

*Is Tusa an Múinteoir: Engaging Children and Parents as*  
Learners of the Irish Language in an English-Medium  
Primary School

A thesis submitted in the fulfilment of the requirements of the  
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
at the School of Education  
Trinity College Dublin

By Jane O'Toole

January 2023



# Declaration

I declare that this thesis has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other university and it is entirely my own work.

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## **Abstract**

The lack of opportunity for the majority of children attending English-medium primary schools to speak Irish outside of school, coupled with a documented decline in attainment in Irish language proficiency in recent decades in English-medium schools, constitute an ongoing concern within education and broader society. This study seeks to explore the overarching outcomes of enacting a sociocultural theory (SCT)-informed pedagogical approach to create meaningful domains of use for learners of Irish in terms of the impact on learners' (a) Irish language use and self-assessed proficiency and (b) motivation and attitudes towards the Irish language. It also seeks to review and evaluate learners' experience of an SCT-informed language pedagogy. Utilising a participatory action research methodology with children and parents as project partners, this is achieved through the piloting and evaluation of two specific SCT-informed pedagogic approaches: (i) tutoring and (ii) technology-mediated language learning (TMLL). Findings indicate that children demonstrated an increase in Irish language use and self-assessed ability in addition to sustained motivation levels. The study indicates that children and parents were positively disposed towards the piloted teaching and learning approaches and that parents gained a greater understanding of their child's Irish language education and learning experience. The participatory action research methodology also emerges as a crucial element of the study in providing a mechanism for child and parent participants to both share their learning experiences and be part of the design and research process. Key recommendations for policy and practice in relation to the development of Irish language opportunities for learners of Irish as an additional language (IAL) are identified in the context of school, local, national and international domains.



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## Abbreviations

ADL	Actual Development Level
CALL	Computer Assisted Language Learning
CARN	Collaborative Action Research Network
CLT	Communicative Language Teaching
CMC	Computer-Mediated Communication
COLZ	Class Online Learning Zone
CTA	Class Twitter Account
CWPT	Class-wide Peer Tutoring
EME	English-Medium Education
GT	Grounded Theory
IAL	Irish as an Additional Language
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IME	Irish-Medium Education
MALL	Mobile Assisted Language Learning
MKO	More Knowledgeable Other
MOOC	Massive Online Open Course
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NEARI	Network of Educational Action Researchers of Ireland



PAL	Peer-Assisted Learning
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PDL	Potential Development Level
PE	Physical Education
PLC	Primary Languages Curriculum
PT	Peer Tutoring
RPT	Reciprocal Peer Tutoring
SESE	Social, Environmental & Scientific Education
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
SPHE	Social, Personal & Health Education
SNS	Social Networking Site
TMLL	Technology-Mediated Language Learning
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
YR	Young Researcher
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development



# Chapter 1:

## Introduction

English-medium schoolchildren need to see that Irish can be used as a modern language of communication, and to extend their use of it from a token level to a more functional and extensive usage. They display healthy attitudes towards Irish, which must be nurtured. They suffer from a lack of opportunity to use the language outside of school, and their exposure to the language in a social domain that relates directly to their lives, would give relevance to the language in their eyes

(Fleming & Debski, 2007, p. 99)

Children who learn Irish as an additional language in English-medium schools can face challenges in experiencing the Irish language as a living language, due to the potential sealed-off nature (Harris, 2008a) of the language learning context in schools. This is coupled with the lack of opportunity to encounter the language in their lives outside of school (Fleming & Debski, 2007). The education sector remains central to national efforts to revitalise the language. English-medium primary schools play a vital role in supporting Irish language maintenance by providing the first introduction to Irish to children, and “laying the groundwork for future language learning” (Harris, 2005, p. 974).

This thesis focuses on the creation of meaningful domains of use for learners of Irish as an additional language (IAL) attending an English-medium primary school. The explored domains include explicit engagement with the Irish language initially in the school context prior to extension to both digital and home domains. The study seeks to explore the overarching outcomes of enacting a sociocultural theory (SCT)-informed pedagogical approach in order to create meaningful domains of use for learners of Irish in terms of the impact on learners’ (a) Irish language use and self-assessed proficiency and (b) motivation and attitudes towards the Irish language. It also seeks to review and evaluate learners’ experience of SCT-informed language pedagogy. This is achieved through the piloting and evaluation of two specific SCT-informed pedagogic approaches: (i) tutoring and (ii) Web 2.0-mediated learning. The participatory methodology also emerges as a key element of the

study in providing a mechanism for child and parent participants to both share their learning experiences and be part of the design and research process. Through this collective process, the current teacher-researcher identifies key recommendations for policy and practice in relation to the teaching and learning of Irish in English-medium schools, as well as reflecting on the impact of the chosen methodological approach.

This chapter provides an overview of the study, with reference to key elements of the study and its learning context. A brief summary of the Irish language context in Ireland is outlined in Section 1.1. The rationale, aims and research questions of the study are subsequently presented in Section 1.2. The final section of this chapter provides an overview of the thesis structure and the focus of each chapter therein.

## **1.1 Introduction to the Irish Language Context**

The Irish language has been the official first language of the Republic of Ireland since the founding of the state in 1922, despite its minority status in terms of the numbers of speakers, which represents a unique position, internationally (Romaine, 2008; Fishman, 1991). English is deemed the second official language of Ireland and is the predominant spoken language of Ireland. Speakers of Irish as a first language represent a dispersed minority in Ireland, and thus the majority of speakers and learners of Irish engage with the language as a second or additional language (Hickey & Stenson, 2016b).

Irish is categorised as definitely endangered (UNESCO, 2019) due to decreasing levels of intergenerational transmission and, relatedly, a decrease of native speakers. The Irish language is spoken as a community and home language in pockets of the country. These areas are called the *Gaeltacht* and are located mainly along the west coast of Ireland. There are also growing number of fluent Irish speakers in urban English-speaking areas of the country (Central Statistics Office, 2012, 2017; Ó Broin, 2013), with habitual speakers of Irish around the country now more numerous than Irish speakers in the *Gaeltacht* (Central Statistics Office, 2017). It is of note that, while Irish was continuously spoken in the *Gaeltacht* as a first language from generation to generation, the same link with the traditional vernacular is not necessarily evident to the same degree in other Irish language communities and networks outside of the *Gaeltacht*, which has implications for the extent of Irish language use, Irish language variation, and standardisation. Indeed, bilingualism outside the *Gaeltacht*

has been described as development “based rather loosely on a thin distribution of family and social networks which have a degree of underpinning from a variety of state policies in education, the work-place and media institutions” (Ó Riagáin, 1997, p. 166).

While the Irish-medium education (IME) sector has experienced growth and success (Ó Duibhir, 2018; McCárthaigh 2021), the vast majority of children in Ireland learn Irish as a second or additional language (SAL) at English-medium schools, where Irish is a compulsory and core subject (Dunne, 2020). There are strong indications that levels of proficiency in Irish in English-medium schools have declined significantly over recent decades (Harris, Forde, Archer, Nic Fhearaile & O’Gorman, 2006; Harris, 2008a, 2008b), while, attitudinally, children remain relatively positively disposed towards the Irish language (Devitt, Condon, Dalton, O’Connell & Ní Dhuinn, 2018). This current study explores Irish language learning at primary school level in an English-medium education (EME) setting in Ireland.

## **1.2 Rationale, Aims & Research Questions**

This section will discuss the rationale of the study, the aims of the study, as well as introducing the research questions of the study.

### ***1.2.1 Rationale***

While officially the first language of Ireland, the minority status of Irish as an additional language essentially means the majority of children learning the Irish language in Ireland encounter it primarily in a school setting. This sociolinguistic context offers little or no opportunity for interacting with the spoken language outside of school, both for children in English-medium education settings (EME) (Harris & Murtagh, 1999) and Irish-immersion education settings (Ó Duibhir & Ní Thuairisg, 2019).

This study seeks to explore the potential influence of a sociocultural theory-informed pedagogy in relation to learners’ Irish language use and self-assessed proficiency, as well as their attitudes and motivation towards the Irish language. The SCT-informed pedagogy explores the creation of meaningful domains of use for learners of Irish as an Additional Language (IAL) beginning in the school setting and then progressing to the digital and home domain. The current study is called ‘*Is Tusa an Múinteoir*’ [You are the Teacher] to

acknowledge the significance of the child's role as tutor, both in the tutor and tutee classroom setting, as well as predominantly the tutor role in the home setting. The chosen name of the study also sought to reflect the agency of learners to engage with the piloted domains of Irish language use at a grassroots level.

### ***1.2.2 Aims of the Study***

The current study seeks to explore to what extent the creation of meaningful, authentic domains of use, in order to enable opportunities to speak the Irish language for learners of IAL from English-medium school settings, could influence child and parent engagement with the Irish language.

The overarching aim was divided into four specific aims:

1. To explore the outcomes in relation to the child and parent participants.
2. To explore the child and parent participant learner experience of the specific pedagogic approaches enacted.
3. To explore the impact of a participatory approach on learner engagement in a given study.
4. To add to the field of knowledge in relation to Irish language teaching and learning in EME settings.

#### ***1. To explore the outcomes in relation to the child and parent participants***

The study seeks to identify any potential impact on (i) child and parent participants' levels of Irish language usage and self-assessed Irish ability, and (ii) child and parents' attitudes and motivation towards the Irish language during the course of the action research study. Given that the study seeks to create authentic domains of use to engage learners, it is clear that Irish language usage will be explored. It was decided that attitudes and motivation towards the Irish language should also be explored. While the area of language proficiency has been considered, for feasibility reasons the study will focus on Irish language usage and attitudes and motivation, thus the concept of self-assessed proficiency was included in a minor capacity only.

***2. To explore the child and parent participant learner experience of the specific pedagogic approaches enacted***

The study seeks to examine child and participant learner feedback in relation to the specific pedagogical approaches piloted with participants, in order to inform practice in relation to Irish language teaching and learning in EME settings.

***3. To explore the impact of a participatory approach on learner engagement in a given study***

This study seeks to explore the shared experience of Participatory Action and facilitate a *collective self-study* (McTaggart, Nixon & Kemmis, 2017), in effect where participant engagement and agency in the course of the project as part of the learning process, project design, and research process. Practices of collaboration and partnership between the teacher-researcher, children, and parents are also explored.

***4. To add to the field of knowledge in relation to Irish language teaching and learning in EME settings***

The final aim of the study is to add to the field of knowledge and practice in relation to the teaching and learning of the Irish language in English-medium primary schools in Ireland, both in terms of influencing teacher practice, Irish language education at national level, and Irish language policy across society. Successive inspectorate reports (Inspectorate 2022a, 2018, 2013) and studies (Harris et al., 2006; Hickey & Stenson, 2016a) express concern in relation to Irish language teaching and learning in EME settings.

***1.2.3 Research Questions***

The research questions evolved from the rationale and aims of study and are as follows:

1. In what ways does a sociocultural theory (SCT)-informed pedagogical approach impact Irish language learners' Irish language use and self-assessed proficiency?
2. In what ways does a sociocultural theory (SCT)-informed pedagogical approach impact Irish language learners' motivation and attitudes towards the Irish language?

3. What were the experiences of Irish learners regarding SCT-informed Irish language teaching and learning?
4. In what ways can a participatory approach influence engagement of learners in a given study?

A sociocultural theory (SCT)-informed pedagogical approach is grounded on the premise of the creation of authentic and meaningful domains of use for Irish language learners to encounter and engage with the Irish language both inside of and outside of the traditional classroom setting. The first and second research question seek to explore how this approach impacted learners' Irish language and self-assessed proficiency, and their attitudes and motivation towards the language, respectively. The third question focuses on participants' experience of learning during the project. The final question then explores the role and influence of the participatory action research methodology, in terms of participant engagement.

### **1.3 Summary of Thesis Structure**

Chapter Two introduces the theoretical framework of socio-cultural theory (SCT) and the related language acquisition theory and pedagogic approaches which underpin the study. A brief overview of (second) language acquisition is presented, followed by a critique of three specific theories from which the rationale for the selection of socio-cultural theory for this study emerges. Language acquisition as a mediated process is then discussed. The chapter then progresses to the exploration of the pedagogic approaches of (i) tutoring and (ii) technology-mediated language learning specific to this school-based study, in the context of the overarching conceptual framework and language acquisition theory. Finally, the school partners of this study, children and parents, are introduced through the lens of student voice and parental involvement and engagement at school level. This leads to a brief overview of two concepts of language learning practice in which the school partners engage with the overarching SCT-informed approach: communities of practice and language learner autonomy.

Chapter Three discusses the Irish language context in Ireland, with specific reference to learning Irish as an additional language at primary school level. The chapter is divided into two overarching parts: An exploration of (i) the national context of learners of Irish and then



more specifically (ii) the teaching and learning of Irish at English-medium primary schools. The chapter, firstly, outlines the national context of Irish speakers and learners with reference to Irish speaker and learner, Ireland's changing demographic, the endangered status of the language, classification of Irish learners and speakers and, finally, general attitudes towards the Irish language. The school context is then examined, with specific focus on the teaching and learning of Irish. Firstly, Irish language education policy is examined, which then situates the discussion of curriculum. This, in turn, informs a discussion of the teaching and learning of Irish in English-medium schools. Attitudes and motivation towards the teaching and learning of Irish in EME settings, functional contexts of use for the language and parental support of children's Irish language learning and consideration of other endangered language contexts all add further insight into the Irish language teaching and learning context.

Chapter Four provides an overview and analysis of the methodological structures and progression at a conceptual and theoretical level which underpin the field research undertaken in this school-based study. The philosophical underpinnings of the study are explored, with reference to ontological and epistemological considerations, as well as identified paradigms. The informed selection of participatory action research (PAR) is explored, with the rationale for a PAR approach in an endangered language learning setting examined, in addition to characteristics of PAR. Statement of positionality, along with an overview of the research context and participants are presented, followed by an exploration of research tools employed in the study. The five stages of data analysis are then interrogated. The chapter concludes with a reflection on the realities of the study.

Chapter Five explores the design and implementation process of the pedagogic approaches in the context of the primary school curriculum and the conceptual framework of the current study, and with reference to the literature of Chapters Two, Three and Four more broadly. Firstly, the chapter explores the design of key Irish language learning resources for tutoring and technology-mediated language learning. The school context and curriculum are then examined in relation to the integration of a PAR approach in undertaking the Irish language study. The chapter also provides an overview of the in-cycle and end-of-cycle reflection and decision process.

Chapter Six details the data analysis of the study. The analysis is structured in response to the current study's research questions and thus presents needs analysis as the outset of the

study, the outcomes of the study, the learner experience in relation to the pedagogic approaches, and finally the influence of the participatory approach on engagement. Firstly, needs analysis is framed in relation to examining levels of (i) Irish language use and self-assessed ability in Irish and (ii) attitudes and motivation towards the Irish language amongst children and parents respectively at the outset of the study. The following five sections of the chapter then analyse data in relation to the entire study. Results in relation to the outcomes of the study are presented in Section 6.2 Outcome A: Irish Language Usage and Self-Assessed Ability in Irish and Section 6.3 Outcome B: Attitude towards the Irish language and Learner Motivation. The following two sections focus on accounts of the learner experience of both child and parent in relation to the two specific pedagogic approaches of tutoring and technology-mediated language learning, drawn from the lesson-specific evaluations and post-intervention research tools. The final section of Chapter 6 examines data sources which provide insights into the impact of the methodological approach of PAR as a vehicle to involve participants with the study, both in terms of its design and in terms of language learning and engagement.

Chapter Seven discusses the principal findings of the study derived from the analysis chapter and provides a discussion in the context of relevant literature and national policy while addressing the research questions in the conclusion of each section. The chapter is structured similarly to Chapter 6, for the purpose of clarity and in observance of the research questions. The first section discusses the study's findings in relation to children's increased levels of Irish language usage and self-assessed Irish ability. This discussion expands on the ripple effect of Irish language usage across domains, Irish language engagement in relation to translanguaging in addition to parents' engagement with the language during the study. The second part of the chapter addresses the second research question, which explores the impact of a socio-cultural theory approach in relation learners' attitudes and motivation levels towards the Irish language, exploring the overarching motivation indices with specific reference to integrative motivation in the context of current educational and societal trends, coupled with a specific examination of scale-level fluctuations in relation to integrative motivation, instrumental motivation and Irish-lesson anxiety. Parents' attitudes and motivation towards the Irish language are also explored in relation to the national context, and with reference to the construct of socioculturally motivated learners, and finally in

relation to both parental engagement with their child's learning and parental encouragement of their child.

The third research question is addressed in both Section 7.3 and 7.4, whereby learners' experience of tutoring and technology-mediated language learning (TMLL) are interrogated. Learner experience of tutoring specifically examines similar-age reciprocal peer tutoring (RPT), the empowerment of the child as the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO), the EME context, parental engagement perspectives and a reflection on how we describe speakers and learners of Irish. The salient points for discussion in relation to TMLL include the recognition of the blog platform as a gateway to engagement with other technological platforms for learning, children's preference for task-based learning, technology-related challenges, the importance of a real audience and finally the pivotal role of the teacher. The final section of the discussion chapter discusses the impact of a participatory action research approach in the study with reference to impact on fostering partnerships, scaffolded approach to children's ownership of learning process, the potential of communities of practice in the endangered language context and the potential of collaborative small-scale research.

Chapter Eight, the concluding chapter, firstly revisits the story of the thesis. The contributions of the study to the field of knowledge are then presented. Recommendations are identified with respect to practice, policy, and research. The recommendations for each domain are summarised and then discussed in context. Future research and applications of the study are then explored. Potential future work is then explored, prior to the final conclusion.

## **Chapter 2:**

### **Literature Review I:**

#### **Sociocultural Theory (SCT): Pedagogy & Partners**

Chapter One introduced the Irish language context, in addition to the rationale, aims and research questions, in order to frame the study. A summary of each chapter was also provided in order to situate the aforementioned key elements of study within the breadth of the study. This chapter, the first of two literature chapters, focuses on language acquisition and learning theory, and examines the theoretical framework of sociocultural theory which underpins the current study's pedagogical approaches. Firstly, a rationale for the arrival at sociocultural theory as the most effective framework to inform the study is discussed in the context of the broader domain of language acquisition theory in Section 2.1 below. Language acquisition as a mediated process is then explored in order to bridge the relevant constructs of SCT to the language learning process. Finally, the two specific SCT-informed pedagogical approaches of (i) tutoring and (ii) technology-mediated language learning (TMLL) utilised in this study are subsequently introduced demonstrating how SCT directly informs pedagogy. Tutoring primarily focuses on the practice of peer tutoring (PT), with specific reference to reciprocal peer tutoring (RPT). Technology-mediated language learning examines, in particular, the utilisation of a blog (in the context of a closed online learning zone (COLZ) for learners) and the utilisation of Twitter as mediating tools to support language learners. In the final section, the partners in language learning are introduced through a discussion of student voice and parental involvement and engagement. This is done to contextualise the actors in the language learning context. Finally, the learner-related concepts of community of practice and language learner autonomy are reviewed, given their relevance in an endangered language context underpinned by a sociocultural framework.

## **2.1 Language Acquisition Theory**

This section provides a brief overview of the field of (second) language acquisition theory. It explores relevant language acquisition theories from which the rationale for the informed selection of sociocultural theory as the theoretical framework to this study emerges.

### ***2.1.1 Overview of (Second) Language Acquisition***

Ellis defines second language acquisition i.e. L2 acquisition “as the way in which people learn a language other than their mother tongue, inside or outside of a classroom and SLA as the study of this” (Ellis, 1997, p. 3). In a broader sense, SLA can be considered as “the study of how second languages are learned. It is the study of how learners create a new language system with only limited exposure to a second language. It is the study of what is learned of a second language, and importantly, what is not learned” (Gass, Selinker & Plonsky, 2013). Gass, Selinker and Plonsky (2013) expand this definition, citing SLA as the study of why: why the majority of second language learners are not successful in attaining the same level of proficiency in their L2 as they do in their L1, and, conversely, why some second language learners do attain native-like proficiency in their L2. It is noted that ‘second’ is generally used to refer to any language other than one’s first language or L1 (Gass et al., 2013; Ortega, 2013; VanPatten et al., 2020). SLA can refer to the process of learning a second, third, or fourth language, i.e., the learning of a non-native language after the learning of one’s native or first language (Gass et al., 2013). This is seconded by Ortega (2013) describing SLA as the investigation of L2 acquisition, or “how people can learn additional languages later in life, subsequent to having acquired a language or languages from birth” (Ortega, 2013, p. 8).

Different theories of SLA, from behaviourism in the 1950s and 60s to Universal Grammar through the 1960s and the cognitivist/developmental perspective from the 1990s, conceptualise both language and learning/acquisition in distinct ways. Behaviourism (1950s & 60s) and monitor theory (1980s) are identified as early theories in SLA (Ellis, 1997; VanPatten et al., 2020). Since the 1990s, the cognitivist/developmental perspective emerged which, in turn, inspired a number of related theories and hypotheses, including the interactionist hypothesis (Long 1981, 1983), the noticing hypothesis, and input processing

(Lightbown & Spada, 2006). A sociocultural perspective on SLA emerged in the 1980s and developing in scope since the 1990s. In addition, complex dynamic systems theory emerged in the 1990s (Larsen-Freeman, 1994)) and has also developed its reach and application in the field of language acquisition and learning (Hiver, Al-Hoolie & Evans, 2022). These and other SLA theories represent a vast and varied field of research. For the purposes of this current study, interactionist theory, CDST and SCT are further explored in Section 2.1.2 in order to inform the choice of theoretical framework for this study.

Prior to a closer examination of specific language acquisition theory, it is important to address some current developments in the field of language acquisition; namely, the acknowledgement of multilingualism or the multilingual turn, and SLA vs. third or fourth language acquisition.

