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English in *Gaelscoileanna*: How does school type impact English writing performance?

by

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Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme leading to the award of the degree of Professional Master of Education, is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others, save to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work. I further declare that this dissertation has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this Institute and any other Institution or University. I agree that the Marino Institute of Education library may lend or copy the thesis, in hard or soft copy, upon request.

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Abstract

The educational landscape of Ireland has been rapidly changing in recent decades, especially in relation to how we view and how we teach Irish. One of the most noteworthy changes is the growth of Irish-immersion schools, or *Gaelscoileanna*, in both urban and rural areas. As a result of this growth, Irish pupils' achievement in the Irish language has been the subject of much research, which has sparked amendments in the way Irish is being taught in primary schools.

However, until recently, there was no differentiated curriculum for the provision of English in Irish-immersion or Gaeltacht schools. For many years there were no guidelines available to teachers as to how to approach the instruction of English in these school types. It seemed there was a need to investigate how these children perform in English, as they receive considerably less instruction time in English than in English-medium schools.

Fifty writing samples were generated and collected from two different school types; an Irish-immersion school and an English-medium school. These writing samples were analysed using a writing analysis tool designed by Mackenzie, Scull and Munzie (2013) in order to gain a deeper understanding of how children learn to write in English across different school types in Ireland.

The study revealed noticeable differences amongst the writing samples from the children from the two different school types, namely that the Irish-immersion participants scored higher across all categories tested in the study.

The writing analysis tool was successful in identifying children's strengths and weaknesses in English writing performance, however further study involving a larger sample size would be helpful to gain a more accurate insight to the differences in English writing performance across school types.

Acknowledgments

English in *Gaelscoileanna*: How does school type have an impact on English writing performance?

Chapter 1: Introduction

The Context 1.1

The aim of this dissertation is to collect and analyse the English writing samples of students from two different school types, an English-Medium school and an Irish-Immersion school or *Gaelscoil,* in the hopes of drawing comparisons between these samplings and determining if school type influences children's writing performance, using a writing analysis tool developed by Mackenzie et al., (2013).

Here it would be prudent to clarify what is meant by English-Medium and Irish-Immersion schools. Most students in Ireland attend English-medium schools, where English is the language of instruction, and Irish is taught as a second language or (L2) (Parsons & Lyddy, 2009a). In Irish-immersion schools, children experience all subject areas through the medium of Irish, which for most students attending these schools is their second language (Ní Bhaoill,& Ó Duibhir, 2004, Parson & Lyddy, 2016). At present, 95.4% of primary schools teach through the medium of English and approximately 6.6% of primary schools outside the Gaeltacht regions are Irish-immersion schools (Hickey & Stenson, 2016). As of 2016, there are 35,850 students enrolled in Irish-immersion schools in Ireland (''Statistics'', www.gaelscoileanna.ie , 2017).

The educational landscape of Ireland has been rapidly changing in recent decades, and specifically much change has come about in relation to how we view and how we teach Irish.

One of the most noteworthy changes is the growth of Irish-immersion schools, in both urban and rural areas. These immersion schools have been expanding rapidly in the past two decades and the number of these school types have more than doubled since 1991 (Hickey & Stenson, 2016; Mac Donnacha, Ní Chualáin, Ní Shéaghdha, & Ní Mhainín, 2005; Parson & Lyddy, 2009a,2009b, 2016,). As a result of this growth, Irish pupils' achievement in the Irish language has been the subject of much research, which has sparked amendments in the way Irish is being taught in primary schools. As outlined in *Curaclam na Bunscoile,* there is a differentiated curriculum for the teaching of Irish in primary schools depending on school type (DES, 1999a). English-medium schools follow one curriculum, while Irish-immersion and Gaeltacht schools are provided with another.

However, the same attention has not been directed towards the instruction of English in Irish-immersion schools. Until recently, there was no differentiated curriculum for the provision of English in Irish-immersion or Gaeltacht schools. For well over a decade, there were no guidelines available to teachers as to how to approach the instruction of English in these school types. With the recent introduction of the new Primary Language Curriculum, it seems appropriate to undertake a study of this nature while the programme is still being integrated in schools.

The overall aim of the study will be to answer, or attempt to answer the following question; in the current educational landscape of Ireland, how does a particular school type have an impact on children's English writing performance?

Key words: Irish-immersion schools, English-medium schools, English writing ability

Personal Motivation and Aim of the Research 1.2

I have always been interested in languages, particularly in the language acquisition of children. I felt compelled to undertake this study after completing my two school placement experiences in both an Irish-medium school in Dublin, and a Gaeltacht school in Connemara. During my time in both schools, I noticed that the students really struggled with English writing, particularly with English spelling. Although extremely bright, most students across the two schools had difficultly spelling simple sight words correctly. After further reading, it became clear that this subject was vastly under-researched, and that only a limited amount of literature exists on the topic. The majority of research undertaken in Irish-medium and Gaeltacht schools has involved assessing the students' Irish proficiency, but their English has not received the same attention. I believe, therefore, that it is quite an important and relevant area of study at present, especially in light of the recent introduction of the new Primary Language Curriculum. It may be too early to see the effects of the new curriculum, but it may make for an interesting study. By undertaking this study, I hope to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges that children face when learning a language so that in the future I, as a teacher, will be better equipped to help them overcome these challenges.

Format of the Dissertation 1.3

The layout of the dissertation is as follows; this first chapter has introduced both the research question, and the context in which the question is set, the second chapter provides an

overview of the pertinent literature based on the subject matter of the dissertation. The third chapter describes and provides a rationale of the methodological instrument used to generate and interpret the data for the study, and the fourth chapter offers an analysis and discussion of the results from the study. Finally, the conclusion delivers a summary of the results and findings of the study and provides recommendations for further investigation.

Chapter 2: Review of the Pertinent Literature

Introduction 2.1

The aim of this study is to collect and analyse the English writing samples of students from two different school types; an Irish-Immersion school or *Gaelscoil,* and an English-Medium school in the hopes of drawing comparisons between these samplings and determining if school type influences children's writing performance. Although Ireland has two official languages, the vast majority of children in Ireland attend English-medium schools where English is the language of instruction (Hickey, 2007; Parson & Lyddy, 2009a).

This chapter aims to explore the relevant literature on assessment of children's writing both in Ireland and abroad. In particular, the chapter focuses on past studies involving writing samples and writing prompts as a viable means of assessing children's writing. The literature I have explored also features studies based on Irish-immersion schools as this is an important component of the current study.

Assessment of Writing 2.2

Assessment of written language has long been used to measure a child's success in school but in recent years, success in written language is mostly determined by scores achieved in diagnostic and state administered standardised tests (Hudson, Lane, & Mercer, 2005; Nelson & Van Meter, 2007). This type of assessment, as claimed by Nelson and Van Meter (2007), is not sufficient to measure the variability in writing performance amongst language learners, and

there has been a marked movement away from these methods in classrooms of late (Glasswell, Parr, & Aikman, 2007). In challenging the pedagogical value of these standardised tests, the National Writing Project in the United States stated that ''for teachers and students, assessment should have an instructional purpose, not simply an evaluative or administrative one'' (National Writing Project & Nagin, 2003, p.77). Based on these claims, I believe that there is a need for an assessment tool that can measure children's writing performance swiftly, and on a regular basis. Research in this domain suggests that teachers need a method that can be administered in the classroom, and at regular intervals, as opposed to specific times during the academic year. Writing is considered a complex process, and it can be argued that teachers also need extra support to deal with these complexities (Mackenzie, 2009; Nelson & Van Meter, 2007; Puranik & Lonigan, 2008; Twistelton, 2006). Often the challenge of assessment according to Glasswell et al., (2007), is ''knowing what to assess and how to assess it, to find out where learners are and to identify where to go next'' (p.70). At present, it is fair to say that although writing is a fundamental skill in education, this area is still vastly under-researched in comparison to the extensive breadth of literature that exists in relation to reading skills and reading-like behaviour (Huot & Perry, 2009; Mackenzie et. al., 2013; Puranik & Lonigan, 2014). Recent decades have noted a growing concern in English writing ability across many different countries such as the United States, Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom (Mackenzie et al., 2013). In response to this concern, many researchers have attempted to design a model to best measure and improve written language performance.

