parents who may otherwise not be able to enjoy the benefits of successful early literacy experiences.

A number of *Early Start* preschool programmes have been set up in targeted disadvantaged areas around the country. The Early Start Programmes were introduced as part of the *Breaking the Educational Disadvantage Cycle* scheme. The Breaking the Cycle programme aims to address the needs of assigned urban and rural disadvantaged schools.[10] The curriculum implemented in the schools is designed to emphasise "the development of cognitive and linguistic skills,"[11] of the participants. Since nineteen ninety four, forty schools located in Dublin, Cork, Limerick Waterford, Drogheda, Galway and Dundalk have

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[8] INTO, *Literacy in the Primary School, A Discussion Paper* (Dublin: INTO, October 1999), 20.

[9] Ibid., 8.

[10] Breaking the Education Disadvantage Cycle, Information Pamphlet, Government of Ireland 1995, 4-5.

[11] Ibid.

been included in the project,[12] with approximately one and a half thousand pupils currently participating.[13] Preliminary results from the programme have been very positive. Teachers "judged Early Start participants superior in cognitive and language abilities to non-early start pupils."[14] As the programme is still in its early stages of implementation it will not be possible to assess its long term effectiveness until participants have made their way through the education system.

An earlier intervention programme on which the Early Start programme is modeled, the Rutland Street Project has already demonstrated a degree of success in this regard. Results from a longitudinal study following the educational careers of some of the first pupils on the programme showed that "participants ... stayed at school longer, a higher proportion took public examinations and thus acquired qualifications on entering the work force."[15]

2.3 Early School Leavers

Along with providing children with a sound educational foundation, intervention programmes such as the Early Start Programme described in the previous paragraph, aim to encourage children who may otherwise be at risk of leaving school early, to remain within the education system. As with remedial provision, intervention at the earliest level of education aimed at encouraging children to remain within the education system is considered

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[12] Department of Education, *Implementing the Agenda for Change* (Dublin :Government of Ireland, 1996), 29.

[13] Department of Education and Science, *Ready to Learn-White Paper on Early Childhood Education* (Dublin: Stationery office, 1999), 99.

[14] Promoting Literacy in Primary Schools, Strategies for Raising Standards, an extract from the discussion paper in *Parent and Teacher Magazine*, Jan/Feb 2000,9

[15] Ibid.

"less expensive and more effective ... than treatment after the problems have emerged."[16] Research suggests a high correlation between low literacy rates and low school retention rates. The IALS reported that, "while there were some exceptions...education was one of the strongest correlates of literacy performance. Thus, in Ireland, about sixty per cent of people who had not completed Junior Secondary education were at level one...In contrast only one to two per cent of college graduates were at level one and over forty per cent were at levels four and five.'[17]

While intervention programmes such as those above have been implemented in recent years figures show that amongst the present second level population drop out rates remain a cause for concern. In 1995 the rate of retention at second level in Ireland stood at just over seventy five per cent.[18] In 1998 this figure had shown little improvement with a retention rate of seventy eight per cent.[19] As result efforts are being made by the Government in a bid to encourage teenagers to remain within the Education system.

The Vocational Leaving Certificate Programme and Leaving Certificate Applied that concentrate on the more practical aspects of the education of the young person have been introduced in recent years. These alternatives to the traditional more academically orientated Leaving Certificate programme aim to encourage students with less interest in the academic aspect of school to stay in the education system while receiving practical training in relevant skills. The new Leaving Certificate structure aims to allow schools to provide

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[16] Department of Education and Science, *Ready to Learn-White Paper on Early Childhood Education* (Dublin: Stationery office, 1999), 8.

[17] Education 2000, *International Adult Literacy Survey, Results for Ireland* (Dublin: Education Research Centre, 1999), 6.

[18] Department of Education and Science, *Statistical Report 1997/98* (Dublin: Stationery Office, 1998), ix.

[19] Ibid.

the "most appropriate senior-cycle programme for all their students."[20] Secondary schools nationwide are now recommended to provide the option of a transition year programme. During this year which follows the Junior Certificate year, students are offered the chance to "learn skills and to evaluate life in ways and situations which arise outside the boundaries of certificate programmes."[21] Through participating in the transition year students have the opportunity to go into work placements and find out more about professions that may be of interest to them. Subject choices can be made and changed depending on how the student enjoyed the placement. In this way the education of the student has the potential to become more relevant to his/her long-term needs thus encouraging him/her to remain in the education system.

The introduction of the *Education Welfare Act 2000* incorporates a number of key moves aimed at improving school retention rates and has led to the setting up of the National Educational Welfare Board. The Board has responsibility for the development, coordination and implementation of a school attendance policy to "ensure that every child in the State attends a recognized school or otherwise receives an appropriate education."[22] As a result of the establishment of the Act, Education Welfare Officers have been appointed to work with children at risk of dropping out of school and children receiving education outside the recognised school structure. Where students leave school under the age of sixteen, the Act states that provision will be made for the continuing education of these students until the age of eighteen.[23]

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[20] Department of Education and Science, *Charting Our Education Future*, 51.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Department of Education and Science, *The Education Welfare Act, Main Provisions* (Dublin: The Stationery Office, 2000)

[23] The Education Welfare Act, Main Provisions, www.irlgov/ie/educ/edwel/Mainprovs.html.

The expansion of programmes such as *Youthreach*, a training and employment scheme run for early school leavers by the Department of Education and Science which "aims to develop the core skills needed for further learning and to prepare young people to progress to further education/training or to employment,"[24] has formed a significant part of initiatves made by the government to address the needs of early school leavers. The introduction of the *Youth Work Bill 2000* now provides legislation that will ensure the monitoring and development of such programmes.

Clearly, the government is responding to the need to encourage students to remain within the education system. However, the most recent figures referred to earlier in the chapter show that while the retention rates have improved marginally, there is still a group of students whose needs are not being catered for. If students are to be encouraged to remain in the education system, finding an approach to learning that is relevant and purposeful is required.

2.4 National Reading Initiative

The *National Reading Initiative* was launched in 2000 as a one year long initiative with a budget of two and a half million. It involved the introduction of a wide range of promotions and structures aimed at "raising awareness in the general public of the importance of reading...across all sectors of society, at all levels and in all contexts."[25] Evidence from the IEA Literacy study suggested that "leisure reading is a potentially valuable way of

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[24] Department of Education and Science, *Youth reach Leaflet*, 1996.
[25] Ibid.

enhancing reading achievement."[26] However it also reported that "Irish children read rather less frequently than children in other countries."[27] Acknowledging that the repeatedly low literacy levels reported for the country "indicate significant areas for concern,"[28] the *National Reading Initiative* aims to address the issue and contribute towards the long-term resolution of the problem.

Strategies such as organising book fairs, supporting local reading initiatives, *Reading-at-Work* promotions and promoting the use of Public Libraries were incorporated into the programme. As part of the *Babies Love Books* project every child born in the year 2000 received a gift pack of five quality books for children with information for parents or guardians on how to use them. A language video for parents designed to help parents develop the oracy skills of their children was distributed, summer camps for primary teachers on the theme of *Nurturing Lifelong Readers* were held in Education centres nationwide and a multi-media campaign involving well known celebrities accentuating the importance of reading was run. Other initiatives included the hosting of an International Reading Conference in Dublin in September, which was attended by a variety of high key speakers in the area of literacy such as Gunther Kress and David Wray. The initiative also commissioned the publication of the *Big Guide 2 Irish Children's Books*. Targeting post-primary schools, the initiative funded the running of a transition year competition project based on promoting reading in the community.[29] Over the year, over two hundred local projects were funded in preschools, primary and post-primary schools, libraries, adult

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[26] Ibid., 247.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Department of Education and Science, *National Reading Initiative*, information pamphlet.

[29] Bernadette McHugh, 'The Year of the National Reading Initiative' in *InTouch, No.28, January/February 2001,* 21.

education groups, prisons, traveller groups, trade unions, hospice care and community groups.[30] In addition to the initial two and half million pounds allocated to the initiative, the Department of Education and Science which was at the time under the ministerial guidance of Micheál Martin, provided six and a half million pounds for Irish Primary schools for the purchasing of library books.[31]

It would be difficult to assess the effectiveness of the National Reading Initiative at this stage, if ever. However, in light of the vitality with which the campaign was run, it would be difficult to imagine that many members of Irish society might have failed to notice the many posters or hear the television and radio advertisements that featured daily on national channels, and thus become aware of the importance of literacy.

2.5 The Revised Curriculum for Irish Primary Schools

Perhaps the most significant move of recent years to address low literacy levels in Ireland has been the revision of the primary school curriculum. The revision came as a result of a need to adapt the education system to provide the skills and knowledge required for an ever-changing society. [32] The development of the Curriculum fell to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, a statutory body that was established in November 1991 in the aftermath of the Quinlan report.

Building on its predecessor the 1971 or 'New' Curriculum as it is referred to, the Revised

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[30] Ibid.

[31] "Minister for Education announces major initiative to promote reading in schools" in *Parent and Teacher Magazine*, Dec 1998/Jan 1999, 19.

[32] Department of Education, *Report of the Primary Education Review Body* (Dublin: Stationery Office,1990), 5.

Curriculum aims to retain all the positive aspects of the '71 curriculum while incorporating 'current educational theory.'[33] Responding to the demands made by a wide range of sectors of the community and incorporating developments in the field of education, the revised curriculum attempts to integrate the 'thinking and aspirations,' of all the partners in education.[34] It aims to encompass the thinking and aspirations of education as called for in the Report of the Review of the Primary Curriculum 1990, the Green Paper in Education 1992, The National Education Convention 1993, the White Paper in Education 1995 and the Education Bill 1998.[35]

The curriculum aims to "cater for the needs of children in the modern world."[36] In order to achieve this it recognises the importance of Education in the development of the child and the contribution that it makes to "the personal, social, cultural and economic fulfillment of the future adult."[37] It acknowledges the development of literacy and numeracy as its key concerns emphasising the importance of these skills in ensuring the personal fulfillment of the individual.[38]

2.5.1 Aims and Principles of the Revised Curriculum

Retaining the child-centred approach to education fostered under the '71 curriculum the

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[33] Department of Education. *Primary School Curriculum-Introduction* (Dublin: The Stationery Office, 1999), vi.

[34] Department of Education, *Report of the Primary Education Review Body* , 5.

[35] Department of Education and Science, *Primary School Curriculum-Introduction,* vi.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid., vii.

[38] Ibid.

Revised curriculum "celebrates the uniqueness of the child."[39] Aiming to nurture the child in "all dimensions" of her life the curriculum acknowledges the need to develop the spiritual, moral, emotional, imaginative, aesthetic, social and physical facets of the person.[40] In acknowledgment of the relationship that exists between education and society, the curriculum aims to help equip children "to share in the benefits of society in which they live and to contribute effectively to that society's sustenance and evolution."[41] Taking account of the rapid pace at which society now operates, the importance of equipping children with "effective interpersonal and intrapersonal skills and skills in communication...the ability to think critically, to apply learning and develop in flexibility and creativity," [42] is promoted. Recognising the importance of literacy in equipping the child for participation in society the curriculum incorporates a major drive to address the literacy problem.[43] Through the provision of a curriculum built on a "detailed and structured framework of content that is comprehensive and flexible" it seeks to 'promote the active involvement of children in a learning process that is imaginative and stimulating.'[44] It's overall vision for education is, "to enable children to meet with self-confidence and assurance, the demands of life, both now and in the future."[45]

Analysis of the document indicates that the Revised Curriculum addresses the needs of

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[39] Ibid., 6.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid., 7.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid.

society in four key areas.

- Nurturing a love of learning in each child.
- The development of higher-order thinking skills.
- The development of collaborative learning and co-operation skills.
- Giving due attention to the social and emotional development of the individual.

2.5.2 A love of learning

The White Paper in Education states that "learning is a lifelong process, building on the foundation of formal schooling...and is important for all people."[46] Reflecting international pedagogical orientations, the Revised Curriculum envisages that Education is no longer something that begins when a child walks in through the door at five years old and ends when she walks out of a second or third level institution at some stage during her teenage life. It pertains to the view that learning is a life-long process. The need to present such a view of education to learners is vital. Research shows that increasing demands are made on workers to learn new skills as technological changes bombard the workplace. Consequently, the general public requires not only an acceptance of the value of lifelong learning, but a desire to maintain an active involvement in education. In the wider context of the Irish Educational system, the publication of *Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education* in July 2000 "marks the adoption of lifelong learning as the governing principle of

[46] Department of Education and Science, *White Paper in Education 1995*, 77.

educational policy."[47] The provisions made in the paper are considered a follow on from policy already in existence in schools and colleges. Therefore the role of the Primary School which is still currently the first formal provider of education in the country, must be seen as being of particular importance.

Individuals will only participate in education where it is considered enjoyable and worthwhile. Drawing on statistics from the Commission on Adult Education conducted in 1983 Drudy and Lynch surmise that "those who were most likely to avail of adult education were those who had a positive view of their own schooling."[48] Therefore, the Revised Curriculum envisages that the role of the primary school in its capacity as the child's first encounter with formal education is central to instilling in each individual a love of learning. The Curriculum states that "primary education ...is an integral part of the child's life in general and [is] a crucial component in a continuum of lifelong learning."[49] It aims to "enable children to become lifelong learners through developing positive attitudes to learning and the ability to learn independently."[50] Through involving the child in a learning process that is "imaginative and stimulating" [51] the curriculum envisages that the child's love of learning will "express itself in an inquiring mind and a heightened curiosity."[52] As the child comes to a love of learning and thus begins to appreciate its value, the curriculum envisages that he will be enabled and empowered to take responsibility for personal

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[47] Department of Education and Science, *Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education* (Dublin: The Stationery Office, 2000), Introduction.

[48] Sheelagh Drudy and Kathleen Lynch, *Schools and Society in Ireland* (Dublin: Gill and McMillan, 1993), 262.

[49] Department of Education and Science, *Primary School Curriculum, Introduction*, 75.

[50] Ibid, 34.

[51] Ibid., 6.

[52] Ibid., 7.

learning.[53]

2.5.3 Higher order thinking and problem solving

There is evidence to suggest that in the past the Irish education system, at primary level has concentrated on the transference of facts giving little consideration to the development of critical thinking skills. This was implied in the results from both the IEA study of reading and the 1998 National Assessment of Reading referred to in chapter one. However, as the IALS study revealed, today's society demands more of its members than before. Workers are required not only to deal with constant changes and innovations but also to be able to predict them. The Green Paper reported that in order to facilitate this type of development, employers require people capable of critical thinking, with problem-solving abilities and individual initiative.[54] The revised Curriculum envisages a learning process that fosters the transfer of learning and develops these higher-order thinking and problem-solving skills.[55] It stresses the importance of "developing generic skills and abilities that help the child to transfer learning to other curriculum areas."[56] The curriculum defines higher order thinking skills as 'summarising, analysing, making inferences and deductions, and interpreting figurative language and imagery.'[57] It aims to facilitate a learning process that will enable children "to apply what they learn to new contexts in order to respond creatively to the variety of challenges they encounter in life [enabling him/her] to approach problems constructively, to communicate effectively and to relate successfully to others."[58] Clearly

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[53] Ibid., 74.
[54] Ibid., 11.
[55] Ibid., 9.
[56] Ibid., 75.
[57] Ibid.,16.
[58] Ibid., 34.

reflecting the demands made through the Green Paper, *Education for A Changing World*, the curriculum encompasses a strong emphasis on developing the ability to question, to analyse, to investigate, to think critically, to solve problems and to interact with others.[59] The Revised Curriculum emphasises the role of literacy learning in facilitating the development of these skills as part of the overall development of the child. The Revised English Curriculum is based on an integrated approach to the teaching of language where reading, writing and oral language is considered "inseparable,."[60] It embraces the principle that language is seen as central to the learning process and that children not only learn language but also learn through language. Through its implementation the English language Curriculum states that the child should be enabled to "justify and defend opinions...use oral language to manipulate images in problem solving...organise, clarify, interpret and extend experience."[61] It emphasises that language is the medium through which new learning is "assimilated and defined,"[62] and that the language activities encapsulated in the English curriculum will lead to the development of the higher order thinking skills of the child.[63]

2.5.4 Collaborative learning

Within society people rarely operate as isolated units. Within the workplace they are expected to work as a member of a team, to confer with, advise and listen to colleagues. Reflecting that for many Irish school leavers these are skills that have never been developed

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[59] Ibid., 11.
[60] Ibid., 45.
[61] Department of Education and Science, *English Curriculum*, 11.
[62] Ibid., 6.
[63] Ibid., 7.

the Green Paper contended that many of those entering the work force lack the communication and other interpersonal skills sought by employers.[64] It appears that having come straight from school or college to the work environment, many young people have become so accustomed to working by themselves and to viewing peers as competitors in the points race, that co-operation skills do not come naturally. We live in a changing society where once small communities and families supported each other and worked together for common good. As individuals it appears that we are becoming increasingly self-absorbed, with many of the traditional social support systems breaking down. The school has a pivotal role to play in creating an environment where children learn to help, support and advise each other. Often children will do this naturally. It is the system that they enter that forbids them to use these skills, they become void and are abandoned. Schooling systems and rigid curricula have insisted that children sit by themselves and work by themselves. Conferring is frowned upon in the fear that laziness or copying might ensue. As adults we constantly depend upon the guidance and direction of others. Where a small issue when looked at by one person may seem an impossible situation, the viewpoint and experience of another can bring new insight to the problem. Yet we do not afford children in our classrooms the same luxury. The solutions often arrived at through conferring and the actual verbal voicing of a problem are not available as a method of resolution in many classrooms. Acknowledging that "children are stimulated by hearing the ideas and opinions of others, and by having the opportunity to react to them,"[65] the curriculum substantiates the theory that collaborative learning "provides learning opportunities that have particular

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[64] Introduction, 11.
[65] Ibid., 17.

advantages."[66] Apart from contributing towards the intellectual progress of the child, collaborative learning facilitates the personal and social facade of his/her development. By the accommodation of learning in a way that is relevant the curriculum aims to "enable the child to develop personally and socially and to relate to others with understanding and respect."[67]

Although both group work and activity learning were promoted in the 1971 curriculum lack of training and understanding of the dynamics prevented the actualisation of such practices in Irish primary schools in general. With a more thorough in-service programme in place the revised curriculum envisages that Irish classrooms will become a place where learning will "involve guided and discovery methods," with collaborative learning featuring in the learning process.[68]

2.5.5 Social and Emotional dimension

The curriculum acknowledges that "the child's social and emotional development significantly influences his or her success in learning."[69] It suggests that "By providing children with the a successful and happy school experience, by nurturing essential intrapersonal and interpersonal development and by developing communication skills, children's self-esteem and self-confidence are raised and their motivation to learn is increased."[70] The development of the social and emotional facet of the individual is seen as

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[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid., 35
[68] Ibid.
[69] Department of Education and Science, *Primary School Curriculum-Introduction*, 16.
[70] Ibid., 16.

"a central concern of every curricular area."[71] While the curriculum acknowledges that the teaching of discrete subjects such as Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) have a particular role to play in the social and emotional development of the child, it also acknowledges the importance of catering for this development through out the learning experience of the child.

As was outlined in chapter one, happy learners are motivated and thus successful learners. However, catering for the social and emotional development of the child is not only attributed importance in terms of academic success. The curriculum acknowledges that "children live in and are part of society and that their personal development is deeply affected by their home and relationships in the home and with other people in society."[72] Therefore, it aims to take full account of the social and emotional development of the child helping them to "develop an appreciation of how the different dimensions of life complement each other."[73] The curriculum envisages the achievement of these aims through the provision of a learning environment that takes account of individual difference, integrates the development of the aesthetic dimension in learning and is underpinned by flexibility of the teacher and school in planning.[74]

Addressing what it is described as "a most important facet of the development of the child's personality,"[75] the English Language Curriculum identifies the *Emotional and Imaginative Development of the child through Language* as one of the strands under which its content is presented. It acknowledges that "in exploring emotions they can come to a

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[71] Ibid.

[72] Introduction, 6.

[73] Ibid., 6.

[74] Ibid., 10.

[75] Department of Educaiton and Science, *English Curriculum, Teacher Guidelines*, 9.

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[71] Ibid.
[72] Introduction, 6.
[73] Ibid., 6.
[74] Ibid., 10.
[75] Department of Educaiton and Science, *English Curriculum,Teacher Guidelines*, 9.

better understanding of themselves and of their relationships with others."[76] Highlighting the importance of literacy in contributing to the social and emotional development of the child the curriculum acknowledges that his/her "reading and writing experience will, increasingly, provide the context through which imagination and emotion can be explored."[77]

Conclusion

The need to address the literacy problem in Ireland has become increasingly well recognised. Initiatives such as the National reading Initiative, a review of the Leaving Certificate Examination and the Introduction of Educational legislation have been introduced in a bid to help address the problem. However, despite the efforts that have been made, the figures continue to demonstrate that Irish children and adults are not reading as well as counterparts in other countries. The Government is now in a position where money must be channeled into numerous initiatives in an attempt to fill the gaps left by what must therefore have been an inadequate education system. There is a greater responsibility than ever before on educators to ensure that in ten years time we do not see a repeat of this pattern. Regardless of the promises and visions promoted in the Revised Curriculum, this can only happen when educators working in the classrooms can find the commitment and enthusiasm needed to develop new methods of teaching that will meet its ideals. The Revised Curriculum for Irish Primary Schools acknowledges the need for teachers to bring "a rich imaginative and innovative range of strategies and resources to the learning

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[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid.

process."[78] It recognises that more so than any other factor, it is "the quality of teaching that determines the success of the child's learning and development in school."[79] However, to fully exploit this potential, responsibility lies with the teacher to ensure that her teaching methods are suited to the interests and abilities of each individual in the class. The figures presented through out chapters one and two regarding literacy and school retention suggest that in the past this have not been achieved.

If literacy and education are to be presented as relevant and enjoyable, and in such a way as to facilitate the development of the skills outlined above as stipulated by the Revised Curriculum, change is required. There is a need to look for new, more creative and imaginative teaching methods. It is here that the field of Drama in Education may have something to offer. The next chapter will consider if and how the use of Drama in Education can be used to facilitate the development of the skills identified in this chapter and to consider specifically how it can be used in the development of literacy skills vital for participation in the twenty-first centuary.

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[78] Department of Education and Science, *Primary Curriculum,Introduction.*, 21.

[79] Ibid., 20.

CHAPTER 3

DRAMA IN EDUCATION

The Revised Curriculum for Irish Primary Schools is designed to cater for the needs of children in the modern world.[1] It underlines the importance of a learning experience which will "enable children to acquire knowledge, concepts, skills and values that are appropriate to their present and future lives."[2] According to this document, skills required for participation in twenty-first century society are "interpersonal and intrapersonal skills, the ability to think critically, to apply learning and develop flexibility and creativity."[3] In order to achieve this, the need to nurture all the dimensions of the child's development, "spiritual, moral, cognitive, emotional, imaginative, aesthetic, social and physical," is recognised.[4]

The change of emphasis in the content and direction of the curriculum gives rise to a need for a corresponding change in teaching methods. Responsibility is placed on teachers to ensure that such change occurs.[5] The curriculum envisages that, the teacher will bring a "rich, imaginative…range of strategies to the learning process.' and will adopt "innovative approaches to teaching."[6]

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[1] NCCA, *Revised Curriculum for Irish Primary Schools, Introduction* (Dublin: The Stationery Office, 1999), vi.

[2] Ibid., 74.

[3] Ibid., 7

[4] Ibid., 6.

[5] Ibid., 21.

[6] NCCA, *Curriculum for Irish Primary Schools, Introduction* (Dublin: The Stationery Office, 1999), 21.

It is the purpose of this chapter to outline the potential of Drama in Education for facilitating the development of the skills demanded in the Revised Curriculum, as outlined above, in a revolutionary and emancipatory manner. It will suggest the power of drama as a means of bringing the learner towards an understanding of the potential that he/she possesses to take control of his/her own learning. Drama in Education will be offered as a potent method of engaging children in the learning process, highlighting the need for motivation in producing independent and effective learners. It will be presented as a necessary tool if as educators we are to prepare children to enter their communities as confident, independent individuals with the capacity to cope with all the challenges that an ever-changing society presents them.

3.1 Defining Drama in Education

In order to understand how drama in education can be used to meet these expectations, it must first be understood what is meant by the term Drama in Education. While the area of inquiry is by no means a new arrival to the field of education, it is only in recent years that it has become valued for its potential as an approach to classroom teaching and learning. For many, the words 'drama' and 'education' when used in the same sentence arouse memories of the school nativity play or the annual production, staged before an audience of adoring parents and grandparents. For teachers it is a term that connotes his/her worst nightmare. Feelings of terror and horror fill their very being. Images of costumes, sets, line learning accompanied by line forgetting and a general sense of confusion haunt them.

The term *Drama in Education*, or *process drama*, as it is offered by individuals such as Dorothy Heathcote, Cecilly O'Neill and Gaviin Bolton, and as advocated in this paper,

aims to draw teachers away from the traditional practices associated with drama in schools, such as those described above. Rather, it focuses on how drama can be implemented as a mode of classroom discourse to bring students to a deeper understanding of the body of information and values which constitutes the *curriculum*.[7] It describes the way in which the principles of drama are applied to the learning process of a child or adult. Instead of centring on a mode of instruction that asks students to listen while the teacher talks, drama in education advocates the use of practical activities that invite the student to take an active role in the learning process. Instead of reading about, for example, The 1916 Rising,[8] the learner may be asked to consider the events through the eyes of the men hiding in the GPO during the event. The group may be asked to make their way from one side of the city to the other observing what is happening around them on the way. He/she may be asked to adopt the stance of a British soldier, a mother of one of the soldiers or a politician during the same event. The learner may be asked to consider the motives for his/her action or to explore what the alternatives might have been. Drama in Education asks the learner to explore the event from the perspective of another, yet demands that he/she draws on all the knowledge of human nature that he/she may possess.

3.2 How does Drama in Education operate?

Drama in Education is based on the creation of an imagined world, "a dramatic elsewhere,'' which, will turn out to be "truthful to experience."[9] According to Heathcote, it

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[7] Further discussion as to what is implied by the term curriculum goes beyond the scope of this paper.

[8] The 1916 Rising took place in Dublin over the Easter weekend of that year, during which a group of patriots attempted to regain control of the city firm the British.

[9] Cecilly O'Neill, *Dramaworlds, A Framework for Process Drama* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1995), xvi.

" involves persons in active role taking situations in which attitudes, not characters, are the chief concern, lived at life rate (i.e. discovery at this moment, not memory based) and obeying the natural laws of the medium." [10]

Process drama does not depend on a written script. It is built up from a number of episodes or scenic units that are, according to Cecilly O'Neill, created, rather than rehearsed.[11] Each episode presents a problem to be solved. Like the all too familiar soaps that dominate television schedules, each episode is designed to end on a note of suspense. A dilemma is left unresolved drawing the attention of the audience to the next instalment. Action is left hanging in the air, giving rise to dramatic tension and driving the dramatic action forward. The episodic structure allows the "gradual articulation" of a dramatic situation, enabling it to be elaborated upon and extended.[12] Dramatic strategies can be used to slow action, to step back from a situation and take time to consider possible consequences, and solutions.

3.3 Drama and Motivation

In Chapter one the importance of motivation in the learning process was considered. Heathcote suggests that schools should are " like no other place on the planet."[13] Teachers

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[10] Dorothy Heathcote, "Drama and Education: Subject or System?" .in *Drama and Theatre in Education,* (London: Heinemann, 1971), 43.

[11] Cecilly O'Neill, *Dramaworlds, A Framework for Process Drama* (Portsmouth, Heinemann, 1995), xvi.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Dorothy Heathcote, "Like Sisyphus we Keep Pushing the Mountain" in A *Head Talle-Developing a Humanising Curriculum Through Drama in Education* (Birmingham: National Association for the Teaching of Drama, 1998), 1.

rarely look at the question of motivation. She suggests that for many, outside life is irrelevant to classroom life. Consequently, pupils are left to "wait for their real lives to take over at break times."[14] The Revised Curriculum calls for the provision of a learning experience that takes account of the need to motivate the child to learn.[15] Drama, offers a mode of teaching and learning that "can engage students, lure their interest, entice them to participate, captivate their imaginations and push them into exciting new worlds."[16]

At its most basic level drama is a potentially motivating approach to teaching and learning because children perceive it as something 'different.' All too often children are placed in learning environments where they are expected to remain seated at desks for the majority of the day. The children are expected to listen while teacher talks or reads straight from a textbook. Drama provides a break from this daily routine of sitting and listening. Children are provided with an opportunity to close books for a while, to move in and out of seats and to engage in group tasks. Through the drama, children may be drawn back to the textbook supplemented by other research material having had their appetites for information whetted by the dramatic encounter.