The enduring use of the term *Second* Language Acquisition and the dominance of L2 learning from a monolingual starting point has, however, been increasingly questioned in recent years (De Angelis, 2007; Ortega, 2014, 2017 ; Leung & Valdes, 2019; Douglas Fir Group, 2016; Anderson, 2022). Anderson (2022) identifies the publication of the paper by the Douglas Fir Group (2016), comprised of 15 leading scholars in the area of language acquisition and linguistics, as a significant indicator of the sea change in relation to the interrogation of the future direction of SLA. Indeed, its title alone, “A transdisciplinary framework for SLA in a multilingual world”, indicates the intention to consider SLA, or LA, in the context of today’s increasingly acknowledged multilingualism. It is acknowledged, after all, that a notable number of the world’s population speak multiple languages daily (De Angelis, 2007). The “multilingual turn” (May, 2014) in SLA in recent years has seen a move away, from terms like “native speaker” and “second language”, to consider multilingualism as a norm rather than monolingualism. In terms of where the language is learned, (second) language acquisition encompasses both the classroom environment and more ‘natural’ settings, whereas foreign language learning is used to describe language learning which is, in general, confined to classroom settings (VanPatten et al., 2020). The foundational basis of multilingualism “acknowledges the social reality of long-settled linguistically diverse political communities as well as the new cultural and language correlations within territorial boundaries configured by increasing migration trends in a fast-changing world” (Erdocia, 2020, p. 1) De Angelis (2007, 2011) draws a distinction between the learning of languages as a second language, and as a third or fourth language, noting how the addition of a third

language to a school curriculum could positively impacts students' overall attainment in a second language (De Angelis, 2011).

### ***2.1.2 Exploring Language Acquisition/Learning Theories***

#### **2.1.2.1 Interactionist Approach**

The Interaction Hypothesis was notably developed by Long (1980, 1981, 1983) and further developed by others (Gass and Varonis, 1985, 1994; Mackey, 1999; 2006; Pica 1987, 1988, 1994; Pica, Young & Doughty, 1987). It is argued that Long's work was primarily influenced by that of Wagner-Gough & Hatch (1975) and Krashen (1985). Wagner-Gough & Hatch (1975) posited that conversation was a nexus of learning itself, as opposed to a mere mechanism to practice previously learned language itself (Gass, 2002). Long's work initially concurred with Krashen's Input Hypothesis: that input that can be marginally above a learner's interlanguage system. However, Long developed his theory to reflect that conversational adaptations could modify L2 input into comprehensible input, in order to support L2 development (Kim, 2017). Interactionism is an established approach to language learning (Gass & Mackey, 2007; Gass, Abbuhl & Mackey, 2013; Kim, 2017; Atkinson, 2014). It is argued that Mackey's study (1999) provides the most comprehensive evidence in support of the effects of an interactionist approach, with credit also attributed to Gass and Varonis (1994) in this regard (Gass, 2002). Mackey (1999) identified a relationship between conversational interaction language development by discovering that learners, who engaged in a structure-focused exchange, demonstrated movement along a developmental continuum more quickly than learners who did not (Gass, 2002). Prior to that, Gass & Varonis (1994) demonstrated a direct relationship between interaction and learners' linguistic production thereafter, whereby an influential role for negotiation of meaning on learners' L2 production was found (Kim, 2017).

It is noted that the understanding of the interactionist approach has further evolved to include consideration of corrective feedback, implicit and explicit learning, as well as acknowledgement of the importance of output (Gass & Mackey, 2020). The broader understanding of the approach underpinned by hundreds of related studies in the interim can be summarised as thus:

The central tenet of the approach is that interaction facilitates the process of acquiring a second language, as it provides learners with opportunities to receive modified input, to receive feedback, both explicitly and implicitly, which in turn may draw learners' attention to problematic aspects of their interlanguage and push them to produce modified output (Gass & Mackey, 2020, p. 213)

#### 2.1.2.2 Complex Dynamic Systems Theory

The application of Complex Dynamic System Theory (CDST) was first applied to the language acquisition context in a study by Larsen Freeman (1994), and is thus considered a relatively new theoretical approach (Hiver, Al-Hoorie & Evans, 2022). From a CDST perspective, the language learning process is considered as “dynamic, complex, nonlinear, unpredictable, sensitive to initial conditions, sometimes chaotic, open, self-organizing, feedback-sensitive, adaptive...” (Larsen-Freeman, 2007, p. 35). In the context of language learning and acquisition, Complex Dynamic Systems Theory (CDST) considers *language* as a meaning-making resource that is open and dynamic; *language learning* as a sociocognitive and ecological process which is nonlinear in nature; whereby the *language learner* is an agent of one's own learning and capable of expanding meaning of language via a transformative learning trajectory (Larsen-Freeman). CDST-informed language instruction focuses on teaching learners as opposed to language, and is characterised as an awareness of differences between learners (Larsen Freeman, 2020). Larsen-Freeman expresses concern in relation to static representations of the language learning process of a dynamic or socio-cultural-cognitive nature (2007).

The emergent, agentic, and relational nature of CDST in the classroom context, whereby the learning factors such as physical environment, teaching, pedagogy, and learners are not considered isolated elements, recognises how the manner in which learners relate to these factors is “integral to what emerges from agents interacting with it” (Larsen-Freeman, 2016, p.378)

#### 2.1.2.3 Sociocultural Theory

It is widely accepted that the seminal work of Lev Vygotsky underpins sociocultural theory (Garhart Mooney, 2013; John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996; Lantolf, 2007). The central tenet of sociocultural theory is that the human mind is mediated (Lantolf, 2000a. 2000b). Vygotsky



proposed that humans interact with the world firstly with physical tools and activity, which enables people to change and influence their circumstances and, secondly, with symbolic tools, or signs, which enable people to “mediate and regulate relationships with others and with ourselves” (Lantolf, 2000a, p. 1). Sociocultural theory demonstrates the interdependence of social and individual processes (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996) in the co-construction of knowledge. Lantolf (2002) identifies that the most prominent aspect of SCT theory represented in SLA is the fundamental premise that “the human mind is always and everywhere mediated primarily by linguistically based communication” (Lantolf, 2002, p. 104), thus arriving at the understanding that language development and language learning are mediated, relational, and social processes. Socio-cultural theory (SCT), in the context of linguistics, reflects a specific area of second language (L2) research situated within the broader sociocultural field, emerging as it did in the late 1980s (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

It is noted that learners’ L1 and L2 are both viewed as mediational resources in the language learning context from an SCT perspective, which differs from the previously dominant approach, whereby use of one’s first language when learning a second or additional language was met with disapproval. Several studies (Storch & Aldosari, 2010; Centeno-Cortés & Jiménez-Jiménez, 2004; De Guerrero & Villamil, 2000) have highlighted the functions and extent of L1 use in L2 learning, in determining the potential benefit of L1 in L2 learning (Storch, 2017).

Storch (2017) argues that SCT offers a rationale for certain language learning activities such as pair work, tutoring, group work, unlike other areas of SLA such as cognitivist approaches (Storch, 2017). Conversely, it is observed that SCT overlooks the role of the individual in favour of the collective; in proposing that learning and knowing is relative to the learning context and actors therein, it is argued that individuals can surmount social norms contingent to their own ability to achieve understanding (Lui & Matthews, 2005). Furthermore, it questions whether SCT can apply to all social group settings, given the potential for different capabilities within classes and learners (ibid.)

More specifically, the SCT construct of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is subject to varying points of view in terms of its applicability and viability. Broadly speaking, Vygotsky maintained that a child on the threshold of learning a new idea or concept could benefit from interaction with a more knowledgeable other, such as an adult, teacher, or peer.

Vygotsky presents a further elaboration on the ZPD, “the ZPD defines those functions that have not yet matured but are in the process of maturation, functions that will mature tomorrow but are currently in an embryonic state” (Vygotsky, 1978, pp. 86-87). Lantolf & Thorne (2006) argue that Vygotsky clearly shows his conviction that human learning assumes a certain social nature and a process by which children grow into the way of life of others around them. Thus, the difference between the child/learner’s actual stage of development at a given point and the cognitive functions including the proximal next stage forms the fundamental principle of the ZPD (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 287). The ZPD can be considered both a “model of the developmental process”, as well as a “conceptual tool” (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 287), which educators can utilise in order to understand aspects of students’ capacity for development. Thus, the Zone of Proximal Development, conceived by Vygotsky and developed and expanded by a number of scholars across disciplines, serves as a model of the developmental process and, more broadly, as a conceptual tool for educators (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; VanPatten, Keating & Wulff, 2020).

It is argued, however, that the ZPD, while a connecting factor of key elements of Vygotsky’s theories, is not a central tenet in Vygotsky’s writings and, if anything, the development of the concept of the ZPD is attributable to more recent scholars such as Bruner and Wertsch (Gillen, 2000). The ZPD is not without its detractors, both in its application to learning in general (Chaiklin, 2003; Lambert & Clyde, 2000; Shayer, 2003) and in the domain of language learning, specifically (Mitchell & Myles, 2004). Broadly speaking, Shayer (2003) notes that Vygotsky did not link the ZPD to effective use in the classroom. More specifically, it is argued that the ZPD is a restrictive learning model which “reduces the learner’s role to one of passivity and dependence upon the adult” (Lambert & Clyde, 2000, p. 29). A further critique posits how the ZPD does not factor in a clear account of a child’s learning needs, ability level at time in question, or potential motivational influences (Chaiklin, 2003). In relation to ZPD-related language learning studies, Mitchell & Myles (2004) identify a limited focus therein, citing that the majority related to single lexical items or morpho-syntactic elements in grammar.

#### 2.1.2.4 Conclusion

In this section, the interactionist approach, complex dynamic systems theory, and sociocultural approach to language acquisition and learning were discussed. All three

approaches demonstrated applicability to the language learning setting of the study, and have some common ground in terms of the importance of interaction between learners. The interactionist approach underlines the importance of how conversational interaction can be a nexus of learning in itself, where the learner can expand his/her understanding of the comprehensible input through the interaction with a partner. Long's (1981, 1983) Interaction Hypothesis was further developed to consider corrective feedback, and the significant area of output (Swain, Gass & Mackey, 2020); it is of note that the focus of interactionism is primarily on the language learning *process*.

CDST offers a differing perspective by acknowledging the complexity of the language acquisition learning and the language learning classroom (Larsen-Freeman, 2016). The acknowledgement of the dynamic ever-changing conditions of language learning and the agentic role of learners and teachers (Larsen-Freeman, 2016, 2020) provides a considered acknowledgement (Hiver, Al-Hoorie & Evans, 2022) of the complexities of language learning which cannot be summed up as a mere process. The relational aspect of learners to the learning environment and others is posited (Larsen Freeman 2007, 2016). However, it is also noted that as the field of CDST continues to evolve, more empirically-based investigations informed by CDST, and greater clarity in relation to how CDST informs study design is broadly recommended going forward (Hiver, Al-Hoorie & Evans, 2022).

Building upon the importance of interaction in the classroom, and acknowledging the complex nature of language learning and agency of learners and teachers, sociocultural theory supports the understanding that language acquisition is situated in *people* engaged in activity, as opposed to *processes*. Sociocultural theory provides a distinctive perspective on language acquisition, as it places importance on people - the learners in the study- in real world settings, as well as acknowledging the importance of both the cognitive and social aspects of learning a language and how they are intricately interrelated to each other. SCT approaches seek to apply research to practice by understanding communicative processes as inherently cognitive processes, and cognitive processes as indivisible from humanistic issues of self-efficacy, agency, and the effects of participation in culturally organised activity (VanPatten et al., 2020, p. 242). Therefore, sociocultural theory is the most suitable framework for this study, given its alignment with the focus on people and relational aspects in the language learning process, the applicability language learning as a mediated process, and the acknowledgement of the combination of both cognitive and social processes at play.

The next section, 2.2, provides an overview of the principal SCT constructs, and considers language acquisition as a mediated process in more detail.

## **2.2 SCT: Language Acquisition as a Mediated Process**

This chapter has outlined the rationale of an SCT-informed language teaching and learning approach thus far. This section considers SLA to be a mediated process. It explores the fundamental premise of SCT in SLA, in that “the human mind is always and everywhere *mediated* primarily by linguistically based communication” (Lantolf, 2002, p. 104). This section will examine SCT constructs in relation to SLA, with particular reference to mediation and the ZPD.

Lantolf & Thorne identify SCT as most compatible with theories of language “that focus on communication, cognition and meaning, rather than on formalist positions that privilege structure” (2006, p. 4), given that SCT is a theory of mediated mental development. Lantolf (2000b; 2002) examines SLA as a mediated process from the perspective of (i) Mediation by experts and novices, (ii) Peer mediation, (iii) Mediation through the L1, and (iv) Artefact mediation.

### **2.2.1 Mediation by Experts and Novices**

Language learning mediation between an expert and novice is a predominant language learning concept. When we consider mediation in the case of an expert-novice language learning context, we are inherently exploring mediated language learning in the zone of proximal development. It is noted by Lantolf (2002) that second language development progresses through a series of stages, in which mediation is initially quite explicit, to the stage at which gradually a more implicit type of assistance is required, as evidenced at the stage where minimal input is required by the expert. This, relatedly, highlights the necessity for mediation to be contingent on the part of the expert or More Knowledgeable Other (MKO), whereby awareness of the learner’s progress is reflected in appropriately modified or reduced scaffolding and support (Hughes, 2015; Lantolf, 2000b; Mermelshtine, 2017).

### **2.2.2 Peer Mediation**

Lantolf proposes that conversations among language learners can be as effective as instructional dialogue between teachers and learners (Lantolf, 2000a; Lantolf, 2002, 2012; Swain, 1995). While it is argued that the most effective form of mediation consists of negotiation between experts and learners, research indicates that it is also possible for peers to mediate each other's language development (Lantolf, 2012), and to scaffold each other's language learning quite effectively, by utilising a range of interactive strategies sensitive to each learner's ZPD (Lantolf, 2000b). Lantolf (2002) refers to this collaborative language learning scenario as peer mediation. Learners are thereby capable of co-constructing distributed knowledge and can scaffold each other through the use of language strategies which are demonstrated and passed on by the language teacher in the first instance. The teacher can initially provide scaffolding and language input to learners prior to their peer interaction. The idea that knowledge is constructed via social discourse is central to peers learning from, and with, each other and reflects Vygotsky's theory (1978) that "social interaction facilitates more learning than that which occurs by students learning on their own" (Hodgson et al., 2013, p. 360). It can be posited that learning can emerge during peer-mediated language learning in the absence of a designated 'expert' (Lantolf, 2002).

Donato's study of L2 learners of French at an American university sought to illustrate how students co-construct language learning experiences in a classroom environment and, secondly, to ascertain whether learners can influence the development of each other's interlanguage system in observable ways (Donato, 1994). Donato concluded that the process of peer scaffolding "enabled learners to expand their own L2 knowledge and extend the linguistic development of their peers" (Donato, 1994, p. 52). In the case of L2 learners of Japanese, Ohta notes that students showed a range of strategies normally associated with a teacher or expert in peer language activities, such as the use of prolepsis to scaffold each other, and willingness to wait for their language partner to respond as opposed to offering too much assistance—suggesting a sensitivity to each other's zone of proximal development (Ohta, 2001). Interestingly, Platt and Troudi (1997) observed that, while primary school children exercise the ability to carry out a learning activity, some have difficulty in scaffolding their classmates as they are not aware of their classmates' ZPD. Van Lier notes that learners' interactions with others are the continuous source of "pedagogical moments or learning opportunities" (Van Lier, 1998, p. 142) and how, from a teaching perspective, such

interactions should allow learners to be perceiving, thinking, acting, and interacting persons, rather than passive receivers of knowledge” (ibid.).

### **2.2.3 Mediation in L1**

While the school of thought exists that the use of L1 in the L2 learning context is not ideal (Ellis, 1997; Lightbown, 2014; Sampson, 2012), the concept that use of L1 as a mediating tool to support L2 learning is also evident (Cook & Hall, 2012; Swain & Lapkin, 2000). The traditional tendency to avoid the use of L1 in language pedagogy is potentially related to different pedagogical models relating to different periods in (S)LA. Sociocultural theory recognises both L1 and L2 as mediational tools (Storch, 2017). Indeed, it is argued that learners’ use of L1 in L2 learning can reduce cognitive load and can also build on prior knowledge (Hanif, 2020).

### **2.2.4 Artefact Mediation**

In the context of SLA, artefact mediation relates to the objects or artefacts which facilitate second language learning. An artefact is essentially a tool which is created and used by humans (Storch, 2017). Artefacts can be material (e.g. a spade, a book) or symbolic (e.g. gestures) (ibid.). Lantolf (2000b) identifies three artefacts which can mediate language learning: portfolios, tasks and technology. The latter artefact of technology and its role as a mediating tool, one of the two key approaches of the study, is discussed in Section 2.4.2.

### **2.2.5 More Knowledgeable Other (MKO)**

The concept of the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) is inextricably linked with the ZPD. Vygotsky considered that peer interaction was an essential part of the learning process. In order for children to learn new skills, he suggested pairing a learner with a more knowledgeable other (MKO) during learning activities. When provided with appropriate scaffolding, the students thus have what they need to accomplish the new task or skill and work in the ZPD. Vygotsky defined the ZPD as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86).

In the next part of this chapter, sociocultural theory and associated concepts that have been introduced in this section will be examined further in the context of their applicability to second language acquisition and language learning—the pedagogic focus of this study.

### ***2.2.6 Zone of Proximal Development***

The construct of the ZPD, as defined in 2.2.1.5, draws together the constructs of mediation, internalisation, and development, representing the dynamic enactment of these concepts. Broadly speaking, Vygotsky maintained that a child on the threshold of learning a new idea or concept could benefit from interaction with a more knowledgeable other, an adult, teacher, or peer. Vygotsky presents a further elaboration on the ZPD:

The ZPD defines those functions that have not yet matured but are in the process of maturation, functions that will mature tomorrow but are currently in an embryonic state (Vygotsky, 1978, pp. 86-87)

Lantolf & Thorne (2006) argue that Vygotsky clearly shows his conviction that human learning assumes a certain social nature and a process by which children grow into the way of life of others around them. Thus, the difference between the child/ learner’s actual stage of development at a given point and the cognitive functions including the proximal next stage forms the fundamental principle of the ZPD (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 287). The ZPD can be considered both a “model of the developmental process” as well as a “conceptual tool” (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 287) which educators can utilise in order to understand aspects of students’ capacity for development (VanPatten, Keating & Wulff, 2020).

It is argued that Vygotsky’s concept of the ZPD was one of least developed theories at the time of his death; indeed, across his work a mere eight references to the ZPD were made and only on one occasion was the actual term ZPD cited (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Furthermore, writings on the concept of ZPD at different intervals over a number of years are not fully compatible with each other (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Chaiklin refers to the opening definition of the ZPD as the “common conception” (Chaiklin, 2003, p. 41) of ZPD, and warns of the danger of oversimplifying references to ZPD in Vygotsky’s writing (Chaiklin, 2003). Gillen (2000) develops this argument by noting how Vygotsky’s seminal work *Mind in Society* was essentially constructed by editors and gave the ZPD a specific focus which was not reflective of his original writings. Gillen (2000) notes this of other scholars too, challenging Moll’s assessment of the centrality of the ZPD theory in Vygotsky’s work.

## **2.3 Pedagogical Approach 1: Tutoring**

Having discussed SLA as a Mediated Process in the previous section, this section explores the SCT-informed approach of Tutoring to in more detail with specific reference to Peer Tutoring (PT) and Reciprocal Peer Tutoring (RPT).

### **2.3.1 Peer Tutoring (PT)**

Peer tutoring (PT) is a type of Peer-assisted learning (PAL). It can be defined as “the acquisition of knowledge and skill through active helping and supporting among status equals or matched companions” (Topping, 2005, p. 631), with a focus on helping others to learn and learning oneself by doing (Can & Ginsburg-Block, 2013). PAL can include an array of group and paired learning approaches such as cooperative learning, Peer Tutoring, peer modelling, peer mentoring and peer education (Topping, 2001; Topping & Ehly, 1998).

Peer tutoring is specifically concerned with students working in pairs; this can involve high-achieving students paired with lower achieving pupils, same ability pairings, cross-age pairings or pairings of children with behavioural issues. Peer tutoring can be defined as an instructional strategy that focuses peer interaction for the purpose of teaching and learning (Can & Ginsburg-Block, 2013). Fantuzzo, Riggio, Connelly, and Dimeff (1989) identified the combination of teaching preparation, actual teaching, and accountability for learning progress as key components of effective Peer Tutoring. This instructional element differentiates Peer Tutoring from other PAL cooperative and collaborative approaches (Cole, 2013). Peer tutoring is characterised by tutor-tutee interactions or peer interactions and as an approach demonstrates a shift from the traditional didactic method of teaching whereby the teacher is central (Philp, Adams & Iwashita, 2013), indicating a change in role from teacher to facilitator (Slavin, 1995). Students are thus enabled to become active agents of their own learning. Topping (2015) reflects that traditional views of PT categorised the peer helper as “surrogate teacher” (Topping, 2015, p. 2), in a transmissive capacity; noting that more recent perceptions recognise Peer Tutoring interaction as “qualitatively different” from a teacher and younger person partnership, with noted advantages and disadvantages. PT is characterised by specific role-taking as tutor or tutee, normally with a clear focus on a specific curricular area supported by clear procedures for interaction, which involve an element of training (Topping, 2005). Topping notes that some Peer Tutoring approaches use



structured materials to scaffold the peer interaction, whereas other approaches advocate structured interactive behaviours that can be utilised for any learning activity.

When organisational variables are thoughtfully and carefully addressed with reference to what the optimal facilitation of the learning context, participants and learning coupled with reasonably high level of implementation integrity, the results of Peer Tutoring are typically good (Topping, 2001, 2005; Topping & Ehly, 1998). The research evidence indicates that PT can facilitate significant improvements in academic achievement in the targeted curriculum area for both tutors and tutee with the proviso that there is sufficient and appropriate attention given to organisational factors (Topping, 2005).

A number of positive learning outcomes are identified and accredited to Peer Tutoring in the maths classroom (Greene, Mc Tiernan & Holloway, 2018; Moliner & Alegre, 2020; Topping, Campbell, Douglas & Smith, 2003). More relevant to the current study, the benefits of structured peer interaction or PT in relation to literacy practices are widely reported. A number of studies report evidence of reading gains (Allen & Boraks, 1978; Fuchs, Fuchs, Mathes & Simmons, 1997; King, 2006; McMaster, Fuchs & Fuchs, 2002; Topping & Bryce, 2004; Topping, Duran & Van Keer, 2015; Tymms et al., 2011) and improvements in writing (Yarrow & Topping, 2001). Peer tutoring has also been a successful intervention for learners of English as an additional language at primary school level (Barnard, 2002; Tavener & Glynn, 1989). The literature on peer tutoring in relation to language is focused primarily on literacy rather than L2 contexts. In exploring the effect of structured peer interaction in a Paired Writing project with 10-11 year old primary school students, Yarrow & Topping (2001) concluded that peer interaction, consisting of metacognitive prompting and scaffolding, enabled additional improvements in writing by children, which supported related research to date (Daiute & Dalton, 1993; Sutherland & Topping, 1999).