Theoretical Framework for Assessment of Children's Writing Samples 2.3

Teachers are under pressure to fit assessment into their already hectic schedules and need a tool to assess children's literacy without taking curriculum time away from other subjects (Nelson & Van Meter, 2007). According to Glasswell and Parr (2009), Graves, (1983), and Nelson and Van Meter (2007) examination of children's writing samples is a worthwhile method of assessment, as children have the opportunity to display their writing skills while simultaneously developing them. Nelson & Van Meter (2005), also consider the study of children's own writing samples an authentic method of assessing their writing skills, and this method has long been used in the classroom. The complexity of writing is heightened however, according to Mackenzie et al. (2013), when teachers go about analysing these writing samples. Much research on this topic has concluded that teachers should be educated in how to collect and interpret their students' writing as a way to measure the children's learning (Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall & Wiliam, 2002; Timperley & Parr, 2004). Providing teachers with this skill can be valuable not only as a way of reflection on their own practice, but as a means of identifying the children's needs in the classroom (Timperley & Parr, 2004). Although researchers have deemed writing prompts and examples of children's own work as valuable in assessing children's writing performance, the problem lies in the fact that there is no consensus regarding the optimal method for collecting and analysing the data (Puranik et al., 2008).

Studies Conducted Involving Assessment of Writing Samples 2.4

Several studies have been conducted using children's writing samples in recent years. The majority of these studies have involved either early writers, or secondary school students. To my knowledge, no such study has been conducted in Ireland in recent decades. A wide range of methods were used to collect these writing samples across these various studies, including asking children to compose stories using prompts (Hudson et al., 2005), allowing children to create a story spontaneously (Nelson & Van Meter, 2007), and text retellings which involves the children listening to a story on tape and reproducing the story in their writing, to some success (Puranik, et al., 2008).

In regard to the assessment of the writing samples, rubrics appear to be the most common method used by researchers. In a study conducted by Mackenzie et al. (2013), researchers developed a writing analysis tool to systematically interpret 210 children's writing samples. The tool was designed to be a practical aid for teachers, and was to be utilised in the classroom, as well as supporting research in this area (Mackenzie et al., 2013). On application of this tool, key aspects of children's writing ability and learning were revealed. The analysis tool consisted of a set of six criteria across which children's writing was to be assessed. It was concluded upon implementation that this tool was both a realistic and practical way of measuring children's writing ability. In a similar study Ahmed and Hago (2015), administered a formal test to assess English language performance in Sudanese secondary school girls. The errors encountered in the test were broken down and coded based on a rubric of six different categories. The study was rich in the data it produced, and it was revealed that the mother tongue of the participants was impacting their English writing and that the girls required extra support in this regard. A secondary school in South Africa participated in a study orchestrated by Akinyeye and Pluddemann (2016), where Grade nine students were tested in their reading

and writing ability, and as part of this assessment were required to compose short pieces of narrative writing. Originally the study was constructed to analyse a large sample size, but ultimately only six students were selected to participate. These students were selected based on their writing ability, therefore two weak, two average and two competent writers were chosen to represent the wider Grade nine population within the school. The six writing samples produced during the study were analysed according to a list of seven criteria as part of an ongoing evaluation of their writing ability. The criteria outlined by Akinyeye and Pluddemann (2016) were as follows: introduction catches the interest of the reader, an appropriate setting is created, characterisation is convincing, sequence of events is logical, pace is maintained throughout the story, the events build to a climax and finally, the conclusion brings the story to a satisfying end/opens other possibilities. The participants produced narrative pieces twice weekly over four months during the course of the study. This research highlighted the need to provide additional support for teachers in order to deepen their content knowledge, and to allow them to utilise this knowledge to facilitate their students' learning.

In a study by Hudson et al. (2005), children were given a variety of writing prompts to encourage them to create their narrative. 195 narrative samples were collected and were analysed based on compositional fluency, spelling, and handwriting scores achieved. It emerged that although writing prompts did little to facilitate children's writing, the prompts provided a valid stimulus for the creation of the writing samples. Similarly, 414 narrative samples were collected from two schools in the United States and were transcribed and coded by using the Systematic Analysis of Language Transcripts programme. Results found that these narratives made for a worthwhile assessment of children's writing ability (Nelson & Van Meter, 2007). Unlike the research conducted by Hudson et al. (2005), this study concluded that in this instance, the writing prompts added to the quality of the writing samples produced by the participants. Writing samples from three different grade groups (third to sixth) were

gathered, transcribed and analysed in a study designed by Puranik et al. (2008). 120 children in total were involved in the study, drawn from seven different schools in Florida in the United States. The children were required to listen to an expository text, which was read aloud to them, and were then required to reproduce what they had heard in writing. These samples were analysed using the Systematic Analysis of Language Transcript conventions. As to be expected, the quality of the writing produced amongst the youngest grade (grade three) was significantly poorer than those in the older grades. Again, a rubric, based on the 6+1 trait scoring method, whereby children's work is assessed according to a list of seven criteria, was used to examine various aspects of a group of first-grade children's writing performance in a study undertaken by Kim, Al Otaiba, Folsom, Greulich and Puranik (2014). The justification for allowing first-graders only to participate in the study was that this particular age-group are only beginning to understand writing as a process. The study was particularly interested in the spelling quality and writing conventions of the first-graders and a writing prompt was used as a stimulus for the sample creation. Results of the analysis identified four categories of concern in relation to writing ability amongst this age group; substantive quality, syntactic complexity, productivity, and spelling and writing conventions. Similar to the analysis tool created by MacKenzie et al. (2013), this rubric was constructed to be utilised in schools and to be a practical aid for teachers in writing assessment. In discussing the limitations of the study's design, the authors acknowledge that only one writing prompt was used in the data generation stage, and that in future studies of this nature, it may be of more benefit to use multiple prompts to assess children's writing. The literature regarding the use of writing prompts reveals two contradictory arguments for their use, however, writing prompts will be used for the purpose of this study in order to generate writing samples from the children.

Teacher's Subject Knowledge of English Writing 2.5

On the area of teacher's subject knowledge and competency in writing instruction, little research has been undertaken in English speaking countries in recent years (Glasswell & Parr, 2007). In Twistelton's (2006) study, which took place over five years into the problems that student teachers face in teaching English revealed that the framework of skills and concepts that teachers need to be aware of is huge and quite complex. Interviews with forty-two individual students and student teacher observation during their lessons revealed that the methodologies employed to develop these skills and concepts hold the same importance as the skills and concepts themselves (Twistelton, 2006). As indicated in Akinyeye and Pluddeman's 2016 study, further research would be beneficial in understanding how teachers are being instructed to teach English.

Despite the lack of literature on teacher's subject knowledge in English speaking countries, in recent years, there has been an increasing interest in how English is being taught abroad and there have been numerous studies on the instruction of English in other countries such as India, Rwanda, and China (Emery, 2012).

English and Irish-immersion schools 2.6

Prior to the creation of the new primary language curriculum, the language in which formal literacy instruction commenced in Irish-medium and Gaeltacht schools was not specified, therefore it was often left to the individual schools to devise a policy in this regard (Ní Bhaoill & Ó Duibhir, 2004; O'hAiniféin, 2008; Parson & Lyddy, 2009a; Parson & Lyddy, 2009b). As a result of this ambiguity, teachers, prior to the introduction of the new language

curriculum, were ''seeking clarification and guidance regarding emergent literacy'' (Ní Bhaoill & Ó Duibhir, 2004, p.3). Up to this point, studies focused on Gaelscoil pupils' literacy have tended to involve an investigation into their reading, and the research into their writing has remained relatively untouched. In light of these statements, this study hopes to offer an idea of Irish-immersion students' writing ability and may be useful in drawing comparisons amongst writing performance of students from different school types.