Process drama draws on the natural inclination of children to make-believe and play. [17] While the inclination to play is at strongest during childhood, according to Piaget, it persists into adulthood. Play is regarded as "an imaginative mode of being and interacting

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[14] Ibid.

[15] NCCA, *Primary School Curriculum, Introduction*, 14.

[16] Clar Doyle, *Raising Curtains on Education, Drama as a Site for Critical Pedagogy* (London: Bergin and Garvey, 1993), 53.

[17] Lynn McGregor, *Developments in Drama Teaching*, (London: Open Books, 1976), 14.

which takes us beyond the space of actual into the realms of possible."[18] Vygotsky, a Russian psychologist whose work has become highly influential on contemporary educational thought, emphasises that through children's play certain needs are satisfied.[19] The purpose of child's dramatic play is to work out possible sequences of events and consequences.[20] Driven by a curiosity to know and an intense need to explore, children role-play naturally from the first time they begin to move about.[21] They naturally interact with and strive to make sense of their environment.[22] Through play and the imagination, meaning is attributed to the surrounding world.

Drama is considered a natural extension of play.[23] They are integral parts of the same artistic process."[24] Thus, Drama provides access to a powerful meaning-making process. As human beings, we strive to understand the world around us; to find meaning in our actions and interactions. Drama facilitates the exploration of our environments in order to find meaning, in a way that echoes our " primary means of operating in the world."[25] Our desire to know is activated and the process of coming to know is sharpened and guided.[26] Context is crucial for understanding and assigning meaning to concepts and situations.[27] Drama offers a context which participants can use as a background against which to make

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[18] Luke Abbott and Brian Edmiston, "Contexts Between Play, Drama and Learning" in *A Head Taller, Developing A Humanising Curriculum through Drama* (Birmingham: National Association for the Teaching of Drama, 1998), 26.

[19] For further information refer to ,Lev Vygotsky, *Mind in Society-The Development of Higher Psychological Processes* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978)

[20] Wooland, 9.

[21] David Booth, *Story Drama*, (Ontario: Pembroke, 1994), 17.

[22] Linda S..Lumsden, *Student Motivation to Learn*, ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, 1994, 1.

[23] Lynn McGregor, *Developments in Drama Teaching* (London: Open Books, 1976), 14.

[24] Geoff Readman and Gordon Lamont, *Drama-A Handbook for Primary Teachers* (London: BBC Educational Publishing, 1994), 15.

[25] Michael Fleming, *Starting Drama Teaching* (London: David Fulton Publishers, 1994), 39.

[26] Louise Townsend, "Art as a Mode of Knowing," in *A Head Taller*, 86.

[27] Brian Wooland, *The Teaching of Drama in the Primary School* (Essex: Longman, 1993) 9.

decisions.[28] It fuels the learning process with a sense of purpose; there is a problem to be solved, an issue to be overcome, and a challenge to be met. From this arises the motivation to learn.

Robert Sylwester suggests that "kids learn more readily when they are emotionally involved in the lesson because emotion drives attention, which drives learning and memory."[29] Drama involves the participant from within the situation. Participants are offered an opportunity to feel the emotions that might be experienced were the situation to arise in 'real life.' The relationship that exists between the imagined world and the real world is central to the learning process unique to drama.[30] It offers opportunity to draw on what is already known by the child. From here stems familiarity and confidence, and thus the motivation to explore further. To create drama, participants must draw on their current knowledge of the world. It involves the application of past knowledge gained from prior experience to the new situation.

Yet, while it allows the student to put themselves in the shoes of another, the student can view what is happening from the perspective of self.[31] Although the dramatic situation is fictional, the emotions that students may experience can be very real. Children are offered the security of knowing that they are participating in a make-believe situation. There is no fear of the consequences that might result in a real life situation. By offering participants these distancing strategies, consequences and possible solutions can be explored in an

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[28] Ibid.
[29] Robert Sylwester, "About Our Brain," *Educational Leadership*, March 1997, 17.
[30] John Somers, Drama *in the Curriculum*, (London: Cassell, 1994), 11.
[31] Ibid., 11.

atmosphere where risk taking is safe. According to Heathcote, "the imagined world is the cake you can eat and still have."[32]

3.4 Personal development through Drama in Education

Drama in education offers a learning site that allows the learner to develop both as an individual and as part of a group. Through interacting with others, participants are led to make discoveries about who they are and what they may become. How the individual reacts to circumstances depends on how she perceives herself, both as an individual and in relation to others. Drama offers a platform from which the learner can view herself in a unique manner. She may be lead to challenge and to consider the underlying motives that cause certain behaviours. This is achieved through exploration of a number of facets of development of the individual such as confidence and the ability to interact with others.

3.4.1 Drama and self-confidence

Clar Doyle suggests that "the best gift we can give them [students] is the gift of confidence." [33] The Revised Curriculum for Irish Primary Schools contends that through the development of self-esteem and self-confidence, motivation of the child to learn is raised.[34] Drama offers a forum where every child can feel success. In drama, there are no correct or incorrect answers. The contribution of each individual forms a valuable part of

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[32] Betty Jane Wagner, *Dorothy Heathcote, Drama as a Medium for Learning* (London: Hutchinson, 1979), 230.

[33] Clar Doyle, *Raising the Curtains on Education,* xiv.

[34] NCCA, *Primary School Curriculum-Introduction*, 16.

the creation and exploration process. Every suggestion is a possible solution to a problem. Consequently, a child is not exposed to feelings of inadequacy. Through drama, the child is offered the opportunity to "face challenge and crisis in imagination before they find themselves overwhelmed by them in real life."[35] As she gains mastery over events as they unfold she may begin to feel a sense of equality to the world allowing her to relate "more comfortably and openly to others." [36]

Through drama, the student is brought to the realisation that she already possessed the resources and knowledge needed to resolve the situation. It serves to help students "discover that they knew more than they thought they knew."[37] In this way, the confidence level of the learner increases. Rather than depending on the teacher or texts to provide knowledge, the child may come to a realisation that within him/herself lies the potential to overcome difficulties met. It is a perspective that Heathcote suggests "they may well remember into adulthood."[38]

3.4.2 Drama and the Imagination

The imagination is a powerful and compelling phenomenon. It offers new possibilities and alternative futures. The Revised English Curriculum contends that "through the imaginative life the child can explore the infinite possibilities of human condition." [39] The greatest minds that have contributed to civilisation have done so on the power of possibility

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[35] Betty Jane Wagner, *Dorothy Heathcote, Drama as a Medium for Learning*, 228.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid.

[39] NCCA, *English Curriculum*, 8.

and the capacity to imagine. It is a force that has all too often been considered the domain of the artist, the writer or the dancer; rarely has it been associated with the realm of education. However, contemporary thinking in the area reveals that the imagination forms the basis of all our learning.[40] Courtney suggests that "the development of imaginative capacity and its externalised expression indicates a cognitive width...It includes the ability to turn the problem round, to see one facet and weigh it against another, and to relate all aspects to one another. It develops the individual's capacity to see oppositions, similarities and complexities."[41]

This implies that the imagination can no longer be excluded from the classroom. According to Kieran Egan, the imagination is "not some desirable but dispensable frill."[42] Rather, he suggests that, "Imagination is the heart of any truly educational experience...it is the quality that can give life and meaning [and] is central to all areas of thinking. Stimulating the imagination is not an alternative educational activity to be argued for in competition with other claims; it is a prerequisite to making any activity educational."[43]

Courtney draws attention to the relationship between imagination and play.[44] He goes on to point out that, play is dramatic. Bond asserts that, "Drama is the imagination's language."[45] It seeks understanding. Its success requires that students "vigorously" use their imaginations to sustain a "fictitious secondary world."[46] Drama, not only requires, but, as suggested by Neelands, "develops the imagination's ability to construct and 'make believe'

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[40] Further discussion on this issue is beyond the scope of this paper.

[41] Richard Courtney, *Recognising Raichard Courtney, Selected Writings on Drama and Education*, eds. David Booth and Alistair Martin Smith (Ontario: Pembroke, 1988), 104.

[42] Kieran Egan, *Imagination, Memory and Cognition*, www.educ.sfu.ca/people/faculty/kegan.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Courtney, 104.

[45] Edward Bond, " Rough Notes on Drama," in *Buliding Bridges* 9.

unfamiliar contexts and situations and...respond to them as if they were actually occurring."[47] Imagination is the search for meaning.[48] We constantly draw on the imagination to make sense of the world. In drama and in using the imagination, perception is extended to allow for the possibility of happenings not directly related to present circumstances.[49]

As part of the dramatic action, the participant must create an imaginary situation. Throughout the process, as responses are created and recreated, the child is asked to think on the spot. He must draw on the power of the imagination to create the appropriate response. In order to do so, past experience and prior knowledge is drawn upon. As the child creates and participates in drama, the potential to extend beyond his own sphere of reference is developed. He may begin to imagine possibilities and alternatives.

3.4.3 Drama for Understanding

Bolton suggests that the main aim of drama in Education is not to develop confidence, poise or a tool of expression; it is, "helping children to understand."[50] Cecilly O'Neill draws attention to the fact that " however deliberately drama is distanced from real life, it is the deepest concerns of their own lives that participants discover in drama."[51] Interacting within the frame of drama can lead the student to discover why people react as they do in various circumstances. Depending on the choice of the teacher *in the light of the needs of*

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[46] Mark Cremin, "The Imagination, and Originality, in English and Classroom Drama," *English in Education,* Summer 1998, Volume 32, No.2

[47] Neelands, 7.

[48] Edward Bond, "Rough Notes on Drama" in *Building Bridges*, 6.

[49] Lynn McGregor, *Developments in Drama Teaching* (London: Open Books, 1976), 79.

[50] Gavin Bolton, "Drama and Theatre in Education : A Survey" in *Drama and Theatre in Education*, eds. Nigel Dodd and Winifred Hickson (London: Heinemann, 1971), 12.

[51] Cecilly O'Neill, *Dramaworlds*, 4.

the group, situations can be set-up where issues such as racism, bullying, drug-abuse or homelessness can be explored. Regardless of the choice of subject matter, participants can be offered an opportunity to come to an understanding of the circumstances and motives that influence the way that people behave. As the child negotiates her way through the dramatic experience, she is forced into a kind of thinking that demands drawing on personal knowledge and experiences. In doing so, the participant is forced to be true to herself. Drama depends upon participants working with "integrity of feeling and thought."[52] Decisions must be honoured and consequences faced. Responsibility must be accepted for the course of action that has been chosen. Under the guidance and support of the teacher, she may be forced to question personal motives. Through communication and negotiation, the participant is drawn deeper into examining, justifying and challenging her actions. As this is done, an opportunity to come to a better understanding of how human nature operates and an awareness of the values and prejudices by which she is driven is offered.

Drama leads to the development of students who are empowered with the ability to "generate" their own learning.[53] Heathcote asseverates that with drama, students are encouraged to internalise control over their own learning, to generate their own goals and, begin to see themselves successfully experiencing attainments.[54] Townsend identifies the motivating power of art in leading learners "to grapple with experience and

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[52] Neelands, *Learning Through Imagined Experience*, 7.

[53] Dorothy Heathcote and Gavin Bolton, *Drama for Learning, Dorothy Heathcote's Mantle of the Expert approach to Education,* Foreword, Cecilly O'Neill (London: Heinemann, 1995),vii.

[54] Dorothy Heathcote, "Like Sisyphus…"in *A Head Taller*, 9.

knowledge."[55] As the student negotiates his way through the dramatic action, he is forced to think critically about the situation, to draw on all the prior knowledge within as a resource for finding a solution. Doyle contends that negotiation in itself is a real sign of empowerment.[56] It is produced out of reflective thinking. As the child tests out new meaning through the drama, she puts herself in an empowering position.[57] The learning experience adopts a particular significance for the student. What has been learned goes deeper than the superficial memorisation of a set of facts. The learning becomes internalised. Learning is significant and meaningful. The student may see the relevance in the learning process and begin to perceive it as his own personal responsibility. The shift of responsibility for learning from the teacher on to the student empowers the learner with the freedom of becoming the director of his own learning in a unique way.

3.5 Skills development through Drama in Education

While growth in understanding of human nature and the world is the most recognised type of learning produced by drama that is most widely recognised, drama is becoming increasingly recognised for its "considerable potential,"[58] for the promoting of other vital skills within the school curriculum. Such skills include enquiry, critical and constructive thinking, problem solving, and skills of interpretation, comparison, judgement and discrimination.[59] Drama is a practical activity, which uses space, movement and speech to

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[55] Louise Townsend, "Art as a Mode of Knowing" in *A Head Taller*, 84.
[56] Doyle, *Raising Curtains on Education*, 12.
[57] Louise Townsend, "Art as a Mode of Knowing" in *A Head Taller*, 85.
[58] Cecilly O'Neill and Alan Lambert, *Drama Structures* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1982), 15.
[59] Ibid., 16.

make meanings.[60] It uses movement, sound and energy as its language. As the storyline unfolds, human relationships change, providing opportunity for the exploration of consequent issues, behaviours or problems.[61] Participants bring a variety of life experiences to the created situation and, thus their "experience to deal with decisions."[62] Through Drama in Education, as students work on a problem as a group, they work towards the solution.[63] Drama in Education creates a "living, moving picture of life."[64] Because of this, the problem that participants are dealing with is clearly defined. Through the medium of the body, students become problem solvers. As children improvise, they hypothesise in action. Participants are forced to construct new, fictional situations, to imagine new futures, alternatives, problems and solutions.[65] The solution is expressed in dramatic form.

Drama demands that participants draw on all facets of their being to engage in the experience. It is an active learning strategy. It provides a forum for learners to engage with the content and skills in as many different ways as possible. Children are asked to 'do', to 'watch' and to 'listen.' In this way it caters for the needs of all learners.

3.6 Social development through Drama in Education

Learning is a social activity. Learning happens when information, attitudes and perspectives are exchanged and challenged. Likewise, drama is a social activity. It rarely

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[60] Jonathan Neelands, *Learning through Imagined Experience, the role of Drama in the National Curriculum* (London, Hodder and Staghtin, 1992), 4.

[61] Joe Winston and Miles Tandy, *Beginning Drama, 4-11* (London: David Fulton Publishers, 1998), x.

[62] Interview, Dorothy Heathcote.

[63] Richard Courtney,*Recognising Richard Courtney, Selected Writings on Drama and Education*), 29.

[64] Dorothy Heathcote, "Drama and Education: Subject or System?" 43.

[65] Jonathan Neelands, *Learning through Imagined Experience,* 7.

requires students to work independently.[66] The Revised Curriculum calls for learning experience that integrates collaborative learning. It contends that through collaborative work children are "stimulated by hearing the ideas and opinions of others" and that it "brings the child to an early appreciation of the benefits to be gained from co-operative learning."[67] All dramatic activities call on participants to converse, argue, interrogate, describe and discuss.[68] It is "always about communicating."[69] It involves people reacting with and for each other.[70] McGregor, Tate and Robinson suggest that the "flow of interaction and reciprocal response is at the heart of all drama."[71] It depends on the ability of people to co-operate with each other thus encouraging collaborative learning in a unique manner. Problems and issues are explored as part of a group allowing participants to benefit from the experience and insight of peers. Individual perceptions can be aired, challenged, extended and modified.[72] While the number of participants that engage in each episode may be small, other members of the group, provide an audience. The entire group is therefore engaged in the same activity. The social nature of the dramatic process reflects how the world operates. A child does not develop in a vacuum. Individuals are constantly interacting with each other, as members of a group and as members of a wider culture. Within the dramatic situation, individuals must interact in the same manner, learning from the different experiences that are brought together within the group.

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[66] Lynn McGregor, *Development in Drama Teaching* (London: Open Books, 1976), 15.
[67] Department of Educaiton and Science, *Primary School Curriclum, Introduction*, 17.
[68] Carmel O'Sullivan, Mary Corr, Mary Howard and Margaret Leahy, *Drama*, Draft, Mild General Learning Difficulties, 2.
[69] Ibid.
[70] McGregor, Robinson and Tate, 19.
[71] Ibid., 17.
[72] Ibid.

Heathcote suggests that drama can " improve class' social health because it requires that a person do certain things in relation to other people." [73] As group members collaborate with each other, drawing on each other's personal experiences, the level of trust between participants increases. Individuals become aware of the experiences and needs of other group members. Understanding of both their colleagues and ultimately themselves is challenged and if need be, modified. This is not confined to the relationship between the students. It encompasses the pupil teacher relationship. It is "a process of negotiation between pupils and teacher."[74]

3.7 The role of the teacher

The role of the teacher in ensuring the success of the use of Drama in Education in pivotal. However, as it differs in format and approach to traditional teaching methods, flexibility is required from the teacher as she endeavours to create a learning environment that is productive for students and teachers alike.

Heathcote suggests that in order for a dramatic experience to be successful there are five areas on which the teacher must first decide her tolerance level. These five areas are decision taking, noise, distance, and size of groups, teaching registers and status as teacher.[75] Decision taking refers to the amount of responsibility and input that the teacher is willing to give to the students. The noise threshold identifies the point at which the teacher feels that the class is making too much noise or an unproductive noise. Distance considers the degree to which teachers are comfortable getting involved with the interaction; it

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[73] Betty Jane Wagner, *Dorothy Heathcote, Drama as a Medium for Learning* , 227.
[74] Carmel O'Sullivan, Mary Corr et al, 3.
[75] Betty Jane Wagner, *Dorothy Heathcote, Drama as a Learning Medium*, 37-38.

depends on the personal space threshold of the teacher.[76] The size of the group with which you are working will determine to some extent the amount of control that can be exerted. By teaching registers, Heathcote is referring to "the attitude that you employ putting yourself at the service of the class."[77] The attitude may vary, it could be one of creating mystery, providing information, questioning or implying. The attitude adopted will both effect and be effected by the status that the teacher chooses to adopt. Whether or not the teacher chooses to adopt the position of teacher-in-role[78] will have a significant impact on this contribution. Heathcote suggests that teachers are made in the classroom during "confrontations with classes."[79] Strategies and approaches used are developed from survival instincts; the type of teacher that she becomes is the result. Drama in education is concerned with the way in which the teacher-student relationship flows. It is based upon a mutual respect between the two parties.

While the teacher has a vital role to play in facilitating the learning experience and will preferably chose to become an active participant in the situation, the responsibility for learning becomes a shared experience amongst the group with the teacher. Dependency on one perceived 'superior' individual, the teacher, decreases, as students become aware of the power to generate learning experiences in a meaningful and emancipatory way. A sender-receiver relationship is established between teacher and student.[80] The teacher is

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[76] Ibid.

[77] Ibid., 37.

[78] See Appendix 1.

[79] Dorothy Heathcote, "Drama and Education: Subject or System?" In *Drama and Theatre in Education*, ed. Dodd and Hickson, 42.

[80] Heathcote, *Selected Writings II-The Nature of Educational Drama*, 62.

encouraged to adopt a tenuous position, passing increasing degrees of responsibility into the hands of the learners.

The successful implementation of such methods requires a disciplined and focused approach to learning. Where drama is concerned, the needs of the child must take prominence over the plans of the teacher. Bolton goes so far as to say that "this kind of drama [process drama] puts tremendous stain [and] responsibility on the teacher."[81] The type and timing of the teacher's questioning is what transforms the experience into an educational challenge. Heathcote asserts that drama lessons should be structured rather than planned.[82] A noise threshold and space threshold must be established. He/ she must learn to be sensitive to the needs of a group. Within any dramatic experience, many issues and problems may be thrown up. Responsibility lies with the teacher to know which of these should be elaborated upon, based on which will be most relevant and of value to a particular group. Only the teacher can ensure that no failure is experienced. Using different language registers, use of voice, gesture and facial expression, the teacher is in a position to set the atmosphere, capture mood, create tension and set the quality of the drama. He/she must help the group to progress into less "well-known and understood territory,"[83] While providing a safe environment, the teacher must also create a learning situation which challenges students, causing them to expand understanding of an issue. According to Heathcote, the teacher must "know what not to say and when not to speak."[84]

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[81] Gavin Bolton, "Drama and Theatre in Education : A Survey" in *Drama and Theatre in Education*, eds. Nigel Dodd and Winifred Hickson (London: Heinemann, 1971), 12.

[82] Dorothy Heathcote, *Selected Writings II*, 78.

[83] Ibid., 74.

[84] Ibid.

3.8 Drama, language and literacy

Literature shows that the use of Drama in Education in the classroom has significant potential as an effective teaching approach that facilitates learning in an enjoyable and motivating way. In its very nature the way in which drama operates offers a unique passage to the development of language and literacy skills. Writers such as Heathcote, O'Neill, Neelands, Wooland and Booth draw attention to the dependency that co-exists between the two fields of enquiry. Both drama and literacy are dependent on the use of language,[85] draw on, extend the meaning-making capacity of the individual, and involve the interpretation of symbol systems.[86] Studies conducted in the area suggest that the use of drama in literacy instruction is not an optional extra, but is essential to the learning process.[87]

"Dramatic play takes place in an imaginative frame that depends upon language for its existence."[88] An inspection carried out in 1990 by the Department of Education and Science in the United Kingdom on 'The Teaching and Learning of Drama,'[89] reported that where it was taught, the use of drama had a strong influence on the development of awareness and understanding of interpersonal and social relationships, the development of

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[85] Michael Fleming, *Starting Drama Teaching* (London: David Fulton Publishers, 1994), 45.

[86] Brian Wooland, *The Teaching of Drama in the Primary School* (Essex: Longman, 1993), 8-9.

[87] For example, Joe Winston, "Giants, Good and Bad: story and Drama at the Heart of Key Stage One" in *Education 3-13,* Volume 22, No.1, March 1994. Shelby A. Wolf, "The Flight of Reading: Shifts in instruction, orchestration and attitudes through classroom theatre" in *Reading Research Quarterly,* Vol. 33, No.4, Oct/Nov/Dec 1998, 410.

[88] David Booth, *Story Drama, Reading, Writing and Roleplaying across the Curriculum* (Ontario: Pembroke, 1994), 25.

[89] HMI, *Aspects of Primary Education,The Teaching and Learning of Drama* (London: HMSO, 1990).

literacy and language skills, and social relationships and on the self-confidence of the children.[90] It reported that the use of drama promoted discussion, reflection and recording, that its immediacy provided a valuable purpose for written tasks and that it encourages the use of richer and more complex forms of learning.[91]

Dramatic play depends on language for its existence.[92] It demands that children communicate clearly and specifically. The language experience arises out of a genuine need to communicate. As problems and solutions are discussed, ideas expressed, questions posed and participants negotiate their way through the dramatic situation, a variety of language uses are required. Through the demands of a dramatic situation, the child can experience language registers that would otherwise be inaccessible. The choice of vocabulary, pitch and tone of voice will vary depending on the context and the role of the particular participant. Should a participant be put in the shoes of an irritated parent, a distresses child, or a lawyer in a courtroom, different uses of language and thinking are required. The scope and flexibility of drama is such that any of these circumstances may arise. Not only are students required to develop speaking skills, as spectators and fellow participants in the dramatic situation, participants are challenged to listen to each other. Because of the social nature of drama, action depends on how individuals respond to one another. To participate it is necessary to listen and reflect on the contributions of all those involved.

The combining of literacy learning and drama in Education can be approached in a number of ways. Drama can be used as a 'lead in' to a text. From within an existing dramatic

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[90] Ibid., 7.

[91] Ibid., 7-15.

[92] David Booth, *Story Drama, Reading, Writing and Role-playing Across the Curriculum*, 25.

context, written material may be introduced. For example, exploring an issue may lead to reading a relevant newspaper article. Alternatively, the text may serve as the starting point for dramatic action. In this situation, the drama depends on text to first provide the context for the action. [93]

The child's ability to become a literacy learner depends on his ability to "acquire the appropriate prior knowledge and...vocabulary to make sense during their reading and writing."[94] This means that before a child can be expected to read a word with any level of understanding, he must first be aware that the word exists. The oral language development of the learner is therefore central to the literacy learning process. Drama in education not only recognises, but also depends on, the centrality of language. During the dramatic experience, children are required to use language as a tool for socialising, thinking, communicating, expressing emotions and forming ideas.[95] Children are required to invent most of the dialogue for themselves. In doing so they must draw on ideas from the world around them, their reading of a text and from past experience.[96] A study conducted in an American high school on the influence of dramatic activities on oral communication skills of a group of ninth graders showed that across the sample there was a perceived improvement in oral expressiveness during the period of the study.[97]

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[93] For full description of techniques see Appendix 1.

[94] Patricia Cunningham, Sharon Arthur Moore, James W. Cunningham and David W. Moore, *Reading and Writing in Elementary Classrooms-Strategies and Observations*, (New York: Longman, 1995), 92.

[95] Neelands, 9.

[96] Linda Hoyt, "Many Ways of Knowing: Using Drama, Oral Interactions and the Visual Arts to Enhance Reading Comprehension" in *The Reading Teacher,* Vol.45, No.8, April 1992, 581.

[97] Robert S.Rosen and Stephen M. Koziol, Jr., "The Relationship of Oral Reading, Dramatic Activities, and Theatrical Production to Student Communication Skills, Knowledge, Comprehension, and Attitudes" in *Youth Theatre Journal*, Vol.3, No.4, 1990,1.

As well as providing opportunity for developing the oracy skills of the child, which are vital for successful literacy learning, it both "complements and enhances," reading and writing.[98] Through the engagement of the child's imagination and feelings, drama presents issues that arise in text in a way that matters to him/her. Writing on the subject of drama and reading, Teresa Grainger contends that while drama needs the world of fiction for situation, characters, problems, moods and themes, in the same way reading needs drama for techniques and conventions which facilitates children's engagement in and response to text.[99] Using drama in education, the child is offered an opportunity to enter the world of the book. Opportunities for exploration of material that could not be accommodated by any other means are provided. Children have the opportunity to "be what they are reading...they can become their books."[100] Children can explore and investigate the text that is being read. Using drama allows them to create alternative perspectives and attitudes and "dig deep into the substrata" of the story.[101] It invites the reader to speculate, create and reflect. Outcomes can be predicted in physical form, allowing children to test out hypothesis and reformulate expectations should the need to do so arise. Through drama characters in books become real, living people. The child can feel the emotions of the character, share the excitement, empathise with the situation and engage in a unique way with the action.

In order to achieve fluency in reading the child requires opportunities for multiple readings of text. The drudgery of reading and rereading the same passage of a book serves as a hurdle to many readers, particularly reluctant readers who require the practise. Participating

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[98] Neelands, 7.

[99] Teresa Grainger, "Drama and Reading: Illuminating their interaction" in *English in Education,* Vol. 32, No.1, Spring 1995, 29.

[100] Jeffrey Kaplan, "Acting up across the Curriculum: Using Creative Drama to Explore Adolescent Literature" in *The Alan review*, Volume 24, No. 3, Spring 1997, 3.

[101] Teresa Grainger, "Drama and Reading: Illuminating their interaction", 29

in dramatic action requires the child to continually refer to text, to read the lines and read between the lines as he/she strives to grapple with arising problems and issues. The rereading is perceived by the reader to a have a purpose, instead of being an arduous task, it is transformed into game of some description. In a study on the use of reader's theatre conducted in an American elementary school with third and fourth graders who were labelled as being at risk from school failure, revealed that "through increased opportunity for practice, the children... improved accuracy and momentum."[102]

Reading involves more than decoding print. It implies the ability to comprehend the message that is offered by the writer. Drama requires the same basic skills of comprehension that is required from the reading process. These skills include understanding, the ability to express details of plot, characters, sequence of events, cause-and-effect relationships, word meaning, motivations, main events of the story and ability to sense the mood.[103] Because participants have been directly involved with the dramatic situation providing a forum for emotional engagement, associated literacy activities adopt a new meaning for participants. Research carried out by Robert Gaskin investigating the effect of emotional involvement on reading comprehension, concluded that a subject's emotional involvement with the issue under discussion in the text affects comprehension of the text and that emotional involvement needs to be attributed a more prominent role in how we understand the reading comprehension process.[104] Drama requires that the child

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[102] Shelby A. Wolf, "The Flight of Reading: Shifts in instruction, orchestration and attitudes through classroom theatre" in *Reading Research Quarterly,* Vol. 33, No.4, Oct/Nov/Dec 1998, 410.