While a rich body of research outlines the academic and cognitive gains associated with PT strategies, the outcomes have also been related to non-academic outcomes (Blanch, Duran, Valdebenito & Flores, 2013; Can & Ginsburg-Block, 2013; Ginsburg-Block, Rohrbeck & Fantuzzo, 2006; King, 2006; Miller, Topping & Thurston, 2010; Topping et al., 2015). King (2006) outlines that pupils who are actively engaged in their own learning, not only experience greater academic gains; but also develop transferable skills across contexts. Miller et al. (2010) reported significant gains in self-esteem for both cross-age and same-age

children who participated in a paired reading programme in Scottish primary schools which was attributed primarily to improved beliefs in competence. The cross-age participants also report gains in self-esteem. A meta-analysis of 36 studies relating to PAL (which included Peer Tutoring, peer teaching and small-group learning interventions) by Ginsburg-Block, Rohrbeck & Fantuzzo (2006), suggests that PAL interventions focused on specific learning outcomes also enhance social and self-concept outcomes (Can & Ginsburg-Block, 2013; Topping, 2015), consistent with an earlier meta-analysis (Rohrbeck, Ginsburg-Block, Fantuzzo & Miller, 2003). When Peer Tutoring is implemented on a whole-class level, it is called class-wide peer tutoring (CWPT).

### ***2.3.2 Reciprocal Peer Tutoring (RPT)***

Reciprocal Peer Tutoring (RPT) is a particular form of Peer Tutoring that enacts a more equitable balance of power between peers, whereby both partners are responsible for teaching the other partner, alternating the role of tutor and tutee (Ayvazo & Aljadef-Abergel, 2014; Cole, 2013; Simmons, Fuchs, Fuchs, Hodge & Mathes, 1994). It is argued that reciprocal peer tutoring facilitates short and frequent reversals of teacher and learner roles, which are otherwise difficult to accomplish between teacher and child (Tavener & Glynn, 1989). Allen & Boraks (1978) describe RPT as an extremely practical instructional tool whereby pairing same-aged peers enables its implementation in a classroom setting. Furthermore, it is posited that the structured switching of roles during Peer Tutoring at optimal junctures is favourable in terms of the novelty offered to participants and in terms of the overarching improvement to levels of self-esteem (Topping, 2005). Tavener and Glynn (1989) argue that a series of studies exploring reciprocal peer tutoring (Pigott, Fantuzzo & Clement, 1986; Palinscar & Brown, 1984; Gilroy & Moore, 1988), underline the importance of reciprocity, role reversal and the sharing of tasks between participant partnerships.

Reciprocal peer tutoring also yields positive outcomes in terms of subject content acquisition and skills (Fuchs et al, 1997; Tavener & Glynn, 1989; Ensergueix & Lafont, 2010). Fuchs et al. (1997) identified the reciprocal interactions between student pairs in conjunction with a systematic reward structure and explicit academic activity as the key components contributing to the positive outcomes of the PALS reading project across a number of elementary schools in America. The findings of a small-scale study (Tavener & Glynn,

1989), which tracked the linguistic gains of Peer Tutoring intervention comparing the linguistic gains of a same-age, two-child partnership and that of a mixed-age child partnership suggest that the selection of tutor and tutee of similar ages may enhance “mutual educational gains” (Tavener & Glynn, 1989, p. 54; Topping, 2005).

## **2.4 Pedagogical Approach 2: Technology-Mediated Language Learning (TMLL)**

This section explores and discusses technology-mediated language learning (TMLL), with a specific focus on the technological platforms utilised in this as mediating tools for language learning. The first section contextualises the field of technology-mediated language learning with specific reference to related terminology, the affordances of technology in relation to language learning, and the relationship between (second) language acquisition (S)LA and technology-mediated language learning with reference to empirical studies about technology-mediated use in (primary) school language learning settings. Sections 2.4.2 and 2.4.3 examine in more detail the two specific Web 2.0 technologies utilised in this study– a blog platform and social media account respectively.

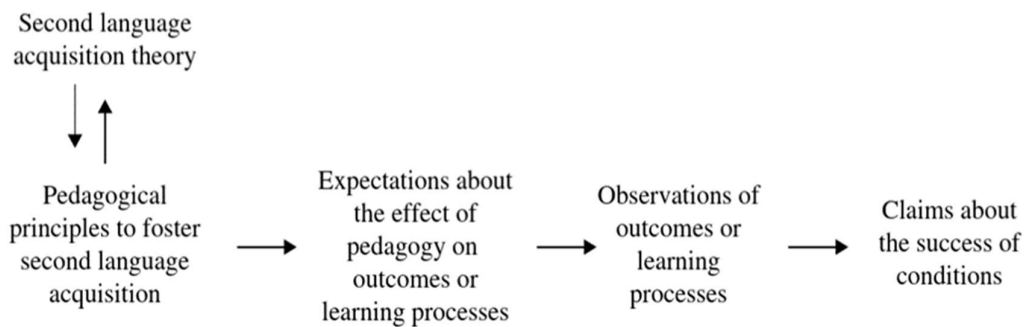
### ***2.4.1 Contextualising technology-mediated language learning***

#### **2.4.1.1 Introduction**

It is evident that Technology-Mediated Language Learning (TMLL), commonly referred to as Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL), or sometimes Technology-Assisted Language Learning (TALL), has clearly evolved over the last four decades (Reinders & Stockwell 2017; Smyth, 2015; Chapelle & Sauro, 2017; Thorne & Hellerman, 2022). This study utilises the term Technology-Mediated Language Learning, reflecting the overarching sociocultural framework of the current study’s approach. Technology is ubiquitous in our lives from our everyday practices to education and professional settings (Wang & Vasquez, 2012, Reinders & Stockwell, 2017). Technology in terms of hardware and software has become more accessible, interconnected, portable, and affordable. The breadth of research relating to the role of technology in language teaching and learning reflects the transformation over time of our increased use of technology in relation to how information is gathered, recorded, and disseminated, and how teaching is approached and how research is conducted (Kessler, 2016). In recent times, Technology-Mediated Language Learning is

characterised by a shift, from predominantly text-based single-mode communication technologies, to more multimodal synchronous communication technologies (such as Zoom), which will only continue to evolve (Thorne & Hellerman, 2022).

In terms of conceptualising the basis on how the use of technology in language learning can be evaluated, Chapelle (2017) proposes five principal arguments that are evident in the literature: comparative argument, corpus argument, authenticity argument, theory-based argument, and pedagogy-based argument. A pedagogy-based CALL intervention may evaluate written competence or an intercultural communicative competence, for example. While a pedagogical lens can inform pedagogy, the rationale-based arguments are not mutually exclusive. Chapelle highlights the merit of a theory-based pedagogical approach to design and evaluation of technology enhanced teaching and learning. The design rationale of a technology enhancing language activity or application may be informed by two or more such arguments. Chapelle (2017) notes the merits of an integrated theory-pedagogy perspective, in relation to the design and evaluation of language learning activities, which benefit the design principles, in addition to the potential, of theory development.



**Figure 2.1. A Theory-Pedagogy Perspective and its Potential Role in Design and Evaluation of Learning Activity (Chapelle, 2017, p. 387)**

In relation to prominent language theories, a social turn is observed in the field of technology-mediated language learning, with the advent of more technologies that facilitate interaction and collaboration. From individualistic language CD-ROMs in the early days of CALL to the world of blogging, online exchange and social media, sociocultural principles are enacted in our online activities across a range of platforms (Bonk, 2016). Furthermore, a discernible shift from effectiveness studies—which might demonstrate

advantages/disadvantages of a specific technology—to a more ecological approach of identifying affordances or constraints of a given technology and/or its application in language learning settings has developed (Reinders & Stockwell, 2017). The adoption of the newest technology based on its perceived affordances alone without consideration of pedagogy is an ongoing cause of concern (Levy et al., 2015; Chappelle, 2017).

#### 2.4.1.2 Terminology

The various technology-related terms referenced in the field of language teaching and learning require clarification in order to contextualise Web 2.0 technologies. Where are Web 2.0 technologies situated in the realm of terms such as Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL), Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) and ICT? Table 2.1 collates a definition of each term.

CALL (computer assisted language learning) is referenced historically as the most frequent acronym to describe technologically-mediated language use and learning (Thorne & Smith, 2011). The umbrella term CALL encapsulates a rich and evolving combination of theoretical perspectives and areas of specialisation. CALL research has expanded to reflect a diversification of the role of CALL (Kessler, 2016). It is noted how “computer-generated and computer-mediated communication now includes a multiplicity of devices and media that extend far beyond the apparatus conventionally referred to as a computer” (Thorne & Payne, 2005, p. 372). The ongoing advances in technology and CALL practice arguably render the term CALL “increasingly anachronistic” (Thorne & Smith, 2011, p. 268), in the context of the advent of Web 2.0 technologies and mobile assisted language learning (MALL) for example.

Web 2.0 Technologies can be considered a subset of the broader domain of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in terms of its function, while also intersecting CALL and its subset MALL, as well as computer-mediated communication (CMC), in terms of its potential application and affordances pertaining to language learning and communication.

The term “Web 2.0” which evolved in the mid-noughties (O’Reilly, 2005), refers to a recognised second generation of Web development and design that facilitates communication and interaction online, novel ways of engaging with Web-based

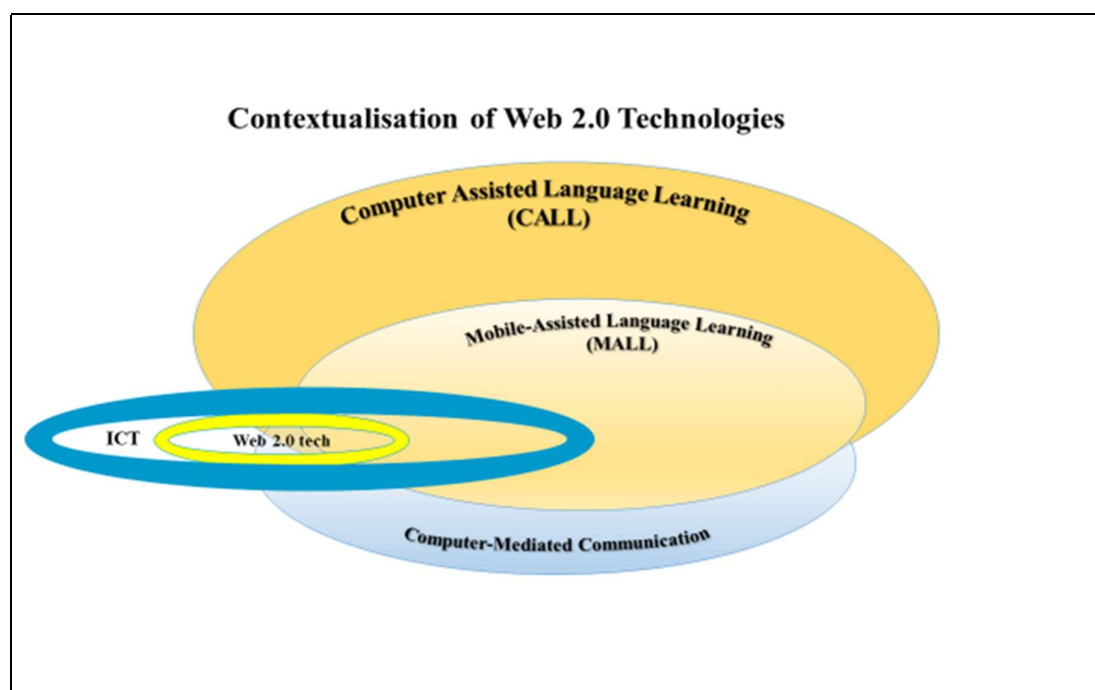
**Table 2.1. Web 2.0 Technology & Related Terms**

	Technological Term	Definition
1.	Web 2.0 technologies	A recognised second generation of Web development and design that facilitates communication and interaction online, novel ways of engaging with Web-based applications, and the use of the Web as a social platform for generating, repositioning and consuming content (A. L. Harris & Rea, 2009)
2.	ICT	A diverse set of technological tools and resources used to communicate, and to create, disseminate, store, and manage information (Department of Education & Skills, 2015)
3.	CMC	Computer-mediated communication (CMC) is an umbrella term that encompasses various forms of human communication through networked computers, which can be synchronous or asynchronous and involve one-to-one, one-to-many, or many-to-many exchanges of text, audio, and/or video messages. (Lee & Oh, 2022)
4.	CALL	Computer-assisted language learning (CALL) refers to “a variety of technology uses for language learning including CD-ROMs containing interactive multimedia and other language exercises, electronic reference materials such as online dictionaries and grammar checkers, and electronic communication in the target language through email, blogs, and wikis”. (Chapelle, 2010, p. 66)
5.	MALL	Mobile assisted language learning (MALL) is the use of smartphones and other mobile technologies in language learning, especially in situations where portability and situated learning offer specific advantages (Kukulska-Hulme, 2012)

applications, and the use of the Web as a social platform for generating, repositioning and consuming content (Harris & Rea, 2009).

Web 2.0. technologies can be categorised as : (1) Wikis, (2) Blogs, (3) Podcasts, (4) Social Media and (5) Virtual Worlds (Harris and Rea, 2009). Two of the five categories—blogs and social media—are the platforms utilised in the current study and will be discussed further in Sections 2.4.2, Blog Platform, and Section 2.4.3, Social Media Platforms & Twitter.

Figure 2.2 below contextualises Web 2.0 Technologies in relation to technology-mediated language use and learning/CALL.



**Figure 2.2. Contextualisation of Web 2.0 Technologies**

#### 2.4.1.3 Web 2.0 Technologies and Language Learning

A number of review studies (Golonka et al., 2014; Parmaxi and Zaphiris, 2017; Wang and Vasquez, 2012; Shandiev and Yang, 2020), in relation to Web 2.0 technologies and language learning, provide overarching findings, as well as pinpoint findings in relation to specific Web 2.0 technologies in language learning settings. Despite the huge growth in the use of technology in language learning settings, Golonka et al. (2014) reported limited outcomes in relation to the efficacy of integrating technology in language learning, however, given that

the majority of the 350 studies reviewed largely focused on the viability of technology to support language learning and focused on the affordances of particular technologies and/or the affective reaction of participants (e.g. motivation, enjoyment). A recommendation to apply principles of SLA to the study of affordances (Golonka et al., 2014) resonates with reported absence of theoretical frameworks in other reviews (Wang and Vasquez, 2012; Parmaxi and Zaphiris, 2012). Shandiev and Wang (2020) identify a lack of theoretical knowledge and practice in relation to newly emerged technologies only. The same review proposes a straightforward classification of technological devices/platforms: *old, still in use* or *new*. Old technologies include e-Portfolios and digital libraries whereas still in use technologies such as social networking, collaborative writing, and virtual reality were identified as offering better or more affordances to learners. Augmented and wearable devices are identified as new technologies which had come on stream after 2014. Online games and videos were the most utilised technologies, while collaborative writing, corpus use, instant messaging, automated feedback, social networking and collaborative writing were also very prominent in terms of use.

In terms of to the adoption and integration of Web 2.0 technologies across the school curriculum, Crook (2012) identifies the following key affordances: (i) New modes of enquiry, (ii) Engaging in collaborative learning (iii) Engaging with new literacies and (iv) Publication of content. Explicit mapping of affordances to technological platforms and devices, drawn from the extensive review by Golonka et al. (2014), provides a comprehensive reference to educators involved in TALL design, implementation, and evaluation.

While mobile learning MALL and Web 2.0 tools have been categorised as disruptive technologies (Nowell, 2014), there is also evidence of school settings harnessing the affordances for literacy development and language learning objectives. The departure from the traditional classroom to digital classrooms is characterised by the establishment of class web pages, educational social media and online discussion group facilitation by agentic educators (Nowell, 2014). Reinhardt & Thorne (2019) contend that the evolution of Web 2.0 learning environments and learning practices has changed our understanding of literacy which has for example come to include post-typographic and multimodal expression.



**Table 2.2. Affordances of CALL: Organisational & Pedagogical (Reinders & Stockwell, 2017)**

<b>Organisational affordances</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved access</li> <li>• Storage and retrieval of learning behaviour records and outcomes</li> <li>• Sharing and recycling of materials</li> <li>• Cost efficiency</li> </ul>
<b>Pedagogical Affordances</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved authenticity of L2 input</li> <li>• Improved interaction between learners, between learners and native speakers, as well as between learners and instructor</li> <li>• Situated learning (e.g., the availability of technology outside the classroom to support language use)</li> <li>• The use of multimedia</li> <li>• New forms of learning and teaching activities</li> <li>• Nonlinearity (e.g., through hyperlinking of texts)</li> <li>• Alternative forms of (giving and receiving) feedback</li> <li>• Monitoring and recording of learning behaviour and progress</li> <li>• Greater control over the learning process</li> <li>• Empowerment of learners and teachers by enabling them to make independent choices about their own learning</li> </ul>

Another salient feature of the “Web 2.0 turn” is the affordance of digital content being producible and shareable in addition to being readable and consumable (Reinhardt & Thorne,

2019; Warschauer & Grimes, 2007). Bower (2008) presents a detailed framework of reference to inform assessments of potential affordances of a digital tool whereas other literature classifies learning-related affordances (Kirschner et al., 2004; Reinders & Stockwell, 2017). Kirschner (2004) differentiates between educational and social affordances, which both converge as pedagogical affordances in a proposed classification of CALL-related affordances (Reinders & Stockwell, 2017).

#### **2.4.2 Blog Platform**

Short for weblog, a blog can be defined as “an online journal or diary” consisting of a “chronological list of entries, or posts” (Sharma & Barrett, 2007, p. 115), which can contain text, images, links to downloadable material or photographs. Sharma and Barrett note how blogs offer teachers many opportunities given that they are not difficult to set up and moderate, and can be an effective medium to communicate with students outside of the classroom (Sharma & Barrett, 2007, p. 120). The affordances of a blog platform include (i) facilitation and support of writing or blogging and provision of feedback in the form of comments on blog posts (Golonka et al., 2014) (ii) facilitation of collaborative e-learning (ibid.), (iii) access to authentic language content and materials (Coppens, Rico & Agudo, 2013).

Tay et al.’s primary school-based study identified (2014) the high usage rate of blogs, coupled with teacher feedback, which detailed a range of blog-based activities that in turn informed the finding that the blog platform acted as a gateway to the uptake of other online software applications. Coppens et al. (2013) explored the use of blogs for learners of the English language, establishing their potential to increase the use of more authentic language learning materials, exploring their wider influence and how the affordances of blogs ultimately increase the opportunities for language teachers to progress students’ learning and to motivate students. Similarly, the use of an L2 blog as part of an Italian language course (Miceli et al., 2010), provided the opportunity of authentic interaction for students of Italian at third level. A comparative study exploring face-to-face classroom and electronic discussions suggests that electronic discussions may “may create opportunities for more equal participation in the classroom” (Warschauer, 2013, p. 22). The results proposed that electronic written discussions provide a “good environment for fostering use of more formal and complex language, both lexically and syntactically”, while at the same time noting less

interactional features of language exchange compared to face-to-face discussions. Warschauer (2013) suggests that both approaches are beneficial to language learners, and that electronic discussions could act a prelude to face-to-face discussions in class. A number of studies also highlight the instrumental role of teachers in navigating and overseeing the implementation of technological platform (including blogs and social media) for class learning use (Callaghan, 2021; Lye, Abas, Tay & Saban, 2012; Tay et al., 2014; Ward, Mozgovoy & Purgina, 2019). We are also reminded that the affordances of asynchronous CMC afford the learner more time for processing language input, considered target language output and space for self-correction (Golonka et al., 2014) arguably in contrast with face-to-face or synchronous online discussions (Warschauer, 2013).

### ***2.4.3 Social Media Platforms & Twitter***

Social media can be defined as “technologies, platforms and services that enable individuals to engage in communication from one-to-one, one-to-many, and many-to-many” (Britannica, 2014). Callaghan & Bower (2012), note that social networking sites (SNSs) have evolved to become a complex place which require users to draw on a number of technological and social skills in order to interact effectively with others. The potential of social media to facilitate learning in an educational context is well recognised (Callaghan, 2021; Callaghan & Bower, 2012; Van Den Beemt, Thurlings & Willems, 2020). In tandem with the proliferation of collaborative technology is the acknowledgement that technology-mediated learning has become more social – which is evidenced in the use of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, where our socially interactive processes are regularly enacted (Bonk, 2016) in both synchronous and asynchronous exchanges underpinned by sociocultural fundamentals such as the staged learning on an interpersonal level which is later internalised on an intrapersonal level.

Critical analyses and review studies in the area of social media platforms and their use in education (Gao et al., 2012; Stewart, 2015; Van Den Beemt et al., 2020), social media and language learning (Istifci & Doğan Ucar, 2021) and specifically Twitter and language learning (Hattem & Lomicka, 2106; Barrot, 2021) provide an insight into the affordances and constraints of the technology and language learning. Table 2.3 demonstrates the low proportion of primary school-based empirical studies included in recent reviews. Three of the systemic reviews referenced explore social media in general across a range of platforms

(Stewart, 2015; Van Den Beemt et al., 2020; Istifci & Doğan Ucar, 2021), with three reviews specific to microblogging (Gao et al., 2012; Hattem & Lomicka, Barrot, 2021). Stewart (2015) provides a critical review of social media affordances across a large but undefined number of studies, concluding that the affordances offered by social media are broad, flexible, and fluid and thus require consideration in relation to the particular learning context.