In 2004, a consensus was reached by the NCCA that supplementary research in regard to literacy was required to investigate our uniquely Irish context and this was outlined in the Education Act 2004 (Department of Education and Science (DES), 2004, as cited in Ó hAiniféin, 2008). 2006 saw Harris, Forde, Archer, Nic Fhearaile, and O'Gorman undertake a study to compare the reading levels of students in both English and Irish in two different school types, English-medium and Irish-medium, found that children's reading level of English in Irish-immersion schools were significantly higher than those in English-medium schools. Similarly, in 2008 Ó hAiniféin analysed the results of 3,289 second and fifth class students from Irish-immersion schools in the Drumcondra Primary Reading Test and Mary Immaculate College Reading Attainment Tests. These results were analysed based on the National standards as were outlined in the accompanying booklet and determined that these students had scored 10% above the national mean in these tests. In 2009, Parson and Lyddy (2009a) investigated the reading strategies that children use to read in both English and Irish from three different school types; English-medium, Irish-immersion and an Irish-medium school in the Gaeltacht region. These second class students were required to read short passages of text in both English and Irish, and their reading errors across the two languages were recorded and analysed. The study found that the second class students from the Irish-immersion school tended to make more reading errors in the English reading task but by fourth class, there was little difference between writing performance across the school types (Parson & Lyddy, 2009a).

With the results of these studies in mind, it seems that there is a trend in Irish-immersion schools' performance in English reading, in that the children in these schools are shown to score higher than those attending English-medium schools. This is a surprising trend, due in majority to the fact that Irish-immersion school pupils receive less English instruction due to the nature of the schools. What is also surprising is that no studies to my knowledge have been undertaken to examine the difference in writing performance across different school types in Ireland.

Summary of the Research 2.7

In summary, for the most part these various methods have proved successful in identifying key areas of writing strengths and challenges in the children's samples, although the rubrics would need to be refined to assess broader populations both nationally and internationally. As claimed by Huot and Perry (2009), and Calfee and Miller (2007), in order for assessment to be effective, skills should be examined across a set of criteria. In my own opinion, not only is there a need to refine rubrics, we possibly also need to investigate how accurately teachers interpret and use these rubrics. It can be suggested that perhaps we should first assess the teacher's English competency before attempting to determine children's writing ability. Upon analysis of the literature, it can be argued that in order to improve children's writing ability, we must first equip teachers with the necessary tools to deal with the various difficulties that young writers face. Little research has been conducted in the area of teacher content knowledge for writing, which is surprising since writing is such an integral part of education (Glasswell & Parr, 2007).

To add another voice to this narrative, other researchers in this domain have argued that teachers and researchers must move away from rubrics and investigate alternative ways of

assessing writing. Rubrics seem to be favoured by teachers, possibly for the reason that they are relatively easy to administer in the classroom and can be applied across various class groups. From my own interpretation of the literature, there appears to be a tendency to adhere to traditional methods of assessing writing, and a hesitance to explore more inventive approaches. Writing prompts continue to be a popular method of data generation amongst children, but perhaps further research would be helpful in identifying more inventive means of creating the writing samples for assessment. As I have stated before, there is currently no agreement as to which method is the most successful and assessment in relation to writing is still vastly under-researched in comparison to other aspects of literacy. The fact that assessment of reading is considerably easier to measure could potentially explain why so many studies tend to focus on reading, both nationally and internationally. No such studies have been undertaken in Ireland to assess English writing performance in Irish-immersion schools, possibly demonstrating that people have not deemed it an area of concern, and in light of the recent introduction of the primary language curriculum, it may be interesting to investigate what results are drawn from this study in an Irish context. Little is known about the differences in writing across various school types in Ireland and this indicates that further research into this domain could shed light on how children in Ireland are learning to write.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction 3.1

This chapter provides an overview of the methodological instrument used to generate and interpret the data collected from two school types; an Irish-immersion school and an English-medium school. The study was undertaken in January 2018 in the two schools located in North Dublin. A number of methodological instruments were considered for this study, but ultimately a writing analysis tool created by Mackenzie et al. (2013), was used to analyse the fifty writing samples collected amongst the two school types.

Positionality 3.2

The word positionality in this case refers to the ''individual's worldview'' (Haraway, 1988, as cited in Foote & Bartell, 2011). I did not know any of the participants involved in the study, and all participants' names were anonymised to alleviate any bias from the study. I followed the outlined criteria very closely so that each sample was examined as objectively as possible.

Participants 3.3

For the purpose of this study, data was drawn from English writing samples of third class pupils from two different school types; an Irish-immersion school and an English-medium school in order to compare the writing performance of the two school types. The two schools were purposefully selected to represent a population of a similar socio-linguistic and socio-economic background. I collected twenty-five writing samples from the two classes, so the total sample size was fifty participants. Although this sample size is relatively limited, Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011), recommends a minimum of thirty participants for a viable piece of research. No specific exclusionary criteria were used, but the class teachers of the two classes

involved were consulted to ensure that none of the participants had specific conditions that might prevent them from taking part in the study. Originally, I had intended to include first class participants in the study in order to compare writing performance across different class levels. However due to the lack of first class participants in the English-medium school, I decided to scale back the study to third class participants only. This purposive sampling was due to the participants' knowledge and relevance to the topic (Denscombe, 2014). Third class students were chosen as most research conducted in this domain up to present have focused primarily on early literacy or writing performance amongst secondary students (Ahmed & Hago, 2015; Akinyeye & Pluddemann, 2016; Kim et al., 2014). Third class students will have acquired a certain understanding of the writing process by this stage and will have some experience in writing composition.

Demographic of Both Schools 3.3.1

Two schools were involved in this study; an Irish-immersion school, and an English-medium school. Despite the difference of their language of instruction, both schools were quite similar. The schools were located within ten minutes of one another and represented a population of a similar socio-economic background. Both class sizes were similar, even though the English-medium school was a considerably bigger school in terms of the number of children enrolled in it. Both classes shared an equal ratio of female to male students. Participants from both schools were made up of primarily white Catholic students, apart from two students of North African origin in the case of the English-medium school, who were fluent English speakers and writers, as expressed to me by the class teacher.

Considerations for Comparability 3.4

In order to control variability in results across school types, the following considerations were taken. Firstly, both school types undertook the study at the same time (nine a.m.) but on different days. The same writing prompt ''Jill won a million euro. She knew just what to do with it'', was used in both schools, and the prompt was read aloud for both classes. Neither class saw the writing prompt written down. The classes from the two school types were given the same amount of time for questioning before beginning the task, and the exact same instructions were read aloud for all participants involved. Both classes were given the same amount of time to complete the study (ten minutes exactly).

Method: Writing Analysis Tool 3.5

Quasi-experimental Design 3.5.1

The aim of this writing analysis tool was to systemically interpret the writing samples from both school types to determine if there are differences in writing performance across different school types. The English writing samples of each of these groups was collected at the mid-point in the school year. On the days of the study, coloured pages were distributed amongst the children, a writing prompt was read aloud for both classes, and the classes were instructed to finish the story on the page provided. The samples from both school types were colour coded and numbered in order to distinguish the writing samples from one another. A writing analysis tool developed by Mackenzie et al. (2013) was used to conduct the analysis and to draw further comparisons between the writing performances of both school types. This method could be described as a quasi-experimental approach, meaning that ''groups or organisations of people receive opportunities and the researcher attempts to demonstrate the

differences among the groups on some type of quantitative measure such as student examination results'' (Anderson & Arsenault, 1998, p.90). This writing analysis tool consisted of examining the writing under six headings: text structure, sentence structure, vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, and handwriting. Each heading was broken down into six different criteria, numbered from one to six, one being the lowest, and six being the highest. Each sample was examined closely, and a checklist was made for each sample that corresponded with the number of the sample. I examined each sample under the six headings and ticked the appropriate number on the checklist that represented the level at which the children's writing matched. The samples from the Irish-immersion school were examined first. The mean score for each sample was generated and the overall score for the study was calculated. To ascertain each individual's average score, I added the number achieved in each heading by the child in question and divided it by six. In order to calculate the mean score for each school, I added each child's score for each of the headings and divided that number by twenty-five. I repeated the process with the samples from the English-medium samples. The criteria for each heading is as follows:

	Text Structure	Sentence Structure	Vocabulary	Spelling	Punctuation	Handwriting
1	No clear message	Random words	Uses words of personal significance, such as their own name, or the names of family members	Random letters/letter like formations	No evidence of punctuation	Letter like forms with some recognisable letters
2	One or more ideas (not related)	Demonstrates an awareness of correct sentence parts e.g. verb/noun agreement, interpretation may be necessary for meaning to be construed	Uses familiar, common words and two/three letter high frequency words	Phonetic spelling, correct spelling of two or three letter high frequency words (e.g. my, to)	Some use of: capital letters, full stops	Mix of upper and lower case letters
3	Two or three related ideas	Simple sentence structures, nouns, verbs, adverbs used. Meaning clear.	Everyday vocabulary	Phonetic spelling, plausible attempts made with most sounds in the word represented, correct spelling of two or three high frequency words (e.g. my, is, to, it)	Correct use of capital letters at the start and the end of sentences	Mostly correct letter formations, poor word spacing, or messy corrections
4	Clear beginning, middle, and ending	Uses both simple and compound sentences with conjunctions (e.g. and, then, but, because)	Range of vocabulary used, words relating to the topic	Use of common English word patterns or sequences, plausible spelling attempts made if incorrect (e.g. er for ir), correct use of inflections (ed, ing), correct spelling of three or four high frequency words (e.g. like, more, here, was)	Some use of: proper nouns or capitalisation, speech marks, question mark, exclamation mark or commas.	Letters correctly formed, mostly well spaced and positioned
5	Evidence of structure and features of genre (text type) E.g. Recount, narrative, report structure and features	Uses a variety of sentence structures: simple, compound, complex. Consistent use of tense. Correct pronoun reference throughout.	Use of descriptive or emotive language	Use of some irregular spelling patterns (e.g. light, cough), application of spelling rules (e.g. hope/hoping), correct spelling of high frequency words	Variety of punctuation used such as: proper nouns or capitalisation, speech marks, question mark, exclamation mark or commas.	Regularity of letter size, shape, placement, orientation and spacing
6	Complex text which shows: strong evidence of features of genre (text type), purpose and audience	Variety of sentences used, variety of sentence beginnings used, sentences flow with logical sequence throughout the piece.	Correct use of technically specific vocabulary and/ or figurative language	Correct spelling of most words including phonetically irregular words	Demonstrates control over a variety of punctuation, all correctly applied.	Correct, consistent, legible, appearing to be fluent

Rationale for the Use of the Methodological Instrument 3.6

This instrument was chosen to analyse the samples for several reasons. Quasi-experimental approaches have long been used as a viable means of undertaking educational research mainly because participants are not required to be randomly selected for the project (Anderson & Arsenault, 1998). Also, these approaches are often employed to determine what individuals or groups of people have learned, therefore are strongly suited to educational research (Anderson & Arsenault, 1998). The writing analysis tool was designed to be used both in the classroom, and for educational research purposes, as a practical aid in identifying children's writing strengths and weaknesses (Mackenzie et al., 2013). Secondly, the writing analysis tool was developed based upon current research on literacy skills and was one of the most recent studies that I encountered while researching this topic (Mackenzie et al., 2013). Developed by experts in this field, the writing analysis tool used in this study had already been tested in pilot studies, was refined, and has been used in further studies since (Mackenzie, Scull, & Bowles, 2015). In the original study, Mackenzie et al., (2013) used participants of a similar age group to the participants that were involved in this study. In previous studies relating to children's writing samples, the participants have either been early writers or secondary school students. I had also intended to use the *Drumcondra English Profiles* (Shiel & Murphy, 2000) as an extra method to assess to the children's writing, but on closer study of the profiles, these were used to measure the children's writing progress over a longer period of time, therefore were not practical for the purpose of this research. The *Drumcondra Profiles* were also published eighteen years ago therefore are not as current as the writing analysis tool. As with the *Drumcondra English Profiles*, most of the research on this topic has involved examination of children's writing over a period of months or years (Akinyeye & Pluddemann, 2016; Parson

& Lyddy, 2015). For the purpose of my research, I required a method of generating samples of the participants' writing within one session with the class, and in the shortest amount of time possible. The writing analysis tool allowed for the generation of a great volume of data within a short period of time. Also, the use of the tool did not require extensive prior study in order to utilise it, making it a feasible means of assessment both in a classroom setting, and for further research projects.

Validity and Reliability of the Methodological Instrument 3.6.1

As expressed by Cohen et al. (2011), in order to ensure validity and reliability an appropriate timescale and sample size must be chosen, an appropriate instrument must be used to generate and collect the necessary data, and one must be consistent with the analysis of the data. The validity and reliability of the instrument was ensured by attending to the following details. Denscombe (2014), expresses the importance of utilising data that is most appropriate to answer the research question. In this case, the aim of the study was to compare the writing performance of the two school types, therefore actual samples of the children's writing were the most appropriate data to use. The criteria for each heading remains the same each time.

Ethical Considerations 3.7

Informed Consent 3.7.1

Informed consent is hereby described as ''a corner stone of ethical behaviour'' (Howes & Moses, 1999, as cited in Cohen et al., 2011, p.77). The current study was approved by the university's research ethics board and the relevant schools involved. After I had selected the schools for the study, I contacted the principals of both schools via email, asking if it were

possible to conduct my study in their school and explained the premise of the study to them. Both agreed to let me conduct the study in the school. The letters of consent (see Appendix A) were distributed about three weeks prior to the day of the study. As this study carried a level two status due to working closely with children, informed consent was needed from both parents and the children involved (Cohen et al., 2011). All parents and teachers were made aware of the purpose of the study and consented in writing for their children to participate. I received parental permission for all the students to participate and all letters of consent were returned to me. On the day of the study, the participants from both school types signed a letter of consent, agreeing to take part in the study (see Appendix B).

Confidentiality and Anonymity 3.7.2

According to Cohen et al. (2011), the main way to ensure confidentiality and anonymity, is to not disclose any information about the participants, and to avoid using participants' names or any identifying factors. The right of confidentiality was expressed to the participants both in writing through the letters of consent, and orally, prior to taking part in the study. The children were given the opportunity to voice any concerns or ask any questions before commencement of the writing task. The writing samples were completely anonymised, as participants were instructed not to write their names on the sample sheets. Participants' confidentiality was respected, and the children's identities remained anonymised throughout the entire research process.

Limitations 3.8

Although the analysis tool is a practical assessment tool for teachers, it is not without its limitations. The sample size used was relatively small, and the samples drawn are from students of a similar background, therefore any results drawn from this study were through quite a narrow lens. If the study were to be undertaken again, a larger sample size would make for a more accurate representation of differences across school types. Only two schools were involved in the study, and only one class from each school participated in the study. Although efforts were made to alleviate any differences in conditions for writing across the two school types, there are countless variables that may have influenced the children's writing performance on the days of the data generation. These variables, according to Cohen et al., (2011) could include individual factors such as motivation, concentration, health, forgetfulness, and related skills and also situational factors such as the context for the test. Also, the criteria used in the study would have to be refined to include a wider scope of variability in children's writing. The six headings are quite open to interpretation, meaning that one must be strict and consistent in the mark that the children receive.

Conclusion 3.9

To conclude, this instrument allowed for the systemic interpretation of the data generated by the children. Many aspects of the children's writing from both school types were revealed through the use of the writing analysis tool, including their writing strengths, and areas that needed to be revised. In the future, I can envision how this tool could be implemented in schools as a viable means of writing assessment, that is both practical and produces results swiftly. Despite the many advantages of this tool, it would require some refinement to ensure that the criteria included a broader range of variability in writing.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Discussion

This chapter aims to present the findings of the research undertaken in both the Irish-immersion and English-medium school. In order to compare the writing performance of children from the mentioned school types, the children generated writing samples via a writing prompt (Jill won a million euro. She knew just what to do with it). These writing samples (twenty-five from each school) were collected and analysed using a writing analysis tool that was created by Mackenzie et al., (2013). This tool involves examining the samples under six headings; Text Structure, Sentence Structure, Vocabulary, Spelling, Punctuation, and Handwriting. Each heading was broken down into six different criteria, numbered from one to six, one being the lowest, and six being the highest. A description of the criteria for each category is included below each heading.