[103] Jennifer L. Alteiri, "Integrating Literature and Drama" in *Reading Teacher,* Vol.45, No.1, September 1991, 582.

[104] Robert W. Gaskins, "That's just how it was, The effect if issue-relater emotional involvement on reading comprehension" in *Reading Research Quarterly*, Vol. 31, No.4, Oct/Nov/Dec 1996, 386-405.

uses body, voice to create and comprehend the situation.[105] It prevents the "vague" understanding of a situation that is a result of "standing outside the story and looking in,"[106] Acting requires the participant to read between the lines. In so doing understanding of the situation is deepened and a tighter link is created between the learner and the "new learning."[107]

Through drama, situations arise where communication by means of writing may be required.[108] For instance, as part of the drama a participant may be required to give a statement to the police, which the police officer in turn will have to write up. Letters, newspaper articles, incident reports, graphs, or maps may be required. Because the process arises as a lead on from the dramatic situation, solutions and emotions have been explored prior to the writing process. The dramatic experience strengthens engagement with the topic, the imagination is stirred and vocabulary experienced and experimented with. Consequently, students are less likely to suffer from writer's block.[109]

As was discussed earlier in the chapter, drama acts as a strong motivating factor in children's learning.[110]

As was discussed in chapter one motivation also has a vital role to play in successful literacy learning. Teachers are constantly faced with the challenge of stimulating reluctant readers to pick up reading material. The research study conducted into the use of classroom

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[105] Linda Hoyt, "Many Ways of Knowing: Using Drama, Oral Interactions and the Visual Arts to Enhance Reading Comprehension," in *Reading Teacher* Vol.45, No.5, April 1992, 581.

[106] Jennifer L. Alteiri, "Integrating Literature and Drama" in *Reading Teacher,* 582

[107] Linda Hoyt, "Many Ways of Knowing…" 584.

[108] Jonathan Neelands, *Beginning Drama, 4-11* (London: David Fulton Publishers, 1998), 29.

[109] Jan Sutton, "Setting the Stage: Creative Drama in the Writing Classroom" in *Stage of the Art, Vol.9, No.7,* Spring 1998, 12.

[110] Cecilly O'Neill and Alan Lambert, *Drama Structures-A Practical Handbook for Teachers* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1982), 21.

theatre with the group of third and fourth grade children referred to earlier, revealed that through the implementation of the drama based approach to the teaching of reading, children improved their accuracy and momentum in reading. It reported that motivation, and confidence levels improved amongst the group and that they became more open to the "realm of reading" in general.[111]

Conclusion

While drama teachers and those who draw on drama based methods have traditionally been seen as "the barnacle attached to the sea of serious learning,"[112] the potential of Drama in Education has become increasingly well established on the international scene in recent years. It offers a site where learning can take place in a natural and motivating way. Students are offered the opportunity to take responsibility for their own learning experience leading to increased student autonomy.

The field of Drama and Education can facilitate literacy learning in a unique way. Through participating in dramatic activities learners are offered a purposeful context through which to explore text. Literacy is presented in a meaningful and purposeful way.

The Revised Curriculum for Irish Primary schools calls for the implementation of teaching methods that will develop the higher order thinking skills required for participation in society. The role of literacy in facilitating the development of these skills was outlined in

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[111] Shelby A. Wolf, "The Flight of Reading: Shifts in instruction, orchestration and attitudes through classroom theatre, " In *Reading Research Quarterly*, Vol. 33, No.4, Oct/Nov/Dec 1998, 382-415.

[112] Dorothy Heathcote, 'Like Sisyphus we Keep Pushing the Mountain' in *A Head Taller*, 5.

chapter one The literature reviewed in this chapter shows that Drama in Education can be used to facilitate this type of literacy learning and teaching needed to develop these skills.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter will outline the aims of the study, the research approach adopted and the research methodology employed.

The study examined the appropriateness of the use of drama in education to motivate children to read. The question was considered in light of its ability to facilitate the development of the skills endorsed by the new curriculum for Irish Primary schools as outlined in chapter two.

Along with a review of the relevant literature, an action research study was conducted in the area. A reading programme was designed and implemented with a class of fifth class pupils. The reading programme was based on the underlying principles and philosophy of the field of drama in Education, combined with what current literature considers to be the most effective in reading practise. The findings were based on a comparison between the effectiveness of the new teaching approach and the methods that were being used in the classroom prior to its implementation.

Part one of the chapter will review the research approach and methodologies adopted. Part two will describe the study in detail giving an outline of teaching techniques used.

4.1 Aims and scope of the study

The aim of the study was to investigate the effectiveness of Drama in Education when in the teaching of reading. It concerned the motivational aspect of drama in drawing students to literacy, as well as its scope to facilitate the development of all the skills involved in the literacy learning process. The study assessed the following aspects of the life of a sample classroom and the pupils.

- The attitude of the sample towards reading within the context of the classroom and as a leisure activity before and after the study.
- The effectiveness of drama as a motivating factor in encouraging children to read.
- The effectiveness of drama in developing the essential language and reading skills compared to the methods currently in use in the classroom in question.
- The effectiveness of a drama based reading programme in facilitating the development of higher order reading skills, comprising of comprehension prediction, inference, analysis, construction of meaning, ability to question, and insight compared to the traditional reading curriculum as implemented in the classroom in which the study was based.
- The effectiveness of drama to facilitate and develop group work and co-operative skills amongst the class sample chosen for the study.
- The appropriateness of a drama based reading programme in facilitating the skills advocated by the Revised Curriculum.[1]

[1] For a full account if these refer to chapter 2.

4.2 Limitations of the study

4.2.1 Time limitation

While the teacher and the school were very accommodating in permitting the researcher extended time slots on the timetable each week, time limitation was still a problem for the researcher. The study was conducted over a four-week period excluding a two-week observation and preparation period. Each session lasted for approximately one hour. In order to investigate any significant changes in reading attitude or reading age a longer period would have been necessary. The study however was designed as a small-scale research project, which would form the basis of a Masters thesis. This imposed limitations on the type of data collection that the researcher could conduct as well as effecting the significance of conclusions and recommendations that could be drawn from the study.

4.2.2 Researcher as learner

As a student in the area of literacy and Drama in Education, the researcher was herself a new comer to the area of Drama in Education. Consequently, the teaching process was a learning experience for the children, the class teacher and the researcher alike. This however put a realistic slant to the project as difficulties encountered and overcome by the researcher reflected the same problems that might arise for any classroom teacher experimenting with a new teaching approach. The researcher also had the advantage of guidance and support from an expert in the area of Drama in Education.

Data was gathered using a wide range of research tools before, during and after the study. Observation, questionnaires, private journals, conversations and interviews were included

in the data collection techniques. The distribution and filling of questionnaires before and after the implementation of the experimental teaching method aimed to establish the attitude of the sample towards reading within the context of the classroom and as a leisure activity before and after the study. The reading programme, based on the use of drama, was designed and implemented over a four-week period. Through observation and interviewing, the effectiveness of the programme in motivating the children to read was assessed.

The study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of a drama based reading programme in facilitating the development of higher order reading skills, comprising of comprehension, prediction, inference, analysis, construction of meaning, ability to question, and insight. Again, this was assessed using observation and interviewing.

The potential of the use drama to facilitate and develop group work and co-operative skills amongst the class sample chosen for the study was evaluated in the light of the observations made before, during and after the implementation of the reading programme.

4.3 Research design-qualitative or quantitative?

The field of educational research offers the choice or combination of two general research approaches, *qualitative* research or *quantitative* research. A quantitative research approach measures a single objective actuality/reality that can be defined in terms of statistics.[2] It can be used to establish context free, sweeping generalisations.[3] Qualitative research approaches on the other hand, while not claiming to be able to achieve universal generalisations, take into account the non-consistent human and social dimension present in

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[2] James H. McMillan and Sally Schumacher, *Research in Education*, 4th Edition (New York: Longman, 1997), 17.

[3] Ibid., 16

the environment of the issue that is being studied.[4] It aims to "describe and analyse individual people's individual and collective social actions, beliefs, thoughts and perceptions,"[5] and is used to develop "context bound generalisations."[6] It permits the researcher to study selected issues in depth and detail.[7] While quantitative research provides statistical results on a field of inquiry, qualitative research 'presents facts in a narration with words.'[8]

The researcher wished to take an in-depth look at how children are currently taught reading and to assess any reaction to a change in interaction and instruction in a classroom. Investigating the social and personal dimension of the implementation of the experimental teaching method was pivotal in fully assessing outcomes of the programme. Assessing these reactions in a normal classroom environment was needed to ensure validity of any findings. As qualitative research enables the researcher to investigate behaviour as it occurs naturally in a non-contrived situation,[9] the researcher considered it the most appropriate design for the intended study.

Having chosen to conduct a qualitative research study, the researcher had then to consider how best the aims of the study might be met in terms of a research lens. The researcher wished to gain first-hand experience of how the experimental teaching method might work

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[4] Ibid., 16-17.
[5] Ibid., 391.
[6] Ibid., 17.
[7] Michael Quinn Patton *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods*, 2nd Edition (London: Sage Publications, 1990), 13.
[8] McMillan and Schumacher, 15.
[9] Ibid, 40.

in an actual classroom. On this basis, the researcher chose to conduct an action research study into the topic.

4.4 Action Research

The field of educational research is becoming increasingly aware of the need to bring theory and practise closer together.[10] While the importance of grounding any educational methodology in solid theory cannot be questioned, it is equally important that it is also applicable to real life situations. From this has arisen a style of research known as action research. It was first used in America in the 1920s. This developed as a result of the growing interest in group dynamics in the field of education.[11]

Action research involves the intervention of an individual or individuals into a real life situation and the subsequent examination of the effects incurred by this intervention.[12] Patterson and Shannon describe it as "inquiry in which practising teachers try to understand the particular individuals, actions, policies, and events that make up their work environment in order to make professional decisions."[13] According to McCutcheon and Jung, the main constituents of action research are "systematic inquiry, reflexivity, and focus on the practical."[14] They assert that "it seeks to answer questions and solve problems

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[10] Louis Cohen and Lawrence Manion, *Research Methods in Education*-4th Edition (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 188.

[11] Cohen and Manion, 188.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Dorothy Schuler and Eileen T Borgia, *Action Research in Early Childhood Education*, ERIC Identifier: ED401047, ERIC Clearing House on Elementary and Early Childhood Education, 1996

[14] Ibid.

that arise from the daily life of the classroom and to put findings into immediate practice."[15] Ring suggests that action researchers "are intent on describing, interpreting and explaining events while they seek to change them for the better." [16]

Cohen and Manion consider the use of action research as appropriate when, as with this study, the researcher wishes to introduce a discovery teaching method where traditional methods had been in prior use.[17] From the implementation of the reading programme in the classroom, the researcher was able to draw conclusions applicable to a real life situation, adapting and changing to suit the needs of the particular situation as is necessary in any classroom situation.

The use of action research as a means of investigation permits a researcher to take a real life situation based within the working world and work out a solution to a problem, or improve on the current situation, in a way that is relevant and directly applicable to the setting.[18] As with all purely qualitative approaches to educational research, findings of action research cannot always be used to form sweeping generalisations and conclusions. It is by its nature situation specific. However, because action research is based on observation and behavioural data, it does have an empirical basis, and is becoming increasingly recognised as a vital aspect of educational and professional development.[19]

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[15] Ismat Abdal-Haqq, *ERIC as a Resource for the Teacher Researcher*, ERIC Identifier: ED381530, ERIC Clearing House on Teaching and Teacher Education, 1995

[16] Mary Ryng, "Action Research: A Teacher's Perspective" in *Oideas* 46, Fomahar 1999, 84.
[17] Cohan and Manion, 194.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid.

4.5 Triangulation

Because all qualitative researchers and therefore action researchers do not base their findings on statistical test analysis, they are obliged to monitor their analytical techniques and processes as much as possible.[20] Collecting data on the same aspect of research from a variety of different perspectives in a variety of different ways will enable the researcher to cross validate information by reviewing for consistency across the board. [21] This technique is known as *triangulation*. Triangulation is defined as "the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of education."[22] It is particularly important that not only is information collected from different sources but that it is collected using different collection techniques.

The researcher used different sources and strategies of data collection to compare for regularities and recurring patterns. Questionnaires, interviews and observation were used to assess the attitude of the children towards reading. Prior to the study, the children were interviewed regarding their attitude towards reading. This was investigated further with the use of questionnaires with the children. The class teacher also discussed his perception on this issue with the researcher.

Both the researcher and the class teacher observed the children during the study to monitor participation and enthusiasm levels and any change in the working atmosphere amongst the sample group. After each session the class teacher would read the researcher's observation notes and verify or challenge any points.

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[20] Schumacher and McMillan, 520.
[21] Ibid., 521.
[22] Cohen and Manion, 233

After the implementation of the reading programme, the questionnaires were redistributed to the children and the same sample were re-interviewed. In the weeks proceeding the study the class teacher continued to observe the class for any change in attitude and the appearance of new skills that he perceived were a consequence of the revised teaching method. A written summary of any changes was forwarded to the researcher in April, two months after the implementation of the study.

4.6 Review of the Literature

Part one of the thesis is based on a review of the literature in the relevant areas. The review covered literature in the areas of international and national literacy statistics, literacy learning, literacy and motivation, curricular policy in Irish Primary schools since the 1970s and Drama in Education.

A literature review is "a critique of the status of knowledge of a carefully defined topic."[23] It enables the researcher to gain a foundation and further insight into his/her particular study.

It includes literature from a variety of sources including professional journals, document dissertations and electronic resources such as literature published on the internet. The purpose of a literature review is to define and limit the problem, place the study in a historical perspective, avoid replication, select methods and measures and to relate the findings to previous knowledge and suggest further research.[24]

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[23] James H. McMillan and Sally Schumacher, *Research in Education-4th Edition* (New York: Longman, 1997), 119.

[24] Ibid., 120.

Literature on each of the areas was sourced in a variety of different ways. Searches were carried out in library databases of a variety of the major colleges and universities in Ireland and Great Britain.[25] The bulk of this work was completed in the Trinity College Dublin library, which has status as a copyright library.[26] Internet searches were conducted through the ERIC database and using other general search engines.[27] While internet searches are of some use, it is worth noting that much of the information offered was irrelevant. Sieving through web-sites can often be a time consuming and fruitless task, even where they are conducted, as is recommended, using specific topic headings.[28]

In order to ensure an up-to-date review of the relevant literature, organisations concerned with the areas of literacy and drama were contacted.[29] This was done through the internet, mail, fax and telephone.

Information was also recorded when the researcher attended conferences on the areas of literacy and Drama in Education. Relevant information was presented at each of the following conferences and added to the literature gathered from other sources; The Reading Association of Ireland Annual Conference 1999 and 2000, the Irish Drama in Education Association first Annual Conference 1999, the Educational Studies Association of Ireland Annual conference 2000, the Past Students Association of the Church of Ireland College of Education 1999, and the launch of the National Reading Initiative 2000.

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[25] Trinity College Dublin, University College Dublin, University College Galway, University College Cork, St. Patrick's College of Education,University of Ulster, Queens College Belfast, Stranmillis College of Education, St. Mary's College of Education, Cambridge University.

[26] This means that all new publications in Ireland and Great Britain are held in the library.

[27] These include Yahoo, Ask Jeeves and MSN.

[28] McMillan and Schumacher, 120.

[29] Reading Association of Ireland, Educational Research Centre—Drumcondra, London Drama, Central School of Speech and Drama, Drama Department-Stranmillis College of Education, Association of English Teachers, American Alliance for Theatre and Education.

4.7 Action Research Component

The second part of the study comprised of the designing and implementing of a reading programme based on findings from the literature review. The action research component of the study allowed the researcher the opportunity to convert the theory that had been studied into actual classroom practise. The programme was implemented with a class of fifth class children. The programme was implemented over a period of four weeks. On average, three one-hour sessions were conducted each week.

The assessment of the effectiveness of the action research programme required that the findings be reported in light of a comparison between the abilities of the sample in the identified skills before and after its implementation. In order to achieve a complete and accurate picture of the effect of the programme a wide-range of assessment tools were required. Observation, both participant and non-participant, questionnaires, interviewing and journals/diaries were used by the researcher at various stages of the study.

4.7.1 Observation

Observation was employed as a research tool pre, during and post the study. In the first instance, it was necessary to conduct a baseline survey to establish where the class were at in regard to the skills and abilities that were being examined. During the course of the action research project, the children were under continual observation by the researcher-teacher. During the period after the study, the class teacher continued to observe and record the class looking for the same skills in order to establish if any changes had occurred. The skills that the class was observed for were,

- Co-operation skills
- Ability to comprehend and analyse text
- Ability to listen
- Ability to express views and opinions
- Ability and willingness to contribute to classroom discussions in a way that demonstrates comprehension
- Ability to question
- Ability to engage with text.

As Bell points out, observation as a research tool is not an easy option.[30] While observation will enable the researcher to experience the environment being studied in the most natural way it is also one of the most obtrusive data collection techniques.[31] It does however reveal characteristics that would be impossible to discover by any other means.[32] According to Hitchcock and Hughes, it is the most effective method of uncovering 'the black box of the classroom.'[33]

The most problematic side of using observation as a research tool is the risk of observer bias. However through the use of a variety of data collection methods the researcher attempted to ensure that data from observations was as non-biased as possible.

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[30] Judith Bell, *Doing your Research Project*, 3rd Edition (Cambridge, Open University Press, 1999), 156.

[31] Mary Simpson and Jennifer Tuson *Using Observation in Small-scale Research, A Beginner's guide* (Edinburgh: The Scottish Council for Research in Education, 1995), 55.

[32] Judith Bell, Doing you Research Project, 156.

[33] Graham Hitchcock and David Hughes *Research and the Teacher, A Qualitative Introduction to School-Based Research* (London: Routledge, 1989), 133.

Observations were recorded in the form of field notes as recommended by Schumacher and McMillan.[34] Recording information in this way is suitable where the observer cannot determine exactly what is to be observed until it happens. This allowed the researcher a greater degree of freedom in deciding what would be observed in each session.[35]

Prior to the implementation of the programme, the researcher adopted the role of non-participant observer. This role later changed to participant observer when she took her role as teacher-researcher.

Non-participant observation

In order to establish the level of the class in each of the predetermined skills areas, the researcher chose to observe as a non-participant. As a non-participant observer, the individual conducting the observation distances himself from the activities that are being investigated.[36]

The researcher began observation in the sample classroom in the month of November. Initially visits were conducted once a month gradually building to fortnightly and during the fortnight previous to the implementation of the project, a daily basis.

When observing in the classroom the researcher positioned herself towards the back of the classroom but to the side of the room.[37] Taking into account the inevitability of children turning around to see what the researcher was doing, her location ensured that while she was far enough away so as not to be within the class, she was actually within view of the

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[34] McMillan and Schumacher, 46.
[35] Simpson and Tuson, 48.
[36] Cohen and Manion, 109.
[37] For plan of classroom, see Appendix 2.

majority of the children. This course of action is recommended by Bell who suggests that it removes the mystery element that might otherwise surround an observer's presence.[38] During the course of the study, the children in the sample attended swimming lessons. At the researcher's own suggestion, she went with the children on these excursions. As well as assisting the class teacher, a male, who felt it was safer to have a female present in case of any problems with the girls in the class, this allowed the researcher to become part of a less formal school situation. The researcher was able to observe the class in a very natural way. Informal conversations with the children on

these occasions gave the researcher further insight into the social skills of the children and enabled her to assess how they worked together as a group.

Participant observation

Simpson and Tuson describe participant observation as "the most subtly intrusive of all observation."[39] As a participant observer, the observer engages in the activity that is to be observed.[40] In effect, the observer becomes a member of the group under investigation.[41] Participant observation provides an opportunity for the researcher to observe phenomena as it occurs in its natural situation. However, this method of observation is demanding for the researcher. It requires the researcher to be fully engaged with the task in hand while also analysing the events in a non-biased manner.[42]

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[38] Bell, 157.
[39] Simpson and Tuson, 14.
[40] Cohen and Manion, 107.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Simpson and Tuson, 14

4.7.2 Questionnaires

Questionnaires are used to gather data at a particular point in time. Usually the researcher devises a form containing questions to which the respondent may chose from a selection of answers, for example yes, no or maybe.[43] If desired by the researcher, opportunity may be given to provide reasoning behind the choice made.

The purpose of using questionnaires as part of the study in question was to establish the general attitude of the participants towards reading both before and after the study.

The researcher aimed to use the questionnaire to establish the preferred leisure activities of the children as well as the types of literacy activities in which the children preferred to participate. The researcher hoped that this would enable her to assess if the experimental reading programme led to a change in attitude amongst the sample class toward reading. The use of questionnaires also provided the researcher with a method of validating data collected from interviews and observation.

Because the questionnaire was for use with children, it was particularly important that the questions were phrased using clear, understandable language.[44] At fifth class level, the children were too advanced to be presented with the happy/sad face semantic differential scale that is often used with young children.[45] However, the language used and the layout of the questionnaire was important to its successful completion. When drafting any questionnaire McMillan and Schumacher recommend that words such as, *few*, *sometimes*

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[43] McMcmillan and Schumacher, 46.
[44] McMillan and Schumacher, 46.
[45] Ibid., 260.

and *always* should be avoided as they are vague and may cause confusion on the side of the respondent.[46]

The layout of a questionnaire is vitally important.[47] The layout of the questionnaire was designed to appeal to the children. Rather than presenting the children with a daunting looking document comprising of lists of questions on plain white paper, an effort was made to make the documents more child-friendly. Each page held no more than three questions. These were laid out using double spacing. Clip-art images were inserted on each page to make it look more appealing and borders were added to create effect.

The length of a questionnaire is important. If a questionnaire is too long a child may become bored and may not finish it to the best of his/her ability.[48] The questionnaire consisted of thirteen questions.[49] Questions one to ten were multiple-choice format. These questions aimed to establish a general idea of the how the children perceived the activity of reading both in and out of school. Questions related to the amount of time spent reading, the extent to which children enjoyed reading and the importance, which they accredited to reading. The questions were based on a Likert-type scale. Scale format questions are often used in questionnaires as they allow relatively accurate assessments of beliefs or opinions.[50] A four-point response system was adopted. Research reveals that a four-point response system is more suitable for use with elementary level children. Evidence suggests

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[46] McMillan and Schumacher, 253.
[47] Cohen and Manion, 96.
[48] Cohen and Manion, 96.
[49] For copy of questionnaire see Appendix 3.
[50] Schumacher and McMillan, 257.

that young children have difficulty differentiating between more than five discrete categories.[51]

Questions two to six and eight to ten provided an opportunity for the children to justify choices made on the scale. For instance, question two asked the children if they thought reading was a great way to spend time, an interesting way to spend time, an OK way to spend time or a boring way to spend time. The choice was followed by the question 'why?' and space was provided for the child to expand on the issue.

In questions ten to thirteen children were asked to express preference towards the type of books they liked to read, how free time was spent and the type of reading material they chose to read. Options were provided which the children ranked in order of preference.

4.7.3 Interviews

Interviews were used during the course of the study for two purposes. In order to support the results of the questionnaires that assessed the attitude of the children towards reading the researcher also selected a sample of children form within the class to interview in detail on the subject. Interviews were conducted with these children before and after the implementation of the reading programme. Interviews were also conducted with the class teacher before and after the study to assess how he considered the attitude of the children towards reading, reading lessons and on each of the areas for which the children were also observed.

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[51] Gambrell, Palmer, Codling and Mazzoni, "Assessing Motivation to Read" in *The Reading Teacher*, Vol 49, No. 7, April !996, 525.

While interviewing is not an easy skill to master, as a method of data collection it has a number of advantages. It is flexible, suitable for gathering information and exploring peoples' thinking and motivation, and can provide a large amount of information.[52] Interviews can be used to enrich and validate data collected by other means, in this case, observation and questionnaires.[53] Unlike other forms of data collection, interviews have the added advantage of providing the researcher with an

opportunity to clarify misunderstandings, and to probe for clarification on particular issues.[54] This was of particular importance to the researcher as a substantial amount of the data was collected from the children involved in the study whose writing ability may not have permitted the degree of depth required for the study. Interviewing provided the researcher with an opportunity to question the children in more detail on the relevant topics. Using interviews with children had the added advantage of providing a means of getting information from children who were weak at reading and writing.[55]

Hitchcock and Hughes contend that the success of any interview depends heavily on the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee.[56] Acknowledging the importance of building up some degree of confidence and trust with the subjects, the researcher, who conducted the interviews, had spent time over a period of five months visiting the classroom to talk to the children, observe the children and become familiar with them.[57] This made an important contribution to ensuring that the children could feel comfortable

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[52] Eric Drever, 8.
[53] Ibid., 19
[54] Eric Drever, *Using Semi-structured Interviews in Small Scale Research (*Glasgow: The Scottish Council for Research in Education, 1995), 3
[55] Schumacher and McMilllan, 263
[56] Hitchcock and Hughes, 86.
[57] Hitchcock and Hughes, 64.

with the interviewer and were not dealing with a complete stranger and that, as advised by Wallace, the interview maintain a friendly and relaxed atmosphere.[58]

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The bulk of the interviews took the format of *semi-structured.* In a semi-structured interview, the interviewer decides in advance what ground is to be covered in the interview, and what main questions are to be asked. More specific questions are worked out during the course of the interview depending on how the interviewee responds. The interviewer uses prompts and probes to get the interviewee to clarify or expand on points.[59] As recommended for conducting semi-structured interviews, the interviewer drew up a schedule of the main points that she wished to discuss.[60] A schedule serves as a guide to the interviewer, reminding him/her of the important topics that need to be covered.[61] Where multiple interviews are involved, as was the case in this instance, a schedule will ensure consistency across the interviews.[62]

At his request, the class teacher was not formally interviewed. As someone who had attended secondary school and teacher-training college along with the researcher he felt comfortable enough to provide any information requested and answer any questions through informal conversation. Once the researcher had decided upon an interview schedule, this was not a problem. The researcher knew the areas on which she wished to question the teacher and integrating relevant questions into conversation made the teacher feel more comfortable. Informal conversations were conducted with the teacher on the

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[58] Michael J. Wallace, *Action Research for Language Teachers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 149.

[59] Eric Drever, *Using Semi-structured interviews*, 1

[60] Michael J. Wallace, *Action Research for Language*, 147.

[61] For interview schedules for children and teacher see appendices 4 and 5 respectively.

[62] Drever, 18

relevant issues over the duration of the study and information recorded by the researcher afterwards. The teacher was aware that information from any conversation with the researcher might be noted and used as part of the study.

The interviews that were conducted with the children were conducted with a sample of six children. Four pilot interviews were first conducted with a sample of children who were in the same class as the children used in the study. This permitted the researcher to assess how long the interviews would take while also allowing her to experiment with the type of questioning that would put the children at ease and ensure maximum information retrieval most suitable for the children. Bell highlights the importance of practising interviewing to refine skill and technique.[63] The way in which questions are worded to the interviewee is an important element in ensuring a productive session.[64] The language used in questioning should be understandable by the respondents.[65] Questions that are too demanding will cause the interviewee to become nervous.[66] This was particularly relevant where the interviews were conducted with children. The way in which questions are worded can also suggest answers to the interviewee and promote the voicing of opinions that she may wish to hear.[67] Similarly, the wording of the questions, tone of voice, facial expression and body language can be used to relax the interviewee and encourage him/her to volunteer more information.[68] The piloting of the interviews assisted the researcher to refine these techniques.

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[63] Bell, 71.
[64] Wallace, 147.
[65] Bell, 73.
[66] Ibid., 70.
[67] Simpson and Tuson 19.
[68] Bell, 70.

The six children who participated in the interviews did so of their own free will.[69] Before being asked to participate, it was explained to all the children in the class what the purpose of the interviews were, what the information would be used for, and the topic that would be discussed during the interview. Permission was first received in writing from the parents of the children based on the child also agreeing.[70] Only one child requested that she would not be interviewed and later reversed this decision. The letters of permission signed by the parents specified that the interviews and lessons could be recorded using a tape recorder and/or a camcorder. This gave the researcher the advantage of being able to review the interviews and make more detailed assessments. Taping the interviews also allowed the interviewer to give the interviewees her full attention and prevented a scenario where notes would be made as the interview was conducted, both of which can be problematic for both parties concerned. [71]

At the beginning of each interview the children were given the choice of switching off the tape recorder, only one child requested that this might be the case. The camcorder was placed in a position where it was out of view of the children but focused on the face and body of the child. Each child was offered the opportunity to look through the viewfinder of the camcorder. The researcher felt that this would help remove some of the mystery from the equipment.