The study evidences a need for further research in relation to communication and literacy practices, and the promotion of multiliteracies (Moje, 2009). Van Den Beemt et al. (2020)

**Table 2.3. Review of Use of Social Media in Education in Primary School Settings**

<b>Critical Analyses/Reviews of Social Media/ Twitter literature</b>	<b>Focus and years involved</b>	<b>Primary school settings</b>
Gao et al, 2012	Microblogging in education; 2008-11	1/21
Stewart, 2015	Critical review of the lit of social media affordances in the classroom (Years not specified)	Not specified- high school, university and online classroom focus
Hattem & Lomicka, 2016	Twitter & Language learning (2009-2016)	0/17 (2 EFL settings, 1 pre-uni)
Van Den Beemt et al., 2020	Literature review of social media use in the classroom (2005-2016)	2/271
Barrot, 2021	Twitter for language learning (2008-2019)	8/396 (2%)
Istifci & Dogan Ucar, 2021	Use of Social media for lang learning (2016-2020) (*2/23 studies related to Twitter)	0/23

examined 271 studies ranging from 2005-2016 in their critical review concluding that primarily teachers utilise social media primarily to motivate students and to improve teaching (intended actions). The most utilised platforms were Facebook, Twitter and blogs in that order. While evidence of learning outcomes were largely undefined, collaborative

learning and active engagement characterised pedagogical strategies identified by teachers across studies. Contrary to Stewart (2015), the use of social media in writing and language courses was evaluated more convincing, leading to more favourable student results and levels of motivation (Van Dem Beemt et al., 2020), consistent with positive findings in relation to application to language learning in Istifci & Doğan Ucar's critical review of 23 studies (2016-2020). Istifci & Doğan Ucar (2021) also identify the dominance of HE and EFL settings in their review, which is also reflected across other review studies.

In relation to the microblogging-specific review studies, Gao et al. (2012) reflect that the integration of Twitter as a communication tool could invite participation from students who are ordinarily reticent to participate in class; a somewhat similar rationale to that of Warschauer (2013) identifying electronic writing as an alternative to face-to-face discussion. Relatedly, the capacity of SNSs to connect users and develop multi-literacies and cognitive skills is also noted (Healy, 2007). Hattem & Lomicka (2016) evaluated Twitter as a strong language tool, affording students the capacity to interact digitally with fellow students, teacher, and native speakers alike. The affordance of community building was also noted. Learner unfamiliarity with the platform was cited as a constraint that could inhibit participation, if adequate training was not provided (Hattem & Lomicka, 2016; Stewart, 2015). Social networking sites (SNSs) have evolved to become a complex place which require users to draw on a number of technological and social skills in order to interact effectively with others (Callaghan & Bower, 2012). In identifying the “overwhelming evidence” on the positive impact of social media for technology-mediated language learning and the increasing interest of language teachers and scholars, Barrot (2021) strongly advocates for an institution-led systemic training for both educators and students to ensure that Twitter's potential as a LL tool can be realised. In addition to the critical reviews cited, a secondary school-based study (Fewell, 2014) identified how the affordances of microblogging (specifically Twitter), such as character limit, rendered reading and writing tasks in the target language more feasible and realisable, advocating the adoption of such platforms as a practicable resource to broaden communication opportunities in the target language for learners.

## **2.5 Partners in Language Learning: Children & Parents**

This section explores the language partners within the school context who are represented by the learning triangle of the teacher(-researcher), child and parent. This exploration is guided by the rationale to locate the complex area of Irish language teaching and learning within the world of the participant Irish language learners, in order to clearly contextualise learner experience in the EME setting where the Irish language can present as a standalone and curricularised (Valdés 2017) language entity. Firstly, the child's role as a participant in the education process is explored through the construct of student voice. Parents' involvement in their child's schooling, education and school life is then explored.

### **2.5.1 Student Voice**

#### **2.5.1.1 Introduction**

Cook-Sather refers to student voice as the “missing voice” in educational research (Cook-Sather, 2002, p. 5). Similarly, McCallum et al. (2000) highlight that few studies actually collect the views of students with regard to learning. Conversely, Bucknall (2012) notes the increasing occurrence of children in the role of research participants or as co-researchers in the field of education. Bucknall maintains that the movement to involve students as active researchers “helps to address these inevitable power inequalities, creating a new role for children in social research and giving them a voice” (2012, p. 3). It is argued that when adult-child relationships are structured in terms of voice, belonging, and participation, children will be empowered, with the capacity to exercise their voice in a meaningful way on issues that concern them. Student voice can be defined as “a means to institutional development, growth and evolution, involving learners in key democratic decision-making” (Kidd & Czerniawski, 2011, xxxvii).

#### **2.5.1.2 International, National and School Policy**

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) outlines (i) children's involvement in policy and decision-making and (ii) children's right to participate, as two of its four guiding principles. More specifically, children's rights to participate are detailed in Article 12 and 13 which highlight the right of children to voice their opinions on

activities and decisions which shape their lives, and the right of children to receive and share information in different ways. The convention was ratified by the Irish state in 1992.

In terms of subsequent national policy, the *National Children's Strategy* (2000) maintained that “children will have a voice in matters which affect them and their views will be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity” (Government of Ireland, 2000, p. 11), as one of its three primary goals. *Young Voices* (2005) a joint publication by the National Children's Office, the Children's Rights Alliance and the National Youth Council of Ireland sought to guide agencies and organisations in both the statutory and non-statutory sectors in Ireland to encourage the development of a culture of participation by children and young people in policy-making and planning.

Lundy (2007) highlights the legal and moral imperative to engage meaningfully with the voice of the child. She presents four fundamental and chronological elements in order to ensure the conceptualisation of Article 12 of the UNCRC and effective implementation of this right in schools: this children rights-based model integrates the four fundamental elements of space, voice, audience and influence (Lundy, 2007) with Lundy's visual conceptualisation of Article 12 (2007).

The Lundy model (Lundy, 2007; Welty & Lundy, 2013) is recognised and validated in the *Learner Voice Research Study* (Flynn, 2018) commissioned by the NCCA, and is a fundamental reference point in Irish national policy documents (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2015) and initiatives (Department of Children & Youth Affairs, 2019). The Learner Voice Research Study (Flynn, 2018) expanded the dialogical to include a space to check adult interpretation of children's or young people's perspectives in order to ensure feedback has been interpreted accurately without the ‘adulteration’ (Flynn, 2013) of child participant views. Delivering on national policy frameworks (Department of Child and Youth Affairs, 2014, 2015) and as a further example of a child-rights approach to student voice, *Our Voices Our Schools* online resource ([www.ourvoicesourschools.ie](http://www.ourvoicesourschools.ie)) (Department of Child and Youth Affairs, 2019) was launched in December 2019. The website provides an online toolkit and repository of resources and reference documents for schools, to support the activation and facilitation of student voice structures and practice in Irish schools. More recently explicit reference to student voice and the Lundy model (2007) has been referenced in the updated *Looking at our School 2022* document for primary schools (Inspectorate,

2022a, p. 6) as a key addition which underpins a whole-school approach to pupil participation.

### 2.5.1.3 Benefits and Caveats

Student voice is most successful when it enables students to feel that they are members of a learning community, that they matter, and that they have something valuable to offer (Rudduck, 2007). There are a number of potential positive outcomes of student voice methodology reported in the literature. Firstly, there is a correlation reported between being heard and a sense of feeling valued on the part of students (Flynn, 2013, 2018) who engage with student voice processes. Students can feel a stronger sense of belonging and a strong sense of self-worth and being respected (Rudduck, Demetriou & Pedder, 2003). Secondly, students can develop skills such as the ability to be an independent learner, as well as the awareness of self-agency and collective agency (Fielding, 2004). Thirdly, the sense of feeling valued can in turn influence attainment. Duffield et al. (2000) maintain that “fostering dialogue at the classroom level, enabling the pupil’s voice to be heard and valued, has the potential not only to improve relationships but to enhance the learning and achievement which policy makers seek” (Duffield, Allan, Turner & Morris, 2000, p. 272). A student voice methodology can also facilitate improved educational outcomes for marginalised students (Bland and Atweh, 2007).

Furthermore, the encouragement of a democratic environment at school can have a positive impact on student-teacher relationships (Flynn, 2018; Roberts & Nash, 2009). A case study of a Spanish primary school where student voice was central to initiating changes in practice highlights the potential of meaningful pupil participation to change traditional relationships between teachers and pupils towards “intergenerational learning” (Susinos & Haya, 2014, p. 397). Vertical and hierarchical teaching structures present as challenges, and new spaces for dialogue between students and teachers are created (Susinos & Haya, 2014). Siry & Zawatski (2011) acknowledge that while a degree of authority is arguably implicit in the classroom, a ‘working with’ methodological stance is proposed whereby teachers and learners can break down hierarchical relationships and work collaboratively. The potential of engaging students as “co-directors of the curriculum” (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 91) is possible. Ttueba highlights the necessity for teachers and students to work together to have respective input into learning: “teachers and children must jointly create new learning environments that suit their



needs and match their cultural and linguistic skills and capital” (Ttueba, 1999, p. 612). It is noted that negotiation of the curriculum where teachers deliberately invite students to contribute to, and modify, the programme of learning, students can really invest themselves in the learning journey and in the outcomes (Schwarzer, Bloom & Shono, 2006). Fielding (2004) presents an insightful scenario where students take on the role of co-researchers. While it is acknowledged that the experience and expertise of the teacher is paramount, Fielding maintains that a class-based enquiry cannot succeed “without the engagement of students as fellow researchers, enquirers and makers of meaning” (Fielding, 2004, p. 307) which gradually enables students to become “agents of their own transformation” (ibid.; Fielding, 2004, p. 307).

With specific reference to the language learning context, Ellis (1992) maintains that teachers need to create a classroom environment where learners are valued and nurtured as individuals; “a learner is more likely to be active if they feel they have some say in what happens in the classroom and if, day by day their personal learning style is respected in communication with the teacher” (Ellis, 1992, p. 212).

The caveat against tokenistic child participation is echoed by many advocates (Fielding, 2004; Lundy, 2007; Rudduck & McIntyre, 2007), in order to avoid “cynical attempts to capture learner voice for ‘performativity’ purposes” (Kidd & Czerniawski, 2011, xxxvii). Educators are challenged to ensure meaningful engagement with student voice: “As educators, we must also be prepared to hear things that we don’t like. One thing is for certain, we are all enriched through the process of authentically listening—providing we not only listen, but also hear and act” (Kidd & Czerniawski, 2011, ibid.). Similarly, Paugh and Robinson (2011) identify a need for teachers to question their own actions in relation to their participation with students—a vigilant critique is recommended as one reflects on one’s own teaching in the light of student feedback. Paugh and Robinson recommend teachers to be mindful of the tendency “to unconsciously erase difference, even when it is tempting to attend only to those who participate in our agenda” (Paugh & Robinson, 2011, p. 376).

## **2.5.2 Parental Involvement, Engagement & Partnership**

### 2.5.2.1 Context in Ireland

Just over 40 years ago, the potential role of parents within the Irish education system in terms of management, setting up schools and affecting policy had been “little exercised” (Coolahan, 1981, p. 156). More recently, the role of parents in their children’s education in Ireland has experienced significant change transforming from a limited role to a partnership with schools which is now “firmly rooted in the educational landscape” (Mac Giolla Phádraig, 2010, p. 88). Building on the Constitution’s acknowledgement of a parent as a child’s primary educator (Constitution of Ireland, 1937, Article 42.1), the Education Act of 1998 bridges the gap between home and school education by recognising parents as partners; in its preamble the Education Act seeks to ensure that the provision of education “is conducted in a spirit of partnership between schools, patrons, students, parents, and other school staff” (Education Act 1998 preamble). Furthermore, it is enshrined in the Education Act that schools shall ‘encourage the involvement of parents of students in the school in the education of those students and in the achievement of the objectives of the school’ (Education Act 1998 section 23(2)(e)). The recent Education (Student and Parent Charter) Bill, (Government of Ireland, 2019) will further impact on how schools communicate with both students and parents. While yet to be enacted, it reflects continued support at legislative and policy level of consultation between schools and parents, by recognising the joint roles of parents, schools and children as education stakeholders.

Parental involvement and/or engagement in Ireland has, in some instances, been presented by a two-category typology: (i) involvement in established school architectures such as parent representative bodies and school management and (ii) involvement of marginalised parents (Hanafin & Lynch, 2002; (i) little parental involvement (ii) high uptake of parental involvement in schools (Mac Giolla Phádraig, 2010); (i) formal parental involvement, (ii) informal home-based parental involvement (Eivers & Gilleece, 2018).

Levels of informal home-based parental involvement with children’s schooling in Ireland are inclined to be higher than other countries (Eivers & Gilleece, 2018; Eivers & Creaven, 2013; Byrne & Smyth, 2010; Bleach, 2010) while evidence of more formalised parental involvement (Eivers & Gilleece, 2018, Hanafin & Lynch, 2002) tends to be lower in

comparison with other countries (Cosgrove & Gilleece, 2012). The next section explores the terms parental involvement, engagement, and partnership.

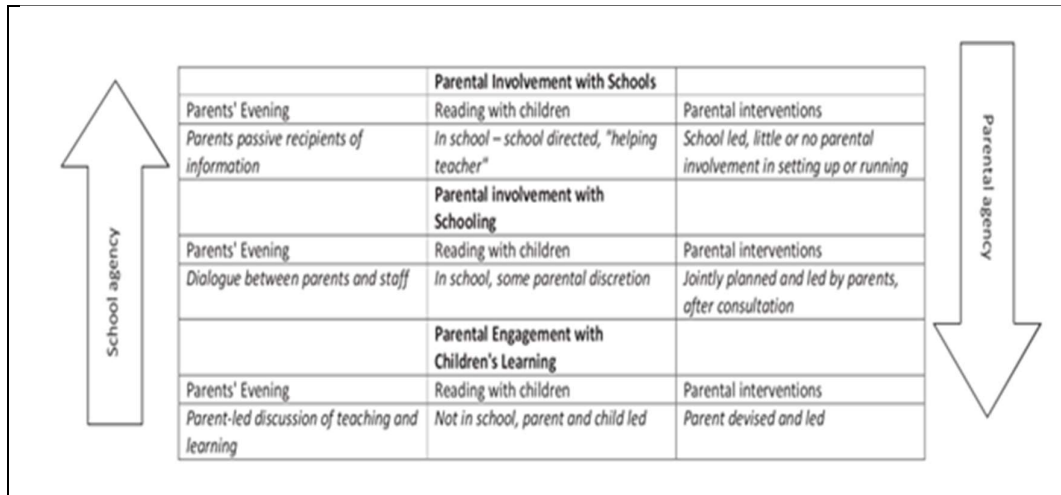
#### 2.5.2.2 Parental Involvement and Engagement

The term parental involvement is broad in its reach encompassing the various typologies discussed in the previous section (Hanafin & Lynch, 2002; Mac Giolla Phádraig, 2010; Eivers & Gilleece, 2018), ranging from involvement in parent bodies and school boards, to home-based involvement with children's learning. The extent of its remit has brought consensus on the variability of its meaning (O'Toole, Kiely, McGillacuddy, O'Brien & O'Keeffe, 2019). Parental involvement can encompass a number of parental activities including participation in various school events and programmes, communication and dialogue with their children about school, communication and interaction with teachers and school staff about their child, education-related rules and routines at home, and aspirations for their child's academic progress (Harris & Goodall, 2008). Parental involvement can be categorised as either school-based parental involvement such as attending parent-teacher meetings or home-based parental involvement such as supporting children with reading (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018). It is argued that parental engagement by comparison, engenders a greater ownership and commitment than simple involvement with an activity/activities (Goodall & Montgomery, 2013) and suggests a greater ownership of action, which thus has implications for both parent and school agency and control therein (O'Toole et al., 2019).

Goodall & Montgomery (2013) propose a continuum from parental involvement to engagement which is illustrated in Figure 2.3 below. (i) School-led Parental involvement where parents are passive recipients, (ii) collaboration between schools and parents where both parties have input and (iii) full parental agency are presented. The progression along the continuum to greater parental agency represents a departure from "a narrow conception of parents-supporting-schools, to the much broader concept of parental engagement in children's learning" (Goodall & Montgomery, 2013, p. 9).

Progression along this continuum would entail open collaboration between schools and parents, and provision of training opportunities for parents to engage in their child's learning. The provision of training that would enable parents to monitor their child's progress, such

as questioning skills, student motivation and effective communication could facilitate this (Barge & Loges, 2003).



**Figure 2.3. Parental Involvement to Engagement Continuum (Goodall & Montgomery, 2013, p. 5)**

### 2.5.2.3 Benefits of, Barriers to, and Best Practice in Parental Engagement

While acknowledging the challenges in securing parental involvement (Harris et al., 2009), the benefits of parental involvement in relation to children's academic progress in school have been widely reported (Park & Holloway, 2017; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Harris et al., 2009; Cox, 2005; Chavkin, 1989). Other benefits include increased attendance (Sheldon 2007; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Sheldon and Jung, 2015) and more positive attitudes towards school amongst students (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011), improved teacher-parent relationships (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011) increased parents' self-esteem and satisfaction (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Wanat, 2012; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995), and parents' increased interest in their own education (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011) and improvement in school performance (Harris & Chrispeels, 2006).

The importance of identifying barriers which discourage parental engagement with children's learning and in turn influence low parental involvement cannot be understated (O'Toole et al., 2019; Crozier & Davies, 2006). Barriers to parental involvement can include parent and family factors, teacher-parent factors, societal factors and practical factors (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018). At school level, a one-size-fits-all approach whereby assumptions that all students and parents have the same needs are pervasive and can result

in the non-identification of barriers to parental involvement (La Rocque, 2011). It is important for school leaders and teachers to be cognisant of the varying needs of students and parents within the school community (La Rocque et al., 2011; Harris & Goodall, 2008; Blair & Haneda, 2021). The necessity of differential strategies which are actively reinforced to secure the engagement of a diverse range of parents is recommended (Harris & Goodall, 2008) to ensure that the participation of “less resourceful groups of parents” (Bæck, 2010, p. 560) is encouraged and facilitated (Harris & Goodall, 2008; Bæck, 2010; Crozier, 1997; Borg & Mayo, 2001; Hanafin & Lynch, 2002)

At teacher level, teachers’ desired parental role can present as being at odds with parents who seek a more active role in their children’ school life and learning (Bæck, 2006). It is recommended that teachers should endeavour to ensure parental involvement is accessible and (ibid.) and ultimately they should conceptualise parental involvement as a *process* as opposed to a *one-off event* (LaRocque et al., 2011). Furthermore, culturally responsive and inclusive home-learning initiatives that cater for all parents are identified as a key progression (Freeman, 2009; Blair & Haneda, 2021) to unlocking existing power relationships and ensuring authentic learning engagement through co-constructed involvement (Freeman, 2009) as opposed to reproducing a narrow range of learning practices (Cairney, 2002). Freeman (2009) highlights the need for teachers and educators to build social and cultural capital with parents in order to foster meaningful engagement by creating time and space for discussion and deliberation around real issues that matter to parents. In his study, it is noted that working-class parents’ conception of school involvement is Freirean in essence, consisting of “collaborative problem-posing where people, in this case teachers and parents, come together as learners” (Freeman, 2009). Thus, a facilitation of real conversations concerning real issues would encourage “a co-constructed involvement” (ibid) which is inclusive in nature of all parents.

### ***2.5.3 Communities of Practice and Learning***

Broadly speaking, a community of practice (CoP) can be defined as “groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015, p. 1). A community of practice approach to the learning process requires a change from the traditional notion of learning as the acquisition of knowledge in a discrete capacity to the concept of learning

through participation within social contexts (Haneda, 1997). The community of practice therefore emphasises the “shared membership in the community, (Haneda, 1997, p. 14) as opposed to the profile of the individual learner. In the context of learner engagement with an endangered language, communities of practice and communities of learning are considered a specific type of community (Flores Farfán & Olko, 2021). A principal objective of communities of practice and learning in endangered language contexts is to design and implement specific activities that can constructively impact on current practice and language context (Flores Farfán & Olko, 2021). Encouragement of shared co-construction of a standard for language learning within a community of practice is recommended in order to promote diversity and in order to empower all learners to readily participate in, and contribute to, the development of a community of practice (Hélot & Ó Laoire, 2011)

#### ***2.5.4 Language Learner Autonomy***

Given the layered language context of Irish as a discrete subject in English-medium schools, student engagement and attitudes, parental attitudes and engagement, the necessity to develop functional contexts of use for language learners within an endangered language context, language learner autonomy is essential.

Language learner autonomy is typified by a teaching and/or learning dynamic in which learners exercise agency by planning, enacting, monitoring and evaluating their own language learning using the target language in so far as is possible from the outset (Little, 2022). This agentic practice develops both a reflective and communicative learner proficiency which in turn facilitates the development of learners’ plurilingual repertoire and identity (ibid.). While LLA was originally associated with adult learning and models of self-access learning it has developed over time from learners working in isolation to the practice of what learners can do for themselves (Little, 2007). The key role of the teacher in fostering language learning autonomy amongst students is evident in the literature (Little, 2022; 2007; 2004). Little (2004) identifies teacher autonomy as a prerequisite for learner autonomy. Professional knowledge and skills such as an understanding of the dialogic approach that explores language and enhances the learning process, an ability to directly model language learning and communicative behaviours for learners and the ability to plan beyond a language lesson to a broader language learning journey are identified as key professional knowledge and skills required for teachers who wish to foster LLA amongst their students

(Little, 2004). Notably, encouraging learners to make choices about their language and engage (Little et al., 2017).

In conjunction with communicative approaches to language teaching and learning, the importance of affording explicit time to language awareness and specific focus on linguistic form in order to improve learner outcomes in (second) language learning is broadly recognised (Little, 2022; Norris & Ortega, 2000; Goo et al., 2015) and its important specifically in the Irish language context is also proposed (Ó Laoire, 2005; Ní Dhiorbháin & Ó Duibhir, 2022). It is argued that having access to a multilingual repertoire can engender a heightened awareness of language and can support the development of metalinguistic capabilities which are exercised when engaged in language learning (De Angelis, 2011)

The importance of being a language *analyst* is identified as one of three central skills (language *user*, *analyst* and *teacher*) in order to teach language effectively (Wright and Bolitho, 1993). Teachers' explicit knowledge of the fundamental structures and elements of the target language enables the role of language analyst (Thornbury, 1977; Ní Dhiorbháin & Ó Duibhir, 2022).