Analysis of the writing samples from school A (Irish-immersion school)4.1

This data was collected from a third-class group in an Irish-immersion school in North Dublin in February 2018. A writing prompt was read aloud for the children, and the participants finished the story on the sheets provided. The following is the criteria for each heading;

Text Structure

The criteria for text structure is as follows;

1 No clear message

2 One or more ideas (not related)

3 Two or three related ideas

4 Clear beginning, middle, and ending

5 Evidence of structure and features of genre (text type) E.g. Recount, narrative, report structure and features

6 Complex text which shows: strong evidence of features of genre (text type), purpose and audience

Sentence Structure

The following is the criteria for sentence structure;

1 Random words

2 Demonstrates an awareness of correct sentence parts e.g. verb/noun agreement, interpretation may be necessary for meaning to be construed

3 Simple sentence structures, nouns, verbs, adverbs used. Meaning clear.

4 Uses both simple and compound sentences with conjunctions (e.g. and, then, but, because)

5 Uses a variety of sentence structures: simple, compound, complex. Consistent use of tense. Correct pronoun reference throughout.

6 Variety of sentences used, variety of sentence beginnings used, sentences flow with logical sequence throughout the piece.

Vocabulary

The criteria for Vocabulary is as follows;

1 Uses words of personal significance, such as their own name, or the names of family members

2 Uses familiar, common words and two/three letter high frequency words

3 Everyday vocabulary

4 Range of vocabulary used, words relating to the topic

5 Use of descriptive or emotive language

6 Correct use of technically specific vocabulary and/ or figurative language

Spelling

This is the criteria for this category;

1 Random letters/letter like formations

2 Phonetic spelling, correct spelling of two or three letter high frequency words (e.g. my, to)

3 Phonetic spelling, plausible attempts made with most sounds in the word represented, correct spelling of two or three high frequency words (e.g. my, is, to, it)

4 Use of common English word patterns or sequences, plausible spelling attempts made if incorrect (e.g. er for ir), correct use of inflections (ed, ing), correct spelling of three or four high frequency words (e.g. like, more, here, was)

5 Use of some irregular spelling patterns (e.g. light, cough), application of spelling rules (e.g. hope/hoping), correct spelling of high frequency words

6 Correct spelling of most words including phonetically irregular words

Punctuation

The criteria for punctuation is as follows;

1 No evidence of punctuation

2 Some use of: capital letters, full stops

3 Correct use of capital letters at the start and the end of sentences

4 Some use of: proper nouns or capitalisation, speech marks, question mark, exclamation mark or commas.

5 Variety of punctuation used such as: proper nouns or capitalisation, speech marks, question mark, exclamation mark or commas.

6 Demonstrates control over a variety of punctuation, all correctly applied.

Handwriting

The criteria for handwriting is as follows;

1 Letter like forms with some recognisable letters

2 Mix of upper and lower case letters

3 Mostly correct letter formations, poor word spacing, or messy corrections

4 letters correctly formed, mostly well spaced and positioned

5 Regularity of letter size, shape, placement, orientation and spacing

6 Correct, consistent, legible, appearing to be fluent

Adapted from Mackenzie, Scull, and Munsie (2013).

Text Structure

On analysis of the writing samples (twenty-five samples), the average or mean score achieved by the participants for text structure was 4.04.

The majority of participants scored a four for this heading. It can be interpreted that most of the samples contained a clear narrative structure (beginning, middle and ending). It appears that the children have been exposed to a wide variety of narrative texts and were familiar with the structure of this genre.

Seven participants scored a three for text structure, meaning that the writing samples featured at least two or three related ideas.

Four participants attained a five in this category, which means their writing demonstrated an understanding of genre structures and features, that of narrative writing.

Two participants scored a six, which meant that the writing sample contained strong evidence of genre specific structure and features, that of narrative genre. There was strong evidence of writing for a specific audience.

None of the participants achieved lower than a three for text structure.

Sentence Structure

The average score for sentence structure was 4.24, with eleven participants scoring a five for this category. This is an increase from the four participants that scored a five for text structure. Most of the writing samples demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of sentence structures. A large portion of the participants had a firm grasp of how to compose both simple and compound sentences. These participants also consistently wrote in the same tense throughout the writing sample.

Nine participants scored a four for sentence structure. The participants' writing displayed a grasp of both simple and complex sentence structures and the samples contained a variety of apt conjunctions (and, but, then).

Five of the participants scored a three for sentence structure. These writing samples contained simple sentence structure. There was no use of compound sentences or conjunctions.

None of the participants scored lower than three for this heading.

Vocabulary

Participants attained an average of 4.04 for this heading. Twenty participants scored a four for this category. The participants used both everyday vocabulary and specific vocabulary relating to the writing prompt (rich, lotto, million etc).

Three participants scored a five in this category. These participants used descriptive vocabulary, as well as vocabulary specific to the topic such as brand names.

Two participants received a three for vocabulary. These participants used everyday vocabulary in their writing, and there was no use of specific or topic related vocabulary.

No participants received lower than a three for this category.

This is the first category to reveal a more consistent trend in the writing samples generated by the children. There is far less variation in scores in this category than was present in the other categories thus far. The vast majority of participants received the same score for this category, whereas in previous categories, there was no obvious or consistent trend in the scores achieved.

Spelling

There average score for spelling was 4.32. This was the second highest rated score in the study.

Fourteen participants scored a four in this category. The majority of the samples contained plausible spelling attempts such as whit for with. This show that the participants had an awareness of English word patterns and sequences, even if they were incorrectly applied.

Eight participants received a five for their spelling. The participants displayed an understanding of irregular spelling patterns (e.g. bought) and were able to apply spelling rules such as shop becoming shopping. High frequency words were spelled correctly, and plausible spelling attempts were made for those words that were not spelled correctly (e.g aigen for again).

Two of the participants attained a three for spelling, as the participants were capable of spelling two and three letter high frequency words without error. Participants spelled challenging words phonetically, making plausible spelling attempts (e.g. yung for young).

One participant received a six for this category. Most of the words were spelled correctly, even less common words such as Portugal and sibling.

Punctuation

The average or mean score achieved for this category was 4.08. This score is on the lower side of the spectrum of the various categories tested. The use of punctuation ranged from the use of capital letters and full stops, to the use of commas, question marks, and speech marks.

Eleven participants scored a four for their punctuation. There was evidence of a range of punctuation in the writing, but these were not consistently applied throughout their writing samples.

Seven participants received a five for punctuation. The participants used a variety of punctuation, correctly applied throughout their writing. The use of the various punctuation was consistent throughout their pieces.

Five of the participants scored a three for this heading. The participants used capital letters and full stops at the beginning of every sentence written. No other punctuation was used.

One participant scored a two for their use of punctuation. There was some evidence of capitalisation and full stops, however this punctuation was inconsistently applied throughout the course of their writing.

One participant scored a six for this category. There was evidence of a strong understanding of punctuation, and a variety of punctuation was present in their writing, all correctly applied.

This category revealed a greater variation in writing ability amongst the participants in comparison to other categories where a more regular pattern of writing performance was seen.

Handwriting

The average score achieved for this category was 5.24. This is the highest rated category out of the six headings.

Thirteen participants scored a six for handwriting. Their letter formations, spacing, and position were correct and consistent throughout their writing.

Seven participants achieved a four for this category. Most of the letters were formed correctly, however, position and spacing were inconsistent.

Five participants scored a five in this area. The majority of their letter formations were regular, as well as their letter size, shape, placement, and orientation.

No participants scored lower than a three for their handwriting.

Analysis of Data from School B (English-medium school)

Writing samples were generated and collected from a third class group from an English-medium school approximately one week after the samples from the Irish-immersion school were generated.

Text Structure

The mean score achieved in this category after careful analysis was 3.68.

Nineteen out of the twenty-five participants scored a four for text structure, with their writing containing a beginning, a middle, and an ending or conclusion to the story.

The remainder of the participants (five) scored a three for text structure, meaning that the text contained at least two or three related ideas i.e. ideas that related to the topic of the writing prompt (winning a million euro).

One participant scored a one in this category, which meant that their writing contained no distinguishable meaning or message.