Hitchcock and Hughes emphasise that many of the problems that can arise during fieldwork can be reduced when it is conducted in familiar settings.[72] The researcher

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[69] The issue of ethics and children and research are discussed later in the chapter.
[70] For copy of letter see Appendix 6.
[71] Hitchcock and Hughes, 94.
[72] Hitchcock and Hughes, 64.

therefore chose to interview the children near the classroom. The interviews were conducted outside the classroom in an area at the top of the stairs where the children often socialised before going out to and coming in from the yard. It was a location where the researcher felt the children would feel comfortable, unlike using the staff room where the children may have felt intimidated. The area was between the two senior classrooms and formed the corridor to the toilets. As the interviews were conducted during class time and both teachers were asked to keep the children from coming in and out to the toilets, there was a minimum amount of interruption. It was the only location in the school where the researcher felt could have some degree of privacy could be achieved without compromising on safety measures. The researcher felt particularly strongly about this as she was going to be in a situation where only she and the child would be present.

Interviewees

The children with whom the interviews were conducted were chosen based on results from the Micra-T standardised reading test and the Drumcondra standardised reading test. The tests had been conducted with the children in September. The guidelines in the tests stipulate that, at least a six-month time lapse is allowed before reading the test. This meant that the researcher was not in a position to administer the tests again. A boy and a girl were selected from the top, middle and lower spectrum of reading ability according to these tests. In selecting the interviewees, personality was also taken in to account. This was to ensure that the interviewees were not all typically lively or typically shy children. The names of the children have been changed to protect their identity.

1) Emily

Actual age at time of testing-10.5

Reading age according to Micra-T-15.06

Emily comes from a steady family background. Her father is a farmer and her mother a nurse. She has older siblings involved in second and third level education. Emily was selected as she had the highest reading age in the class. From observation and consulting with the class teacher, the researcher found Emily to be a quiet but confident child. While she did not often volunteer information when the class was being questioned on a topic Emily would have no difficulty in answering if called upon to do so. From her observations the researcher noted that Emily would often appear not to be listening in class, tending to look out the window or flick through books instead.[73] This however proved to incorrect as seen in the way that she was able to pick up from what the teacher had said at any stage.

Her pastimes included reading and playing sports. She competed on a national level in badminton along with her classmates and was at the time top of that age-group in the country. In the schoolyard, Emily generally joined in the football games as the teams were always mixed. She participated wholeheartedly in this activity and was very active on the field.

[73] Example, January 11th, 2000.

2) Stewart

A.A-10.3

R.A-13.0

Stewart comes from a two-parent family. His father is a farmer and his mother works in the home. He has older brothers who attend the local secondary school.

Stewart was a lively, enthusiastic child who may be labelled as the class joker with a strong classroom presence. He often contributed to classroom conversation often without being called upon to do so. Stewart came across as a very confident child who said exactly what he thought. He did however have a very serious side to his personality as seen from his general enthusiasm towards his work, and his sensitive approach to his peers. His classmates listened to Stewart and he had a position as one of the class leaders.

More so that any other child in the class, observation revealed that Stewart's ability to read into situations and to think critically was very well developed when compared to other class members.[74] He demonstrated a particular ability at Maths. The observer noted on several occasions that he did not appear to be listening to the teacher and on at least one occasion, questioning by the teacher verified this.[75] Stewart was an avid football enthusiast and every breaktime was spent pursuing this activity. He displayed a potential to be aggressive on the sports field. He displayed a strong sense of fair play and expected others to play by the same rules.

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[74] As observed by the researcher, Tuesday January 11th, Thursday 13th January, Tuesday 1st February.

3) Lorna

A.A-10.4

R.A-11.5

Lorna was a pleasant, cheerful child. Lorna hailed from a two parent family and both her mother and father were in full time employment. She was not a child who would push herself forward in class. She was not shy when called upon to do things in class although she tended not be asked often. Lorna had her own particular set of friends, a generally lively but hardworking group of girls. Lorna was a child who opened herself up more on a one to one basis, such as when the researcher was helping with supervision at the swimming pool and during break time. Her break times were generally spent either talking with her peers or looking after the younger children as was the way for some of the older girls in the school. Lorna gave the overall impression of a relaxed, happy-go-lucky child who, while interested in her work did not always consider it the most important aspect of the school day.

4) Andrew

A.A-11.7

R.A-11.9

Andrew had joined the class at the beginning of the year when he and his mother were allocated a house in the area. His mother is a single parent living on a new council estate built specifically for single mothers and their children. During her observations, the researcher noted that he was a particularly quiet child. Andrew came from a different

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[75] Researcher's observation notes, Tuesday 11th February 2000.

religious background to the majority of the class. Although not an issue, an awareness of this, manifested during a drama session, was noted by the researcher during her observations.[76]

Andrew worked quietly and consistently in class. Throughout her observation the researcher noted that he generally listened attentively to the teacher. He often volunteered to answer questions posed by the teacher or to read passages from textbooks.

Andrew's artistic ability stood out amongst the class. This was evident from the work that was displayed around the classroom and from drawings that were on his desk. His talent in this area was an area of admiration amongst his classmates who openly praised his ability.

Andrew did appear to attach himself particular friends although liked by everyone. He appeared happy to be by himself. The class teacher confirmed this perception. He did join in football games in the yard with the others occasionally although this was not a regular occurrence. He was often the last member of class to leave the room at break-time, and, when he could get away with it would stay inside and draw or read. He was often to be seen by himself or on occasions playing with the girls in his class. He also mixed with the others boys in the class who did not play football although this was a very small number.

5) Kerry

A.A-10.9

R.A-8.10

Kerry came form a two-parent family with both parents in full time employment. Kerry was a very quiet child. Although always pleasant, she spoke to the teacher only when

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[76] As observed by researcher during observation period.

spoken to. She did not come across as a child who had a lot of confidence and barely spoke louder than a whisper. She never drew attention to herself and in class, avoided eye-contact with the teacher.

In class Kerry often appeared to be quite distant as when asked questions by the teacher she demonstrated difficulty in answering. She was one of the three people in the class who was withdrawn for learning support.

Kerry was settled with a particular group of friends with whom she played at break times. The girls with whom she socialised were a quiet group who worked quietly and tended not to push themselves forward in class.

Although quiet, Kerry was a polite and pleasant girl. Although often nervous, she appeared to enjoy speaking to the researcher and seemed pleasantly surprised at the attention.

6) David

A,A-10.0

R.A-< 8.06

David comes from a two-parent home although his natural father is not part of the family. He has been legally adopted by his mother's husband and he recognises him as and addresses him as his father. Support for David's education, particularly his reading, comes mainly from his adoptive father. At the time of the research his father who like his mother was often out of work, was working on a new house that the family would be moving into at some stage. He was at the time living in a council house on an estate in the town. David had a younger brother who was the child of his mother and his adoptive father.

David's attendance at school was irregular. He missed at least one day at school every week. He had also been very sick earlier in the year and had missed a good deal of school. He openly and cheerfully admitted to not being particularly interested in schoolwork.[77]

In class, the researcher noted that David had difficulty maintaining concentration. He often looked out the window, around the classroom and played with his books when the teacher was talking. His facial expressions often suggested that he did not comprehend what was going on. When work was set for the class, he sometimes had to ask the people sitting beside him what he was supposed to do. He often failed to complete his written work.

The class teacher was very aware of the difficulties that David experienced and tried to give him as much attention as he could. During written work the teacher would go to David's desk and work with him there. When doing his reading, which was done individually, David would go to the teacher's desk and work with him there. This would take place when the rest of the class were engaged in written work of some description.

David was one of the three children in the class withdrawn for remedial support.

David had a cheerful demeanour. He was popular amongst his peers and well integrated in to the social life of the class. At break time he played either played football or occasionally, the researcher noted him playing with members of the younger classes.

4.7.4 Journals

The use of journals and dairies as a form of data recording adds another dimension to research findings. A journal provides a forum for the researcher and/or other participants involved to record personal views, opinions and reflections on research proceedings, it

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[77] Interview conducted with researcher 3/3/00 .

provides a place where the researcher can give off steam and record frustrations.[78] It permits the writer to be completely honest and forthright.[79] Valuable information can be provided based on first hand experiences of the research participants. While the information is interpretative, according to Wallace, research that does not take account of the human, emotional dimension may be seen as incomplete.[80] As part of the study both the researcher and the pupils in the class kept journals. The researcher considered it important that the children were provided with an opportunity to contribute their personal thoughts on the study. The children were asked to fill in a journal which, was provided for them, after every lesson. This exercise was given to them as part of their homework. The children were encouraged to be as honest as they could be when filling in the journal. A page was included in the journal which suggested the sort of things that they might comment on, this included mentioning parts of the lesson that did and didn't enjoy, ways that the lesson might have been improved and what their opinion of the story was so far. The children were assured that anything that they wrote down would be treated in confidence. In order to avoid children filling in the journal in a way that aimed to please the researcher by saying only positive things the children were reassured that the researcher wanted and needed to hear the negative aspects as well.

The time spent building a relationship of trust with the children in the weeks prior to actual teaching stage of the project and during out of class activities, was invaluable in allowing the children to feel that they could be honest and open when talking or writing about the project. Bearing in mind that filling in a journal is a time demanding and for some, arduous

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[78] Hitchcock and Hughes, 69.
[79] Wallace, 62.
[80] Ibid.

task, the researcher did not expect a full participation rate in this particular exercise.[81] It did however provide another source of validation of data collected from other sources.

The journal kept by the researcher was completed after every session in her roles both as observer and teacher. It allowed her to opportunity to record personal frustrations and perceived successes.

4.8 Research and the child, ethical considerations

Hitchcock and Hughes suggest that 'research not taking account of children could be seen as lacking.'[82] Contributions from children form the bulk of the data collected by the researcher.

Where children are involved in research, they must be taken seriously.[83] While the researcher must design data collection methods to accommodate the particular needs of children, conducting research with children also gives rise to a number of important ethical issues. The responsibility lies with the researcher to ensure that children involved are provided with a safe environment in which to contribute their point of view.

Prior to implementing the project, the researcher sought permission from both the parents of the each child in the class and as well as each child. As well as receiving the fully-informed consent of parents when conducting research with child the researcher is obliged to respect the child's freedom to chose to participate in the research or not or to discontinue

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[81] Bell, 147.
[82] Hitchcock and Hughes, 63.
[83] Hitchcock and Hughes, 63

at any time.[84] A letter was sent to the parents informing them of what would be happening during the course of the study.[85] They were made aware that the children would be recorded on video camera and that there was a possibility that their child might be interviewed individually and recorded.If either the parent or child did not wish to agree to either situation they were assured that they would not have to participate. All children and parents agreed to participate.

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[84] Paul Henry Mussen and others, *Child Development and Personality* 7th Edition (New York: Harper Collins, 1990), 29.

[85] See Appendix 6.

CHAPTER 5

THE STUDY

Chapter five will describe the action research project in detail. A description of the school and sample class will be given. A detailed account of each of the drama sessions will be provided.

5.1 The School

The study was carried out in a primary school situated in a large rural town in the Northwest of the country. At the time of the study, two hundred and fifty children attended the school. The school has a staff of nine teachers including a shared learning support teacher. The principal is a teaching principal taking responsibility for the teaching of senior infants and first class. The two male members of staff teach fifth and sixth class. The service of teachers on the staff range from two teachers who have graduated from teacher-training college in the last three years and teachers who have taught there for over twenty years. The staff is small and time spent in the school revealed that relations amongst them are relaxed and very positive.

The pupils hail from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds. Some of the children attending the school belong to middle class one or two parent families while others belong to one or two parent working class backgrounds. Unemployment was also a concern for a small percentage of the parents at the time of the study. In the town where the school is situated there are two large council estates, which have experienced

significant trouble with drug and alcohol abuse, family violence and teenage petty crime.[1] A number of families who attend the school are from these estates.

Discipline is given priority in the school. The teaching principal takes an active role in supporting the staff in this regard. Fortunately, the school does not experience any major discipline problems with the wider school community working together to ensure a safe, happy environment in the school.

While the school is under joint Presbyterian and Church of Ireland management, children from all religious backgrounds attend the school. The majority of the children do however belong to the Protestant faith. The town is situated less than ten miles from the Northern Ireland border and while religious difference is not a prominent issue in the school, there is awareness of it amongst the children. The Orange order is active in the area and many of the children belong to families that are involved. A substantial number of the children are members of the youth bands of the organisation. The significance of this was seen during the study and will be discussed later in the chapter.

The school embraces a "caring and sharing" ethos, where "each child is nurtured and valued for his/her own sake."[2] Pupils and teachers are valued equally and the school endeavours to promote self-respect and mutual respect among all of its community.[3]

A special needs policy is implemented. The school plan states that the school "acknowledges the emotional social, physical and educational needs of the individual

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[1] Information received from conversation with learning support teacher in other primary school in the town, 5/9/'99.

[2] School Plan, Philosophy/Ethos of the school, i.

[3] Ibid.

child," and recognises the importance of the special needs policy as being "fundamental to classroom practise in the [our] school."[4] The policy is based on early identification of learning difficulties, the restoration of the self-esteem of the child, full integration into

the life of the school, development of material and human resources into the area, the importance of parental involvement and collaboration between class and learning support teachers.[5] Particular reference is made to students with reading difficulties. Based on the work of Clay and Westwood, the policy endorses the empathy and enthusiasm of the teacher, the provision of opportunity for reading for pleasure and for information, an understanding of the processes involved in reading and, the development of the self-esteem of the learner through praise, encouragement and the recognition of personal progress.[6] Children who receive learning support for either literacy or numeracy, or both, are extracted from the mainstream class either individually or in small groups. The need to attend remedial classes for literacy support is based on the results of standardised reading tests. The school uses the Drumcondra Primary Reading Test.

The school as a whole had a policy of promoting positive attitudes towards literacy and reading in the school. The school is a member of both the Setanta and the Puffin Book Clubs. As well as providing pupils with an opportunity to order recent publications for themselves, these clubs offer free books to the schools that place orders with them. Each of the classrooms had received a significant number of books for their libraries over the years. As a result of this and investment by the school in the purchase of books all the classrooms boasted well-stocked libraries. The way in which these were accessible to the

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[4] School Plan, Special Needs Policy, i.
[5] Ibid.

children differed from classroom to classroom. Posters were put up in various locations throughout the school promoting reading.

The teachers in the school welcomed the implementation of the study in the school and all members of staff were welcoming and supportive of the work that was conducted by the researcher. This attitude was carried down throughout the school with pupils of all standards being welcoming and enthusiastic. Full permission was given to the researcher to use any resources available to the school; this included all equipment such as art materials, computers, compact disc players and photocopying. The school also purchased the novels that were used with the children during the course of the study.

The researcher was accepted wholeheartedly into the school community and invited to participate in the wider life of the school. The researcher was introduced and welcomed at a whole school assembly and children were aware of why the researcher was there and what was happening in the fifth class classroom. During her visits to the school the researcher was regarded by the children and treated like any other member of the staff.

5.2 The classroom

The study was conducted with a class of twenty-eight fifth class children. The children in the class ranged from ten years one month to eleven years and nine months and were of mixed ability. Reading ages ranged from 8.06 to 15.06 according to the Micra-T standardised reading test.[7] Sten scores on the same test ranged from ten to one. Three

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[6] Ibid., ii

[7] Administrated to children Sep. 1999.

children received remedial help for literacy three times a week and four children received extra help with numeracy skills.[8]

The teacher was male. He had qualified from teacher training college three years previously. He had taken a permanent position in the school immediately after leaving college and was in his third year of teaching fifth class. The teacher enjoyed a good relationship with his pupils who responded well to him and enjoyed the relaxed classroom atmosphere that he created for them.

The classroom in which the children were taught was a large spacious room. Children sat at double desks which were set out in rows.[9] Children sat at designated desks, friends were allowed to stay together as long as they behaved. The teacher changed the children's seating places when he or the children felt that a change was needed. The teacher's desk was positioned to the side at the front of the classroom. Although this served as a base for the teacher, he spent very little time there, preferring to walk around the classroom.

Any whole class teaching that was needed was conducted from the white board. Like many schools in the country, the school did not have a hall as it was at the time being used as a classroom. However, the classroom was large enough that desks could be moved back leaving space for drama work when necessary.

Although the room was filled to capacity with furniture and children, space was found all around the classroom for presenting the children's work. Posters based on an anti-bullying campaign competition decorated the walls outside the classroom. Inside the classroom, the children's art-work was displayed on the back wall, beside the nature

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[8] The same three children received both literacy and numeracy support.

[9] See classroom plan, Appendix 2.

table. The space under the nature table served as a storage area for neatly kept boxes of games kept for playing with when it was too wet to go outside. Written work that had been written up on the computer and illustrated using clip-art was hung at the back, above where three new computers and printers were positioned. Other computer equipment included a scanner and a digital camera that was used for putting images on the school's web-site. One of the computers was connected to the internet. Bookshelves and trolleys were lined along the left hand side of the classroom, both school library books and children's textbooks were here, organised neatly on trolleys and in a set of library shelves. The class library was very well stocked with a variety of recognised contemporary authors from both Ireland and the UK.[10] The books on the shelves catered for the full range of reading abilities in the class and consisted mainly of novels. Reference books were kept on shelves at the front of the classroom and the children were free to choose these to read as well.

A television and video machine had a permanent position on one of the trolleys. Four large windows spanned the left-hand side of the classroom allowing light to flow into the classroom.

5.3 The sample class

As a group, the children were a lively but well behaved class. From her observation the researcher noted that when asked to do anything, such as getting out books, putting away books, lining up to go outside, or settling back to work having come from outside, the

[10] Observation notes, 20th Dec., 1999.

children did so without hesitation.[11] The teacher implemented a reward system in the classroom. The class was divided into groups and were awarded stars for good behaviour, coming in quietly and settling to work quickly. Prizes of fountain pens or other stationery and chocolate were awarded at the end of a designated period. The class responded in a positive way to this system.[12]

Although there were individuals in the class who were shy and less willing to come forward than their classmates, the children were generally not a reserved group of children. They conversed easily amongst themselves, and occasionally good-natured banter was exchanged across the classroom.[13] From conversations conducted with the class teacher and other members of staff the general consensus in the school was that they were a particularly co-operative and pleasant group of children who had been well-liked by the various teachers as they had made their way up through the school.[14] There were individuals in the class who were an exception to the general consensus with one child in particular causing trouble with other children and teachers on various occasions.[15] By the time the researcher joined the class, the teacher had already had occasion to call the child's mother in to discuss his behaviour.

Although there were definite groups of friends amongst the children, the researcher did not notice any rivalry or hostility between them. In general the children got on well together as a group. One occasion in particular illustrated this when the teacher had to deal with trouble in the yard at break-time between his class and the class above them, sixth class. In reporting the matter to the teacher the class were very supportive of each

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[11] Researcher's observation notes, 7/12/99,10/1/00, 11/1/00, 13/1/00…
[12] Observation notes, 13/01/00
[13] Researcher's observation notes, 10/1/00, 13/1/00,
[14] Conversation conducted in staff room with other members of staff, 07/12/00

other, standing up for each other in confirming that the fault did not lie when any of their own class members.[16] During class there were several occasions where members of the class laughed at less able children for not knowing things.[17] Although it did happen, this was not a regular occurrence and was quickly dealt with by the teacher.

As with any group of people, a core group existed within the class who dominated discussions while another group kept contributions to a minimum. The observer noted a group of eight children who repeatedly volunteered to answer questions or contribute to discussions.[18] The class teacher was very aware of this and tried to ensure that the same people were not always dominating lessons. One child in particular stood out in relation to dominating discussions. The child, a boy, stood out as being very confident, intelligent and showed a great ability to analyse and deduce from situations. He was often reluctant to give others a chance to express an opinion and the teacher reprimanded him on a number of occasions for speaking out of turn.[19] It is interesting to note that this child had been home schooled until the age of six. At the other extreme, a core of about four children never contributed voluntarily to classroom discourse and had to be asked to participate in discussions. These children varied in capability with regard to schoolwork.

5.4 Base-line assessment

Prior to the implementation of the study, the researcher conducted a baseline study to assess the capabilities of the sample class in each of the areas identified.

- Attitude to reading

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[15] This shall be discussed again later in the context of the study.
[16] Observation notes,7/12/99.
[17] Observation notes, 10/1/00,17/1/00.
[18] Observation notes through out the observation period.

- Listening skills
- Problem-solving skills
- Co-operation skills
- Capability to engage with text

The research tools of observation, questionnaires, journals and interviews were used in the baseline assessment. The findings from the baseline assessment are reported in chapter five.

5.5 Drama sessions

The drama based reading sessions conducted by the researcher were based on a novel for children entitled *The Firework Maker's Daughter* written by an English writer, Philip Pullman.[20] When choosing a suitable book the researcher had very specific criteria to meet. The nature of the teaching method required a novel which

- had a strong story line
- left parts of the story to the imagination
- posed problems to which answers were not immediately given to facilitate decision making
- incorporated dramatic tension
- involved a variety of rich characters
- was well written.

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[19] Observation notes throughout observation period

The researcher experienced a great deal of difficulty in locating a book that met those criteria. She found that much of the Irish children's literature was particularly unsuitable as the vast majority of books written by Irish children's authors are historical based novels. The researcher wished to avoid this, as she did not wish the reading programme to become a history lesson in this particular instance. After searching and reading numerous novels for children over a period of five months, the book that was chosen was eventually found in a children's bookshop in England. The length of time required to source the book reflects the difficulty which exists in finding appropriate material for the implementation of the type of reading curriculum endorsed by this study.

The *Firework Maker's Daughter* is set on the Indonesian Island of Java. We are not told this directly in the story but place names along with names given to the fireworks allow the readers the opportunity to work this out for themselves. The novel is based on the actual and symbolic journey of a young girl, Lila, to fulfil a dream to become a firework maker like her father. Against his wishes, and with out his knowledge Lila embarks on a journey which every firework maker must complete, into the heart of a volcano to meet Razvani the god of fire. Through the help of good friends, especially a talking white elephant- a sacred and revered animal in East Asia, her unrelenting determination and some good luck, Lila succeeds in realising her dream. However in the process she puts her father's life in jeopardy and is forced to question the things in life that mean most to her. The story, steeped in the essence of Indonesian culture offers the reader a stimulating and mind broadening view of human nature. It is beautifully written with happiness and sadness intertwined. The researcher chose the novel not only for the story line and way in

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[20] Philip Pullman, *The Firework Maker's Daughter*, (London: Corgi Yearling Books, 1995).

which the writer allows the reader to work things out for him/herself, but also for the liveliness and humour that the book incorporates. The combination of this humour along with the sensitive handling of the full range of human emotions that the book reflects provided opportunity for the dramatic exploration of the characters.

When the novel had been chosen the initial task was to break the story line into episodes. This involved dividing the story into blocks that would allow the researcher to begin and end sessions of work on dramatic moments. This facilitated the further exploration of issues or events in the story. For example, one episode ended when Lila fell down a cliff face when climbing to the fire-fiend's grotto. The children did not find out whether or not she had survived until the next session thus feeding their enthusiasm to return to the story. In some incidences, the episodes coincided with the chapters in the book but this was not always the case.

Before the researcher began taking the English lessons the way that the desks were laid out in the classroom was changed at her request. Instead of being set out in lines all facing forward, the desks were re-arranged in groups.[21] As group work would be a feature of the researcher's teaching method it was important that the physical environment accommodate this. A space was left in the middle where drama work could be conducted and to enable the furniture to be pushed back if need be with the minimum amount of disruption.

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[21] See Appendix 7.

5.6 Drama Sessions

Session 1-Tuesday 25th January

Session one was an introductory session. Before beginning to read the book, the children talked about the cover and the title attempting to deduce what they thought the story might be about. The novels were distributed amongst the class. The researcher now in her role as teacher read the first episode to the children. In this episode the main character, Lila was introduced with her father, her best friend Chulak and a talking white elephant called Hamlet. We find out that Lila's mother had died when she was a baby and she had spent her entire childhood working with her father playing with, making and inventing new fireworks. Hamlet, being a white elephant was regarded as a sacred and revered creature in the culture to which he belonged. Chulak was his keeper and only he and Lila knew that Hamlet could talk. At this stage it was important that the teacher model for the children how the voice can be used to bring characters and story to life. The children responded well to the story. Both the class teacher who now became an observer and the researcher noted that the children listened attentively. The class teacher also noted with surprise that although the children had been given the choice of either just listening or following the text in the book, every child in the class without exception chose to follow the book and did so through out the session.

Having read the first episode (pages 1-12), the class were asked to predict what they thought Lila might do next. After a period of speculation and discussion, the class decided that she would run away. The teacher confirmed this for them. The class at this

stage also began to build a profile of Lila and decided from the information given in the book so far that she was probably about twelve years of age.

Having reached this conclusion, the class were then asked to consider what kind of things Lila would need to bring with her if she was to embark on a journey. This work was done as a class with the teacher listing the suggestions made on the white board. Having done this the class then decided that the most important item for Lila to bring with her would be a map and that this would have to be detailed. The class were then asked to scan back over the part of the book that had been read to find out what kind of features would be marked in on a map of the area. A road, mountains, a volcano, a river with a bridge, a jungle, and a village were identified as elements that would be included.

At this point the class was divided into groups. It was explained to the class that they would have to do some research to find out more about the country and its people. This would enable them to create an accurate picture of the country and allow them to produce a map that would be an accurate reflection of the island.

Each group was assigned one of the features identified as being elements that would be included on the map.

Group 1- people

Group 2- mountains

Group 3- food

Group 4- housing

Group 5- the village.

Each group was given a folder with information on their particular topic that had been downloaded from the internet. Using the book and these folders, the children were to

extract information on their assigned areas. The teacher demonstrated how looking for clues in the text could do this. The groups were then given time to complete the task.

The children were encouraged to work together and help each other. Both the researcher and the class teacher circulated throughout the classroom encouraging, guiding and giving direction where needed.

By the time the group work had been completed, time had run out and making the map had to be postponed until the next session. The children were told that they must not read on in the book, a revelation at which they were thoroughly disgusted. They were left the challenge of looking back over the part of the book that had been read to see if they could work out the name of the island in which the story was set. Although the name was not given directly it was mentioned in a name given to one of the fireworks that Lila invented. The class were advised to use their atlases to complete the task.

Session 2-Wednesday 26th January

The lesson began with a review of the work completed the previous day. Each group shared what they had learned about their assigned topic. They then began the task of using the information that had been gathered to create a map of the island which Lila would be able to use on her journey. While the researcher had intended to create a 2-d map of the island, the class teacher suggested at the spur of the moment that play-dough and paper, which were readily available in the school, be used to create a 3-d map. The researcher and children agreed to this enthusiastically. A quick search of the classroom

then produced pipe cleaners, old scraps of material and crepe paper all of which were left at the disposal of the class to help with model making.

As a class group the children used the text to help identify where key features would be placed on the map. The river and the mountains were identified as good starting points around which they could place the other features.

The groups then began the task of making their contributions for the map. As they did this, they were encouraged to confer with the rest of their group about the work that was being done. The researcher and teacher conferred with the groups, questioning, directing and encouraging.As each group was finished they came up and placed their contributions on the map.[22] The children were asked to justify why they chose to put their contribution in a particular location, for example, the village was near the river so that the villagers would have a steady supply of water.

When the map was completed, discussed and praised, the children were set to read pages 13-15 silently, which they set about with industry. When this task was completed the researcher asked a few factual questions to ensure that the material had been read. At this point one of the children, Claire, was asked to come up to the front of the class to help us form a picture of Lila as she set out on her journey. The researcher chose a child to do this rather that asking for a volunteer on the basis that it was the first time that any of the class had been asked to come to the front. It was important at this stage that it be a child who would not be intimidated by the attention of the rest of the class and would in effect model the type of work required. Claire was a very confident child well used to public attention and very enthusiastic about the work.

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[22] For picture of the map see Appendix 8.

The class then proceeded to pack Lila's backpack for her. Thinking back to what had been suggested in the previous session food was packed. Initially mangoes picked from the mango orchard beside the village, were put in the bag. These were removed again as on reflection the children considered that they were too heavy and could be found growing in abundance in the jungle anyhow. The map and water were packed and Lila was given a stick to help her climb the mountain, the first one broke when she leaned on it so she had to be given a stronger one. A freeze frame was created of Lila. The rest of the class directed Lila as to her facial expression and her body shape resulting in a little girl who looked and stepped out with determination.