## **2.6 Conclusion**

This chapter situated the theoretical framework of socio-cultural theory in the field of language acquisition and provided a rationale for the choice of a socio-cultural theory informed theoretical framework for the study. The principal constructs of SCT were then presented. Language acquisition as a mediated process was explored further with specific reference to the constructs of mediation, the more knowledgeable other, and the zone of proximal development. Supporting language teaching and learning approaches were also explored briefly. The two specific SCT-informed pedagogic approaches of tutoring and technology-mediated language learning were then presented in detail. Tutoring focussed on peer tutoring in primary education with reference to reciprocal peer tutoring. Technology-mediated language learning (TMLL) explored the platforms of a class blog and a class Twitter (microblogging) account. In the final section, the learner context is explored through a discussion of student voice and parental involvement and engagement, with subsequent reference to relevant language learner language practice in endangered language contexts.

## **Chapter 3:**

### **Literature Review II:**

#### **The Context of Learners of Irish as an Additional Language (IAL) in English-medium primary schools**

Chapter Two introduced the theoretical framework of sociocultural theory, explored language acquisition as mediated process, explored the SCT-informed pedagogical approaches of tutoring and technology-mediated language learning, introduced the school partners in language learning by exploring the practices student voice and parental involvement and engagement, and associated language learning practices (community of practice, and language learn autonomy).

This chapter, the second of two literature chapters, will focus on the context of learners of Irish as an additional language (IAL) in English-medium primary schools. This is achieved by initially exploring the broader national context of Irish speakers and learners in the first section. Then, more specifically, the school context of learners of Irish is introduced.

#### **3.1 National Context of Irish Speakers and Learners**

The national context of Irish speakers and learners is presented in four sections. Firstly, an overview of Irish speaker and learner statistics in the Republic of Ireland is outlined, which also discusses Ireland's changing demographic. The Irish language is then explored, with reference to its endangered language status and heritage associations. The way in which Irish language speakers and learners are classified or self-identify is subsequently interrogated. Finally, the exploration of national context concludes with a discussion in relation to general attitudes towards the language.

##### ***3.1.1 Irish Speaker & Learner Statistics***

According to the most recently published national census results of 2016 (Central Statistics Office, 2017), 39.8% of the population of the Republic of Ireland (1.76 million people) are



'able to speak Irish' (ibid.). This vague self-assessed ability metric encompasses all speakers on the bilingual continuum from native speaker to beginner in terms of proficiency, and from daily to occasional or indeed inactive speakers of the language. Daily speakers of the Irish language outside of the education system equal 1.7% (73,803 people) of the population (ibid), which indicates an overall ongoing decline of daily speakers. Irish speakers in both Gaeltacht areas and largely urban networks account for the number of daily speakers outside of the education system. The population of *Gaeltacht* areas is reported to be 96,090 (Central Statistics Office, 2017), of whom 63,664 reported to be able to speak Irish. 20,568 of the Gaeltacht population reported that they spoke Irish daily. Thus, there is now a larger number of daily Irish speakers dispersed around the country in Irish-speaking networks *outside* of the Gaeltacht, compared to that of the Gaeltacht itself.

Significantly, 11.7% of the population (558,608) report speaking Irish daily *within* the education system, which clearly represents the largest domain of Irish language use and demonstrates the continued centrality of the education system with regard to Irish language maintenance and revitalisation (Walsh; 2022; Ó Laoire, 2007, 2005; Ó Murchadha, 2021; Harris, 2008a). Almost 92% of the school-going population engage with the Irish language in English-medium schools, where Irish is a compulsory school subject both in primary and secondary school. Almost 7% of students attend Irish-medium schools known as *Gaelscoileanna* or immersion schools, which are mainly attended by children learning Irish as a second language (Nic Fhlannchadha & Hickey, 2019). The remainder of pupils attend *Gaeltacht* schools which cater for both native speakers of Irish and learners of Irish living in the Gaeltacht area and which arguably lends itself to greater diversity of Irish language competencies than in *Gaelscoileanna* (Nic Fhlannchadha & Hickey, 2019). Thus within the school-going population, approximately 8% of children are experiencing Irish language as the medium of instruction daily while the overwhelming majority of students (92%) encounter Irish daily as a standalone subject.

The majority of the population have learned Irish as a second language over 13-14 years of schooling which can be quantified as 2,300 hours (Ó Laoire, 2005) of in-school tuition by school-leaving age. Despite this experience, approximately 60% of the population profess to not be able to speak Irish as adults. The Census question is limited in terms of scoping Irish speakers' or learners' specific competency areas (Barry, 2021; Walsh, 2022). Nevertheless,

the broad conclusion that the EME Irish language experience has not engendered an enduring engagement amongst learners beyond the school years is evident.

The linguistic make-up of Irish residents has changed significantly since the 1990s. The 2016 census (Central Statistics Office, CSO, 2017) highlights that 535,475 people composed of over 200 nationalities were born outside of Ireland which represents 11.6% of the total population, a figure which is also reflective of an increase in individuals with dual Irish nationality who are registered as Irish nationality in the census. Polish nationals represented the largest non-Irish nationality, followed by UK, Lithuanian, Romanian, Latvian, and Brazilian nationals in that order. The 2016 census also reveals that 612,018 Irish residents spoke a foreign language in the home. The languages most often spoken in Irish homes were Polish, followed by French, Romanian, and Lithuanian. It is interesting to note that 30% of the people who spoke a foreign language at home were Irish-born.

In the context of migration to Ireland, which witnessed steady increases and consolidation over the last three decades, the cultural and ethnic diversity in schools in Ireland has become more prevalent and visible (Devitt et al., 2018; Nowlan, 2008). Children with an L1 other than English or Irish are considered learners of English as an Additional Language (EAL) and dedicated studies highlight the ongoing debate in relation to adequate learning provisions and recognition in the Irish education system (Nowlan, 2008) which, by extension, includes children's Irish learning experiences. Cronin argues that "the existence of multilingualism as a default value for many immigrants arriving in Ireland recontextualises Irish for even the very youngest members of the school age community" (Cronin, 2005, p. 49), an argument which is also applicable to Irish-born multilinguals. The adoption of a model of multilingualism (Herdina & Jessner, 2001) for language curriculum planning and further research to ensure meaningful learning of three languages in Irish schools, including the Irish language, is recommended (Ó Laoire, 2005).

The Children's School Lives (CSL) longitudinal study (Devine et al., 2020) provides further insight into how Ireland's demographics and language practices play out in the primary school context. From a cohort of 129 primary schools with participating second classes, forty-three mother tongues were reported as home languages. English was spoken by 83.5% of families at home which was slightly higher than the estimates of teachers and principals. The second most spoken language at home was Polish (4.3%), over double that of Irish

(1.8%). Lithuanian (1.3%), Romanian (1%), Arabic (1%), and Portuguese (0.5%) constitute the other most frequently spoken languages at home. The increase in linguistic and cultural diversity is both a challenging issue and potential opportunity for the Irish language in Ireland (Devitt et al., 2018). Other endangered language contexts also identify the challenges and opportunities that have arisen in relation to the learning of minority languages in increasingly multilingual societies, for example in Wales (Welsh Government, 2017; Augustyniak & Higham, 2019), Scotland (Nance & Moran, 2022; Phipps, 2018), the Basque region (Etxebarrieta, Pérez-Izaguirre and Langarika-Rocafort, 2020; Augustyniak & Higham, 2019), and Catalonia (Erdocia, 2020).

### ***3.1.2 Irish as an Endangered and a Heritage Language***

It is observed that all endangered languages and their communities of speakers and learners are in an ongoing state of flux whose trajectories are situated in complex and typically heterogenous language ecologies (Flores Farfán & Olko, 2021). The diversity of existing endangered language contexts worldwide, linguistic variance and variants (Rodríguez-Ordóñez, Kasstan & O'Rourke, 2022), speaker proficiencies, attitudes, motivation, and community and individual objectives therein cannot be understated (Flores Farfán & Olko, 2021).

Irish is considered an endangered language (UNESCO, 2019; Romaine, 2008). Degrees of language endangerment status can be attributed to a language on a number of bases; Fishman maintains that intergenerational transmission is the most salient yardstick on which to evaluate the vitality of a language. On that premise, the Irish language is designated as definitely endangered (UNESCO, 2019). The weakening trends in relation to intergenerational transmission and trends in relation to peer and community usage of Irish, similar to other Celtic languages, means that the Irish language relies heavily on education as the principal mode of transmission, in addition to the connection between the home and other domains (Ó Murchadha & Migge, 2017).

In the past, sociolinguistic studies pertaining to minority language contexts primarily concentrated on native speakers and therefore relatedly language revitalisation efforts which concentrated on re-establishing or reinforcing intergenerational language transmission (Šatava, 2019). While intergenerational transmission continues to be an area of concern for

the maintenance and revitalisation of the Irish language, it is noted that, more broadly, language maintenance and revitalisation requires review and reformulation in light of the aforementioned changing demographic of Ireland, and more broadly, theoretical shifts in sociolinguistics and applied linguistics (Valdés, 2017) whereby alternative modes of transmission are interrogated and developed.

In terms of other indicators of language vitality, it is evident that the Irish language has gained ground in recent decades, in terms of official status and documentation. In the European context, the Irish language became an official working language of the EU in 2007. Following the conclusion of a 15-year derogation period, which witnessed an increase in the availability of Irish language resources and EU documentation in Irish, on the 1st of January 2022 the Irish language gained full parity with the other 23 languages of the EU (European Commission, 2021; Government of Ireland, 2021; Ó Caollaí, 2022). The language has made significant advances in terms of official and legislative status albeit somewhat paradoxical that this is more pronounced at European rather than national level (Walsh, 2022). Its (i) decreasing daily use as a spoken language outside of the school domain and, by extension, its decrease in intergenerational transmission and (ii) the state's dependence on the education sector as a central crutch to support Irish language learning and transmission remain nonetheless prominent trends of concern.

While it is clear how heavily support of the Irish language context relies on the education system, it is of note that this is not uncommon in language revitalisation efforts around the world; a study of 30 countries engaging with language revitalisation highlighted that dependence on schools as primary resource was apparent in the vast majority of cases (Pérez Báez, Vogel & Okura Koller, 2018). Nor is it considered unusual for such language programmes to have limited success in terms of revitalising a language (Valdés, 2017).

In addition to being classified as an endangered language, the Irish language can also be considered a heritage language, which generally refers to non-dominant language spoken in a language minority context by communities who are correspondingly referred to as heritage language speakers (Diskin, 2020). Similarly, Valdés observes that heritage language is a term that has been widely used to refer to “non-majority language spoken by groups often known as linguistic minorities” (Valdés 2005, p. 411). However, the term heritage language and speaker can also be problematic; it is argued that the term heritage language is

reminiscent of times past when English was perceived as the most important school language (Garcia, 2005) and therefore potentially diminishes other languages, prior to the currently emerging era of acknowledged multilingualism (Abarca Millan, 2015).

### ***3.1.3 Classifying Irish Language Speakers & Learners***

In endangered language contexts, the profile of communities of speakers and learners can occupy different and overlapping spaces where there are blurred and dynamic boundaries which correspond with a wide-ranging continuum of language proficiency (Flores Farfán & Olko, 2021). Given the different contexts in which people, speak, learn, and use Irish, a number of terms are utilised to describe language speakers and learners to reflect the language contexts and varieties of Irish language therein (Nic Fhlannchadha & Hickey, 2016; Dunne, 2020). The native speaker is a well-recognised term across languages which can be defined as someone who has acquired the language in childhood from his or her parents and has mastered a high level of proficiency in that language coupled with an immersion in the associated culture of the language (Ó hIfearnáin, 1999). It is a reality that young native speakers of Irish in the Gaeltacht are exposed to English and other languages at a much earlier stage than previous generations (Ó Broin, 2013). The complexity of engagement with a heritage household language whereby a gradual break in transmission could occur with a younger generation is reflected in the scenario of how teenagers may present with different levels of proficiency, younger siblings may have receptive skills rather than productive skills and younger again may have neither having aligned with the dominant language (Flores Farfán & Olko, 2021).

In terms of endangered native speaker and heritage language contexts, a plethora of speaker descriptions within the heritage language context have been coined, such as: semi-speakers (Dorian, 1981; Flores Farfán & Olko, 2021) rusty speakers (Flores Farfán & Olko, 2021) , receptive speakers (Farfán & Olko, 2021), passive speakers (Dorian, 1981; Flores Farfán & Olko, 2021; Tsunoda, 2006), terminal speakers , latent speakers (Dorian, 2014; Flores Farfán & Olko, 2021; Tsunoda, 2006), and rememberers (Flores Farfán & Olko, 2021; Tsunoda, 2006). Dorian (1981) is credited with the proposal of the term *semi-speaker* in relation to studies with a Scottish fishing community, whereby so-called semi-speakers with prior knowledge of Scots Gaelic shared their experiences of their attempts to reintegrate with native speakers community. The term, similar to other nuanced labels cited above, has been

criticised in more recent years as depicting a deficit model of speakerhood (Flores Farfán & Olko, 2021 ). The common thread of the application of these cited terms (Dorian, 1981; Flores Farfán & Olko, 2021; Tsunoda, 2006) is a connection with the heritage language in the home or community setting at *some* relative early stage in the speaker’s life.

Children attending *Gaelscoileanna* (Irish-medium schools outside of the designated Gaeltacht) are representative of bilingual, or a small number of cases, multilingual speakers of Irish, also recognised as proficient/ near-fluent or fluent speakers of Irish; final year IME primary students demonstrated very good communicative ability (Ó Duibhir, 2011) and overall high fluency not withstanding less accuracy in comparison to native speaker norms (Ó Duibhir, 2018), with 40% of IME primary students reported as likely to progress to IME at post-primary level (Ní Thuairisg & Ó Duibhir, 2016). However, the challenge for such students and to apply these language competencies outside of the school domain remains challenging (Ó Duibhir and Ní Thuairisg, 2019).

The *new speaker* paradigm is a relatively recent (O’Rourke, Pujolar & Ramallo, 2015) and complex construct (Ó Murchadha & Flynn, 2022; Šavana, 2019) coupled with new understandings and recognition of new speakerhood. New speakers have been defined at the outset as “individuals with little or no home or community exposure to a minority language but who instead acquire it through immersion or bilingual education programs, revitalisation projects, or as adult language learners” (O’Rourke et al., 2015, p. 1). A more succinct explanation identifies new speakers as typically regular and fluent users of a language that is not one’s principal language of socialisation (Walsh, 2019). A less concrete and more ideological perspective drawing on the subjectivity of the actors involved maintains that “at its most basic level, the designation ‘new speaker’ refers to social actors who use and claim ownership of a language that is not, for whatever reason, typically perceived as belonging to them, or to ‘people like them’” (Ó Murchadha et al., 2018, p. 4). This interpretation is drawn upon in a more recent study (Ó Murchadha & Flynn, 2022), with the qualification that the term new speaker is also proposed to encompass “speakers with a wide range of proficiencies, from emerging through to expert users” (Ó Murchadha and Flynn, 2022); an expanded interpretation to reflect the arguably diverse profile of Irish language subject-specialist secondary school teachers in both EME and IME settings whereby ideologies of language variation were explored. Thus, the parameters of construct of new speaker, in its relative infancy, continues to be contested – evidenced by different perspectives in relation

to levels of acquisition and perceived and ascribed notions of ownership. Relatedly, common ground between new speakers and heritage speakers is evident, whereby both groups can coexist within the same language community (Rodriguez-Ordóñez, Kasstan & O'Rourke, 2022). The concept of linguistic *mudes* is associated with new speakers of a language, and refers to a “critical juncture in the life cycle where a speaker changes linguistic practice in favour of the target language” (Walsh & O'Rourke, 2014, p. 68).

It is proposed that the principal difference made between new speakers and language learners relates to context (Ní Loingsigh & Mozzon-McPherson, 2020). Indeed, it is argued that while new speakers are “regular and active fluent users of a given language which is not the language of socialisation in early childhood” (Ní Loingsigh & Mozzon-Pherson, 2020, p.3), language learners may chiefly acquire a language in the educational context without the opportunity to use the language in other social or cultural domains (Walsh, 2019; Ní Loingsigh & Mozzon-Pherson, 2020). However, it can be argued that the term nor other terms fully encapsulate or convey the specific context or language engagement of *learners* of Irish as a second, third or fourth language in EME settings. It is noted that in English-medium schools, it is generally the case that whatever the home language of the child, Irish will not have been used or heard prior to beginning school (NCCA, 2019a), and as a result Irish is learned as a new language (*ibid.*). Communities characterised by a “very reduced use” (Farfán & Olko, 2021, p. 94) which can be described as symbolic or postvernacular use (*ibid.*) resonates with some of the varying levels of contact learners of Irish can have with the language on their journey through primary EME.

Terms have been coined to reflect exposure to an endangered or heritage language for children who learn Irish for the first time on attending school (and for adults who have had that experience) are L2 learners of Irish (Hickey & Stenson, 2016a) or *heritage learners* (Armstrong, 2013) which may require review given the emergence of our plurilingual society, and in relation to contested connotations of the term heritage. Recently, the reference to learners of Irish as a second or additional language (SAL) (Dunne, 2020) reflects the increasingly linguistically diverse classrooms in primary EME. Somewhat similarly, the established use of the term English as an Additional Language (EAL) in the Irish context to describe could also be applied to the Irish language context; the term Irish as an Additional Language (IAL) which would encompass both learners of Irish as second language, as well as learners of Irish as third, fourth or any number of additional language. It reflects that the

majority of children entering English medium primary are learning Irish for the first time where the term *additional* encompasses second, third or any number of additional languages, representing an umbrella, inclusive term to include all new learners of Irish.

Interrogating and negotiating the trajectory of Irish language learners and Irish language speakers and related policy (Ó Laoire, 2012) through the lens of new speakers (O'Rourke et al., 2015), heritage learners (Armstrong, 2013) and new learners (NCCA, 2019a), has the potential to find common ground between what is sometimes a fractured Irish language landscape, a potential collaboration which could at a minimum contribute to language survivance (Valdés, 2017) if not renewed vitality across Irish language communities. The emergence of the new speaker paradigm, previously in existence but not articulated until a decade ago, may inspire further studies and research in the equally complex realm of learners of Irish as an additional language. Undoubtedly, emergence of new speakers will continue to take on increasing significance particularly should language survival become increasingly dependent on this form of language transmission (Šavana, 2019), which, by extension, may raise the profile of the new and reconnecting learners of Irish.

#### ***3.1.4 General Attitudes towards the Irish Language***

This section will examine general attitudes towards the Irish language beginning with the most recent studies in the context of general attitudes since the 1970s. Most recent studies in relation to general attitudes towards the Irish language (Darmody & Daly, 2015; Ó Riagáin, 2007; MacGréil & Rhatigan, 2009; Dublin City Council, 2022) indicate a predominantly positive disposition towards the Irish language and towards Irish language education which, in turn, largely demonstrate a continued attitudinal support of the Irish language in recent decades (Ó Riagáin, 1997; Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994, 1984; CILAR, 1975). Attitudes towards Irish language education (Darmody & Daly; Ó Riagáin, 2007; MacGréil & Rhatigan, 2009) are also discussed. Children's attitudes towards the language (McCoy et al., 2012; Devitt et al., 2018) will be explored in Section 2.3.4 *Attitudes and Motivation towards the Teaching and Learning of Irish*.

Recent statistics indicate that 67% of Irish adults in the Republic of Ireland are positively disposed towards the Irish language (Darmody & Daly, 2015) drawing on an Irish language survey carried out in 2013 by Amárach Research (n=1215). It is noted that more positive



attitude is discernible in the 2013 in comparison with the previous national survey of 2000 (Darmody & Daly, 2015). Relatedly, largely positive attitudes towards the future of the Irish language are discernible on comparison of previous national surveys (1973, 1983, 1993 & 2000) (Ó Riagáin, 1997, 2007). For example, a steady support was found amongst adults to aspire to speak both Irish and English equally (Ó Riagáin, 1997, p. 155) as highlighted in Table 3.1, which in each case, represented a noticeably larger figure than preferences for English only.

Similarly, support for a bilingual Ireland with English as the principal language was also expressed, with a notable increase to 41% in the North-South Language Survey, compared to 33% level of support in the national survey of 1993 (Ó Riagáin, 2007). MacGréil & Rhatigan (2009) also demonstrate a stabilisation of positive attitudes towards the Irish language in the 1990s and 2000s on comparison of their attitude survey findings of 2007-08 with a national data sample 1988-89.

**Table 3.1. Attitudinal Support towards the Irish language (Ó Riagáin, 1997, p. 155)**

If everyone in Ireland could speak Irish and English equally well, which would you prefer to speak?			
	1973	1983	1993
Irish and English equally	38%	44%	39%

While it is lauded that 93% of respondents are positively disposed to some form of Irish language maintenance in Irish society with just 7% believing that Irish should be forgotten or discarded, MacGréil & Rhatigan (2009) also readily acknowledge the varying interpretations of bilingualism amongst the population.

Digging deeper into the overarching attitudinal findings, Darmody & Daly (2015) identified that positive attitudes towards the Irish language were significantly correlated with being Catholic and having a third-level education. In addition respondents' perception of parental wish for them to learn Irish impacted positively on attitudes, as did use of the language to some extent, and self-led efforts to improve one's Irish language competence. Correlations

with a positive attitude to Irish and advancement to third-level and socio-economic status is also reported in studies prior (MacGréil & Rhatigan, 2009; Watson & Nic Ghiolla Pádraig, 2009) which highlights the persistence of a middle-class bias despite the widening of educational participation and opportunities in recent decades (Ó Riagáin, 2008)

In addition to broadly positive attitudes, 64% of respondents underlined the bond between Irish language and Irish culture and identity in their agreement with the statement that without Irish, the country would lose its identity as a separate culture (Darmody & Daly, 2015). Interestingly, Ó Riagáin (2007) had identified a weakening of the connection between Irish language and Irish identity and culture in examining the response to the same question in previous national surveys which appears to have gained traction once more as demonstrated in Table 3.2. 57% of respondents also claimed basic or advanced fluency in Irish, and it was found that those more positively disposed towards the language were more likely to speak Irish.