Sentence Structure

Participants scored an average of 3.72 for the category of sentence structure. Within this category, there was noticeable variation in the scores achieved.

Nineteen participants received a four in this category, the same as the previous category. The writing displayed a clear beginning, middle, and ending.

Five received a score of three for sentence structure. These participants used simple sentences in throughout their writing, with no evidence of compound sentence use. Although the sentence structures were simple, the writing contained grammatical features such as nouns, verbs and adverbs throughout.

One participant scored a two for this category. The text displayed an awareness of the different components of sentences, however, the meaning of the piece was hard to decipher.

Vocabulary

The participants received an average score of 3.88 for vocabulary. This is the second highest rated category out of the six headings studied.

The majority of participants (twenty-two out of twenty-five) scored a four for their use of vocabulary within their writing. The participants' writing displayed a range of vocabulary use, including specific words relating to the writing prompt (e.g. brand names such as Porsche). Four was the highest score achieved in this category.

Three of the participants scored a three for vocabulary, which meant that the writing contained everyday vocabulary, with no use of specific terminology related to the topic. The use of everyday vocabulary was referenced using the Oxford 307 word list.

No participants scored lower than a three for this category. There was little variation in the scores achieved for this category in comparison to the previous category.

Spelling

The participants in the study attained an average score of 3.84 for spelling. The participants displayed varying degrees of spelling ability within their writing.

As seen in the previous category, the majority of the participants (twenty-one out of twenty-five) received the same score for this category. Twenty-one participants received a four for spelling. There was evidence of an awareness of the word patterns and sequences of English spelling, as well as the correct spelling of three or four high frequency words. Participants correctly applied inflection such as wanted.

Four participants scored a three for their spelling. Upon examination of the data, the participants' writing displayed many examples of approximate spelling (e.g. tought for thought). Most of these attempts were plausible due to the fact that the main sounds in the word are represented, even if they are incorrectly spelled.

No participants scored lower than a three for this category.

Punctuation

Participants scored an average of 2.92 for the heading of punctuation. This was the lowest scored heading for School B. This category also revealed more variation in writing performance amongst the participants than previous headings. The use of punctuation was an area of differentiation within the participants' writing.

Thirteen participants scored a three for their use of punctuation within their writing. These participants used both capital letters and full stops at the beginning and at the end of each of their sentences throughout the writing samples. There was consistent use of capitalisation and full stops.

Six participants received a six for punctuation in the study. The writing samples showed some use of a range of different types of punctuation such as proper nouns or capitalisation, speech marks, question marks, exclamation mark, and commas.

Four participants were marked a two for their punctuation. There was some evidence of the use of capital letters and full stops within their writing, but this punctuation was not consistently applied throughout their writing.

Two participants received a one for this category. No punctuation of any kind was used throughout the participants' writing.

Handwriting

The mean score for the category of handwriting was 4.32, which is the highest rated category for school B. Participants' execution of handwriting varied across the writing samples, with the majority of the samples scoring a four or a five.

Eleven of the participants scored a five for handwriting. The letter formation, spacing and placement was consistent throughout the writing samples, with the writing maintaining its legibility from beginning to end.

Another eleven participants received a four in this category. For the most part the letters were correctly formed, and the letters were well spaced.

Three participants scored a three for their handwriting. Although most of the letters were correctly formed, the spacing between letters was inconsistent.

No participants scored lower than a three for this category.

Comparison of results for School A and School B 4.3

The results of this study highlighted noticeable differences in writing performance amongst the two school types, the Irish-immersion school and the English-medium school. The main difference between the performance in both schools was that the participants from the Irish-immersion school scored higher than the participants from the English-medium school

across all categories in the study, as can be seen in figure 4.1 below. The participants from the English-medium school scored an average of 3.73 overall whereas the Irish-immersion scored an average of 4.33 for the study. However, several trends emerged throughout the analysis of the writing samples, particularly amongst the English-medium samples. Although the English-medium participants scored lower than the other participants, their writing followed a more consistent pattern, meaning the writing samples were more easily analysed. There was noticeably less variation in the writing performance amongst these participants, and many of the participants received the same score across each heading. There was only one or two participants' writing performance that was inconsistent with majority of the participants' score. These participants received lower scores than the majority of the participants.

<u>Figure 4.1</u>
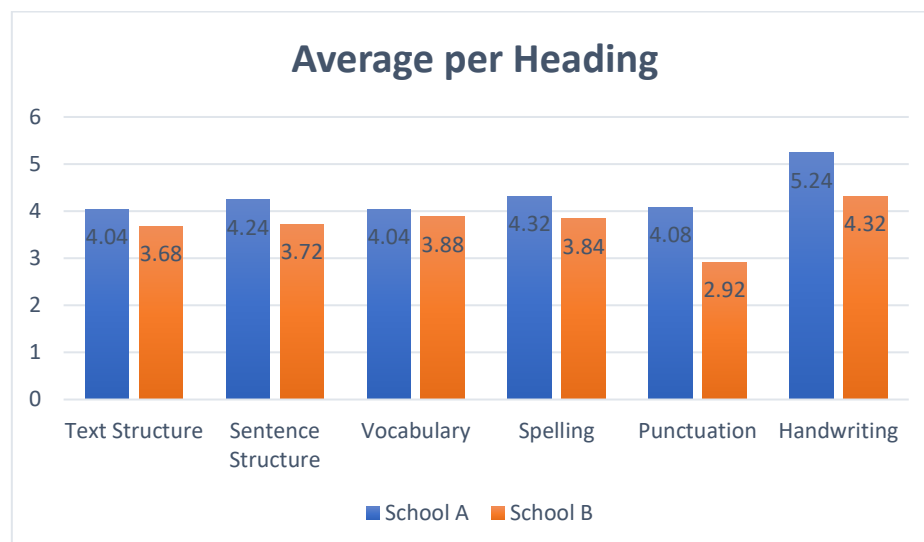
Analysis of the Irish-immersion writing samples proved a more challenging task in comparison to the English-medium samples. There was a greater degree of variation amongst

the participants' writing performance from this school type. Upon initial analysis of the samples, there was no discernible pattern or trend evident in the writing, and there was much variation in the scores received amongst the participants. However, once the results were transferred into graph form, we can see that the samples from both school types follow a similar pattern. Both school types show that the participants achieved similar scores for the first four categories, then lower scores for punctuation and an increase in score for handwriting (figure 4.2). While the English-medium samples followed a more linear pattern during the first four categories, as can be seen in figure 4.2, the writing samples from the Irish-immersion school followed a less consistent pattern for these first four categories. The last two categories revealed a similar pattern in that both school types scored lower than the previous four categories for the second last heading and then achieved a higher score for the last category. Despite the similarity in trend amongst the writing samples, the Irish-immersion participants still scored higher overall in comparison with the participants from the English-medium school.