Lila was allowed to sit down while the rest of the class questioned her as to why she wanted to go on the journey. They warned her about the dangers that she would meet in the form of wild animals, hot fire and live volcanoes. The class reminded her of all her father had done for her over the years and appealed to her to consider his feelings. Lila was not to be moved however. She understood the dangers that she might meet but although she was worried, these things were only a possibility. When Lila asked the class if someone offered them something really special like a holiday would they let anyone stop them and they had to admit no. They realised that they were not going to change her mind.

With Lila having departed our company and Claire returned to the class, the children were asked to begin to bring together what they had just found out about Lila and begin to build a personality profile of her. The researcher drew a silhouette of Lila's face and inside wrote the word s that the children suggested described her personality in the shape.

This exercise is called *Role-on-the-Wall*.[23] This was pinned up in the classroom and added as the story progressed.

The children were set pages fifteen to nineteen to read for the next day. The books were taken home to do this.

Session 3-Thursday 27th January

The session began with the researcher questioning the children briefly on the material that they had been set to read the previous night. The researcher then read pages nineteen to twenty six to the class, allowing them to provide background sound effects wherever jungle noises were described in the text. The episode ended when Lila met face to face with a group of men armed with wooden daggers who run a river taxi service, the only way to cross a river which blocked Lila's path to the fire grotto where Razvani lived. Lila is left struggling to make the decision as to whether or not she should get into the boat.

The researcher then led a discussion on new characters, a group of pirates who had now been introduced into the story.

In order to explore the possible outcomes of the situation and gain insight into whether or not the decision made by Lila to get into the boat was a sensible one, a dramatic device known as *Devils and Angels*[24] was employed. The children were brought out of their seats for this activity and positioned at opposite sides of a corner of the classroom. The class was divided into two halves. The researcher adopted the role of Lila. Lila was placed in the situation where she had to decide whether to get into the boat or not. One half of the class represented the pirates whose job it was to persuade Lila to get into the

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[23] See Appendix 1.

boat with them. The other half of the class represented Lila's conscience and warned her of the pitfalls of getting into the boat with these seemingly bloodthirsty men.

Lila explained her predicament to both groups. The pirates offered to take her across. Lila reported what the pirates had said back to her conscience. The second group, her conscience, then sent Lila back to the pirates to find out more about who they were. Lila went over and back a number of times relaying information and questions from one side to the other. The groups drew on the information that they had from the book about the pirates and about the type of person Lila was to persuade or discourage her from making a decision.

In the end, Lila, in keeping with her impulsive personality and feeling that she had no other option although it went totally against everything her conscience shouted at her, got into the boat. On entering the boat the pirates promptly set upon her until they were requested to return to their seats and resume their positions as school children.

The activity was followed by discussion on what the events had revealed about Lila's personality. The teacher then read the next short episode to the class. It transpired that as there was no other alternative she was obliged to get into the taxi-boat, *The Bloody Murderer.* When we leave her, Lila's life is being threatened by the head pirate who nearly causes the boat to capsize in the process.

Before leaving the class the researcher and the children took time to change around the position of features on the map based on information that had been discovered as they proceeded through the novel. Words describing Lila were added to the silhouette.

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[24] See Appendix 1.

Session 4-Tuesday 1st February

Session four began with the teacher reading pages twenty eight to thirty one to the class. Children who volunteered were invited to come to the front of the class and to take on the parts of some of the characters in the section. They were encouraged to use their voice and facial expressions to bring the text to life. The rest of the class participated by providing the sound effects. In the episode we find out that the pirates are a bunch of incompetent failed chicken farmers who when faced with a vicious tiger in the jungle leave Lila, their hostage, to deal with the animal while they cower behind her.

It was then decided that it was time to meet Rambashi the pirate leader, and talk to him about his contribution so far. The teacher went into role as Rambashi. The children came out of their seats and sat on the floor around Rambashi. Having introduced himself and thanked the class for their invitation he told them a little bit about himself, relaying the tearful story of how his chicken farm had closed down when the chickens all died of melancholy. His wife had left him having run off with a business tycoon from Taiwan and somehow he had teamed up with these numbskulls, as his band of helpers were referred to in the book. The children were then invited to question Rambashi on his situation and his treatment of Lila. At first the children asked questions that were irrelevant to the situation but once one child began to follow a more thoughtful line of questioning the others quickly followed suit. Although Rambashi tried his hardest to evoke the sympathy of the children they were having none of it. Having mistreated Lila he found no allies amongst them and had he not ran off in his usually cowardly manner he would certainly have been punished for his actions.

On her 'return' to the classroom -teacher out of role-the researcher proceeded to question the children on what they had thought of and found out about Rambashi. Their opinions were accurately summarised in one child's observation that he 'was like the animals he looked after-a big chicken.'[25] The class then began to consider whether Rambashi was as threatening a character as he claimed to be. A vote conducted in the class showed that fourteen of the twenty eight children thought Rambashi was a coward, eight thought he was indeed and bloody murderer and the remaining children were undecided.

In pairs, the class were then assigned the task of trying to work out what they thought Rambashi's next swindle would be. Each pair were asked to come up with three suggestions. They were reminded to bear in mind what they had found out about his personality. Several of the groups made suggestions that were very close to the actuality of what happened next.

Although the researcher had intended to read another section to the class at this point she decided that the children were too tired to maintain concentration. Their thoughts were briefly turned back to Lalchand, Lila's father and they began to consider his feelings at this stage.

Session 5-Wednesday 2nd February

This session began with the researcher reading pages thirty three to thirty six of the story to the class. This brings the story back to Chulak,t he white elephant and Lalchand, Lila's father. We discover that Lila will perish in the fire grotto if she does not have water from

[25] Observation notes, 01/02/00

the Emerald Lake with her. Lalchand is heart broken. Chulak, Lila's friend devises a plan to steal the elephant so that he can bring Lila the water. Together he and Lalchand succeed in smuggling the elephant out of the house where he has now been sent. Although they think they have not been seen, a servant spots Lalchand fleeing the scene and follows him to his home. Helping to steal the white elephant is a serious crime in Java and the servant knows he would be well rewarded should he choose to inform the authorities of Lalchand's involvement in the kidnapping. The episode ends leaving the reader to decide for themselves what the servant will do with the information.

At this stage the children and researcher played a game called *Elephants' Footsteps* which had been invented simply to provide the children with the opportunity to enjoy themselves and get out of their seats for a while. The researcher took the role of Lalchand. Lalchand was creeping from the scene of the crime at one end of the classroom to his house at the other end of the classroom. The object of the game was for each member of the class to follow Lalchand as quietly as possible. Should Lalchand hear them and turn around they were given five seconds to think up a good reason as to why they were going the same way. If the reason was not believable the child who offered it would have to sit down again.

When the game had been played and enjoyed, the children sat on the floor in front of the teacher. A discussion began as to what the servant should do. A profile was built up of the servant's circumstances. The children were each asked to give a reason as to why the servant should or should not report Lalchand. Taking into account the culture in which the story was set it was decided that the servant should ask the advice of a goddess. The

researcher suggested the goddess of water, knowing that a lake goddess would come into the story later.

Having discussed the type of language that is used when praying, the class set about the task of writing the prayers. When this was completed the children swapped the prayers, adopted the role of the goddess and wrote replies. Children were then invited to read out the prayers and the researcher/teacher read out the given replies.

The children were set pages of the book to read for homework.

Session 6-Thursday 3rd February

The session was introduced by the researcher telling the class that there was going to be a festival. The children began to question what the festival was for, who would be attending and what sort of things would be happening. The class were informed that the goddess of the lake would be there as a special guest and that she would grant wishes to those who were deserving of them. The class were asked to decide what kinds of things would be needed for the party. Food, music and dancers were considered important.

The attention of the children was then turned as to how the festival might be advertised given that it was taking place in the middle of the jungle where there were no radios newspapers or television as far as could be gathered from the text.

One of the children suggested that Hamlet the white elephant be used for the purpose. He had been used for this purpose, much to his disgust, earlier on in the book. Suitable language, writing and colours for advertisements were discussed. The class was reminded that the activities which would take place at the festival would have to be in keeping with the lifestyle and culture of the people.

The class was divided into groups of five children. Each group was given a large sheet with the outline of an elephant on it. The elephants were decorated with advertisements designed to entice people to come to the festival. When the work was completed each group took it in turns to come to the front of the class and tell the others about their advertisements, pointing out the activities that they had decided to include. The elephants were then hung up around the classroom where the children were able to admire and read each others' efforts.

Session 7-Tuesday 8th February

The lesson began with the children listening to the teacher reading the next three pages of the novel. This episode described the activities at the festival up to the point where the priests are about to throw Chulak, who had appeared to ask the goddess for the water for Lila, out of the village as he is not one of them.

The children were divided into groups representing the villagers, the band, dancers and priests. The groups were sent to use the book to find out what kind of people were in their group and what their role was at the festival. The children were asked to re-enact the scene at the lake in their roles. The result was a scene where belly dances danced to the music provided by the band. When the music and dancing had finished the villagers took it in turns to bring their requests to the goddess who was played by a girl in the class. The goddess either granted or refused the requests according to how deserving she considered the request to be. The priests sat at the front beside the goddess, looking self important and making sure that everyone else stayed in their proper place which was behind them.

A child was chosen to be Chulak. When he brought his request to the goddess the priests grabbed him and the teacher called for the frame to be frozen creating a *still-image*.[26] When the researcher placed her hand on the shoulder of a priest they were asked to say out loud what they were thinking. This device is called *thought-tracking*.[27] The responses given by the priests reflected the hostility of the community towards strangers.

This led to a discussion on how people can be treated badly because of difference. The class discussed occasions when they were treated differently, in a negative sense, either in school or amongst their friends. The class were then divided into groups of three or four and enacted a situation where somebody was being treated badly because they were different. Issues, which arose, ranged from differences in religion to differences in the soccer teams that they supported.

The activity was followed by further discussion that had to be cut short because it was lunchtime. The class were set reading to do for homework

Session 8-Wednesday 9th February

The children were questioned on the section that they had been set to read the previous night to check if they had read it. Two children reported that they had not read it. The researcher proceeded to read the next episode which described Lila's journey up the mountain. The section was charged with emotion and in order to add to the effect a piece of music entitled 'To Die For' which is an instrumental piece featured on the soundtrack

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[26] See Appendix 1.

[27] Ibid.

to the Lion King was played in the background. The episode ended when Lila had fallen down a steep cliff before it could be established if she was dead or alive.

A discussion was then conducted on Lila's feelings at this stage of the story. The style of the passage that had described her situation was focused on. The attention of the children was brought back to the way in which the sounds that Lila heard around her were described. The children agreed that it was done in such a way that it was like poetry. The class were asked if anyone could suggest a starting line. One of the girls suggested 'as Lila walked through the jungle...' and the rest of the class liked it and agreed. The teacher wrote the line on the whiteboard. Using this as a starting point each of the sounds that had been mentioned were listed. When the list was complete the children were then asked to suggest a suitable end for the poem. One of the boys suggested '...and then, silence.' The rest of the class agreed that this would be very effective. The teacher also read a poem out to the class that she had prepared which was very similar to the one on the whiteboard with a few differences in wording. Each child in the class was then asked to try to write a poem based on the jungle sounds using the same first line as the poem on the whiteboard. They were assured the poem did not have to rhyme which came as a great relief to many. When the task was complete the children were invited to come to the front and read out the poems that they had written. [28] The importance of using voice to convey emotion was highlighted and a suitable tone of voice discussed.

While the children read out the poems, the music that the teacher had used as background music to the passage was played. This helped slow down the pace at which the children

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[28] For samples of poems written by the children see Appendices 9 and 10.

read and reminded them of the intensity of the emotion which the poem could be used to convey.

After this all the children were brought up to the front of the classroom to sit on the floor in front of the teacher. After talking about all that had happened to Lila so far and how it was effecting her, the teacher read to the end of the episode. When the children were told under no circumstances were they to read on, they were appalled.

Session 9-Thursday 10th

The beginning of the next episode, which the teacher read to the class, saw Lila in Razvani's grotto. Razvani appears to her and tells her that in order to become a firework maker she must walk through the flames which he causes to rise up before her. She is warned that the minute she steps into the flames there is no turning back, she will only succeed at the task if she has the three gifts. Razvani does not tell her what the three gifts are and until know Lila had never heard of them. The ghosts of other firework makers who went before her and did not succeed in crossing the flames appear and warn her not to go through with the task. Lila is left with two choices, to turn back and forget about becoming a firework maker or take the chance of perishing in a pool of fire. The action was left suspended at this point.

The children were then divided into two halves and it was explained to them that they were going to assist Lila in making a decision. Based on a dramatic device known as *Devils and Angels*[29] a game called *Ghosts and Demons* was invented. It was the job of the ghosts to persuade Lila not to go through the flames, the demons were to try entice

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[29] See Appendix 1.

her to enter the fire. A child was chosen to take the role of Lila who took position in the centre of the room. The two groups of children were sent to opposite sides of the classroom.

Lila had the choice of taking a step towards one side or the other depending on how persuasive they could be in their reasoning to her stance.

Session 10-Tuesday 15th

This session was a relatively calm one. Members of the class were called upon to read aloud from the text. The section in the book contained advice given to Lila by Razvani after she had walked through the flames. The lesson centred mainly on discussion of what Lila had discovered. Razvani told Lila that the world is an illusion. He likened it to a candle flame that exists only for a little while and then is gone. He imparted to Lila that life is constantly changing and nothing lasts forever. This was then discussed with the children who drew on personal examples of how things constantly changed in their own lives and in the lives of those around them.

Razvani also told Lila that the three gifts were not something that he could give to her, but, something that she held inside herself. By succeeding in walking across the flames unhurt, she had proven that she possessed the gifts and was worthy of the trade. The novel did not reveal at this point what the three gifts were. As a class the children then made suggestions as to what the gifts could have been. At first material gifts were suggested, but through questioning and guidance, the children came to a realisation that the gifts were personal qualities. As suggestions were made, they were written on the blackboard. When there was a consensus that a suggestion was inaccurate, it was wiped

off. The options were gradually narrowed down to three-courage, determination and talent.

The teacher then read the next section in the novel. Here Lila finds out from Chulak and Hamlet that her father has been arrested and is to be executed. Lila blames herself for his arrest and with the cloud of not knowing if he is dead or alive begins the journey back home. As there had not been enough time in class, the children were asked to complete an activity for homework. Each child was given a worksheet of Lila's silhouette. Inside the body they were asked to write things that had happened that were inside Lila's control and outside the body, things that were outside her control. This technique is called *Role-on-the-Wall*.[30]

Session 11-Wednesday 16th February

The lesson began with the researcher reading the next episode to the class. In this episode, Lila, and Chulak come before the Emperor to beg for the release of Lila's father who, they discover on arrival, is still alive. Hamlet asks for a private audience with the Emperor.

At this point the reading ended. The researcher then divided the class group into pairs. One person was to adopt the role of the Emperor, the other Hamlet. All the Hamlets were then asked to leave the room. The researcher explained to the Emperors that they were about to find out that Hamlet could speak. They were told that they were to act amazed but very angry. They were to demand reasons as to why they had not been told about this

[30] See Appendix 1.

before. The Emperor was to show anger to the degree that he would not let Hamlet interrupt. The Emperor was to stand for the duration of the interview.

The group outside the door, the Hamlets, were then told that they were to reveal to the Emperor that they could speak. Hamlet was to try to explain Lila and Chulak's predicament, and give out about the way he had been treated. The children were told that in the interview, Hamlet was to be determined to tell his story but aware that he was talking to the Emperor who had the power to say whether or not he could live, and that he must show respect. He was to remain in a kneeling position throughout the interview. It was emphasised to both groups that regardless of how the other person reacted, they must stick to the behaviour laid down. This activity involved the employment of *Hidden Objectives in Role-Play.*[31]

The children returned to the original pairs at this point and told to begin on the count of three. At first each of the characters were so shocked by the reaction of the other that there was a stunned silence. Many of the children looked at the researcher in amazement. The researcher had to intervene at this stage and remind the children to simply stick to the instructions that had been given. The interviews were then allowed to proceed for about three minutes.

At this point the interviews were stopped. The children were asked to sit on the floor. The researcher then conducted a discussion as to how the interviews had gone asking the various Hamlets and Emperors to explain how they had felt during the interview and if any problems had arisen. When this had been completed, still in role, the class were asked to write a report on the interview for the records of the state. The class were offered

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[31] Appendix 1.

the opportunity to read the reports aloud which, some members volunteered to do. The researcher then read the rest of the chapter to the class, where they found out that the Emperor and Hamlet had managed to get over their difficulties. The class were asked to read a passage for homework and were reminded not to read to the end of the book.

Session 12-Tuesday 22nd February

Having done the required reading over the weekend, the children were launched straight into the activity at the beginning of the session. The passage set for homework was a description of the firework competition that the Emperor had held to establish who was the best firework maker in the world. Contenders were firework makers from Germany, America , France and Lalchland and Lila. Lila and Lalchand knew at this stage that the Emperor had conceded that Lalchland would not be put to death if he and Lila won. The novel described in vivid detail the firework displays created by each of the contestants.

The class were divided into four groups of seven. Each group was assigned to each of the contenders participating in the firework display competition. Each was given a large sheet of white art paper. In groups, they were asked to describe each of the displays in picture form. In order to do this accurately, the children were required to look back through the passages describing the displays. When this was done each group was then asked to dramatise the display that they had just illustrated, an activity that was participated in with great enthusiasm. The session ended with the researcher reading the end of the novel to the class. This passage revealed what the three gifts were-courage, talent and the third one, which the children had not suggested, luck.

Session 13-Thursday 24th February

The purpose of this session was to draw together what Lila and her friends had learned from their adventures. In order to do this, the researcher had drawn a large diagram of a road along a sheet of wall paper. This road represented Lila's journey. Along the way various events and places were mapped in. The sheet was spread out across the classroom floor. Working as a class unit, the children, using their novels, were asked to trace the things that had happened to Lila. They were asked to identify and to write down adjectives or phrases that described the kind of person Lila was, and the emotions that she experienced, as demonstrated through her actions, For example her initial running away showed that she was stubborn, determined and selfish. This was completed for her entire journey. Using the map as a guide, the children engaged in a lengthy discussion as to how Lila had changed and the things that changed her. Time ran out as this point. The children were asked to do one more activity that night. This involved writing briefly how they thought Lila had changed from the beginning of the novel to the end.

CHAPTER 6

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

This chapter will present and review the findings from the action research project. Findings will be presented under the following headings.

- Attitude towards reading
- Engagement/ involvement with the text and learning experience
- Listening skills
- Higher order thinking skills
- Co-operation skills

6.1 Attitude towards reading

The attitude of the class towards reading was assessed before and after the project. The same questionnaires were administered before and after the project. A sample group of children were interviewed both before and after the project to assess if there had been any change. The class teacher was also asked about his perception of the attitude of the children towards reading before and after the project. The observations of the researcher, as non-participant observer before the study, and participant observer, during the course of the study, were also taken into account.

6.1.1 Pre research findings

Prior to the study, the teacher reported that in general he perceived the class group as "pretty good"[1] at spending time reading and found that in general they had quite a positive attitude towards the activity. This was supported from the results of the questionnaire. When asked how often they liked to read books, eighty-two per cent of the class said they liked to read books either often or sometimes, while only eighteen per cent said that they read either not very often or never.

However, the teacher specified that the attitude of the children towards reading depended on the context of the activity. For example, the researcher observed that children often took out their novels to read, as was permitted when they were finished their class work early.[2] The observations of the researcher report that this was an activity that the class in general appeared to enjoy.[3] The researcher noted that during the times that she was in the classroom, a number of pupils; Gary, David, Kerry, Derek, Claire and Linda, did not participate in this activity on a consistent basis. However, the researcher could not decipher if this was because they were not able to complete set work in the given time, as was often the case with this group, or if they did not enjoy this activity. The perception of the researcher was that the rest of the class looked forward to finishing work early and engaged in reading the novels voluntarily. During the time when the researcher was in the classroom, the class were participating in the *MS Readathon*.[4] The teacher found that

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[1] Conversation with Teacher, 1/2/00.

[2] Observation notes throughout the observation period.

[3] Conversation with teacher, 1/2/00.

[4] This event is run annually as a joint venture between RTE's Den Two and the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Ireland. Children are sponsored to read books. It aims to raise money for the society while providing an incentive for children to read. Prizes are offered for individual children and for whole schools. The more books that are read the more valuable the prize that they receive.

participating in this event helped motivate the children.[5] This view was supported by one of the children who was interviewed. During the course of the interviews with the children, Stewart told the researcher that although he doesn't like reading books much, he had read five books for the Readathon.[6]

However, the observations of the researcher reported that participating in reading lessons based on the reading scheme did not evoke the same level of enthusiasm. While the class remained quiet and well behaved during these sessions, the researcher noted consistently over the observation period that a significant number of pupils listened passively, looked out the window or daydreamed.[7] This was supported by the information offered by the class teacher. He reported that the biggest problem experienced by both he and the pupils in relation to reading was the reading books that were being used in the classroom. Referring to the reading scheme, the teacher reported that using the reader he often felt that he was 'just doing reading for the sake of doing it.'[8] Having had a student teacher teach in the classroom for the month of September who had based reading lessons on a class novel - *Under the Hawthorn Tree*, by Marita Conlon-Mckenna, the teacher reported that the class had found it particularly difficult to readapt to the reading scheme format.[9] Data gathered from the interviews with the children provides further support of the problem experienced by teacher and pupils alike in this regard. When asked about what they thought about the English readers during the interviews, four out of six of the interviewees expressed negative attitudes towards the texts and all of them said that given the choice they would

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[5] Conversation between teacher and researcher, 1/2/00.
[6] Interview with Stewart, 18/01/00
[7] Observation notes, throughout period of observation
[8] Conversation between teacher and researcher, 01/02/00

change them. Emily, Stewart, Andrew, David, Lorna and Kerry all reported that some of the stories were "boring."[10] Emily expanded further on the point contending, that, " nothing exciting" happened in the stories and that they had "boring people in them."[11] Stewart felt that some of the stories in the reader were " silly" and described many of them as " unrealistic."[12] When asked what sort of books they would use for teaching reading if they were the teacher, Stewart, Lorna, David, Emily and Andrew expressed a preference for allowing each child in the class to choose their own novel to read instead of using a class reader.[13] This was supported by the data received from the analysis of the pre-research questionnaires. When asked if they enjoyed reading as part of school-work the results showed sixty per cent said that they only 'sometimes' enjoyed reading as part of class work. Finding it difficult to follow boring material was identified as one of the reasons for choosing 'sometimes' rather than 'always.'

During the course of the interviews conducted with the sample group, the interviewees were asked their opinion regarding the amount of time spent on reading during class time. Stewart reported that he felt there was " a bit too much" reading in class. He specified history as an example. He also reported that there was too much irrelevant information given in the textbooks used in school.[14] Kerry agreed that there was too much reading done in class, asserting that "everything we do is reading."[15] On this basis, Kerry stated that

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[9] Interview with class teacher, 1/2/00.
[10] Preliminary interviews conducted with children
[11] Interview conducted with researcher, 21/01/00.
[12] Interview conducted 18/01/00.
[13] Interviews conducted with researcher.
[14] Interview, 18/1/00.
[15] Interview 18/01/00

she hated History and Geography.[16] Lorna felt that there was "sometimes too much reading in school" and went on to say that she would prefer if they did more writing instead.[17] David's perception of the situation was that while he couldn't read the textbooks, the other pupils in the class do a lot of reading in History and Geography. Consequently, while other children read or followed textbooks he had to listen.[18] Emily agreed that they did a lot of reading in school but felt that this was necessary to 'find out things.'[19] Andrew did not state any dissatisfaction with the volume of reading that was conducted in the class.

During the course of the interview conducted prior to the implementation of the study, the children were asked about reading as a leisure activity outside the classroom environment. As part of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to rank leisure in order of preference where number one was the favourite activity.[20] The choices offered were playing with the computer, playing sport, spending time with friends, reading and watching television. [21] Spending time with their friends and playing sport were reported as the most popular activities. Reading was reported as the least popular activity of the choices provided. Twenty nine per cent identified spending time with friends as their number one activity, seven per cent identified reading as their favourite leisure activity. Eighteen per cent put reading down as their second favourite activity.

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[16] Ibid.
[17] Interview, 19/01/00
[18] Interview 20/01/00.
[19] Interview 21/01/00.
[20] See Appendix 3, question 12
[21] Ibid.

In summary, the findings suggest that in general, while children were happy to participate in reading their own choice of reading material during school hours, they preferred to engage in other activities when given the choice outside the school environment. The findings also support the view that the children did not enjoy reading in school as part of school work, with the problem being attributed to the amount of time spent on reading and the material that was used.

6.1.2 Post research findings

The researcher used questionnaires, interviews, observations and children's journals to assess if there had been a change in attitude towards reading as a result of the implementation of the drama-based reading programme.

- *Questionnaires*

Question one asked respondents how often they liked to read, the choices being often, sometimes, not very often or never. Before the project, eighty-two per cent of the class said they liked to read books either often or sometimes, while only eighteen per cent said that they read either not very often or never. The results after the implementation of the experimental reading programme showed that eighty-six per cent of respondents said that they liked to read often or sometimes, an improvement of four per cent. Accordingly, the percentage of respondents that said they read either not very often or never decreased by four per cent from eighteen to fourteen.

Question two asked respondents if they considered reading as great, interesting, okay or boring. Respondents who said that they thought reading was either great or interesting

increased from sixty-three on the pre-research questionnaire to sixty seven per cent on the post-research results. This showed an improvement of four per cent.

In question three, respondents were asked to identify if they spent a lot, some, very little or none of their time reading. Prior to the study, sixty four per cent of respondents reported that they spent a lot or some of their time reading. The results received from the questionnaires after the implementation of the study showed an increase of sixteen percent, with eighty two percent of respondents reporting that they spent a lot or some of their time reading.

Questions one, two and three addressed the attitude of the children towards reading as a leisure activity. When compared to the data collected from the questionnaires administered prior to the project, the post study questionnaires show an improvement in the attitude of the children towards reading in each of these questions. This may suggest that for a small percentage of the children in the class, the drama-based approach to the teaching of reading changed their perception of the activity in a positive way. As a result, they may have engaged in the activity more often than they might have before the project. This supports the opinion offered by Neelands that drama complements and enhances the reading activity leading the child to a greater engagement with text thus nurturing a more positive attitude toward literacy and drawing them into the reading experience. [22]

Question four asked respondents to identify the importance that they attributed to being able to read. Prior to the study, ninety six per cent had said that being able to read was either very important or important as opposed to not very important or unimportant; the

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[22] Jonathan Neelands, *Learning Through Imagined Experience*, (Hodder and Staughton, 1992), 8.

post project results showed that one hundred percent perceived reading as either important or very important. Through creating situations that required the children to engage in the act of reading in a purposeful manner, these results imply an increase in the number of children in the class that began to perceive reading as an activity that serves a variety of useful purposes. For example, during the course of the project the children used their reading skills to enable them to engage in map-making, poster design, debating and labelling.

Question five asked respondents to specify if they considered people who read a lot to be very interesting, interesting, not very interesting or boring. Eighty six per cent said that they thought people who read a lot are very interesting or interesting leaving fourteen per cent who considered people who read a lot to be not very interesting or boring. There was no change in results before and after the implementation of the study.

In question six, the respondents were asked if they considered libraries a great, interesting, okay or boring place. Prior to the project, fifty three per cent reported that they considered libraries as great or interesting. This increased by six per cent to fifty nine per cent, according to results analysed after the implementation of the project.

Question seven, asked the respondents to identify if they felt very happy, happy, unhappy or very unhappy if someone gives them a book. When filling the questionnaire after the project, ninety two per cent said that it made them feel very happy or happy, an increase of ten percent from the initial questionnaire.

Questions six and seven assessed the respondents' attitudes towards the activity of reading. Analysis of the data reflects a positive change after the implementation of the drama based reading programme. Again, this may suggest that the perception of books and reading held by members of the class changed as they experienced reading in a fun and relevant way, as facilitated through the Drama in Education approach.