**Table 3.2. Irish Language and Identity (Darmody & Daly, 2015)**

Statement <i>‘Without Irish, Ireland would (certainly) lose its identity as a separate country’</i>			
National Surveys	1983	2000/1	2013
% in agreement	66%	50%	64%

It was also found that Irish language was more likely to be spoken amongst young adults compared with other age cohorts. Furthermore, approximately four out of five adults agreed that the Irish language should be available as a school subject. On comparison with a 2001 national Irish language survey, it was found that attitudes toward the Irish language and towards the teaching of Irish were more positive amongst adults in 2013 than in 2001. A recent Dublin City Council survey (2022) (n=892) gave further insight into general attitudes towards the language albeit at a regional level, yielding positive indicators amongst respondents. 59% of respondents who had less than fluent or no Irish expressed an interest in improving their Irish, and three quarters of respondents reported that they would like to see more opportunities to learn Irish in Dublin City.

While it is observed that there is a generally positive attitude towards the Irish language nationally, this does not equate to Irish language use (Dolowy-Rybińska & Hornsby, 2021). Given this disconnect, it is recommended that the Census or surveys administered expand their remit to capture more precisely a broader spectrum of attitudes including for example perceived usefulness of the language (ibid.).

## **3.2 School Context II: Teaching and Learning of Irish in English-medium Primary Schools**

Having established the national context of the Irish language in the first section of this chapter, and following the discussion of the broader school context in relation to the social actors who participate in the learning of Irish, this section develops the discussion of the school context with specific reference to the teaching and learning of Irish in English-medium primary schools. Irish language and educational policy developments are firstly discussed. The teaching and learning of Irish is then explored with specific reference to school inspections and proficiency levels, children's and teacher's attitudes and motivation towards the language, Irish language contexts of use for learners, and translanguaging. Parental engagement with children's Irish language learning is then examined. The importance of technology-mediated language learning (TMLL) is also reviewed in relation to the Irish language context.

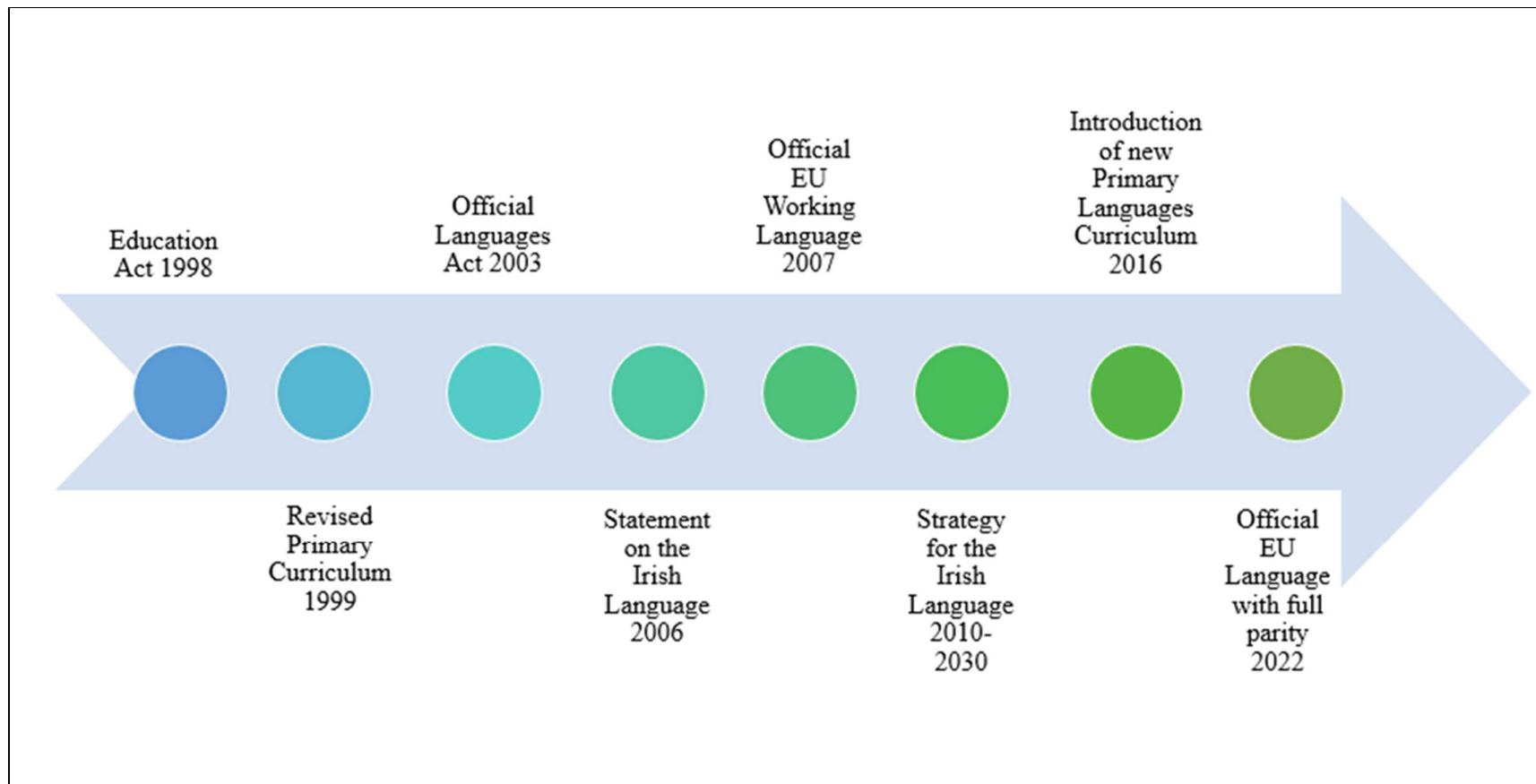
### ***3.2.1 Irish Language and Educational Policy Developments***

This section provides an overview of both educational and Irish language policy since the late 1990s relevant to learners of Irish as an additional language (IAL). It includes principal Irish language national policy developments (Statement on the Irish Language 2006, Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030) progression of national and international recognition and status of the language (Official Languages Act 2003; Statement on the Irish Language 2006; Irish as a working Official EU Language 2007; Irish as a fully recognised EU Official Language 2022), overarching educational policy (Education Act 1998) and curricular developments (Primary Curriculum 1999, Primary Languages Curriculum 2019). These developments will be discussed chronologically in the main and are illustrated in Figure 3.1 below. It is contended that the position of Irish as a core subject, especially outside of the Gaeltacht, can be interpreted as both language (acquisition) planning and status

planning, “because the centrality of Irish in the curriculum sends a message that the state considers it important enough for all to acquire during their schooling” (Walsh, 2022, p. 141). It is acknowledged that the continued positioning of Irish as a core subject at primary and secondary level represents a privileged status (Batardière et al., 2022).

The Education Act (1998) was a momentous development for education in terms of inclusion, parental choice in relation to schools, as well as important provisions for the Irish language. It was stipulated that the Act would have regard to supporting the national objectives of increasing and extending bilingualism in Ireland with specific reference to the realization of greater use of Irish at school and in the community. This was specifically the case for Gaeltacht schools whereby their responsibility to support Irish as the language of the community was stipulated (Walsh, 2022). Both these points were reinforced by Minister of Education, Norma Foley, recently (Foley, 2022), in addition to the acknowledgement of the responsibilities of the Department of Education in relation to the teaching and promotion of Irish. An introduction of an overhauled, revised Primary School Curriculum in 1999 brought, in turn, significant changes to the Irish Language Curriculum, (Department of Education & Science, 1999a). The findings from the influential *Twenty Classes Study* (Harris & Murtagh, 1999) identified a statistically significant correlation between positive attitudes towards the language amongst a nationally representative cohort of sixth class students and a communicative teaching approach. This study, in part, informed the transition from an audio-visual approach to Irish language teaching from the 1970s to the adoption of a communicative language teaching and learning approach in the 1999 curriculum. A later review of the implementation of the 1999 curriculum (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), 2008) reported an increase in both children’s enjoyment of Irish at school and in children’s pride in the language. This is consistent with evidence of increased enjoyment across subjects (NCCA, 2019a).

Concurrent to the roll-out of the new Irish Language Curriculum (Department of Education & Science, 1999a) at the time, the noughties as a decade also witnessed developments in relation to the official status of Irish. At a national level, the Official Languages Act (2003) established a statutory basis for the provisions of public service through the Irish language, including the appointment of a Languages Commissioner to ensure compliance by public bodies. This momentum also contributed to the anticipated Statement on the Irish Language



**Figure 3.1. Chronology of Irish Language and Educational Policy**

2006, which could be considered a precursor to the more comprehensive Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030 which would follow four years later. The Statement on the Irish Language identified thirteen key objectives which each supported the Irish language and the Gaeltacht, underpinned by the key tenets of preservation, promotion and development of the language (Ó Ceallaigh and Ní Dhonnabháin, 2015).

Building on the national implementation of the Official Languages Act, the Irish language enhanced its European status by becoming an official working language of the European Union (EU) in 2007 progressing from previous treaty language status. As highlighted in Section 2.1.3, the Irish language has since realised full official and working status after the fulfilment of a 15-year derogation period at the beginning of 2022. This is significant in terms of potential career opportunities required in the Irish language (Hoyte-West, 2020) and, by extension, potential instrumental motivation amongst Irish language learners.

The progress of educational, national Irish policy and European-level developments of the Irish language of the noughties was met with the launch of the Strategy of the Irish Language 2010-2030 in 2010, the primary aims of the strategy seek to (i) increase the knowledge of Irish, (ii) create opportunities for the use of Irish and (iii) foster positive attitudes towards its use (Government of Ireland, 2010). In terms of Irish language speaker and learner metrics, the strategy aims to, in its lifespan, increase the number of people with an ability to speak the language from 1.66 million to 2 million in addition to increasing the number of daily speakers of Irish from 83,00 to 250,000. The Strategy has been described as ambitious (Ó Ceallaigh & Ní Dhonnabháin, 2015; Walsh, 2021) with ongoing critical challenges in terms of implementation (ibid.). While seeking to promote and develop the use of Irish across domains, education clearly remains central to the fulfilment of the Strategy's objectives. The education sector is identified as one of "the critical engines for generating the linguistic ability" (Government of Ireland, 2010, p. 12) and to this end a commitment to developing skills and expertise in the Irish language amongst teachers is cited. However, it is noted that there has been no evidence of this commitment in practice (Ó Ceallaigh & Ní Dhonnabháin, 2015)

Despite the lack of prescribed centralised professional development for teachers under the Strategy, the introduction of the new Primary Language Curriculum (2019) which has been introduced incrementally in junior schools nationwide since 2016, has arguably brought

new impetus to the teaching and learning of English and Irish both in English-medium and Irish-medium schools (Devitt et al., 2018). Significant changes in Irish society over the last two decades in addition to ongoing concerns with regard to teaching and learning are identified as two primary reasons for its introduction (Little & Kirwan, 2021). The rationale of the PLC underlines how “children learn through interactions” (NCCA, 2019, p. 8) and the importance of the home and communities of children in providing such opportunities: “language learning occurs when child and adult or child and child have meaningful interactions and conversations”(ibid). The curriculum rationale also clearly stipulates that “Children learning Irish as an L2, who have less exposure to the language, need opportunities outside of the Irish lessons to hear and listen to the language that they are learning (NCCA, 2019, p. 10).

A phased introduction of the new Primary Language Curriculum took place in Junior primary schools from 2016, prompting a later introduction of the PLC to senior primary classes. One of three core curricular subjects taught in all English-medium primary schools in Ireland, alongside English and Mathematics, historically the primary curriculum recommended that the Irish language be afforded 2.5 hours of discrete teaching a week for junior classes and 3.5 hours for senior classes (i.e. 42 minutes on average a day over 5 days of the week). This represented a reduction in time from the previous curriculum (Harris, 2008a, 2008b) and it is suggested as one of the factors in the decrease in proficiency amongst learners (Harris, 2008b; Harris & Murtagh 1999). The introduction of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy in 2011 recommended that the teaching of first language of the school, the L1, be increased to 8.5 hours a week which included an increase of dedicated L1 teaching time and integration with other subjects such as Social, Environmental & Scientific Education (SESE). While this increased L1 teaching of Irish in Irish-medium schools, the teaching time of Irish in English-medium schools did not change. Weekly discretionary time affords the teacher agency in prioritising the optimum use of time in chosen curricular areas.

### ***3.2.2 School Inspections & Proficiency Levels***

The most recent Inspectorate Report (Inspectorate, 2022a) provides a timely reference to discuss the teaching and learning of Irish in English-medium schools. Notably, while concerns had been raised with regard to the teaching and learning of Irish in EME setting in previous reports (Inspectorate 2013; 2018), the seriousness of the concern is reflected in its

inclusion as one of four key messages highlighted at the outset of the report. It is identified that “pupils’ learning outcomes, motivation and engagement in Irish needs to be improved” (Inspectorate, 2022a, p. 103).

Pupils’ attainment was reported to be good or very good in 67% of Irish lessons evaluated during Whole School Evaluation (WSE) and Whole School Evaluation Management, Learning and Leadership (WSE-MLL) inspections and pupils’ attainment was considered good or very good in 72% of incidental inspections which highlights there is scope to improve the quality of pupils’ learning in approximately 1/3 of lessons observed (2016-2020) (Inspectorate, 2022a). It was recommended to increase focus on the development of pupils’ communication skills in Irish on the premise that while students demonstrated use of fundamental language structures in a structured language context, the transfer of new language to other communicative scenarios proved challenging for learners. Limitations were also observed in terms of lack of opportunity to write in different genres for different audiences, and the overarching necessity to foster more engaging and enjoyable Irish language learning experiences overall (Inspectorate, 2022a). The findings mirrored outcomes from the previous two Inspectorate reports underline concerns in relation to the teaching and learning of Irish, in English-medium primary schools. In the case of primary schools, the inspectors’ findings in relation to Irish were notably less positive than those for English or Mathematics; the standard of Irish teaching was unsatisfactory in one-fifth of the lessons observed and the quality of learning was unsatisfactory in almost one-quarter of the lessons observed (Inspectorate, 2013). Recommendations include a change in teaching approach, use of a more communicative approach, use of Irish throughout the school, rich language input by teachers, and improved assessment of the subject (Inspectorate, 2013; 2018).

The current prognosis for Irish language teaching and learning is arguably predictable based on the findings of the seminal work of Harris (Harris & Murtagh, 1999; Harris et al., 2006; Harris, 2008a; Harris, 2008b) which indicated a downward spiral in terms of learner Irish language proficiency between the years of 1985 and 2002 (Harris et al., 2006), as well as negative reviews by students in relation to the nature of Irish lesson content and materials which were reported as being boring and repetitious (Harris and Murtagh, 1999; Harris, 2008b). Barry (2021) questions the level of competency of learners of Irish after an



inordinate number of hours of dedicated learning in both primary and secondary school, a concern that is consistent in the literature in recent decades.

A steady decline in attainment levels of Irish language proficiency in English-medium schools (Harris et al., 2006; Harris, 2008a, 2008b) has been well documented. A comparison of two national surveys assessing achievement in spoken Irish for sixth class students in primary schools—one conducted in 1985 (Harris & Murtagh, 1988) and the second seventeen years later in 2002 (Harris et al., 2006)—clearly shows a long-term decline in student success in oral Irish in English-medium schools (Harris, 2008a, 2008b). For example, the mean score of the Irish listening test for students in English-medium schools in 1985 was 46.9% compared with 34% in 2002; a decline of 12.9%. Furthermore, if one looks more closely at two key learning objectives of the listening test (i) Listening vocabulary and (ii) General comprehension of speech, only 5.9% of students in English-medium schools attained mastery in (i) Listening vocabulary in 2002 compared to 42% in 1985, and only 7.8% of students in English-medium schools attained mastery in (ii) General comprehension of speech in 2002, compared to 48.3% in 1985. While Harris (2008a, 2008b) notes that the decline of students attaining mastery correlates with an increase in students achieving minimal progress, overall there was an increase in the number of students who did not meet the threshold of basic proficiency between 1985 and 2002.

Harris notes that the decline in attainment of Irish in ordinary schools is not replicated in all-Irish schools which overall maintain high attainment rates of the Irish language, and represent “standards which are overwhelmingly superior to ordinary schools” (Harris, 2008a, p. 56). The performance of All-Irish schools during this period is laudable considering that All-Irish schools increased their intake of pupils from 1% to 5% of pupils nationally (Harris, 2008a). This suggests an increase in students with differing levels of Irish proficiency and differing levels of Irish spoken in the home (Harris, 2008a; Harris et al., 2006).

An over-reliance on the use of Irish textbook over the years (Harris et al., 2006; Department of Education & Science, 2007; Inspectorate, 2013, 2022a; Hickey & Stenson, 2016a) not only has implications for lesson enjoyment, but also for the development of literacy skills. While English-medium schools avail of dedicated schemes of readers for English language literacy development, the general Irish textbook serves as both an oral language and literacy

resource which is to the detriment on the development of the teaching and learning of decoding skills and phonics in Irish (Hickey & Stenson, 2016a, 2016b). The challenges in teaching and learning of Irish and Irish reading in particular are outlined (Hickey and Stenson, 2016a) on revisiting the teaching and learning of reading in English-medium primary level twenty-five years after initial studies in the area (Hickey, 1991).

It is argued that a communicative approach of the 1999 Irish curriculum , notwithstanding its merits, translates to a predominantly oral language focus, particularly in junior primary (Devitt et al., 2018); with the caveat that an over-emphasis on oral skills may have the unintended consequence of marginalising Irish literacy (Hickey & Stenson, 2016) and the integration of other core language skills. It is of note that the new Primary Language Curriculum supports the integration of language skills across languages informed by principles of cross-linguistic transfer and common underlying language proficiency (Ó Duibhir and Cummins, 2012)

### ***3.2.3 Children's Attitudes & Motivation towards Irish***

Given the importance of attitudes and motivation as a key driver for language learning, (Ellis, 1997; Ushioda, 2005, Gardner, 2002; Dörnyei, 2000), this section discusses children's attitudes and motivation toward the Irish languages, as well as exploring teachers' attitudes towards the language.

#### **3.2.3.1 Attitudes towards Learning Irish amongst Students**

It is found that primary school-going children are largely positively disposed toward the Irish language (McCoy et al., 2012; Devitt et al., 2018; Harris & Murtagh, 1999). For example 74% of children reported to always or sometimes liking Irish in the Growing Up In Ireland Study (McCoy et al., 2012). Of the core three subjects of English, Mathematics and Irish, attitudes were found to be least positive toward Irish (ibid.) Relatedly, further analysis of the same cohort of nine-year olds (n=8,578) in the GUI study indicates an excess disengagement with Irish compared to English and Mathematics (Devitt et al., 2018); 36% of children had a less favourable attitude towards Irish than school compared to corresponding statistics for Mathematics and Reading as 17% and 9% respectively. The GUI study also highlighted that attitudes towards the Irish language are found to be more positive in *Gaelscoileanna* as one might expect; however no significant differences were identified

between *Gaeltacht* and English-medium primary schools (McCoy et al., 2012). These findings correlate with evidence of positive attitudes towards Irish displayed by students during focus groups facilitated by the Inspectorate (Inspectorate, 2022a). Relatedly, attitudes towards Irish compared to other subjects did not fare favourably in the Children School Lives Study (Devine et al., 2020), where Irish was deemed the least useful, and least interesting, compared to all other subjects reviewed. The central role of the teacher in a child’s engagement in primary school (McCoy et al., 2012; Devitt et al., 2018) has clear implications to the importance of teacher’s attitudes in the Irish language classroom, not least because Irish is presenting as the least favourable core subject.

Comparatively, more recent studies (McCoy et al., 2012; Devitt et al., 2018) demonstrate an increase in positive attitudes in comparison with the findings of *Twenty Classes Study* (Harris and Murtagh, 1999), bearing in mind the older age group and smaller cohort of largely 11- and 12-year-olds from nationally representative sample of 20 sixth classes (n=534). The study reported that broadly 50% of the children were positively disposed towards Irish as illustrated below in Table 3.3. Correlations between a more positive attitude towards Irish and higher proficiency in the language were identified. A communicative teaching approach on the part of teachers was also found to be correlated with more positive attitudes to the language. On that premise, the effect of an explicitly CLT approach to the teaching and learning of Irish in the 1999 primary curriculum could potentially be a factor in apparent growth of favourable attitudes amongst school children in the intervening period.

**Table 3.3. Attitude to Learning Irish % in Strong or Slight Agreement (Harris & Murtagh, 1999)**

1.	I really enjoy learning Irish: 48%	48%
2.	I love learning Irish	42%
3.	I want to learn as much Irish as possible	50%

Beyond demonstrating an overarching positive orientation towards Irish amongst primary students, the *Twenty Classes Study* (Harris & Murtagh, 1999) provides a number of specific insights in the complexity of attitudes towards Irish. Firstly, it is clear that levels of

*Integrativeness*, which relates to being well-disposed to the language and the idea of integrating with the Irish language community and Irish speakers, are more positive than levels of Motivation which constituent scales relate to students' desire to learn Irish and commitment to learning Irish (Harris & Murtagh, 1999), indicating that children, while largely positively disposed towards Irish, are not quite as keen when it comes to the application of learning the language. In examining specific scales as predictors of achievement it is of note that two of the *Motivation* scales (*Attitude to learning Irish* and *Motivational Intensity to learn Irish*) and the *Irish-lesson anxiety* scale were identified as significant predictors of achievement. Secondly and relatedly, the combination of relatively high levels of Irish-lesson anxiety coupled with dissatisfaction with Irish lesson content and materials suggest the context for learning may not be harnessing the potential of children's levels of *Integrativeness*, nor effectively encouraging more positive *Motivation* scales orientation in relation to school-based Irish language learning are broadly reflective of findings in the most recent Inspectorate report (Inspectorate, 2022a). It has been posited that while it can be perceived that junior classes are more amenable to learning Irish, negative attitudes towards the language can develop from fourth class onwards and into secondary school (Owens, 1992)

It is suggested that limited opportunity for using the Irish language for students can impact negatively on both instrumental and integrative motivation (Murtagh, 2007); and creating opportunities for students for both integrative and instrumental orientation is essential in context of EME students (Coady, 2001). In a small-scale comparative study of an IME primary and two EME primary settings (n=39), it is reported that while primary students' attitudes in an IME setting towards bilingualism were inclusive of perceptions of the benefits and relevance of Irish as a living language, students in the EME settings did not identify bilingualism with speaking Irish due its lack of practical use, in contrast with their positive attitudes towards participation in a pilot programme of French (Coady, 2001). In addition, the role of the teacher is identified as an important factor in relation to children's attitudes toward learning Irish in school (Devitt et al., 2018) which is also supported by language motivation theory (Dörnyei, 2000, 2010; Ushioda, 2005).