Figure 4.2
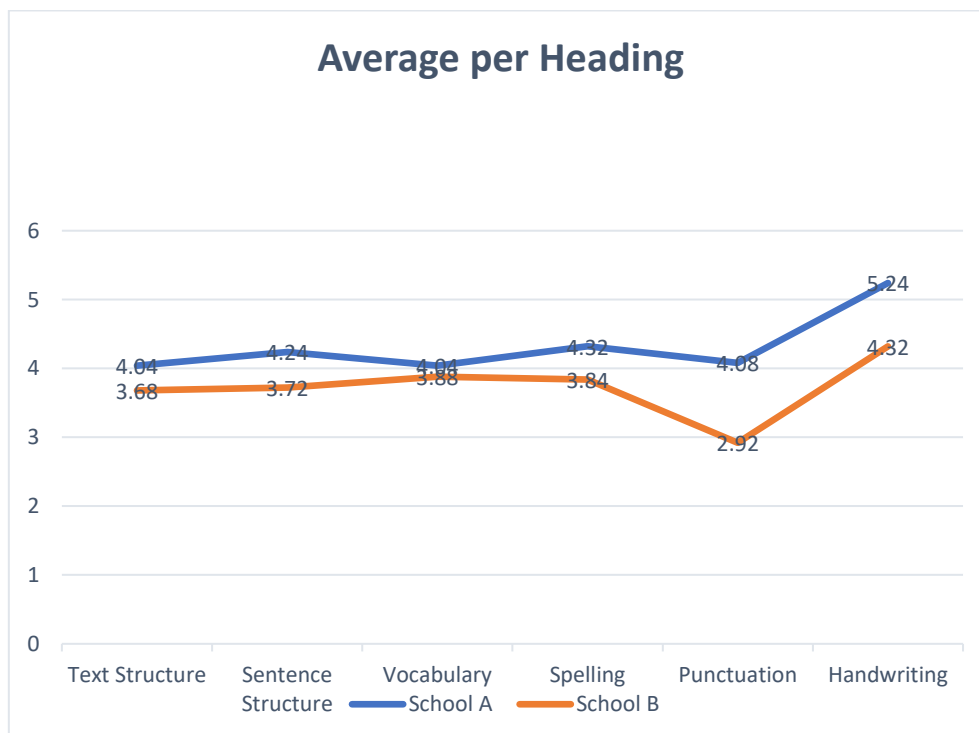
Conclusion 4.4

Considerable differences in English writing performance were evident amongst the writing samples from both school types, as is reflected in the scores the participants received. The main difference within the writing of both school types was that the Irish-immersion school scored higher across all headings tested in the study. There was variation amongst the writing performance of each school, but this variation was considerably more obvious amongst the writing samples of the Irish-immersion school. Although there was variation evident in the English-medium samples, these samples displayed a more regular pattern of scoring. However, there were areas of comparability across the writing samples of the two schools. For example, both schools scored their highest marks for the category of handwriting, and both scored their lowest marks for punctuation, highlighting the areas of strength and concern within the children's writing. Another point to be emphasised here is the fact that there were a number of EAL (English as an Additional language) students in the English-medium class, meaning that this could have an impact on the scores achieved.

Discussion 4.5

The question of the impact of school types on English writing performance must be addressed here. Upon careful analysis of the data, it appears that in this case, there was a difference in English writing performance amongst students of the same year group from the two schools in question. The data showed that the students from the Irish-immersion school did indeed score higher across the six categories being assessed, therefore it would be prudent to investigate potential explanations for this difference in scoring. As expressed in the literature review, Irish-immersion students scored higher than their English-medium contemporaries in previous studies, specifically in standardised reading tests (Harris et al., 2006; Ó hAiniféin,

2008). In research undertaken by Gaelscoileanna.ie it was revealed that ''students in Irish-medium schools have higher achievement in both English and Maths than their peer groups in English-medium schools'' (www.gaelscoileanna.ie, 2017, p. 1). Although the purpose of this study was not to assess reading ability, but writing performance, the results of the data appear to support what previous research has shown; that Irish-immersion students seem to read and write to a higher standard of English. Studies on immersion education in countries such as Wales and Canada have shown that there are considerable advantages to bilingualism (Parson & Lyddy, 2016). It is important to note that although we tend to label Irish-medium students as bilingual, the fact is that most of these children come from monolingual households, and do not speak Irish at home (Hickey, 2007, Parson & Lyddy, 2009a). It may be more accurate to use the term immersion education students. Elaborating on these benefits, Kennedy (2012) states there are many advantages to immersion education, including cognitive and linguistic advantages, meaning that although upon initial education the bilingual students tend to lag behind monolingual students, by the fourth year of schooling, the bilingual students have caught up (Parson & Lyddy, 2009a, Parson & Lyddy, 2016). Therefore, it seems that the linguistic skills that children obtain in an immersion education setting aid in the acquisition of another language, which could potentially explain why the Irish-immersion students scored higher in the writing task for this study.

To conclude, the data revealed an interesting insight into the way children write. Although the participants from the two school types received different scores for their writing performance, the errors the participants made were quite similar. The major difference between the writing performance of both schools was that the English-medium samples revealed more errors than those of the Irish-immersion school, however the errors made within the samples were not majorly different. The writing analysis tool highlighted areas within the children's writing that had not been covered by the class teacher or areas that the children were struggling

with. In the future, it would be interesting to further use this analysis tool with a larger sample size, even amongst different class groups.

Chapter 5: Conclusion to the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the following question; does school type have an impact on English writing performance? In order to answer this question, writing samples were collected from third class students from two school types and analysed to examine whether or not there were differences in the writing samples from the students of the different school types. A writing prompt was read aloud for both classes and the children were asked to complete the story on the page provided. Fifty samples were collected in total. A writing analysis tool developed by Mackenzie et al. (2013), was used to systematically interpret the children's writing under six headings; text structure, sentence structure, vocabulary, spelling, and handwriting.

Summary of the Findings 5.1

Upon analysis of the samples, it was revealed that the Irish-immersion school participants scored higher than the English-medium students in each heading across the categories of writing ability being assessed. Participants from the Irish-medium school scored an overall average of 4.33 whereby the English-medium participants scored an average of 3.73 for the study. Both schools scored highest in the category of handwriting, and their lowest for punctuation. While there was variation in writing performance within participants of the same school type, it is interesting to note that the English-medium participants writing followed a more regular pattern in comparison to the Irish-immersion participants.

In answer to the question posed, if the aforementioned limitations of the study are accepted, school type does indeed seem to have an impact on English writing performance.

This impact of school type on writing performance was that Irish-immersion students appear to write to a higher standard of English according to the criteria outlined in the writing analysis tool and made less grammatical and spelling errors than the English-medium students. These results are supported by the relatively limited research undertaken on immersion education within an Irish context (gaelscoileanna, 2017; Ó hAiniféin, 2008; Parson & Lyddy, 2009a; Parson & Lyddy, 2016). Reasons for this difference in writing standard must be considered here. It is no surprise that bilingual learners have scored higher in the study, as for decades research has shown that bilingual learners have linguistic advantages over monolingual speakers (Parson & Lyddy, 2016). What is surprising is that these findings are inconsistent with what I had observed on school placement experiences, as these children really struggled with English writing and were above the fourth year of schooling therefore by Parson and Lyddy's (2016) claims, should have ''caught up'' to English-medium children's standard. It may be more accurate to use the term immersion education students. One explanation for the variability within English writing ability within Irish-immersion schools is that in other countries that have immersion education systems, these schools tend to commence literacy instruction in the target language (L2) (Parson & Lyddy, 2016). In Ireland, however, the language of initial literacy instruction in immersion schools is left to the individual schools to decide, meaning that some immersion schools do not introduce English to the students until the second year of schooling (Parson & Lyddy, 2016).

Recommendations for Further Action 5.2

The analysis of the data revealed several areas for recommended action which are outlined here. Although the study was successful in drawing comparisons between the two schools involved in the study, in future, it may be worthwhile to use the writing analysis tool

(2013) with a larger sample size to include a number of different schools. This would make for a more accurate representation of writing performance across different school types. As expressed in the literature review, little research has been undertaken regarding differences in English writing performance between Irish-immersion and English-medium schools, as most studies have tended to focus on reading ability across school types. Although a number of studies have been completed on reading performance in an Irish context (Harris et al., 2006; Ó hAiniféin, 2008; Parson & Lyddy, 2009a; Parson & Lyddy, 2009b), this research is still fairly limited. A larger scale study using the methodological instrument could potentially shed light on how children in Ireland are learning to write and how teachers are being instructed to teach writing. As explored in the literature review, initially bilingual learners tend to lag behind monolingual learners, and that it takes up to the fourth year of schooling for these bilinguals to catch up to the monolinguals' level. If this is the case, it would be interesting to undertake this same study with participants below the fourth year of schooling in order to see if the English-medium students score higher than their Irish-immersion contemporaries. The tool also has the potential to be adapted for use as an assessment tool across different curricular areas. Subject specific criteria could be used to determine maths performance, for example, or even Irish writing performance. Writing ability is considered a complex process, and it seems that although children undergo formative and summative tests, these tests fail to consider the variability within the standard of written English amongst children, even within the same class. Whether or not further studies of this nature will take place in Ireland is unsure, what is certain is that further research is needed in relation to writing ability of both primary and secondary school students in this country.