Question eight asked respondents if they strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed, or strongly disagreed with the statement that 'reading is an important part of schoolwork.' Prior to the implementation of the reading programme, ninety six per cent said that they strongly agreed or agreed that reading was an important part of schoolwork. After the programme this decreased by three percent to ninety three per cent. These findings may imply that as a result of the project, the children began to see learning as something that did not depend on the reading of textbooks. It is of value to note that during the interviews conducted prior to the implementation of the project, as was reported earlier, four out of the six interviewees had expressed the opinion that they thought too much class time was spent doing reading. Drawing on the theoretical approach of Harriet Finlay Jones,[23] Bolton suggests that the use of Drama in Education arouse the desire for knowledge in a way that leads the child to become " self-reliant and mainly self-taught."[24] Where before the children depended on textbooks as the main source of information, the results imply that they may have come to

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[23] Harriet Finlay Jones taught in Sussex between the years of 1897 and 1910. She is regarded as a pioneer in the field of Drama in Education having recognised the potential of drama as a method of teaching and learning.

[24] Gavin Bolton. *Acting in Classroom Drama, a Critical Analysis* (Birmingham: Trentham Books, 1998), 10.

a better understanding of the potential within the class as a group and of individuals to provide solutions to problems.

Question nine asked respondents if they enjoyed reading as part of schoolwork. The choice provided was always, sometimes, not very often or never. Prior to the study results of the questionnaires reported that eighty six per cent of respondents enjoyed reading as part of schoolwork either always or sometimes. This decreased by eight per cent to seventy eight per cent.

These results may imply that the children had experienced a more enjoyable method of learning than reading from texts. Again it is important to bear in mind that four of the six children interviewed had already stated that they felt there was too much reading in class. The findings may suggest that the students did not perceive the work that was being conducted by the researcher as 'reading.' Rather, it is possible that it was considered as a fun activity that motivated and engaged the student in the learning process.

In question ten, the respondents were asked to specify if they would like the teacher to read out loud to the class every day, almost every day, once in a while or never. The pre-research project results showed that one hundred percent said that they would like the teacher to read aloud to the class either everyday or almost everyday. The post-project questionnaires showed a decrease in the number of respondents who said that they would like the teacher to read aloud to the class either every day or almost every day. The percentage of respondents decreased by six per cent, going from one hundred per cent down to ninety three per cent.

This could be attributed to an increase in student autonomy. One of the aims laid down in the Revised Curriculum for Irish Primary schools is to " enable children to become lifelong learners through developing positive attitudes to learning and the ability to learn independently."[25] These results imply that such a process began to unfold in the classroom because of the harnessing of the philosophy and methodologies of Drama in Education. The results may imply that the pupils, having discovered they had the ability to do so, became more willing to play an active role in their learning. Heathcote suggests that the use of Drama in Education should help pupils "discover what they already know."[26] It aims to draw the learner from a state of dependency on the teacher to a position where he is empowered to take responsibility for and control of his own learning. Therefore, the decrease in the percentage of pupils in the class who reported that they would like the teacher to read to them during class may imply that as a result of the project, the class wanted to take more responsibility on themselves for their own learning.

Question eleven asked respondents to rate the type of books that they liked to read where one was their favourite and four their least favourite. Options given were school textbooks, class library books, class reader and own choice of reading material. Prior to the implementation of the project, sixty per cent of respondents gave preference to their own choice of reading material. Sixty-eight pre cent of respondents choose school textbooks as their least favourite, and twenty-five per cent choose the class reader. According to the results of the post project questionnaire, those preferring to read their own choice of reading material increased to by twenty per cent to eighty five per cent. Before the project,

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[25] NCCA, *Primary School Curriculum Introduction*, 34.
[26] Dorothy Heathcote, *Collected writings on Education* II, 12.

twenty five per cent reported that they preferred to read class library books, after the project this decreased to fourteen per cent. Prior to the implementation of the project, results from the questionnaire reported that eleven per cent chose their class reader as their favourite reading material of the choices provided. This decreased to zero percent after the project. School textbooks did not receive any number one ratings on either set of results. Again, this may imply a break away from the dependency of the student on the choices made by the teacher. The results may show that the children in the class began to attribute more value to choices that they made themselves.

Question twelve asked the respondents to rate preferred free time activities. Choices given were playing with the computer, playing sport, spending time with friends, and watching television. Respondents were asked to rank leisure in order of preference where number one was the favourite activity. Prior to the implementation of the study, spending time with friends and playing sport were reported as the most popular activities. Playing the computer and watching television were rated third and fourth. Reading was reported as the least popular activity of the choices provided. Data gathered after the implementation of the project showed that these results did not change as a result of the study.

Taking into account the data received from the rest of the questionnaire as discussed above, these results suggest that while the drama-based reading programme may have succeeded in changing the perception of reading within the classroom situation, it did not necessarily carry through to experiences outside the classroom environment.

- *Observation and journals*

During the implementation of the drama-based reading programme, the researcher adopted the role of participant observer. The class members also filled out a journal after each session recording how they felt that the lesson had gone, what they enjoyed about it or didn't enjoy about it, and any other personal comments that they had to make about either the work or the novel.

The Revised Curriculum for Irish Primary Schools states that " in engaging with the Curriculum, the child should be enabled to develop a love of reading."[27] The use of Drama in Education as part of an approach to the teaching of reading aims to draw readers towards the development of such an attitude, as was reflected through the implementation of the study. When compared to the observations made by the researcher prior to the project that reported the children often seemed inattentive and disinterested in the reading lessons, a view supported by the class teacher, the attitude of the children towards reading transformed into one that reflected enthusiasm,[28] attentiveness,[29] and enjoyment.[30] Each of the drama sessions, by their nature,[31] drew on the personal experiences of the children, providing a springboard from which consequent dramatic experiences were shaped. Because of the drama based approach the reading experience came alive, taking on significance for the children. This is evident from observation notes of the researcher and from the data gathered in the course of interviews conducted with the six sample children after the implementation of the study.

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[27] NCCA, *Primary School Curriculum, Introduction*, 35.
[28] Observation notes, 25/1/00.
[29] Observation notes, 2/2/00.
[30] Observation notes, 9/2/00.
[31] Refer back to chapter 3.

For example, the first session introduced the novel. [32] The first three pages of the novel were read to the children. The class then discussed how Lila might react to the situation, and predicted that she would run away. A list was made of the things that Lila would need to take with her. The text was used as evidence to support this and required that the children scan through the text. Natasha suggested that she should bring a blanket. This was later eliminated as Liam pointed out that the country had a warm climate and she may not need it, it would simply make her bag heavy.[33] The researcher records in her observation notes that the class engaged in the task with enthusiasm. The children answered questions readily, were very attentive and contributed enthusiastically to classroom discourse.[34] For example David, the weakest reader in the class who by his own admission usually switched off during reading sessions,[35] contributed to the discussion. Observations revealed that he scanned the text intently, and where he appeared to experience difficulty turned to the person beside him to ask what words were.[36] Claire and Linda launched into the activity with great enthusiasm, heads bent over the books, conferring now and again on what they had discovered.[37] The journals filled in by the children after the first session support this observation. Writing in her journal about the introductory session, one child reports," I really enjoyed doing English today. I love the story so far." [38] Eight of the journal entries expressed disappointment that they were not allowed to continue reading the story. [39] Out of the twenty-eight journals with entries completed for that session, only one child recorded

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[32] Observation notes, 25/1/00.
[33] Observation notes, 25/1/00.
[34] Observation notes, 25/1/00
[35] Interview with David, 20/1/00 and observation notes through out the observation period.
[36] Observation notes, 25/1/00.
[37] Observation notes, 25/1/00.
[38] Journal entry, Daryl, 25/1/01.
[39] Journal entries.

a negative attitude towards the work conducted.[40] This opinion was expressed by Stewart and was later changed as he was drawn further in to the reading and drama experience.[41]

According to Emily, who had reported prior to the study that she found reading lessons "boring,"[42] the new approach to reading was more enjoyable than the traditional approach; she specified that using drama " made it as if you are there."[43] She commented that it was more enjoyable as "you don't have to sit at your desk all the time."[44] Although Scott had not reported any discontentment with the traditional method of teaching reading during the pre-research interview, he reported afterwards that the new approach to reading was a better one because "it was more fun than all that boring writing and stuff."[45] Prior to the study, Lorna had reported that she viewed reading lessons as "OK."[46] In the post-study interview she reported that as each episode had unfolded, she "couldn't wait to find out what would happen" in the next. David reported that although he found reading boring he didn't get bored when the researcher was there.[47] He compared the way that the book was broken into episodes, each "ending on the exciting bits" to television where he said 'they do that as well."[48] Prior to the project, the same child had expressed the opinion that he would " love to go to sleep," even when the class novel was being read, and that he hated books.[49] Stewart finished his interview session with a summarising comment that reflects the positive effect had by the study on this attitude to the reading experience; " I liked it a

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[40] Journal entry, 25/1/00.
[41] This will be referred to again and discussed further later on in the chapter.
[42] Interview 21/1/00.
[43] Interview, 3/3/00.
[44] Interview, 23/3/00.
[45] Interview with Andrew, 3/3/00.
[46] Interview with Lorna, 19/1/00.
[47] Interview, 3/3/00.
[48] Interview, 3/3/00.
[49] Interview w, 20/01/00.

lot, good fun reading it and maybe you (the researcher) could get teacher persuaded to do it." [50]

Through out the journals, the enthusiasm and enjoyment experienced by the children through the drama based reading programme was reflected in the comments made. For example, Sarah a child who the researcher had observed as often being quite indifferent during reading lessons prior to the study records in her journal that " I am dying to read on...but I can't."[51] This is a comment that is made repeatedly through out the journals during the course of the study.[52] Out of the eleven entries that were made into her journal, Natasha, a child whom the researcher had noted as being consistently inattentive during reading sessions prior to the implementation of the study, all eleven reflected enthusiasm and enjoyment.[53] Referring to the session held on the eighth of February she writes " We pretended we were at the Festival...it was great fun. I'm sorry that I missed all last week...I'll be sorry when she [Miss Stewart] goes.[54]

Drama is inherently fun. It arouses the curiosity of the child feeding the " desire to know."[55] According to Morgan and Saxton's *Taxonomy of Personal Engagement*, before there can be learning there must be interest. [56] The data collected during the interviews and from the journals, show clearly, that through the drama based approach to the teaching of

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[50] Interview, 3/3/00.
[51] Journal entry, 25/1/00.
[52] Journal entries Liam 25/1/00, 7/2/00, Claire 25/1/00, 9/2/00, Sarah, 5/2/00, Kerry, 3/2/00.
[53] Journal, Natasha.
[54] Journal entry, Natasha, 8/2/00.
[55] Louise Townsend "Art as a Mode of Knowing," in *A Head Taller, Developing a Humanising Curriculum through Drama in Education*, 84.
[56] Norah Morgan and Juliana Saxton, *Teaching Drama, A Mind of Many Wonders* (Portsmouth, NH, Heinemann, 1987), 23.

reading the interest of the children was aroused creating a passageway into the learning experience.

During the course of the interviews conducted before and after the implementation of the project, the six children were asked how they would spend a free afternoon. This was to assist the researcher to assess the attitude of the interviewees towards reading outside the school context. Prior to the implementation of the study, five out of the six children stated that they would probably ride a bicycle, play sport or watch the television. Only one of the children, Emma, reported that she would consider reading as an option. According to the data gathered during the post research interviews, there was no significant change in these results. However, Stewart, had previously said that he would "sit and watch t.v" if he had a free afternoon and that he "wouldn't read."[57] In the post-project interview he said that he "might read more outside school" as a result of the project, as he now considered reading was "a better way of spending your time than watching t.v."[58]

In summary, the observations of the researcher and the entries made in the journals, supported by findings from the post-research questionnaires suggest that the children responded positively to the drama-based approach to the teaching of reading and that their attitude to reading improved within the school context. However, it did not significantly effect the attitude to leisure reading in so far as the sample interviewed did not express an increase in the amount of time which they would spend reading in their leisure time.

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[57] Interview with Stewart, 18/1/00.
[58] Interview with Stewart, 3/3/00.

6.2 Involvement/ Engagement

Prior to the implementation of the project, the extent to which the children engaged with reading material, and became involved in the reading experience, was assessed through observation, as recorded in the observation notes of the researcher. In order to authenticate the observations made during the implementation of the project by the researcher as a participant observer, the journals of the children were analysed and used to assess this facet of the research.

6.2.1 Pre-study findings

Prior to the implementation of the study, the researcher observed that while the children listened quietly to material that was read during reading lessons, there was very little opportunity for in-depth engagement with the text. This was mainly due to the fact that the nature of the stories in the reading scheme, published by a well established Irish Education publishing company, did not facilitate any level of real engagement.[59] For example, during a reading lesson observed by the researcher prior to the implementation of the study, the researcher noted that while the children remained quiet while the teacher and some of the children read passages from the story, there was no involvement with the story. For example, when asked to read aloud, the observer noted that four out of the six children asked to read, did so without expression, demonstrating that the readers did not empathise with the characters and were not involved emotionally evoked in the passage. The researcher noted that while the other two children used some degree of expression, this was

[59] This is a recognised problem with basal readers, which, are written specifically for the purpose of classroom convenience. It has lead to the highlighting of the importance of using 'real' books written by recognised authors for the teaching and learning of reading. This system has been encouraged in the Revised English Curriculum.

at the prompting of the teacher.[60] Questioning on the passages read was mainly factual, with some predictive questions being asked.[61] On analysis of the reading material, the researcher noted that the content of the stories did not facilitate in-depth examination of circumstances or characters.

Although the researcher looked at the children's writing on the reading passages this did not assist her in her assessment of the level of engagement of the class with the material. Written work was based on the set questions that were found after each story in basal readers and did not stretch beyond factual questioning.

6.2.2 Post-study findings

In contrast, during the course of the project, the researcher noted that the response of the children to reading material was transformed through the use of the dramatic approach. For example, the enthusiasm of members of the class to contribute to classroom discussions demonstrates the level of involvement felt by the participants. Prior to the implementation of the study, the observer had noted that through out the different curricular areas there had been about seven children who consistently became very involved in discussions.[62] Through out the implementation of the study, contributions were made from all members of the class when questioning and discussion was conducted.[63] Kerry, Gary, and Shirley were amongst the quieter members of the class who contributed willingly to these

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[60] Observation notes, 10/1/00.
[61] Observation notes, 7/12/99, 10/1/00,14/1/00.
[62] Observation notes, 7/12/00, 17/1/00, 11/1/00, 1/2/00.
[63] Observation notes, 25/1/00.

discussions.[64] Prior to the implementation of the study, the researcher had noted that these individuals rarely if ever made voluntary contributions during classroom discussion and struggled when asked to do so by the class teacher.[65] In the session held on the fifteenth of February, when the class were discussing the concept of illusions and the fragility of life, the researcher noted that Kerry, Shirley, and Gary all contributed voluntarily to the discussion.

The researcher observed that the enthusiasm of all members of the class to contribute and participate was maintained through out the duration of the project. Analysis of video footage from sessions held on the second, eighth, tenth and sixteenth of February support these observations. Where the children were required to have input, all members were willing to contribute. For example, during the session held on the tenth of February, the festival for the goddess of the Emerald Lake was recreated. Watching Chulak being thrown out of the village because he was a stranger led to further exploration of the theme of difference and bullying. Analysis of the video footage revealed that the class contributed to the discussion in a particularly open and honest manner. Andrew, Liam, Shirley, David and Stewart drew on personal experiences. Again, it is of significance that, as mentioned above, Shirley in particular would not have been forthcoming with contributions to classroom discussions prior to the implementation of the project. The class was then divided into groups of three and four, each group assigned the task of devising and acting out a situation where one of them was being bullied because of a difference. Watching the groups prepare the work, the researcher observed that they worked intently and remained fully engaged

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[64] Video footage, 2/2/00, and 16/2/00.
[65] Observation notes, 7/1/00, 10/1/00, 14/1/00.

with the activity. Facial expressions showed interest and enthusiasm, the groups conversed and interacted enthusiastically and there was a buzz of industrious conversation in the room.[66] The involvement and engagement of the class was demonstrated in the excellence of the work produced. Themes of racial, religious and physical discrimination were raised. Stewart, John and Andrew took the example of religious discrimination. It was demonstrated by creating a scuffle between the supporters of rival football teams, Rangers, a team traditionally associated with Unionism, and, Celtic typically associated with Republicanism. Knowing that the school was situated in a particularly politically charged area, and in the light of the fact that there were two members of the class of a different religious persuasion to the others, the researcher had tried to veer away from the topic when leading the initial discussion on difference. In hindsight, the researcher realised that this contradicts the philosophy of using drama, which in its nature allows participants the freedom to explore the issues that are most relevant and prevalent in their lives. O'Neill asserts that teacher behaviour is integral to the success of process drama and warns that the teacher must "value pupils' contributions more than her own."[67] Through the drama, the class revealed their ability face a complex issue head on. Drama in Education aims to enhance the learner's understanding of human behaviour, themselves and the world in which he/she lives.[68] This can only be achieved where there is an honest and open approach

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[66] Video footage, 8/2/00.

[67] Cecilly O'Neill and Alan Lambert, *Drama Structures-A Practical Handbook for Teachers* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1982), 21.

[68] Ibid, 13.

to human prejudice, where participants can work with " integrity of feeling and thought."[69] Drama provides a site where prejudices can be presented and examined, such as happened here. Not only did the learner become meaningfully engaged in a highly emotive experience but, through the examination of all the forces that drive human nature to react in such ways, the critical skills, interpretative skills and problem-solving solving skills of the learner, were exercised.[70]

Referring to the work presented by the children during the session that day, in her journal that night the researcher recorded "their presentations showed a real understanding of human nature; tone of voice, gesture- everything was excellent."[71] The engagement of the pupils is demonstrated in the entries made in some of their own journals that night. Natasha comments, "we talked about what people might do just because you're different... we done little plays on how bad it is to be mean to people just because you're different like Chulak."[72] Jane included an illustration with her journal entry. The illustration showed the play that had been performed by her group. It featured a child saying "hey fat face,' and another child with tears running down her cheeks saying, "please don't hurt me."[73] The success of this technique, as with all explorative work conducted using drama based techniques, lies in the relationship between the fictitious situation and reality. [74] Drama offers a site where real-life issues and problems can be

explored in a safe environment where participants can take risks. The risk of exposing personal feelings is high and often shied away from by children and adults alike. In this

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[69] Ibid., 15.
[70] Ibid., 15.
[71] Researcher's journal, 8/2/00.
[72] Journal, Natasha, 8/2/00.
[73] Journal entry, Jane, 8/2/00.
[74] Cecilly O'Neill, *Dramaworlds,* 4.

instance, the children were able to draw on their knowledge of human nature and of the prejudices that exist in their society and perhaps on first-hand knowledge of what it is like to be a bully or be bullied. The Revised Curriculum states that "the child's existing knowledge and experience form the basis for learning."[75] The learning that may have occurred though the dramatic experience fulfils this requirement. In having the opportunity to draw on personal experience and knowledge, the children were increasing their level of personal engagement with the story enabling them to bridge the gap between the world of the book and their world. In this way, the children were enabled to bring meaning to the situation that acts as a motivating force in fuelling the desire of the learner to know more, and in this case, read on.

For a child to be intrinsically motivated to engage in any activity, he/she must feel that it has a purpose.[76] One aim of the drama was to present the activity of reading in a purposeful manner.[77] In order to participate fully in the drama activities, the children had to be familiar with the facts and suggestions offered in the story line. Reading, and where needed, re-reading the text adopted a significance for the children. Problems presented through the drama could only be solved when the child was equipped with background information from the text. For example, in the session conducted on Wednesday the twenty-sixth of January, the children were divided into groups and each assigned some element of work to do on making a three-dimensional map that Lila would need for the journey. It required that the children read back through a significant amount of the book. In her observation

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[75] Primary School Curriculum, Introduction, 8.

[76] Suzanne I Barchers, *Teaching Reading, from Process to Practice* (USA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1998), 190-192.

[77] Refer to Chapter 3, Drama and Literacy.

notes, the researcher records that the children completed the task with enthusiasm.[78] She notes that, although Gary and David, children who the observer had noted prior to the study were inclined to sit back and let others do the work, struggled with the task, they maintained interest, and with guided questioning from the researcher became engaged with the task. Their task was to find out what sort of clothing the people would wear. The researcher drew their attention to a passage in the book that described the weather. From this, the boys were able to draw appropriate conclusions. The involvement of the children is also reflected in the journals where twenty-four of the children specified that they had particularly enjoyed making the map. One child records "I thought making the map was brilliant. We made everything; all we started out with was a green piece of cardboard. From there we added on all the things we needed."[79] In her journal, Daryl notes that, "we done detective work today... We had to read over the chapter and then find out about what food they ate and other things, it was great!" [80]

These comments reflect the involvement and engagement that the children experienced during the learning experience because of the use of process drama. According to Louise Townsend, " devising is learning."[81] As the children devised the map in this instance or devised solutions to the predicaments of various characters on various occasion through out the project, they were contributing toward their own learning. Through approaching the learning process through the medium of Drama in Education, demanding that the learner work in and through the material, the desire to know was activated. Drama in Education puts responsibility for learning into the hands of the learner. Rather than the teacher

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[78] Observation notes, 26/1/00.
[79] Journal entry, Claire, 26/1/00.
[80] Journal entry, Daryl, 25/1/00.
[81] Louise Townsend, "Art as Mode of Knowing," in *A Head Taller*, 79.

standing at the top of the class giving the class information on Lila's home place and telling them what features should go onto the map and where they should go, the children were offered the opportunity to work this out for themselves. The process demanded that the children draw on all they already knew and add to it from what they could decipher from the text. As is one of the aims of Drama in Education, by becoming constructors of their own learning, the children began to take ownership of the process. The success that they experienced led to an awareness of their ability to do so and fuelled the desire to continue taking greater responsibility on themselves for their own learning.

The journals kept by the children over the course of the study were an invaluable source of data for the researcher in assessing the level to which children engaged with the material because of the drama. Journal entries integrated comments on the emotions experienced by the children as they participated in the drama, demonstrating the involvement of the participants in the experience. They began to use the journals to make commentaries and predictions on the story line, and analyse the course of action chosen by characters as the story unfolded. For example, relating the incident in the book where Lila must choose whether on not she will try to do the final test in becoming a firework maker, Jane, a child who struggled with class work prior to the implementation of the study, particularly where higher order thinking skills were demanded writes " Today we read the story again, it was dreadful the way she had been treated. She could have (as written) turned back but she had come a long way."[82] After a different session the same child records "why did she have to go? Just to be a firework maker?"[83] Reporting a lesson where the children wrote poems

[82] Journal entry, Jane, 9/2/00.
[83] Ibid., 10/2/00.

based on the sounds that Lila could hear as she made her way up the mountain, Jillian writes "The poems were about what Lila [herd] in the jungle and when she came out of it and up on the mountain all was silent [exept] for the odd rumble of Mount Merapi."[84] Another entry by a child called Linda referring to the second session where the class constructed a map for Lila and then spoke to her (a child played the role of Lila), records that 'as far as I am concerned she was determined to go through with it." [85] These comments demonstrate that through the dramatic process the children the comprehension and understanding that the children had of the text was significantly deepened. Learners began to engage with the text at a deep level causing them to take account of and question the emotions, motives and actions of the characters in the story.

Literacy required for today's society requires the ability to search, locate and use information offered from text. It is a meaning making process involving the exchange of ideas and knowledge between author and reader. It involves the reader engaging in tasks that require a more complicated cognitive ability than in the past.[86] A move in emphasis from product to process is required to fulfil this demand.[87] As is clearly demonstrated here, the use of Drama in Education in approaching literacy teaching can meet these demands. As the child becomes engaged in the reading experience in and through drama, she is engaging in a process that demands the deconstruction of text and the extraction of meaning from each situation as she strives to make sense of each of the episodes as they unfold.

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[84] Journal entry, Jillian, 9/2/00.

[85] Journal entry, Linda, 26/1/00.

[86] Dr Thomas Kellaghan speaking at the RAI International Conference on Literacy, Malahide, Dublin, 2000.

[87] David Wray, *Literacy and Awareness* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1994), 42.

Drama provides a context where the learner can examine what is happening throughout the text in a meaningful, relevant and enjoyable manner. The way in which the learners began to examine the text, to question the motives and actions of the characters as shown through the journals demonstrates the value of drama in facilitating the development of these vital literacy skills.

The journals demonstrate the way in which the learners became engaged not only in the text but in their own learning process as the children also began to comment on the actual learning experience. For example, in one session the class were split into two halves, one being Lila's conscience, the other being the pirates, and they tried to help her make the decision as to whether or not she should get into the boat 'river taxi' with the men. Lee comments, " I did not enjoy when the pirates [win] Lila on to the boat because the pirates had better reasons and Lila's mind did not win."[88] Prior to the implementation of the study the researcher had observed that while Liam was a conscientious worker, he struggled with tasks that required him to think beyond the material. When asked questions in class that demanded that he do so his suggestions were inaccurate and showed a lack of insight.[89] Commenting on the enjoyment that she is deriving from the experience, Orla notes "If anything was boring I wouldn't take as much interest."[90] On finishing the novel the same child comments in her journal "Now we have finished the book I have a better view of the book."[91] Ralph, a child who prior to the implementation of the study, often appeared

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[88] Liam, Journal, 27/1/00.
[89] Observation notes, 7/12/99, 13/1/00, 17/1/00.
[90] Orla, journal, 3/2/00.
[91] Ibid., 22/2/00.

uninvolved in classroom pursuits comments in his journal,[92] "I think the story is good finding things out about Rambashi."[93] Demonstrating that he was engaged with the story to such an extent that the pretence almost became reality for him, Ralph records " I talked to Rambashi during the lesson."[94] Ann demonstrates her engagement with the dramatic experience very clearly by her comment "I like acting. I want to be an actress, but I probably won't be."[95] Prior to the implementation of the study, the researcher observed that during class the same child did very little to push herself forward. While she was inclined to giggle with her friends during class-time she did not draw attention to herself where schoolwork was concerned and rarely volunteered to answer questions or participate in discussion.[96] The same lack in confidence can be detected toward the end of the comment, but the fact that the comment was made demonstrates that the dramatic process was already beginning to open up new possibilities for the child. The process involved her to the extent that she obviously felt that she could reveal a very deep desire to the researcher. The success that she felt as a result of the work is also shown in the way that she records an occasion where she was praised "Miss [Stuart] like my title it was listen lila listen."[97] The researcher played background music while reading a particularly evocative passage from the novel that day. The child also comments " Miss [Stuart] also put on some music. [Whish] I think suited the story."[98] After the first session James, referring to researching the material needed to make the map, writes " I enjoyed doing it because it was good to get a picture of the sort of people we were talking about and to understand what [were] were

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[92] Observation notes, 7/12/99, 14/1/00.
[93] Ralph, journal, 3/2/00.
[94] Ibid., 1/2/00.
[95] Journal entry, 8/2/00.
[96] Observation notes, 7/12/99-17/1/00.
[97] Journal Entry, Orla, 9/2/00.

talking about."[99] The Revised Curriculum recognises the need to provide children with a learning experience that enables them to become self-reliant in their learning thus helping " to equip the individual to cope with the rapidly changing nature of modern life, and its unpredictable patterns of life and work."[100] The comments made by the children in their journals reveal that by engaging them in the learning process through the use of Drama in Education they began to develop an awareness of the learning process enabling them to begin to take responsibility for their own learning.

Data collected during the course of the interviews support the finding that the children became engaged in the book through the drama activities. In the interview prior to the study, David, who said that he didn't like books and would "love to fall asleep"[101] when Harry Potter was being read, was able to relate in great detail the session which was based on the dramatic device known as *Devils and Angels*.[102] In this session one, half of the class acted as Lila's conscience and the other as the pirates. David reports that the researcher, in role as Lila, " should've listened to my brain,"[103] and not left Lila to the mercy of the pirates. Kerry demonstrates the level to which she became involved in the story, when, during the course of the interview she reports that her favourite section of the book was where Lila met Razvani. She notes that Lila's discovery that there was no such thing as Royal Sulphur, the substance that she had travelled to the mountain to receive, stood out in her mind. Kerry recounts how the book reveals that the Royal Sulphur was inside Lila all

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[98] Ibid.
[99] Journal entry, James, 25/1/00.
[100] Primary School Curriculum-Introduction, 31.
[101] Interview notes, 20/01/00.
[102] See Appendix 1.
[103] Interview with David, 3/3/00.

the time. It was her bravery, determination and unrelenting desire to be a firework maker. This section of the novel is quite a complex passage that speaks of life being, like a flame, an illusion. It contends that everything in life comes and goes and, it is what is inside the person that matters. For Kerry, who would have been classified as amongst the weakest children in the class in terms of reading and comprehension ability, this demonstrates very clearly the way in which she was drawn into Lila's experiences and understand the deep significance of the story.