### 3.2.3.2 Attitudes towards Teaching Irish amongst Teachers

Teachers with high proficiency or fluency in an endangered language such as some teachers of Irish can have a powerful status in the language community (Flores Farfán and Olko, 2021). Teacher as “norm arbiter” (Rodríguez et al., 2022, p. 536) in the endangered or minority language context is also recognised in the literature (Jaffe, 2015). On this premise, and also considering the aforementioned importance of the teacher role in relation to children’s engagement with Irish, Devitt et al. (2018) identify an extremely pertinent point: that the decreasing levels of proficiency and competencies in Irish at primary level (Department of Education & Science, 2007; Harris et al., 2006; Harris & Murtagh, 1999) as detailed in Section 2.3.3 prior, are particularly of concern in relation to teachers’ positioning or, indeed, increased marginalisation in relation to motivating students in their learning journey with Irish.

In terms of teachers’ attitudes to Irish being taught to pupils in English-medium schools, 90.2% of their attitudes were very favourable or favourable in 1985, compared to 81.3% in 2002, which represents a decrease of 8.9% (Harris, 2008a). Furthermore, the percentage of sixth class teachers in English-medium schools who derived great satisfaction or satisfaction from teaching Irish fell from 80.3% in 1985 to 55.4% in 2002, which marks a significant decrease of 24.9%. Harris argues that a reduction in teaching hours of Irish under the 1999 curriculum is a factor in the decline in student achievement; particularly so, because “the use of Irish does not easily extend beyond the Irish slot without the special effort of the teacher” (Harris, 2008a, p. 63).

It is suggested that if some primary teachers do not teach Irish for the prescribed time daily/weekly it is due to not being comfortable with Irish (Ní Ghallachair, 2008). It also merits discussion that teachers have explicitly relayed the difficulties of overcoming negative attitudes towards Irish from students (as cited by Owens (1992)), citing the importance of more concerted support at a school, community, and national level (Harris, 2007). The importance of addressing dissipating teacher confidence and competence in Irish, coupled with dissatisfaction to teach Irish, cannot be understated (Department of Education & Science, 2007; NCCA, 2008; Hickey & Stenson, 2016a). The importance of optimising school based- acquisition of Irish as pledged in the Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030 (Government of Ireland, 2010) also remains imperative (Hickey & Stenson, 2016a).

### ***3.2.4 Irish Language Contexts for Children***

It is apparent that the generally positive attitudes towards the Irish language amongst primary-going children do not automatically translate into Irish language use outside the classroom or school (Ó Duibhir & Ní Thuairisg, 2019; Devitt et al., 2018). It is thus important to examine contexts of use for children as a fundamental element of the Irish language question. Fleming & Debski propose that the overarching positive attitudes apparent in the younger generation should be “harnessed and challenged into increased language usage in more domains of life” (Fleming & Debski, 2007, p. 97).

The establishment and maintenance of functional context of use to speak Irish outside of school is a challenge for children attending English-medium primary schools (Fleming and Debski, 2007; Harris & Murtagh, 1999) and Irish-immersion primary schools (Ó Duibhir & Ní Thuairisg, 2019). Harris & Murtagh (1999) identify the lack of interactive contact with the Irish language for children in EME primary schools as the principal sociolinguistic contextual factor for the teaching and learning of Irish in EME. Taking one step back into daily school life, it is to be acknowledged that the class teacher plays a vital role in establishing the classroom as a functional context of use of Irish (Harris and Murtagh, 1999), in terms of the leading the daily discrete Irish lesson, the informal use of Irish during the school day and the potential implementation of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) whereby other school subjects or part thereof are taught in Irish (Harris & Murtagh, 1999; Harris, 2008a, 2008b).

It is argued that students attending English-medium schools need to be shown that Irish can be spoken as a modern language of communication, and should be encouraged to progress from tokenistic use of Irish to meaningful and frequent use of the language (Fleming & Debski, 2007). If children attending English-medium schools had opportunities to use the Irish language inside and outside school and thus use the language in social domains “it would give relevance to the language in their eyes” (Fleming & Debski, 2007, p. 99). Furthermore, it is recommended that healthy attitudes towards Irish displayed by school-going children should be nurtured.

The use of Irish throughout the school would echo the recommendation by Harris (2008a, 2008b) for a partial immersion programme in ordinary schools where a number of chosen

subjects could be taught through the medium of Irish in order to ensure it is a spoken and used language in the school environment outside of Irish lessons as discussed in Section 2.3.3. The Teaching and Learning of Irish in English-Medium Schools.

Murtagh (2007) investigated the out-of-school use of Irish, motivation and proficiency of secondary school students in their final year, from both immersion-Irish schools and English-medium schools. The student cohort included students taking Higher Level Irish and Ordinary Level Irish in mainstream schools respectively, and students taking Higher Level Irish in immersion schools. Having noted a huge discrepancy nationwide between the number of people who claim to speak Irish and the number of people who speak Irish daily, or even weekly, Murtagh establishes that “such low-level use of Irish in daily communication means that real opportunities for mainstream students to practise their Irish skills are limited” (Murtagh, 2007, p. 429). Furthermore, she believes that the absence of a functional context for most learners of Irish, not only limits their opportunities of contact with the naturalistic use of the language, but also could impact negatively on instrumental and integrative motivation (Murtagh, 2007).

Recommendations for the piloting and implementation of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) through Irish in English-medium schools have been put forth for decades (Harris, 1983, 1984, 2008a, 2008b; Harris & Murtagh, 1988, De Spáinn, 2016). However, it is clear according to Department of Education statistics that the number of English medium-schools teaching through Irish outside of the designated core time declined significantly between 1985 and 2002 for example (Harris, 2008a). In addition requisite lesson content and planning and teacher proficiency, and the building of competences in delivering CLIL through Irish in EME settings must be acknowledged (Ó Duibhir & Cummins, 2012; De Spáinn, 2016; Ní Chrónáin, Ní Mhurchú & Ó Ceallaigh, 2016). While CLIL can provide Irish language opportunities in another context other than the Irish lesson, Ní Chrónáin et al. (2016) urge caution that the learning outcomes of the subject in question are not compromised by the potential limitations of the level of Irish utilised in the lesson. Advocating a graduated, whole-school bolstered approach, De Spáinn (2016) suggests that any partial immersion should be supported by a language plan for the school which would ensure provision of Irish language opportunities within the school to further broaden the context of use for students.

In terms of school-based research in English-medium schools relating to the Irish language, there is evidence of a growing number of innovative school-based studies which seek to enhance the teaching and learning experience of Irish in English-medium primary schools (Merrins-Gallagher, Kazmierczak-Murray and Perkins, 2019; Moriarty, 2017). An exploration of oral language development both in English and Irish in a linguistically diverse junior primary English-medium school setting. The former study (Merrins-Gallagher et al., 2019) highlights how a small-group instruction approach, within a station teaching setting, enabled language development and increased language use opportunities during class for pupils via a usage-based language acquisition approach. The latter study explores developing the genre of rap as a pedagogic resource for translinguaging (Irish and English) among primary school students (n=34), which represented a fun, innovative and empowering way for children to engage with the Irish language (Moriarty, 2017). Further examples of Irish language related school-based studies which specifically relate technology-mediated learning are explored in Section 3.3.4 Technology Mediated Language Learning and the Endangered (Irish) Language Context.

It is argued that grassroot initiatives provide the best avenues for extending the use of Irish outside of the school domain (Edwards, 2017; Ó Giollagáin & Charlton, 2015; Ó Duibhir & Ní Thuairisg, 2019). GAA clubs that embrace the use of Irish are one such example (Ó Duibhir & Ní Thuairisg, 2019). Such collaborations with schools as partners would respond to teacher request for more systems-wide support in the transmission of positive attitudes towards the Irish language and provision of additional contexts of use (Harris, 2007; Hickey & Stenson, 2016a)

### ***3.2.5 Translinguaging***

This section introduces the language concept of translinguaging given its relevance when learners of Irish in EME contexts and in the context of a developing recognition multilingualism and “language as resource” (Hornberger, 1998) engage in Irish language learning and speaking within the classroom and potentially outside of school. Learners of Irish may have occasion to instinctively reference the majority language or a home language when (initially) negotiating an Irish language activity or social situation.



In addition, as noted in 3.1.1, an increasing acknowledgement of the prevalence of bilingualism and multilingualism as social and linguistic norm challenging the monolingual norm, is reflected in the literature which takes a more flexible approach to conceptualising what a language is (Moriarty, 2017). A language can be now understood to be a “malleable resource” (Moriarty, 2017, p. 77), as opposed to a “fixed and static entity” (ibid.). Translanguaging is a widely used and accepted concepts aligned with new concepts associated with multilingualism (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017). Apparent in the work of Wei (2011) in the Chinese-English context (Moriarty, 2017), it is contended that translanguaging was first used as a language pedagogy (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017) in the bilingual context of English and the minority language of Welsh (Lewis, Jones & Baker, 2012). Translanguaging can be defined as “a bilingual pedagogy based on alternating the languages used for input and output in a systematic way” (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017, p. 903) in this context. The term translanguaging has evolved to a broader interpretation which recognises the entire linguistic repertoire of multilingual speakers as an integrated resource for meaning making and communication which is inclusive of both home and additional languages (Devitt & Ó Murchadha, 2021).

In terms of classroom pedagogy, an increasing recognition of the use of a number of languages in lessons in favour of the separation or compartmentalisation of languages is apparent (Moriarty, 2017; Cenoz & Gorter, 2015, 2017; Blackledge & Creese, 2010; Duarte, 2019, Devitt & Ó Murchadha, 2021). In the English-medium education context in Ireland, it is proposed that it may be more effective for teacher to draw on a blend of monolingual and concurrent (i.e. translanguaging) language usage approaches in order to support learners to access and make use of their existing language repertoire in the learning and acquisition of Irish (Moriarty, 2017). It is noted that in the case of Welsh, the majority language of English is the introduced supporting language for the majority of students learning Welsh (Jones, 2017) coupled with a cohort of children also accessing a home minority language(s), which is also reflective of the context in English-medium schools in Ireland (Moriarty, 2017; Ó Laoire, 2005).

### ***3.2.6 Parental Engagement with Children’s Irish Language Learning***

The broader realm of parental involvement and engagement in their child’s education was introduced previously in 2.5.2. Given the importance of parental engagement as a key

component to motivate children's learning and impact positively on learning outcomes (Park & Holloway, 2017; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Harris et al., 2009; Cox, 2005; Chavkin, 1989), this section focuses specifically on parents' engagement with their child's learning of Irish.

Harris & Murtagh's *Twenty Classes Study* (1999) investigated parents' attitudes and practices in relation to the Irish language. A cohort of 198 parents from seven of the twenty classes participated in the study. It was found that parents' use of Irish at home clearly impacted on pupils' attitude/motivation, and thus "initiatives which provide parents with an opportunity to improve their own command of Irish are likely to improve children's Irish proficiency" (Harris & Murtagh, 1999, p. 163). In terms of parental support of children learning Irish, 64.2% of parent responded favourably in terms of their own attitude towards Irish and 75.3% of parents generally approved of their children being taught Irish. Despite these figures, Harris & Murtagh (1999) note that there is a lack of more direct support from parents highlighted by the fact that 69.2% of parents allowed children to develop their own attitude in relation to Irish. Furthermore, praise for progress in the case of Irish to children from their parents was significantly lower, in comparison with English or Mathematics. The study also gave substantial insights into parents' attitudes toward the Irish language and towards their child's learning of the Irish language. The findings highlighted that parents with higher levels of proficiency in Irish, or who use Irish at home more often, are inclined to support their children more in learning Irish and their children tend to have higher levels of achievement in Irish and more positive attitudes towards the Irish language. In general, parents have positive attitudes towards the Irish language and to the idea of their children learning Irish. However, it was found that "actual commitment to and involvement in the process is much less common" (Harris & Murtagh, 1999, p. 171). Thus while parents are generally supportive of their child learning Irish in school, a majority of parents exhibit "a lukewarm, hands-off attitude to the actual enterprise of their children learning Irish" (Harris et al., 2006, p. 7). Parents' generally display satisfaction and blind faith that the school are doing a good job in relation to the teaching and learning of Irish (Harris & Murtagh, 1999), while it is less likely for parents to assist with their children's Irish homework, or praise achievement in Irish compared to other subjects.

Relatedly, the study also highlighted a telling correlation between parents' knowledge of how Irish is taught and pupil achievement in Irish, coupled with positive pupil attitude to Irish. A quarter of parents did not know anything about how Irish was taught, followed by

over half of parents who knew only a little; a mere 17.7% knew a lot about how Irish is taught. Interestingly, a significant number of parents (83.3%) believed the school their child is attending was doing everything in its power to facilitate their child's progress. Given that three quarters of parents claim to know a little or nothing about the teaching of Irish, the blind support of the school's Irish programme suggests a passivity or a perceived "no-go area" of the curriculum for the majority of parents.

The subsequent findings (Harris & Murtagh, 1999) recommended that parents should be (i) informed of the benefits to children's learning that their direct involvement and support could foster and (ii) informed of how Irish is taught and of the nature of second language learning. Both these recommendations could be facilitated via teacher and parent group meetings. It is also suggested that parents should be given the opportunity to improve their own Irish with a focus on what their children are currently learning.

Kavanagh & Hickey's study in relation to parental involvement in Irish-immersion schools, with particular reference to parents with Irish as an L2, is arguably relevant to the position of similar parents of children in English-medium schools who seek to be involved in their child's learning of Irish. It is noted that is not simply a task of teaching parents with Irish as an L2 the Irish language, rather an exploration of "parallel and alternative ways of helping parents to be active partners in their children's education process" (Kavanagh & Hickey, 2013, p. 448) is necessary to enable low proficiency speakers of Irish to utilise the strengths that they have, as opposed to highlighting their weakness in terms of language proficiency. This could be improved using inclusive measures, such as informing parents about Irish language learning resources suitable for home use—with less of a school flavour—to increase parent and student exposure to the language and benefit families of all proficiency levels. Other recommendations for L2 parents of Irish were the accessibility of translated versions of textbooks for parents and the use of English in designated 'English zones' for parents within the immersion school grounds in order to provide the opportunity of a voice for parents of low proficiency in Irish (Kavanagh & Hickey, 2013).

The importance of encouraging parents with low proficiency in Irish, to make use of the skills that they do have for successful involvement, is also stressed in the study. Practical examples of parental involvement such as "emphasising their role in supporting their children's L1 oral language development, supporting their L1 literacy at home and showing

positive attitudes to L2 and to learning the L2” are suggested (Kavanagh & Hickey, 2013, p. 448).

As well as outlining a positive attitude towards the Irish language amongst adults and indicators of instrumental motivation in relation to the study of Irish in order to pass school exams (See Section 2.1.5), Darmody & Daly (2015) also outline how their findings have implications for parents. It is suggested that manifestations of instrumental motivation to pass Irish exams at school amongst adults is indicative of the perception of Irish as a school subject. It is suggested that parents could “help enhance positive attitudes by taking interest in how their child is getting on with the Irish language and assist them with homework, if possible” (Darmody & Daly, 2015, p. xiii). Initiatives such as parents who are proficient in Irish helping fellow parents who may have low Irish proficiency to support their children’s Irish language learning is put forth in this regard (Darmody & Daly, 2015). The fundamental premise of support and language input for parents, central to the provision of an out-of-school language domain for their children is highlighted, whereby there is evidence of attitudinal support from parents but perhaps the structures of support for parents to fulfil this role are currently lacking. Parent-to-parent support in the Irish language (Darmody & Daly, 2015) could be indicative of a connected learning community amongst the parents of a class/year group/ school which may require and benefit from school support in relation to the establishment and facilitation of such parent-to-parent structures.

Indeed, the *Twenty Classes Study* (Harris & Murtagh, 1999) was explicit in noting how the majority of parents were more challenged to provide support with Irish homework rather than any other subject areas. This dynamic further exacerbates the challenge of overcoming the perception of Irish as a mere school subject at the primary school stage of a child’s Irish learning journey.

### ***3.2.7 Technology Mediated Language Learning and the Endangered (Irish) Language Context***

The last section explored functional contexts of use for children learning the Irish language; this section explores the technology-mediated domain as one such potential context of use which is increasingly pervasive in and relevant to our lives, thus presenting as a key domain to exploit for language learning in the endangered language context. The presence of Irish

(as an endangered language) in the digital sphere is firstly considered. The literature in relation to technology-mediated language learning and associated affordances is then contextualised progressing to a discussion of platforms and L2 practices with specific reference to the endangered language and Irish language context. Web 2.0 cultures of use in endangered language contexts are also discussed.

While acknowledging a clear growth of Irish language online content emanating from a combination of public bodies, educational institutions such as universities, language schools, and language organisations, it is argued that Irish is broadly a “low-resourced language” (Lynn, 2022, p. 8), in terms of language technology capacity and support. A significant number of necessary tools and datasets are non-existent to date which in turn has implications for the creation of CALL materials for Irish (ibid.). Significantly for learners of Irish, Irish can be considered relatively well-resourced at a lexical level in terms of publicly available online dictionaries (such as [www.foclóir.ie](http://www.foclóir.ie)) glossaries, thesauri and terminology databases (Lynn, 2022).

The Irish language has a strong presence on the Twitter platform, with a total of eight million Irish tweets shared since the platform’s inception in 2006 (Lynn, 2022). This is relevant for the use of social media within the language classroom. Caufield (2013) describes online communities of Irish speakers on social media (the three most prominent platforms of the study were a blog space, Twitter and a Facebook group) as, “a new form of language community in evolution” (Caufield, 2013, p. 241). Caufield suggests that the most significant finding from his study of Irish language communities online, was the geographical spread of individuals engaged in Irish language interaction, whereby the language community is bonded by a shared interest rather than logistically.

Irish primary schools diversifying their digital presence and communication channels with schools, school community and broader educational community by complementing their school website with school social media accounts. In a study of 100 representative primary schools in Ireland, Gilleace and Eivers (2018) found that 85% of schools had an operational school website or blog. Eleven schools had a school website link to a school Twitter account and seven schools had a school Facebook page. It was also posited that a school social media account may not be linked to the school website.

Digital literacies today such as social media engagement are characterised as *participative*, *multifarious* and *everyday* (Reinhardt & Thorne, 2019) compared with more traditional digital activities involving bidirectional teacher and student exchange. Educators are encouraged to “consider involving broader audiences and purposes that would help students to engage with the world outside of the classroom” (Reinhardt & Thorne, 2019, p. 218), which resonates with the minority language context whereby social media can be harnessed to create language learning opportunities (Cunliffe, 2021).

Ward (2004) first raised the significance of CALL materials for Irish as an endangered language, having identified minimal reference to the potential of technology as a resource for Irish language learning in the seminal work of Harris & Murtagh (1999) with regard to the teaching and learning of Irish in English-medium primary schools. Ward explored the additional uses of CALL in the endangered language context through a class-based pilot project, the findings of which indicated that the children were positively disposed to the use of CALL in Irish class, and the social impact of CALL may be more importance than the immediacy of language gains. O'Toole (2010) examined vocabulary acquisition and motivation of L2 learners of Irish in primary school by integrating the use of Web 2.0 technologies (Interactive Whiteboard and blog) into Irish teaching and learning to facilitate a blended learning environment. The use of both ICTs clearly motivated students but gains in vocabulary were less apparent. These findings support Ward's view (Ward, 2004) that the development of CALL materials can help raise interest in the language. More recent utilisation of Web 2.0 technologies in the Irish language primary context include the use of 3D virtual reality gaming (Dalton & Devitt, 2016) which was successful in creating a functional context for using the Irish language by creating a virtual domain of use. Two principal findings highlighted (i) how the well-received rewards structure enabled self-efficacy in Irish, and (ii) how the interactive affordances of the game—whereby children could help each other or motivate each other in the game—impacted positively on the children's experience and encouraged real time, authentic use of Irish in a positive setting. In addition, Ward et al. (2019) highlight how an application called Wordbricks, similar in design to Scratch – an open-source, well established engaging coding application in Irish – was piloted in Irish primary schools, with the purpose of composing grammatically correct Irish sentences. Findings indicate a successful deployment coupled with high levels of enjoyment, supplemented with the recommendation of further research in relation to lexical

gains. It is also recommended to continue efforts to normalise the use of CALL in Irish (language) classrooms and to engage in a co-creation approach between teachers and CALL specialists approach in designing and deploying CALL materials and applications to ensure the best design and pedagogical outcomes (Ward, 2020).

The contextual factors of use of technological platforms and social media and networks for learning communities of endangered languages is considered by Cunliffe (2021). Given learners' various levels of language engagement, proficiency, and confidence, the potential levels of engagement are mapped out from minimal engagement (*Receive*) to full engagement (*Create*) (Cunliffe, 2021), in Table 3.4.

**Table 3.4. Levels at which Speakers of a Minority Language Engage in Twitter (Cunliffe, 2021, pp. 80-81)**

1. <b>Receive</b> — receives the message, but does not recognise the language
2. <b>Recognise</b> — receives the message, recognises the language, but does not understand it
3. <b>Like</b> — receives the message, recognises the language, understands the gist, reacts in an affirmatory non-linguistic manner
4. <b>Share</b> — receives the message, recognises the language, understands at least the gist, reacts in an affirmatory manner by propagating the message through their own networks
5. <b>Reproduce</b> — receives the message, recognises the language, understands the content, copies and reuses the content in a new message which they propagate through their own networks
6. <b>Reply</b> — receives the message, recognises the language, understands the content, replies with a new message in the language
7. <b>Create</b> — receives the message, recognises the language, understands the content, influenced by the presence of a message in the minority language creates a new original message in the language which they propagate through their own networks.