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January 2018

To Parents, guardians, and students,

 My name is Clíodhna Nolan and I am a Professional Master's of Education student in Marino Institute of Education. As part of my master's degree, I must undertake an area of study for my research dissertation. I am interested in investigating the differences and similarities in how students attending gaelscoileanna and English-medium schools write in English. In order to complete this study, I would need access to children's English writing from a gaelscoil and an English-medium school. Children will be invited to write a short narrative piece in response to a prompt provided. The children will be asked to write continuously for a period of ten minutes, after which time they will be asked to finish up their story. Once the samples have been collected, I will examine them under the following six headings; text structure, sentence structure, vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, and handwriting/ legibility. For the purpose of this study, I would be interested in working with children in both first and third class year groups. I ask your permission to allow your child to participate in the study.

All children have the right to refuse to participate in the study. The children have the right, at any stage during the study, to withdraw themselves and their writing samples from the research, without explanation if they so wish. All work submitted will be anonymous and only a select few will have access to these writing samples including myself, the class teachers, and a research supervisor. The hard copies of the writing samples will be destroyed with a shredder as soon as they have been scanned onto my computer. All samples will be stored on a password-protected computer, and all traces of these samples will be deleted from the computer upon completion of the study.

If you have any queries about the study, please do not hesitate to contact me via email.

Thank you for your cooperation,

Clíodhna Nolan

Consent to take part in Research

I voluntarily allow my child ……………………………………. to participate in this research study.

I understand that even if I allow my child to participate now, I can withdraw them at any time without explanation.

I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.

I understand that all information provided for this study will be treated confidentially.

I understand I have the right to contact the researcher and seek further information about the study.

_____   _____

Parent's signature   Date

Eanáir 2018

A thuismitheoirí, a chaomhnóirí, agus a scoláirí,

Is mise Clíodhna Nolan agus is iníon léinn mé ó instiúid Oideachais Marino. Tá máistreacht Gairmiúil san Oideachas á déanamh agam faoi láthair, agus mar chuid den chúrsa tá orm tráchtas a scríobh. Is é an t-ábhar a bheidh mé ag déanamh staidéir air ná an Béarla i ngaelscoileanna. Tá sé ar intinn agam samplaí den scríbhneoireacht a thagann ó na páistí a bhailiú agus anailís a dhéanamh orthu. Beidh orm samplaí ó ghaelscoil agus ó scoil Bhéarla a bhailiú chun comparáid a dhéanamh eatarthu. Tá suim agam a bheith ag obair le páistí i rang a haon agus rang a trí. Iarrfaidh mé ar na páistí cúpla líne scríbhneoireachta a chumadh, agus tar éis 10 nóiméad, baileoidh mé na samplaí. Déanfaidh mé na samplaí a scrúdú ansin faoi na teidil seo a leanas; poncaíocht, litriú, comhréir, peannaireacht, structúr na habairte, agus stór focal.

Ba mhaith liom cead a fháil uait do pháiste a bheith páirteach sa taighde seo. Tá cead ag an bpáiste diúltiú don staidéar más mian leo, agus tá cead aige/aici éirí as an staidéar ag aon am ar bith, gan mhíniú. Beidh an obair a dhéanfar faoi rún daingean. Ní bheidh teacht ag aon duine seachas mé féin, na múinteoirí ranga, aguus an maoirseoir taighde ar scríbhneoireacht na bpáistí.

Má tá ceist ar bith agat faoin taighde seo, ná bíodh aon drogall ort ríomhphost a chur chugam.

Míle buíochas,

Clíodhna Nolan

Foirm Toilithe

Tugaim cead do mo pháiste ……………………………. a bheith páirteach sa taighde atá luaite thuas.

Tuigim go bhfuil sé de cheart ag an bpáiste éirí as an staidéar, ag am ar bith le linn an taighde, gan mhíniú.

Míníodh ábhar an taighde dom i scríbhinn.

Tuigim go mbeidh an t-eolas a thógtar ón staidéar seo go hiomlán rúnda.

Tuigim go bhfuil sé de cheart agam teagmháil a dhéanamh leis an taighdeoir má tá ceist ar bith agam faoin staidéar seo.

_____   _____

Síniú an tuismitheora   Dáta

MARINO
INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

January 2018

Dear pupils,

My name is Clíodhna Nolan and I am currently studying to be a primary teacher in Marino Institute of Education. As part of my course, I have to choose a topic to study. The topic I hope to study is English in Irish- speaking schools or *gaelscoileanna.* In order to do this, I would need to look at how you write in English. I would like to ask you for your help with this study. If you agree to take part, you would be asked to write a short story (about ten lines) and I will collect these stories and look at them very closely. This would only take about twenty minutes in total. I will then write about what I noticed in the stories.

You don't have to put your name on the story, so I will not be able to tell what you wrote. No one other than myself, your teacher and my teacher will be allowed to read the stories. I will keep the stories very safe while I am studying them. They will be kept on my computer at home, and the stories will be deleted once I have finished studying them. You are allowed to back out of the study, at any time during the process, without giving a reason. If you have any questions about the study, please ask me.

Thank you for your time,

Clíodhna

Please write your name on the line below if you agree to take part in the study.

_____

Date:

Samhain 2016

A Phríomhoide, a chara,

Is mise Clíodhna Nolan agus is iníon léinn mé ó instiúid Oideachais Marino. Tá máistreacht Gairmiúil san Oideachas á déanamh agam faoi láthair, agus mar chuid den chúrsa tá orm tráchtas a scríobh. Is é an t-ábhar a bheidh mé ag déanamh staidéir air ná an Béarla i ngaelscoileanna. Tá sé ar intinn agam samplaí den scríbhneoireacht a thagann ó na páistí a bhailiú agus anailís a dhéanamh orthu. Beidh orm samplaí ó ghaelscoil agus ó scoil Bhéarla a bhailiú chun comparáid a dhéanamh eatarthu. Tá suim agam a bheith ag obair le páistí i rang a haon agus rang a trí. Iarrfaidh mé ar na páistí cúpla líne scríbhneoireachta a chumadh, agus tar éis 10 nóiméad, baileoidh mé na samplaí. Déanfaidh mé na samplaí a scrúdú ansin faoi na teidil seo a leanas; poncaíocht, litriú, comhréir, peannaireacht, structúr na habairte, agus stór focal.

Ba mhaith liom cead a fháil uait na páistí ón scoil seo a bheith páirteach sa taighde seo. Tá cead ag an bpáiste diúltiú don staidéar más mian leo, agus tá cead aige/aici éirí as an staidéar ag aon am ar bith, gan mhíniú. Beidh an obair a dhéanfar faoi rún daingean. Ní bheidh teacht ag aon duine seachas mé féin, na múinteoirí ranga, agus an maoirseoir taighde ar scríbhneoireacht na bpáistí.

Má tá ceist ar bith agat faoin taighde seo, ná bíodh aon drogall ort ríomhphost a chur chugam.

Le dea-ghuí,

Clíodhna

INSTITIÚID OIDEACHAIS

MARINO

An Associated College of
Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin

INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

December 2016

A Phríomhoide, a chara,

My name is Clíodhna Nolan and I am writing to you regarding the possibility of conducting some research for my Professional Master of Education (Primary) degree dissertation in your school.

I am currently in my second year of the Masters programme, and as part of my course I have to complete a research study. My area of interest is in the level of written English in *Gaelscoileanna,* and as part of my research hope to investigate the difference in writing performance in English across different school types: English-medium schools and G*aelscoileanna.* In order to do this, I would need to gather writing samples of children from English-medium schools so that I could analyse and compare them to writing samples from a *Gaelscoil.* I was wondering if your school would be able to help me in this. The process would involve me reading out a writing prompt for the children, and then for ten minutes they would finish the story for me in writing. I would then collect, code, and analyse these samples. These samples would be completely anonymous, no names would be included in the study, nor will the name of the school be mentioned at any stage in my dissertation. No one other than myself, my dissertation supervisor, and the class teachers if they so wish, will have access to these samples. I would be interested in working with a third class group for the study. I hope to conduct this study either the week beginning 29 January or the following week, which would be the week beginning 5 February.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me by email or by telephone. Looking forward to hearing from you,

le dea-ghuí,

Clíodhna