Through the drama the children were offered the opportunity to engage physically and emotionally with the events and characters in the novel. Through allowing the children to experience the emotions implied within a fictitious situation, in a real and immediate manner, the participants became involved in a unique way, not typically afforded through merely listening passively to the reading of text. For example, during the session held on the sixteenth of February, the children participated in an activity called '…interviews.' The class were divided into pairs, with one adopting the role of Chulak, the other the role of the Emperor. Having conducted the interviews, the participants were then asked about how it had progressed. The annoyance and frustration felt by the participants was very real and reflected very accurately how the average person would react to such an experience. This emphasises again the way in which drama draws on and mirrors real life. While " engaging in the shoes of another" the participants had the opportunity to view what had happened "from the reality of self."[104] Video footage of the session reveals that both during the interview and when giving feedback, the participants were totally engaged in the process.

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[104] John Somers, *Drama in the Curriculum* (London and New York: Cassell Education Ltd., 1995), 11.

When asked how his interview had gone, Ralph, in role as Hamlet the elephant reported "terrible!" His tone of voice and facial expression displayed total disgust at the experience.[105] When asked why, he replied accusingly, " because HE (pointing at his partner, the Emperor) wouldn't let me say anything!" This was received with a grumble of indignant agreement from all the other Chulak's in the room. Those who had taken on the role of the Emperor were equally as involved in the role. In a bid to justify their anger, the elephants were quickly chastised by the Emperor, for not having told him about his ability to talk before this. Joe, Emily and Stewart were particularly disgusted with Hamlet's behaviour and expressed this very readily.[106]

The success of this technique, *Hidden Objectives in Role Play*, depends on the way that the participants face situations that they did not anticipate. Participants were forced to view the situation from a new and unexpected perspective. O'Neill notes that through drama the varying perspectives offered to participants on each episode permits an "increasing level of personal engagement."[107] The unpredictability of the outcome of the dramatic experience was clearly demonstrated in this session. In order to participate the children had to think quickly, to look critically at the situation, and to question and analyse the reaction with which they were faced. The transference of knowledge that they already had was required to deal with the situation and they had to defend their own stance. The development of each of these mentioned skills is called for in the Revised Curriculum.[108]

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[105] Video footage, 16/2/00.
[106] Video footage, 16/2/00.
[107] O'Neill, *Dramaworlds*, 3.
[108] NCCA, *Primary school Curriculum, Introduction*, 11.

The researcher felt that ensuring the engagement and involvement of the participants was not achieved immediately on starting the drama work. Rather, it was a gradual process, built up over the entire period spent by the researcher in the classroom. The researcher, as participant-observer, noted the work was significantly different from any work that had been conducted in the classroom before and, consequently some of the children were initially slow to respond to the work.[109] However, as the project progressed, the children became increasingly enthused and involved with the work. McGregor emphasises the need for both pupils and teachers to learn to use the drama process.[110] O'Neill emphasises that through Drama in Education, the inhibitions of the participants lessen and risk taking is encouraged.[111] She notes that this is a process, and as the researcher discovered through the implementation of the project, both she and the children needed time to become accustomed to the new method of operation. The way in which the dramatic experience gradually drew one child from a position of disdain towards the reading and drama experience, to an attitude of complete engagement and enjoyment, is very evident from entries in Stewart's journal. His first entry reads "I think that the story is boring because it's not my kind of story. I think it could be a bit more interesting. I listened to you reading it. Boring after a while." [112] A sketch of children falling asleep at their desks accompanies his entry. On day two, big writing informs the researcher that "it's getting worse." [113] The child does however concede that he enjoyed making the models for the map. In the third

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[109] Observation notes, Tuesday 25th January.

[110] Lynn McGregor, *Learning Through Drama* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1977), 25.

[111] Cecilly O'Neill, Dramaworlds, *A Framework for Process Drama* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1995), 8.

[112] Journal entry, Stewart, 25/1/00

[113] Journal entry, Stewart, 26/1/00.

session, as the child becomes more involved, he reports that the book "could be cool,"[114] however, he also suggests that the researcher might have spent the time reading Harry Potter instead. By session number four the attitude of the child becomes more positive and, by the sixth session, Stewart records that that "story is cool."[115] The final entry in the journal reveals that "the story was so cool." [116]

In summary, the researcher found, that through the implementation of the drama-based reading programme, the children in the class became engaged and involved in the reading and learning experience in a way that they had not demonstrated prior to its implementation. Increased engagement and involvement with the material resulted in higher motivation levels and the facilitation of deeper understanding and the development of higher order thinking skills as demanded in the Revised Primary School curriculum.

6.3 Listening Skills

The researcher observed the class before and during the implementation of the project to assess the listening skills of the children. Reviewing video recordings made of several sessions conducted with the class allowed the researcher to assess the degree to which the children listened, both to the teacher and to each other. Information gathered during the interviews conducted before and after the study based on work conducted in class also assisted the researcher in constructing an accurate account of the listening skills of the

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[114] Journal entry, Stewart, 27/1/00
[115] Journal entry, Stewart, 3/2/00.
[116] Journal entry, Stewart, 24/2/00.

class. The perceptions of the class teacher regarding any change in behaviour in the class in the period after the implementation of the study were also taken into account.

6.3.1 Pre-study findings

As was reported earlier in the chapter the observer noted that on average an hour and a half to two hours everyday was spent on reading activities that demanded that the children listen.[117] Observation also revealed that on average another hour to an hour and a half were spent questioning, explaining, and discussing aspects of work which required also required the pupils to listen.[118] The rest of the time was spent on written work and classroom organisation.

Each morning homework was checked, reading heard and Religious Education, Irish and Maths were taught. At the end of this session just before lunch the class novel, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* was read to the class. After lunch English writing was generally done, followed by either History, Geography or Environmental Studies. The ability and willingness of the class to listen to what was going on varied depending on the time of the day, the subject that was being taught and the particular aspect that was being covered. For example, on Tuesday the eleventh of January, the children listened attentively to the teacher and to each other during the morning session, which was Irish. During this time they were playing the Irish language game called *An Spota Té*.[119] However, by afternoon when Geography and English Reading were being done, the children were less

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[117] Observation sessions, 7/12/99-7/2/00

[118] Ibid.

[119] To play this one child is put in 'the hot seat.' The teacher fires ten or so questions at the participant. The winner is the person who answers all the questions in the shortest period of time.

attentive. The gradual tiring of the children as the day went on is a natural classroom phenomenon where children have spent the day sitting in seats and either listening or writing for the majority of the day. The researcher noted that Emma, Graham, Heather, Stephen and Jacqueline spent a significant amount of the time staring out the window.[120] It may imply the need to adapt teaching techniques according to the time of the day.

In general, throughout the observation period, the researcher noted that the class listened quietly when the teacher was speaking.[121] Tasks were completed quietly and quickly at the request of the teacher. It is significant to note that where the researcher observed poor listening skills, it was generally amongst the children at either the top or lower end of the ability spectrum of the class. For example, David who displayed mild learning difficulties often demonstrated inattentive behaviour and poor listening skills in class. He often looked out the window, looked around the classroom, flicked through books or played with items in his pencil case.[122] Gary and Kerry, who struggled with their work in general, displayed similar behaviour although not to the same extent as David.[123] Emily, Helen, John and Stewart, who were at the top end of the class also demonstrated similar behaviour, either looking out the window, looking around the classroom or reading on independently in textbooks instead of listening to the teacher or their classmates.[124]

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[120] Observation notes, 11/1/00.
[121] Observation notes, 7/12/99.
[122] Observation notes, 7/12/00, 13/1/00, 14/1/00.
[123] Observation notes, 7/12/00, 13/1/00, 14/1/00.
[124] Observation notes, 11/1/00, 13/1/00, 14/1/00

At the time of the researcher's presence in the classroom the class teacher was reading the novel *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* to the class. During readings of Harry Potter, the children generally listened attentively and were enjoying the novel. This is supported by data received indicated during the course of the interviews. Out of the six children interviewed, four of them expressed a positive attitude toward the book. When questioned on the material in the novel, the answers received that they listened well to the story and were able to use the information from it to make inferences and draw conclusions. However, Lorna reported that it was " not her kind of book." [125] She said that sometimes she listened, but at other times, she got bored. When asked about Harry Potter, David replied that when it is being read to the class he is, "never listening," and, would " love to sleep instead." [126]

6.3.2 Post study findings

During the implementation of the drama-based reading programme the class maintained and improved upon their listening skills. According to the observation notes of the researcher, and in agreement with the class teacher, the children were extremely attentive and listened very well when she was reading parts of the novel or when members of the class read passages.[127] This included those members of the class who previously had displayed inattentive behaviour. For example, at various stages in her observation notes the researcher specifies that Gary, Kerry, Emily, Stewart and David engaged in discussion in

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[125] Interview with Laura, 19/1/00.
[126] Interview with David, 20/1/00.
[127] Observation Notes, 25/1/00, 27/1/00, 1/2/00, 2/2/00…

such a way as to demonstrate that they had been listening intently to what had been said or read in class.[128]

The attentiveness of the class in general continued through out the course of the study. Video footage from the second of February, the eighth of February, the tenth of February and the sixteenth of February, show that without exception, every single child in the class remained attentive, maintaining eye contact with the teacher or speaker. This is clear evidence of an improvement in the listening behaviour of some of the previously mentioned children who had demonstrated difficulties. For example, before the study, David expressed no interest in reading during the course of the interview and said that he never listened when Harry Potter was being read to the class. This is supported in the observation notes of the researcher.[129] He felt that there was too much reading in school, especially as he had to sit and listen as he couldn't read. In the interview conducted after the study David was able to relate parts of the story back to the researcher and discuss Lila's actions in such a way as to demonstrate that he had listened attentively during the sessions when he was present.[130] The Revised Curriculum emphasises the need not only for children to develop the ability to listen, but also the need to attend to what is said as crucial.[131] In order to participate in the drama activities the children were required to listen to passages from the text and to each other. Dramaitc experience depends on the interactions of a group with each other. It involves "teachers and students engaged in collective enquiry and exploration."[132] Participants are constantly building on what they

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[128] Observation notes 27/1/00, 1/2.00,3/2/00,8/2/00, 9/2/00.
[129] Observation notes, 10/1/01.
[130] Interview with David, 3/3/00.
[131] NCCA, *Primary School Curriculum, English- Teacher Guidelines*, 7.
[132] Norah Morgan and Juliana Saxton, *Teaching Drama, A Mind of Many Wonders* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1987),

know, what they have heard and what other participants have brought to the experience. Therefore, in order to participate in the process, listening is not an optional extra but a necessary element of the process. As a result the listening skills of the participants develop.

During group and whole class activities that involved listening to each other's contributions, the children struggled at first. Much of this arose from the fact that they were not accustomed to doing group-work. It was also at first an issue during whole class activities. All members of the class were anxious to contribute to discussions. Often, when they were asking questions to find information on certain aspects of the story and the characters, different children would ask the same question to which answers had already been given in previous questions.[133] However, as the project progressed, the children not only became used to the discussion format but also became aware of the value of listening to each other during classroom discussions. The drama activities depended on the contributions of the whole class. Suggestions made by any member of the class served as a starting point from which other members could then base their contributions.

In communication between the teacher and the researcher a month after the implementation of the study, the teacher stated that he noticed a significant improvement in the listening skills of the class, specifying that they had become "more aware of other pupils listening to them, and that they showed respect for each other's views.[134]

In summary, the researcher found that the listening skills of the class members improved during the course of the study, particularly those members who prior to the implementation

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[133] Researcher's journal, Wednesday, 26th January.
[134] Letter for class teacher to researcher, 15/4/01.

of the study had demonstrated signs of inattentiveness. The children became more aware of the need to attend to the contributions of each other and recognised the value of listening to classmates as well as to the teacher. This suggests that the use of Drama in Education presented the material in a motivating and enjoyable way. It facilitated the development of a classroom environment where children were encouraged to work together. Finding within the class the ability to solve problems for themselves with less input from the teacher than would have been required before the study the children took significantly more responsibility for their own learning than they would have in the past.

6.4 Problem-solving skills/Higher order thinking skills

Higher order thinking skills incorporate the ability to question, to analyse, to investigate, to think critically and to solve problems.[135] The researcher assessed the higher order thinking skills of the children prior to and during the implementation of the study through observation.

6.4.1 Pre-study findings

Prior to the implementation of the project the researcher experienced difficulty in assessing the higher order thinking skills of the children. The greatest problem was that little opportunity was provided for the development of these skills. The work conducted in class in general, followed the format of reading text followed by questioning. The majority of the questioning was factual. Where the questioning required more in-depth analysis, a core group of the class dominated the contributions; namely, John, Stewart, Claire, Linda and

[135] Primary School Curriculum-Introduction, 11.

Emily. For example, in an activity conducted in groups in the class entitled *the diamond dilemma*, each group was given the role of being the government of a country. Each country was given a budget and nine problems with which the country was faced. The problems were end war, cancel debt, save endangered species, stop deforestation, solve homelessness, stop pollution, stop street crime, stop petty theft and improve schooling. They were set the task of prioritising the problems in terms of how much money should be channelled into each area. Each group was given a white sheet of paper and a set of nine flashcards, on which each of the nine problems were written. The flashcards were to be affixed to the paper in a diamond shape with one card in the first row, two in second, three in the third, two in the fourth and one in the fifth and last row. The area worthy of the greatest percentage of the budget was slotted in at the top of the diamond, descending to the matter considered to be of least importance. Each group had to appoint a spokesperson and an encourager. The way in which the groups arranged the problems demonstrated that the children were able to deduce the areas of most importance and justify the decisions that were made. For example, when group three were asked why they considered ending wars more important than dealing with homelessness they justified their answer by pointing out that if there was no war there would be less homelessness.[136] This session demonstrated that the problem with the class was not that they did not have the ability to solve problems but that they were limited in the opportunity provided to do so.

During the implementation of the project, the researcher continued to observe the higher order thinking skills demonstrated by the class members.

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[136] Observation notes, 1/2/00.

6.4.2 Post-research findings

From the beginning of the implementation of the project, with guidance, the children demonstrated potential to infer, to think in a critical manner and to analyse information when guided by the researcher and class teacher. For example, in the first session, the children were launched into an activity that required reading between the lines of the text to gather information needed to give an accurate picture of the country in which Lila lived so that a map could be produced. The researcher observed that while the majority of the children struggled, they eventually succeeded in the task. In her observation notes the researcher recorded, "I was amazed at the way some of the children were able to piece things together and draw conclusions sometimes aided by questioning, sometimes not."[137] Through the course of the study, the ability of the children to deduce, infer, question and predict became more refined and developed. These skills are specifically demanded in the Revised Curriculum.[138] It states that "developing the ability to question, analyse, to investigate, to think critically and to solve problems" is required.[139]

Through questioning, the class concluded that Lila would run away. They came up with a list of items that Lila would need to bring with her on the journey, one of which was a map. They deduced that this would have to be a detailed map, which would include features such as roads, mountains-including a volcano, a river with a bridge, a jungle and a village. Each of these features was suggested on the basis that they were mentioned or referred to in the

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[137] Researcher's journal, 25/1/00.
[138] Primary School Curriculum, Introduction, 11.
[139] Primary School Curriculum, 11.

first chapter. The class was then divided into groups to research further into each of these features and make a model to be placed on the map. The researcher first modelled for the children how to read between the lines and use evidence provided from the text to add to the knowledge given on aspects of the country. When the groups set to work on finding out more about their assigned area, some such as Kieran and Ryan struggled at first,[140] but with help from the teacher they overcame their difficulties. According to the observation notes of the researcher, Natasha and Jane, two girls who were of average or slightly below average ability, sometimes found class work difficult and often struggled with maintaining concentration, initially found the work demanding.[141] However, as with Kieran and Ryan, once the teacher directed their attention to the text and demonstrated further how to use the information given, they worked without further problems.[142] From the beginning individuals such as John showed great ability to deduce and infer, for example, he worked out from illustrations in the novel that the buildings were three storey to save space to allow more people to live in a smaller area.[143] Two individual children, Linda and Claire, asked if they could make a statue for the village as they considered that it was evident that the village was not in a Christian country. When asked to show evidence of this they drew attention that a "gift from the gods" had been mentioned in the text.[144] This demonstrates an ability to transfer learning from one area to another. The girls would have been aware of the different forms of worship from another curricular area, perhaps Religious Education or Geography. This demonstrates how the use of Drama in Education facilitates and develops higher-order thinking. According to Bolton, writing in the foreword to Heathcote's

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[140] Observation notes, 25/1/00.
[141] Observation notes, 25/1/00.
[142] Observation notes, 25/1/00.
[143] Observation notes, 25/1/00.

Collected Writing on Drama in Education, Drama in Education is "dedicated to helping pupils discover what they already know."[145] The Revised Curriculum recognises the "integrated nature of knowledge and thought and stresses the connections on content in the different curriculum areas."[146] It contends that "the ability to transfer knowledge is a central feature of the curriculum." [147]As shown above, as a result of the use of process drama, the children began to transfer knowledge from one area and apply it to another as they sought to understand and broaden their experience.

As the study progressed and the members of the class became more involved in the drama orientated learning process and more aware of what was expected of them, the ability of the participants to contribute in an articulate and more meaningful manner also increased. Reflecting on video footage of the session of the sixteenth of February, the researcher notes that the children had become more willing and able to elaborate during the discussions than they had been in previously recorded sessions.[148] A month after the study was completed the class teacher noted that the ability of the class to elaborate had improved, noting particularly that their ability to reason had improved.[149] Towards the middle point of the study, the children had become accustomed to demanding work and the researcher was able to being to withdraw her input as the children continued to demonstrate the skills of questioning, analysing, evaluating and inferring independently of her support. As early as the second session, the researcher recorded in her observation notes that she felt that the

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[144] Researcher's journal, 25/1/00,
[145] Dorothy Heathcote, *Collected Writings on Education and Drama*, 12.
[146] *Primary School Curriculum-Introduction*, 11.
[147] Ibid., 16.
[148] Researcher's notes based on video footage of 16/2/00.
[149] Letter to teacher from researcher, 15/4/01.

amount of guidance that was needed was decreasing.[150] During the session held on the first of February, through the device of *teacher-in-role*,[151] the children met Rambashi, and were provided with an opportunity to add to the body of knowledge that the text provided and thus assist Lila in knowing how to deal with him. At first, the line of questioning followed by the children was of limited scope, although very entertaining. However, once one child, Emily asked a question that yielded useful information and sought to expose Rambashi for the person he really was, the rest of the class followed the same line of thinking.[152] At the end of the session, the children felt that they had heard enough to provide conclusive evidence that Rambashi was a character who deserved no sympathy.[153] On reviewing the interview, the majority rightly deduced that Rambashi was in fact harmless and would probably not be ruthless enough to go through with murdering Lila.[154]

The session conducted on the tenth of February involved the children in *Ghosts and Demons*, an adaptation of the drama technique, *Devils and Angels*.[155] Lila was in the Grotto and was at the point of deciding whether or not she should venture into the flames in the cave. If she did not have what it took to be a firework-maker, she would perish in the flames. One of the children, Lydia, took the role of Lila. In order to persuade Lila to their way of thinking, the activity required that the children draw on all that they knew about Lila's personality, which they had pieced together as the novel had progressed. Through out the activity, the children displayed an excellent ability to infer, deduce, retaliate, debate and persuade. Individuals appealed to her determination, to the strength of her desire to be

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[150] Observation notes, 26/1/00.
[151] For explanation see Appendix 1.
[152] Observation notes, 1/2/00.
[153] Observation notes, 1/2/00.
[154] Observation notes, 1/2/00.
[155] See Appendix. 1.

a firework maker, and reminded her of the sacrifices that she had made thus far.[156] Those on the side of the ghosts, reminded Lila of her love for her father. They pointed out that she might never see him again and that this would break his heart, others appealed to the fear of taking risks that is natural in everyone and implored that she play it safe.[157] Drawing on what they knew of Lila's personality as suggested through the text, the opposition appealed to the determination and courage she had displayed through out the story. She was reminded by Vicky of how she had been so determined to be a firework maker that she ran away from home.[158] Liam reminded her that she had been brave enough to face a tiger and being eaten by him would have been far worse that burning herself.[159] Finally, she was reminded that she had made the final and most dangerous part of the journey up the side of Mt. Merapi. Through out the activity the children drew on everything that they knew about the character. Many of these things as shown in the examples given above were not pieces of information given directly to the readers but conclusions that they were able to draw from what they had been told. Through out the drama activities the children were repeatedly required to engage higher order thinking skills as demonstrated again through this activity. Having done this the children were then required to present their argument in a clear and coherent manner. In this way the use of drama was contributing towards fulfilling the demand of the revised Curriculum that, "the child should be enabled to explore and develop ideas through language...and develop the skills and knowledge necessary to express himself or herself through...drama and language."[160]

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[156] Observation notes, 10/2/00.
[157] Observation notes, 22/2/00.
[158] Observation notes, 10/2/00.
[159] Ibid.

In summary, the researcher noted that the use of Drama in Education as a learning approach in the classroom facilitated the use of and development of the higher order thinking skills such as summarising, analysing, making inferences and deductions and interpreting, as demanded by the Revised Primary School Curriculum. The researcher was unable to conclude that there had been an improvement in the development of these skills amongst the class group because of the drama methodologies. However, in the light of the observation that the development of higher-order thinking skills was not widely facilitated through the traditional teaching method, the implication is that an improvement would have occurred.

6.5 Co-operation skills and ability to work in groups

The ability of the class to work together and the co-operation skills demonstrated were assessed both before and after the implementation of the project using observation and data gathered from the interviews conducted with the six sample children.

6.5.1 Pre study findings

Prior to the study, the researcher noted that while the class members got on very well together and gelled well as a group, within the context of class work the ability of the class to co-operate was weak. In general, the work conducted in the class was individual work. Pair work and group-work featured in the classroom sporadically. Where group work featured, the children enjoyed it although certain members of the class were inclined to

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[160] *Primary School Curriculum-Introduction*, 35-36.

dominate while others made no effort to contribute.[161] For example, during the diamond dilemma referred to in the previous section, the researcher notes that the group discussions were dominated by a number of key individuals. The groups were given about seven minutes to make their decisions. Circulating around the groups, the researcher noted that the children struggled with coming to terms with group-work. In group one, Claire dominated and the others agreed with her decision. In group two, Liz dominated. Group three distributed the responsibility evenly. However the researcher noted that there was very little discussion happening at the table. In group four Gary did not contribute at all but let the others do the work. Group five argued continuously. This was mainly because there were two children in the group displaying strong leadership qualities, John and Orla, and despite the fact that the group had voted Orla as the spokesperson, John said that he wanted to do it. Orla backed down graciously. It demonstrated John's reluctance to work as a team member.[162] In the same group Ralph made no effort to contribute.

6.5.2 Post-study findings

Prior to the study, the class teacher had the desks arranged in lines across the classroom. In order to facilitate group work, the researcher changed this layout. The tables were rearranged into groups that seated between four and six children.[163] This formation also served to provide floor space at the front of the classroom that could be used for drama activities if needed. The change in layout brought about a change in the dynamics of the classroom. Prior to this, the children could only confer with the children sitting on either

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[161] Observation notes 1/2/00
[162] Observation notes, 1/2/00.
[163] For classroom plan, refer to Appendix 7.

side of them.[164] The revised formation allowed each child access to at least three other children, and therefore three alternative points of view. Based on the success of the change in dynamics brought about by this, the class teacher decided to keep this format after the researcher had left the classroom.

Much of the work conducted as part of the drama-based reading programme required that the class work in groups. The drama work required that the children draw on each other's experiences and knowledge as they worked to solve problems.

Care had been taken at first to draw the class gradually into the process of working in groups. While the first lesson integrated group work, it was structured in such a way as to allow pairs to work together within the group; these pairs were in turn required to confer with other pairs in the group. Despite this, according to the observation notes of the researcher, the class struggled with group work. [165] Again, in the second session, which was an extension of this, a greater level of group work was required. The researcher recorded that "as groups they worked appallingly." [166] She observed that "it didn't strike anyone that they would have to see what other members of the group were doing before they could decide what they themselves wanted to do."[167] The perceived difficulty experienced by the class is supported by data received from the interviews conducted with the children after the study. When asked about the work group, Emily reported that there were " problems at the beginning as group members "wouldn't be able to agree on the one

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[164] Observation notes, 25/1/00.
[165] Observation notes, 25/1/00.
[166] Journal entry, 26/1/00.
[167] Observation notes, 26/1/00.

thing."[168] She adds that this problem was overcome through learning to compromise. Although she admitted that group work was difficult, she reported that it is "not as hard as when you have to do everything on your own." [169] In her interview, Kerry reported the same thing. She expressed that at first working as a part of a group was difficult as she " didn't know what to do."[170] However, she also informed the interviewer that she preferred it once she got used to it. She felt that it allowed people to " get more ideas and share things." [171]

As the study progressed the ability of the class members to co-operate as members of a group and as a class improved. In whole class activities, such as interviewing Rambashi using the techniques of *teacher-in-role* and *hot-seating*, the children gradually came round to demonstrating an understanding that when they operated as a unit, basing questions on information received from previously asked questions, they could arrive a point where useful information could be extracted.[172] Following a session that required the class to recreate a festival where different groups had responsibility for different aspects of the celebration, the researcher recorded in her journal, " It's amazing how they (the children) have gone from not knowing how to work as a group, to becoming real experts at it, I had very little input today."[173]

Towards the end of the study, the majority of the work conducted was based on small-group work. At this stage, not only did the children show that they could handle it effectively, but also began to show a preference for lessons of this type. During one of the

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[168] Interview with Emily, 3/3/00.
[169] Interview with Emily, 3/2/00.
[170] Interview with Kerry, 3/3/00.
[171] Interview with Kerry, 3/3/00.
[172] Observation notes, 1/2/00.
[173] Journal entry, 8/2/00.

sessions that required some individual work, one child asked if it would be possible to do the work as part of a group instead.[174]

Using a technique based on the strategy, *role-on-the-wall*, [175] the final session involved reviewing Lila's journey, in both a literal and emotional sense. As a class, the children looked at how Lila's journey had changed her, considering what she had learned from each of her adventures as the story had unfolded. A "map' was drawn out on a roll of wallpaper. All the children in the class sat on the floor around the map, novels in hand and together discussed and mapped out how Lila had changed. The observation notes of the researcher reveal that this was accomplished without difficulty. Contributions were made from all members of the class, each taking responsibility for writing suggestions on the frieze, and helping other class members find suitable vocabulary where needed.

Reporting to the researcher a month after the study, the teacher noted that the class had demonstrated better co-operation skills since the completion of the study. He reported that because of the work done with the class, the children showed more respect for each other's views. He also felt that less teacher input was required when doing group work had been prior to the study and that the children had become skilled at organising tasks being undertaken.

The transformation of the class from demonstrating the inability to work effectively in groups to not only showing the ability to share responsibility for learning with others and depending on each other for knowledge and advice, but also stating a preference for this format of work, is an example of the effectiveness of Drama in Education in developing co-operation skills. Drama is a social activity. It provides an opportunity for a "collection of

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[174] Journal entry, 8/2/00.
[175] See Appendix 1.

attitudes to relate together in problem-solving."[176] It recognises and operates on the view that where a number of minds and experiences come together, a "spectrum" for problem-solving is provided.[177] It demands that participants co-operate and collaborate in the service of something beyond themselves."[178] The Revised Curriculum aims to "enable children to...relate to others with understanding and respect."[179] It emphasises that "working collaboratively provides learning opportunities that have particular advantages...and ...brings children to an early appreciation of the benefits to be gained from co-operative effort."[180] The evidence presented supports the effectiveness of the use of Drama in Education in fulfilling these requirements.

In summary, the researcher found that the use of Drama in Education provided the children with the opportunity to engage in group work. Therefore, the co-operation skills of the group improved and the children came to a greater awareness of the importance of listening to each others' contributions.

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[176] Heathcote *Collected Writings on Education II*, 71.
[177] Ibid., 72.
[178] Dorothy Heathcote and Gavin Bolton, *Drama for learning, Dorothy Heathcote's Mantle of the Expert Approach to Education*, vii.
[179] NCCA, *Primary School Curriculum-Introduction*, 35.
[180] Ibid., 17.

CHAPTER 7

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The overall aim of the study was to assess the effectiveness of Drama in Education as an approach to literacy learning with a group of fifth class children.

Part one of the study reviewed literature in the areas of literacy and Drama and Education. Chapter one presented findings from international and national studies which illustrate that literacy levels in Ireland are significantly lower than counterparts in other countries. The role of literacy in developing the skills required for a knowledge society was considered. Reference was made to the role of motivation in learning. Chapter two outlined the main initiatives that have been introduced by the government to address the issue. Particular attention was drawn to the Revised Curriculum for Irish Primary Schools which aims to address the needs of society through primary education. Chapter three reviewed the area of Drama in Education drawing attention to its role in facilitating the development of the skills called for in the Revised Curriculum. Its particular capacity for the development of language and literacy was considered. Part two of the study described the empirical element of the research. A reading programme integrating the principles and methods of Drama in Education was designed and implemented with a group of fifth class children. The effectiveness of the reading programme in facilitating the development of higher order thinking skills, listening skills and co-operation skills was assessed using a variety of research tools. The data gathered from the study was reviewed.

7.1 Conclusions from the theoretical component of the study

Society is becoming increasingly dominated by technology that appears to demand less and less thinking from the human brain and seems to render traditional literacy skills outdated. The fast moving, electronically dominated world that surrounds us demands that in order to retain the ability to think beyond what the media wants us to think, we must be able to question, analyse, infer, deduce and interpret figurative language and imagery. The IALS reported that the most effective means of developing these skills is through literacy learning. Data from the study draws attention to the need for literacy skills in society. Both in terms of economic success and personal fulfilment, literacy equips the individual with the skills needed for participation in society. Literacy is a meaning-making process that involves an interaction between reader and text. Literacy learning requires the application of current knowledge and understanding of the world to text. It is grounded in the language experience of the learner. Successful literacy learning can only occur where it is presented as a meaningful and purposeful activity that relates to the world in which the individual lives. Where an activity is seen as meaningful, learners are motivated. Presenting literacy as relevant to society, while becoming increasingly challenging, is crucial. Literacy learning and teaching approaches must account for the role played by motivation in the process. If not, the literacy standard in Ireland can only continue to deteriorate, eventually crippling the economy and leaving a society whose members are ill-equipped to deal with all that is presented to them.

Figures from national and international studies demonstrated that the literacy levels of Irish children and adults are significantly below the level needed for participation in the knowledge society. The National Assessment of English Reading showed that there has

been no improvement on the reading levels of Irish school children in the last five years. The IALS reported that one fifth of the Irish population do not have the standard of literacy required for today's society. The implication is that the Irish Education system has failed to provide its participants with the basic skills needed for personal fulfilment and economic success. Through failing to take account of the changing demands of literacy, the changing theories and practices in literacy learning and teaching and the need to present literacy in a motivating and relevant way, a significant sector of society have been denied the basic human right of being educated for full participation in society.

Attempts have been made to rectify the situation. Nineteen ninety nine saw the development and implementation of national and local initiatives to raise literacy awareness. Intervention strategies such as pre-school programmes have been introduced in some disadvantaged areas. The Education system has begun a process of reform which has seen the introduction of more flexible curricula aimed at encouraging young people to stay in school. Resources continue to be poured in to the provision and development of remedial education in the country. The introduction of legislation for early learning and adult learning attempts to take account of the need to present education as a life-long process spanning from birth to death. The Revision of the Curriculum for Primary Schools attempts to narrow the gap that exists between what society requires and what the Education system has traditionally provided, which the literacy figures indicate has been inadequate to date.

However, the question must be asked is it too little too late? The figures show that despite the reform that has been undertaken, figures as recent as 1998 and 1999 show that there is still a deficit in literacy provision in Ireland. Regardless of the provisions that are made,

unless due account is taken of the importance of presenting literacy as a meaningful, relevant and necessary skill, there is no initiative that can solve the problem. This is clearly demonstrated through the low literacy figures that persist in Ireland. What is required is a change in educational philosophy that will draw the responsibility for learning out of the hands of the educator and place it straight into the hands of the learner. A transformation is required in Irish classrooms. To achieve this educators must begin to look for teaching approaches that facilitate the development of the higher-order thinking skills required for today's society such as are accommodated through literacy learning.

Drama in Education offers an approach to learning that is emancipatory and revolutionary. The use of Drama in Education provides teachers and learners with a place where educational and personal success can be experienced. Drama is intrinsically motivating drawing on the natural inclination of the human to make-believe, which, according to Piaget is strongest in childhood. Through providing learners with meaningful contexts through which to address and resolve problems, the learning experience becomes real and purposeful. Working through the mediums of the body, voice and the imagination the participants are provided with the opportunity to draw on personal knowledge and understanding to discover more about the issue that is being explored. Through the experience, learners can come to a deeper understanding of human nature, their peers, the world around them and ultimately themselves. Through Drama in Education a unique bridge is created to literacy learning. Dramatic action depends on language interactions for its success. Language forms the basis of literacy learning. Interacting with text through the creating and recreating of situations and characters allows the learner to see the text as a

point of reference for the development of personal experience. The learning process that can result is motivating, enjoyable and purposeful.

7.2 Conclusions and recommendations for the action research component of the study

Drawing on the theoretical findings in the field of literacy learning and Drama in Education in the context of the requirements of the Revised Curriculum for Primary Schools, a reading programme was developed and implemented with a group of fifth class students. The effectiveness of the use of Drama in Education in literacy learning and teaching was assessed under the following headings:

- Attitude to reading
- Ability to listen
- Development of higher order thinking skills
- The development of co-operation skills
- Ability to engage with text

Based on the data collected by the researcher through employing the researcher tools of interviewing, observation, questionnaires and journals the following conclusions were drawn from the study.

- Participants considered reading in school to be more enjoyable when approached through the use of Drama in Education.

- There was no significant change in attitude to reading outside school as a result of the implementation of the drama-based reading programme. However, this was a small-scale study. a longer period would be required to assess the latter.
- The ability and desire of the children to listen improved during the implementation of the study. This continued after the researcher had left the classroom in so far as the teacher reported that the children had developed a sense of audience when reading aloud in class.
- The engagement level of the class increased significantly during the implementation of the study. The children were enthusiastic about participating in the dramatic activities, reporting that it made the story more realistic.
- The ability of the group to co-operate with each other increased significantly as a result of the study. During the implementation of the study the researcher noted that the children became more accustomed to and expert at group work as the study progressed. In the aftermath of the study the teacher reported a significant improvement in the co-operation skills of the group.
- The programme had a positive bearing on the group dynamics with the class teacher reporting that after the study the group improved at listening to each other and treated each other with increased respect.
- As a result of the study the children developed a sense of audience, and improved in their use of expression when reading aloud having developed an awareness of the potential of the voice to adding to the experience of reading and listening.

- The ability of the group to think critically, to infer, to analyse, to question and to transfer skills improved during the implementation of the study. However, there is no evidence to suggest that this continued after the implementation of the study.

In relation to the teaching experience the researcher, drawing on the opinion of the class teacher concludes that,

- The class teacher considered the approach enjoyable and manageable. Speaking as a teacher who would not previously have employed drama-based methods in his teaching, he concluded that it was approach that he would use again in the future. The teacher made contact with the researcher following school year to find out more about the area as he intended to use the same text and approach with his new class. This highlights the need for the provision of in-service training in the area.

- As a teacher, the researcher who had limited previous experience in area, found the study an effective and motivating teaching approach which facilitated a unique relationship between the teacher and learner based on mutual respect and dependency.

In relation to the research methods employed the researcher concludes that

- The use of questionnaires with children was the least suitable and most problematic form of data collection. She considered that very little information was gathered as a result of the completion of the questionnaires. The questions were phrased in an unproductive way. While this should have been detected during the piloting of the questionnaire the researcher had placed more concern on assessing if the language was

understandable to the children rather than useful to her in terms of the information that it would yield. Where space was provided for children to expand on questions they were unable to do this in a productive manner.

- The journals filled in by the children in the class were an invaluable source of data for the study. The majority of the children used the journals in a constructive and open manner allowing the researcher to reflect on the progress of the study and identify weaknesses and strengths of the teaching methods.
- Participant observation was a challenging but very worthwhile form of data collection for the study. Used in conjunction with video footage this was particularly constructive.

7.3 Recommendations for future research

Arising from the findings of the study and in light of the limitations of this study, the researcher suggests that further research might be conducted into the following aspects of Drama in Education and Literacy Learning,

- The development and implementation of a similar study over an extended time period. This would allow for assessing the potential of Drama in Education in developing the overall reading ability of the learners. Bearing in mind the time span of this particular study, this was not feasible in this case.
- Further research into the role of the teacher in a similar study would be useful for reference by teachers who wished to implement Drama in Education as part of their literacy programme. This would be particularly relevant in light of the Revised English

Curriculum for Primary Schools which calls for the implementation of creative and innovative teaching methods in literacy instruction.

APPENDIX 1

Collective character

A character is improvised by a group of students; any one of them can speak as the character. In this way the whole class can be involved in a dialogue, for instance, by half the class taking one of the characters involved.

Conflicting advice

Characters are offered conflicting advice as to what to do about any given situation. This can be done in character or by other characters in the drama and by voices in the character's head played by other members of the group.

Conscience alley

At a critical moment in a character's life when a dilemma, problem, or choice must be made, the character walks between wo rows of students who may offer advice as the character passes. The advice may include lines or words spoken earlier in the drama.

Flashback

The relationship between the dramatic present and the past in reinforces by showing 'flashback' scenes while the present scene unfolds, or at a critical moment in a character in confronted by images from the past.

Forum theatre

A small group act out a drama for the rest of the group as 'observers'. Both the 'performers' and the 'observers' have the right to stop the drama at any point and make suggestions as to how it might proceed; ask for it to be replayed with changes to bring out another point of view or focus; deepen the drama by using any of the other conventions. An important feature is that all the participants, 'performers' and 'observers', take responsibility for the crafting of the drama.

Group sculpture

The group, or an individual from the group, models volunteers into a shape, usually of a non-representational nature, which expresses a particular aspect of the theme or issue being addresses. The collective creation of this sculpture will force the group members to bring out their own, individual interpretation of events portrayed in the drama.

Hot-seating

Characters are questioned about their values, motives, relationships and actions by other members of the group. This is a very effective rehearsal technique that helps an actor to flesh out and discover new facets of their character through the responses the make to the questions. The questioners may also be in role as witnesses, historians, detectives, etc. There can be added tension if the character is questioned at a moment of stress, or at a turning point in their lives.

Improvisation

A spontaneous acting out of a given situation in which students have to respond to the given circumstances-who, where, when, what. A prepared but unscripted performance or a situation that is prepared by one group of students which is improvised with the teacher-in-role or with volunteers from another group.

Interviews, interrogations

Characters are interviewed by 'reporters' or interrogated by an authority figure in order to question their motives, values, beliefs or to elicit more facts about a given situation.

Letters

Delivered by the teacher/leader to either the whole group or to small sub-groups in order to introduce a new idea, focus or tension to the existing drama. The participants can write them both in and out of character as a means of crystallising thought or reflecting on past action.

Narration

One of the participants tells the story while others 'act it out', or a series of scenes are linked by narrative which can either simply tell the story or, more importantly, comment on the action from a particular point of view.

Re-enactments

In order to examine a situation in more detail, a scene or an event that 'has already happened' may be re-enacted. If this is linked into the idea of clarification of fact or confirmation of the source of a rumour it can provide a very powerful focus for checking and confirming the whole-group's growing understanding of a given situation.

Ritual and ceremony

Students create appropriate rituals and ceremonies that might be celebrated or endured by characters to mark anniversaries, cycles, initiations, belief systems etc.

Role-on-the-wall

A record of a character is kept in the form of a large outline of a figure in which students might write key lines, phrases, ideas or feelings about the character. The outline is kept and re-edited as students discover more about the character.

Sound-tracking

Sounds are used to create the atmosphere of the 'place' in which the drama takes place. These can be prerecorded or live and are usually, though not always, created by the participants.

Still photographs

The still photograph is developed to include the convention of a freeze frame or pause in the action, as if on a video recorder. This allows the group to examine a particular moment in more detail.

Tableau

Participants create a physical image using their own bodies to represent a moment from the drama. Combined with thought-tracking and sound-tracking, this convention can be used in variety if different circumstances. Try linking two or more together as a away of developing a narrative sequence or predicting possible outcomes.

Teacher-in-role

Expressed in its simplest form the teacher/leader takes part in the drama along with the other participants. Teachers often feel extremely reticent, for a variety of reasons, about joining in alongside the children but there is no doubt at all that children respond very positively indeed to their teacher becoming part of the shared act of creating a drama.

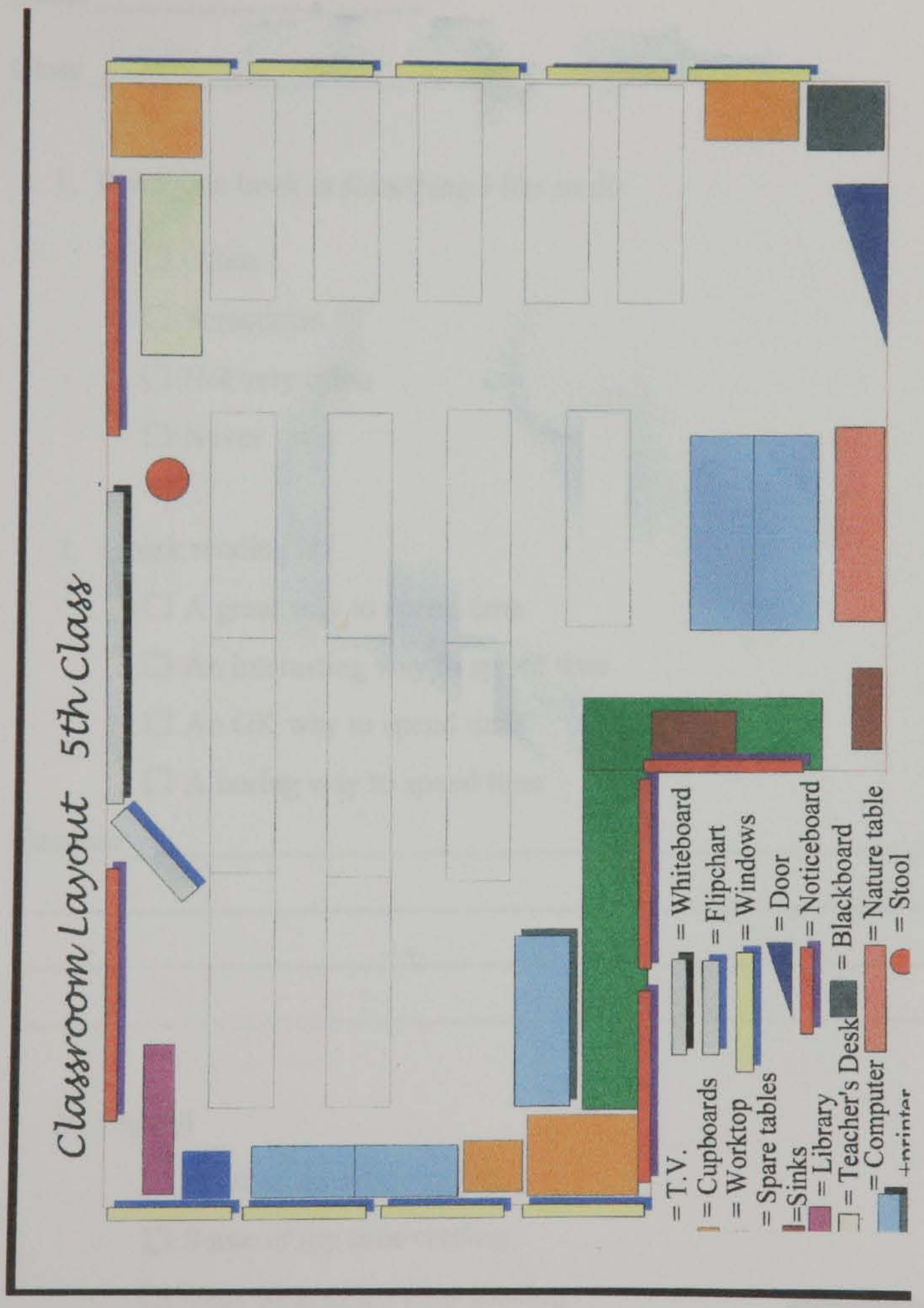
Thought-tracking

The inner thoughts of a character are revealed either by the person adopting that role or by the others in the group. This is a particularly useful way of slowing down and deepening a drama especially if used in conjunction with still *photographs* or *tableaux*.

Whole-group drama

All of the participants, including, usually the teacher/leader, are engaged in the same drama at the same time.

APPENDIX 2


Classroom Layout 5th Cl
= T.V.
= Whiteboard
= Cupboards
= Flipchart
= Worktop
= Windows
= Spare tables
= Door
=Sinks
= Noticeboard
= Library
= Blackboard
= Teacher's Desk
= Nature table
= Computer
= Stool
+printer

QUESTIONNAIRE

Name _____

Class _____

1. Reading a book is something I like to do

   ☐ Often

   ☐ Sometimes

   ☐ Not very often

   ☐ Never

2. I think reading is

   ☐ A great way to spend time

   ☐ An interesting way to spend time

   ☐ An OK way to spend time

   ☐ A boring way to spend time

Because _____

_____

_____

_____

3. I spend

   ☐ A lot of my time reading

   ☐ Some of my time reading

   ☐ Very little of my time reading

   ☐ None of my time reading

4. Knowing how to read is

☐ Very important

☐ Important

☐ Not very important

☐ Unimportant

Because_____

_____

_____

_____

5. People who read a lot are

☐ Very interesting

☐ Interesting

☐ Not very interesting

☐ Boring

Why?_____

_____

_____

_____

6. I think libraries are

☐ A great place to spend time

☐ An interesting place to spend time

☐ An OK place to spend time

☐ A boring place to spend time

Because_____

_____

_____

_____

7. When someone gives me a book I feel

☐ Very happy

☐ Happy

☐ Unhappy

☐ Very unhappy

8. Reading is an important part of schoolwork

☐ Strongly agree

☐ Agree

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly disagree

Because_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

9. I enjoy reading as part of schoolwork

☐ Always

☐ Sometimes

☐ Not very often

☐ Never

Because_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

10.I would like my teacher to read out loud to the class

☐ Everyday

☐ Almost everyday

☐ Once in a while

☐ Never

Because_____

_____

_____

_____

In the next three questions place each of the choices in order of preference where 1 is what you like the most.

11.I like to read

- ☐ School textbooks
- ☐ Class library books
- ☐ Class reader
- ☐ Own choice of reading material

12.In my free time I enjoy

- ☐ Playing with the computer
- ☐ Playing sport
- ☐ Spending time with friends
- ☐ Reading
- ☐ Watching television

13.I like to read

- ☐ Novels
- ☐ Newspapers
- ☐ Comics
- ☐ Magazines
- ☐ Web-sites
- ☐ My school books

Which of these is your favourite?

THE END!

THANK-YOU FOR FILLING IN THIS QUESTIONNAIRE!

APPENDIX 4

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR CHILDREN

- Do you like to read?
- Do you think reading is important?
- What do you think of having a class reader?
- If there were no class readers what would you use instead?
- Do you like to read aloud in class?
- Do you like it when other people read aloud in class?

APPENDIX 5

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR TEACHER

- How important do you consider the ability to read for children?
- Can you describe a typical reading lesson?
- What are the main problems that you encounter when teaching reading, both for you and the children?
- Do you find children are motivated to read?
- In general how would you describe the attitude of the children in the class to reading?
- What techniques/strategies do you employ to encourage a positive attitude to reading in the classroom?
- What kind of texts do you use for reading lessons? Why?

APPENDIX 6

Norma Stewart, B.Ed. (Hons). Dip.
Hazelwood
Kerrykeel
Letterkenny
Co.Donegal
Phone-(074)50038/ (086)2310247
E-mail-stewartn@tcd.ie

Tuesday, 07 December 1999

Dear Parent(s),
My name is Norma Stewart. I am a qualified Primary school teacher currently studying for a Master Degree in Education. As part of my research I am designing and implementing a drama-based reading programme for fifth class. This is being conducted under the supervision of Carmel O'Sullivan, lecturer in the Education Department in Trinity College Dublin.
Mrs Maye and Mr McIlwaine have kindly agreed to permit me to conduct the study in your child's classroom. As a result as of this early in the New Year I will be taking responsibility for the teaching of English in your child's class for the duration of 4 weeks. During this time I hope to be able to interview some of the children about their reading experiences and their attitude towards reading. I would greatly appreciate it if you would give permission for your child to be interviewed should the need arise.
Any interviews would be recorded and any relevant data included in the study. Your child and school remain anonymous at all times. Any material gathered will be treated in the strictest of confidence. I have included a permission slip for you to fill in if you and your child agree to do so. If you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact me at the above phone number, e-mail address or residential address.
Your co-operation is greatly appreciated.

Yours Sincerely,

Norma Stewart

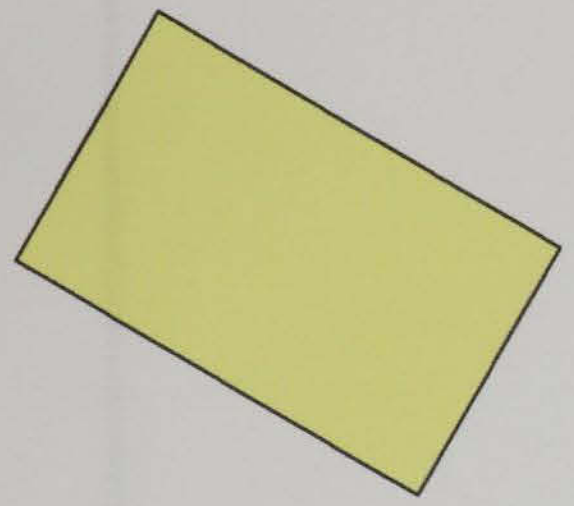
Mrs
Principal

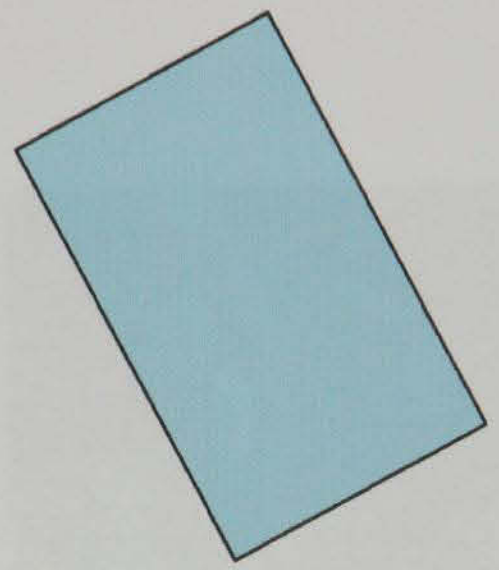
Norma Stewart
Researcher

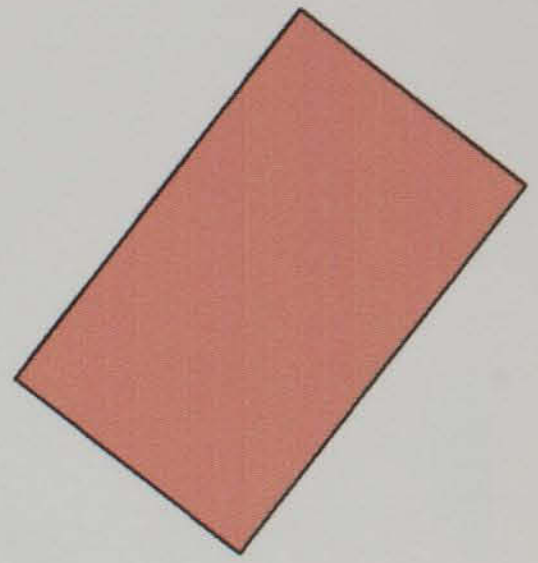
I grant permission for (insert name here) _____to participate in an interview for the purpose of research project outlined in the enclosed letter.

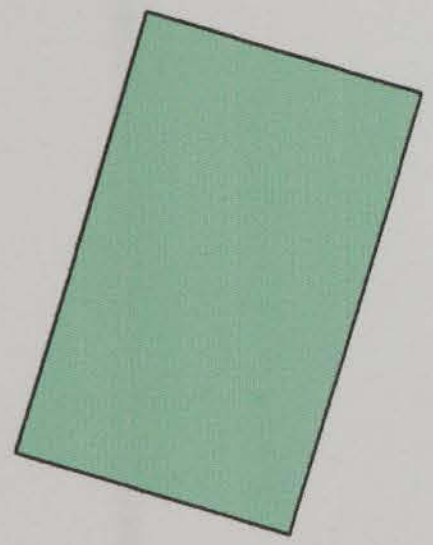
Signed _____
Date _____

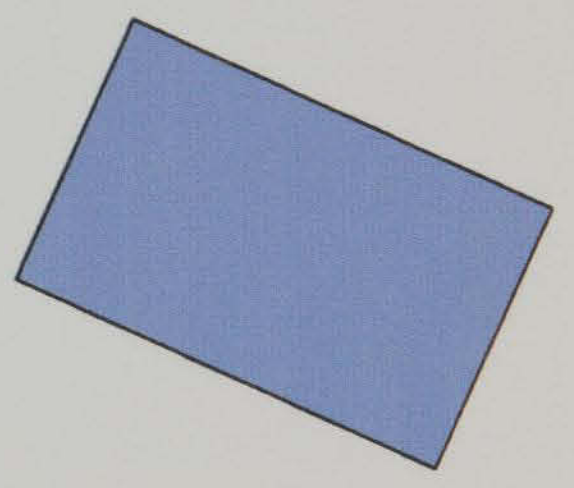
REVISED DESK LAY-OUT IN CLASSROOM, OTHER FURNITURE AS BEFORE







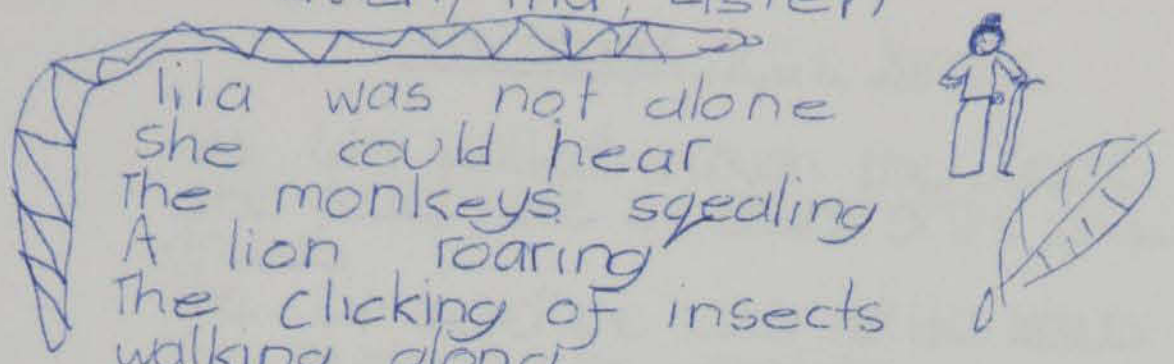




APPENDIX 8

APPENDIX 9

Listen, lila, Listen

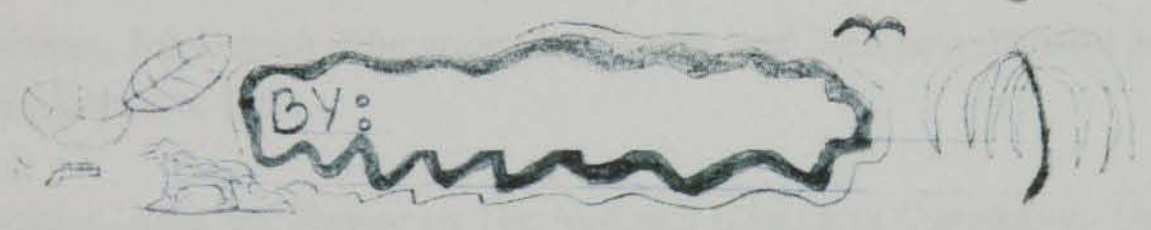


lila was not alone
she could hear
The monkeys squealing
A lion roaring
The clicking of insects
walking along
The birds where singing high up.
And little ~~ceeck~~ croaks of frog
jumping in frount and behind her
Now that was all gone.

APPENDIX 10

The Sound of the Jungle

As Lila walked through the Jungle
she could here the sound of the jungle
animals
The Lip lap of the water off the leaves
The squeling of the monkeys
The croaking of the frogs
The clicking of the insects
The roars of the toger and the rustling
of the leaves
and then the sound drifed away



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