In terms of the global community of Irish language learners and speakers, Hickey (2011) acknowledges the growing number of Irish language learners outside of Ireland whereby learners in the UK, USA, Australia, and mainland Europe engage in online courses and chatrooms. Online language learning opportunities for Irish language learners have grown further in recent years. For example, an Irish language and culture Massive Online Open Course (MOOC) launched in 2018 with the support of the Department of Heritage, Culture and the Gaeltacht. It witnessed uptake from 10,000 ab-initio learners (Mac Lochlainn, Nic Giolla Mhichíl & Beirne, 2020), which is indicative of the scale of technology-mediated Irish language learning at adult engagement level globally.

Thus, we have considered the Irish language in relation to online presence and its relevance for the Irish language classroom. School-based studies highlighting the benefits of technology-mediated language learning for the Irish language context have been explored. Contexts for use of social media and online learning in the endangered language setting were also explored in order to inform practice in the school setting. It is evident that Irish has a real presence in online spaces and these represent an authentic domain of use for language learners. However, research to date would suggest that there has been limited exploitation of this within the classroom context- in particular at primary level. Given the nature of digital integration in communication today, technology-mediated domains present as a compelling medium to facilitate Irish language engagement for learners. This current study aims to address this gap.

### **3.3 Learning from other Endangered Language Contexts**

The previous section examined policy and practice in the context of Irish language learners at English-medium primary schools which focussed on key elements such as This section explores other relevant endangered language contexts given the importance of endangered language communities to learn from each other's practice.

It is widely recommended that endangered or minority language learning settings and communities learn from fellow communities in other contexts to inform language planning, education policy and practice (McCarty, 2018; Olko & Sallabank, 2021; Olko et al., 2016; Tsunoda, 2016; Mendizabal & Penman, 2021). The **Welsh** (Thomas & Roberts, 2011; Hornsby & Vigers, 2018; Kalogirou, Beauchamp & Whyte, 2019) Welsh Government, 2017,



2022; Augustyniak & Higham, 2019), **Scottish** (Nance, 2021; Nance and Moran, 2022; McEwan Fujita, 2020; McLeod, 2020; McEwan Fujita, 2010; Armstrong, 2013), **Basque** (Leonet, Cenoz & Gorter, 2017; Etxebarrieta, Pérez-Izaguirre & Langarika-Rocafort, 2020; Augustyniak & Higham, 2019), and **Galacian** (O'Rourke, 2018; DePalma, Zapico-Barbeito & Sobrino-Freire, 2018) language contexts provide some insights for the Irish language context and, by extension, Irish language teaching and learning in EME settings.

The Welsh language revitalisation movement has over recent decades achieved relative success progress in terms of Welsh language transmission in schools (Thomas and Roberts, 2011, Jones, 2008) and in the broader community (Jones, 2017; Augustyniak & Higham, 2019) steered by government initiatives such as the most recent strategy *Cymraeg 2050: A Million Welsh Speakers* (Government of Wales, 2017). The continuum of school language models both as primary and secondary level (Jones, 2017) which include Welsh-medium, English-medium with significant use of Welsh and dual stream for example (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007), indicates a more expansive and dynamic approach to Welsh language teaching and learning compared with an arguably more static and detached dichotomy in Ireland at present. It is also of note that the recently launched new primary curriculum for Wales (Welsh Government, 2022a) does not refer to Welsh as a second language in favour of conceptualising the language equally alongside English and other languages (Welsh Government, 2022b) which reflects the objectives of and rationale of the *Cymraeg 2050* (Government of Wales, 2017). Translanguaging in the Welsh (Jones, 2017) and Basque (Leonet, Cenoz & Gorter, 2017)) school context were discussed in Section 3.2.5.

The Welsh and Basque contexts are often compared (Augustyniak & Higham, 2019, Leonet, Cenoz and Gorter, 2017), as both languages share the distinctive feature of being spoken in specific regions but without being the principal language of the state (Extra & Gorter, 2008). Similar to Irish, the Basque language enjoys state and institutional support. Basque-medium education serves both children with Basque as a home language and speakers of Spanish as a home language demonstrating both a state language maintenance and immersion agenda (Leonet, Cenoz and Gorter, 2017). As well as measured success of Basque language transmission at school, dedicated policy and dynamic practice reflects a commitment to creating domains of use for speakers and learners of Basque outside of the school domain. For example, the *Ulibarri* programme whereby teacher support centres support schools by funding a range of extra-curricular activities in the Basque language to

build on school learning (Zalbide & Cenoz, 2018, Ó Duibhir & Ní Thuairisg, 2019) also serves as an inter-school project funded at government level which demonstrates the broader vision of Basque policy in the provision of contexts of use for the language after school hours.

The importance of providing opportunities for learners to speak Gaelic outside of the classroom and fostering such supports are identified (McEwan-Fujita, 2010). In a comprehensive comparative review of the work of McLeod (2020) and McEwan-Fujita (2020), Nance (2021) identifies two points of interest applicable to the Irish context. Both sociolinguists (McLeod, 2020; McEwan-Fujita, 2010) advocate an inclusive approach to Gaelic speakers and learner communities whereby the all members of the language community of all proficiencies can contribute to overarching language aims arguably informed by pragmatism whereby all parties have value in the endangered context (Nance, 2021). Secondly, the necessity to reflect upon the “evolving and fluid nature” of language communities also resonates with the Irish context whereby the learning community is no longer anchored geographically per se, but instead the learning community exists and evolves across various physical and virtual networks (Nance, 2021). This fluidity and adaptability could more readily assist the extension of language learning outside of the school domain.

In the case of Galician, O’Rourke (2018) studies the trajectories of new speakers or *neofalantes* of Galician, which in turn sheds light on learners’ linguistic capacity facilitated through the education system which has developed into active language use. Similar challenges to Ireland are identified whereby the teaching and learning of Galician in the education system has played a vital role in terms of improving the profile of the language and developing a “large pool of potential new speakers” (O’Rourke, 2018). However, this has not translated to active use of the language at societal level for the majority of learners. While representing a minority of the population (2%), the *neofalantes*, who champion the language and resist the laissez-faire top-down language policy and planning, could be considered as “proponents of social change” (O’Rourke, 2018, p. 416) willing to challenge and influence the current sociolinguistic order. Such movements could encourage activism and participation from the aforementioned ‘pool’ of potential speakers.

In a study of early years student teachers in the Galacian language context, De Palma et al. (2018) identify the veritable challenges of teaching a minority language in non-supportive environments, while also arriving at the potential agency of teachers of minority languages to contribute to language revitalisation at a local level which resonates with the challenges of teachers of Irish. The importance of proficiency, informed and suitable methodologies and pedagogy were highlighted as key components in enabling success (De Palma et al., 2018).

These various endangered or minority language contexts can inform policy and practice in the Irish context and will be discussed further in Chapter, 7 in relation to the findings of this study.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

This chapter sought to explore the context of learners of Irish as an additional language in English-medium schools in Ireland in order to inform the specific context in which the SCT-informed pedagogical approaches will be implemented.. The national context of Irish speakers and learners was firstly discussed in order to provide a clear background to the Irish language policy and practice in EME primary education. The teaching and learning of Irish in English-medium schools was then explored in depth with specific reference to policy, curriculum, teaching and learning of Irish, attitudes therein, parental engagement and interrogation of other endangered language contexts.

The next chapter presents the methodology of the study which facilitates the implementation of and review of the pedagogical approaches proposed for the Irish language learning context at English-medium primary school level.

# Chapter 4:

## Methodology

### 4.1 Introduction

Chapter 3 explored how a sociocultural theoretical framework could inform a pedagogical approach to language teaching and learning, with specific reference to the teaching and learning of the Irish language. In joint consideration of the research context and the pedagogical potential of SCT, this current study sets out to address the following research questions:

This chapter provides an overview and analysis of the methodological structures and progression at a conceptual and theoretical level which underpin the field research undertaken in this school-based study. It lays the methodological foundation in order to explore the actual *lived experience* (McAteer, 2013) or *story* (Sullivan, Glenn, Roche & McDonagh, 2016), of the four iterative research cycles that evolved and the subsequent generation of *actionable knowledge* (Coghlan, 2007) to inform Irish language teaching and learning

Section 4.2 outlines the philosophical roots of the study. The ontological and epistemological underpinnings and paradigms which resonate with the study are explored. These, in turn, inform the rationale in identifying the most appropriate research methodology (McDonagh, Roche, Sullivan & Glenn, 2019) for the context of the study in Section 4.3. The teacher-researcher's statement of positionality is presented in Section 4.4, followed by an overview of the research context and participants in Section 4.5.

Ethical considerations are outlined in Section 4.6. Section 4.7 identifies and describes the research tools employed in the study in order to generate data. This section also outlines the piloting and co-design of specific research tools. Section 4.8 details the data analysis processes, with reference to the approach taken, the methods of data analysis employed, the valid of processes, and dissemination. The chapter concludes by reflecting on the realities of the study in Section 4.9.

## 4.2 Philosophical Underpinnings of the Study

### 4.2.1 Related Approaches & Paradigms

Approaches to methodology in research have been considered as ‘paradigms’ since the pioneering writings of Kuhn in the early sixties (Cohen et al., 2011). Succinctly phrased by Bassey, a research paradigm is “a network of coherent ideas about the nature of the world and of the functions of researchers which, adhered to by a group of researchers, conditions the patterns of their thinking and underpins their research actions” (Bassey, 2002, p. 37). Cohen et al. (2011) develop the meaning of a paradigm in practice by noting the progression from a “shared belief system or set of principles” (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 5), to a way of pursuing knowledge. This, in turn, involves a specific research community who develop “consensus on what problems are to be investigated and how to investigate them” (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 5). More simply, a paradigm can be defined as a “basic set of beliefs that guide action” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). According to Denzin & Lincoln (2017), a paradigm encompasses axiology, epistemology, ontology, and methodology.

#### 4.2.1.1 Ontology and Epistemology

It is widely accepted that a researcher’s ontological and epistemological stance influences a chosen research methodology (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2017; Guba, 1990; Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011). Creswell (2007) offers some clarity in this regard by considering ontology, epistemology, and methodology in the frame of questioning the nature of reality, the relationship between the researcher and that being researched, and the process of research.

**Table 4.1. Ontology, Epistemology & Methodology (Creswell, 2007)**

<b>Ontology</b>	What is the nature of reality?
<b>Epistemology</b>	What is the relationship between the researcher and that being researched?
<b>Methodology</b>	What is the process of research?

Ontology refers to how we view the world or define reality, whereas epistemology refers to the study of how we know things—the theory of knowledge. Accordingly, epistemology can be defined as our relationship with knowledge: the relationship between the researcher and that being researched (Creswell, 2007). Ontological and epistemological assumptions develop and overlap, and are not independent of each other (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Bryman (2016) presents *objectivism* and *constructionism* as the two dominant positions of social ontology. Unlike objectivism, whereby social phenomena present as external facts which we cannot influence or reach, constructionism implies that reality is a construct whereby social phenomena and their meaning are continuously being realised by social actors (Bryman, 2016). Constructionism, according to Bryman (2016), suggests that social phenomena which are enacted through social interaction are in a continual state of revision. This study is underpinned by the overarching constructionist world view, that reality is perceived as a construct, whereby “the realities of everyday life and interactions are actively constructed in and through forms of social action” (Holstein & Gubrium, 2011, p. 341).

It is understood that ontological assumptions provide a grounding for epistemological assumptions (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Cohen et al., 2018). Essentially, the ontological position of a study underpins the whole research project. Alignment with a constructionist ontology influences one’s epistemological direction. McDonagh et al. (2019) outline how one’s ontological and epistemological values underpin how educators teach, and shape the nature of teacher-student relationships. However, the researcher’s ongoing consideration of both spheres was not hierarchical or linear as will be illustrated—both sets of assumptions develop and overlap and are not independent of each other (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

As Table 4.2 outlines, Crotty proposes three specific principal epistemological stances that are grounded in constructionism: *interpretivism*, *critical inquiry*, and *feminism*. In contrast to a positivistic view of knowledge, whereby only those phenomena that can be observed and measured qualify as valid knowledge (Brundrett & Rhodes, 2013), an *interpretive epistemological stance* assumes that knowledge is constructed from the interpretation of multiple perspectives, including that of the researcher and research participants (Brundrett & Rhodes, 2013; Cohen et al., 2018).

Theory is generated in interpretive research as the researcher seeks to understand the reality of what “goes on at one time and in one place and compare[s] it with what goes on in different places” (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 20); focusing on transferability and replicability as opposed to universal scientific theory. While positivism and interpretivism can be presented as the two major opposite epistemologies (Brundrett & Rhodes, 2013; Bryman, 2016), positivism and constructionism are also positioned as two dominant diverging epistemological stances (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

**Table 4.2. Excerpt from Crotty (Colour coding by Jane O’Toole)**

Ontology	Objectivism	Constructionism
Epistemology	Positivism Post-Positivism	Interpretivism Critical Inquiry Feminism

Interpretivism focuses on how humans make meaning of their worlds:

Empirical social science research in this tradition comprises researchers’ interpretations of the various interpretations made and used by actors in the research settings being studied, with and through which those actors express what is meaningful to them. Analysis explores those meanings in the context of the academic literature within which researchers frame their research questions (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 8)

Figure 4.1 illustrates the philosophical roots of this research study as discussed in this section. The tree diagram traces the progression from the philosophical roots of the study discussed in this section, progressing to the consideration of paradigms and the nature of the study. This informs the examination of potential research methodologies and research methodology rationale explored in 4.3.1.

#### 4.2.1.2 Qualitative & Quantitative Paradigm

The terms qualitative and quantitative can be interpreted in a reductionist sense as merely denoting research methods represented broadly by words (qualitative) or numbers (quantitative), or by open-ended questions (qualitative interview) or closed-ended questions (quantitative hypotheses) (Creswell, 2014). A more holistic approach to considering the qualitative or quantitative approach is to consider philosophical assumptions of the

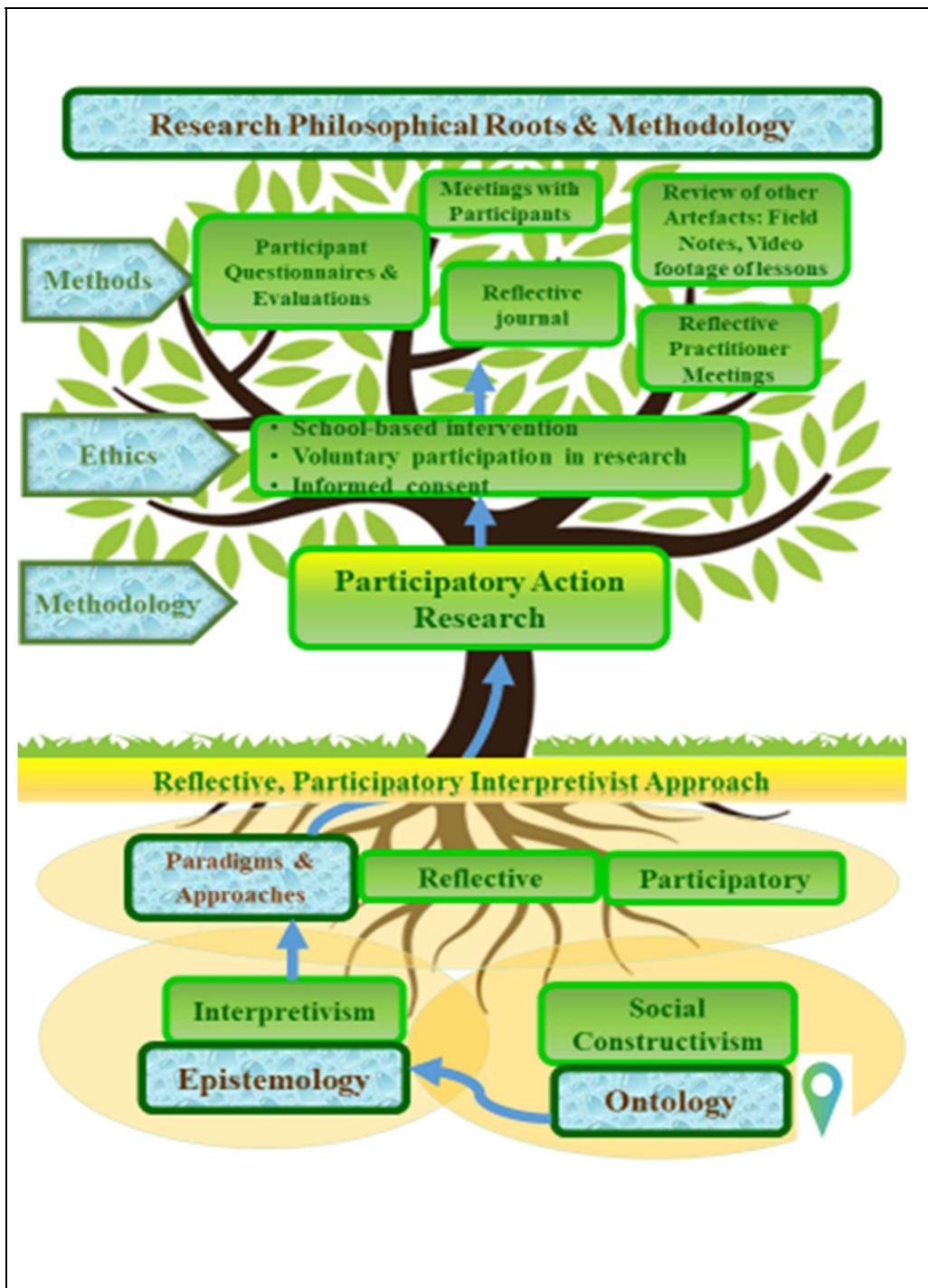


Figure 4.1. *Philosophical Roots of Research & Research Methodology*

approaches (Creswell, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2017), historic origins (Creswell, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2017), as well as the subsequent elements of research design and methodology (Cohen et al., 2018; Creswell, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). A qualitative



research approach can be succinctly defined as “an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” whereas quantitative research is “an approach for testing objective theories examining the relationship among variables” (Creswell, 2014, p. 4).

Qualitative researchers, according to Denzin & Lincoln (2017), “stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017, p. 8). Qualitative research has emerged during the latter half of the twentieth century (Creswell, 2014), and which has “bloomed and blossomed exponentially” (Mason, 2018, p. ix) in the course of the last twenty years or so. Encompassing a range of approaches, qualitative research provides a rich source of theory and methods as a foundation for research tool design and data analysis (Boulton & Hammersley, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2012; Cohen et al., 2018; Marshall, 1999).

#### 4.2.1.3 Participatory Paradigm

The participatory paradigm is based on the perspective that “knowledge is a basis for change and is collaboratively generated through cycles of action and reflection” (Reason and Bradbury, 2008; (Godden, 2017, p. 2; Reason & Bradbury-Huang, 2007). Knowledge is considered as culturally contextualised (Somekh 2006), and transformative, through its aims of challenging oppression (Freire, 1974; Godden, 2017). Participatory methodologies vary in terms of their position on a participation continuum, ranging from a low level of participation amongst participants, which can be interpreted as disempowering participation, to a greater level of empowering participation to a level of “citizen control” (Godden, 2017). It is observed that participatory research is underpinned in enacting a shift within the traditional research process: “At its most basic, participatory research involves those conventionally ‘researched’ in the different phases of a study, for instance, in the construction of data, presentation of research findings and dissemination, and pursuit of follow-up action” (Coyne & Carter, 2018, p. 15). Research methodologies within the participatory paradigm include cooperative inquiry, participatory action research, student voice methodology, pedagogy empowerment, and dialogue conferencing.

### 4.3 Research Methodology

The research methodology evolved from the philosophical assumptions of this study. The rationale for the choice of methodology is explored with respect to several qualitative methods which resonate with a reflective approach within a participatory paradigm.

#### 4.3.1 Which Research Methodology and Why?

Having established the epistemology, ontology, relevant paradigms and overarching approach, the next step involved choosing the most appropriate methodology which could most effectively (i) align with the overall framework (ii) be compatible with the research context and (iii) best address the study's overarching research questions.

The researcher narrowed the focus to five particular methodologies which all had the potential to be utilised in the study: Ethnography, Case Study, Grounded Theory, Design-Based Research, Action Research and Cooperative Inquiry. This choice was made based on reflection upon emerging contextual, pedagogic and methodological elements identified by the teacher-researcher at the outset, which are presented in Table 4.3.

These elements were distilled into ten questions (See Table 4.4), in order to explore the methodologies as illustrated in the following table ( ■ = Yes ■ = Partially ■ = No). Action research emerged as the most suitable methodology based on the interrogation of the following considerations 1-10 and exploration of the application of action research in the area of language learning research (See Section 4.3.7).

##### 4.3.1.1 Suitability to Context (Consideration 1 & 2)

At the outset, it was important to reflect on consideration one and two, to determine which methodologies were suited to educational research and the primary school setting. In theory, all six qualitative approaches were applicable. Ethnography has had long association with school settings (Delamont, 2012; Woods, 1977); as has case study, which “typically involves detailed examination of one, possibly two or three situations in-depth and holistically” (Guthrie, 2010, p. 74); action research has also been notably developed within the field of education (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011).

**Table 4.3. Emerging Contextual, Pedagogic and Methodological Elements of the Study**

**Contextual Elements** (reflecting on 4.5 Research Context & 4.4 Statement of Positionality)

- Educational research setting
- Primary school setting: fourth class
- Class-based study; practitioner inquiry; participatory study
- Study carried out by teacher-researcher; 'insider research'; questions surrounding positionality, bias
- Study addresses teacher's concern regarding Irish language teaching and learning

**Pedagogic Elements** (reflecting on C2 C3 Literature Review)

- Seeks collective input to improve teaching and learning of Irish, engagement with the language as an L2.
- Seeks to review a range of interventions that could be piloted in sync with term/ half-term calendar
- Seeks to address research questions (RQ1,2 & 3) but also engage with arising findings/ themes/ ongoing feedback

**Methodological Elements** (reflecting on 4.2 Philosophical Roots of Research)

- Seeks to address a concern (Chapter 1), research questions(RQ1 & 2) but also engage with arising findings/ themes/ ongoing feedback during study
- Seeks to construct and enact interventions with participants to investigate if engagement can be improved via periodic review and termly cycles
- Seeks an inclusive methodology that involves participants in the co-construction and collaborative review of interventions (RQ4)
- Seeks to improve practice and language engagement, seeks to initiate change (RQ4)

**Table 4.4. Methodology Criteria & Associated Considerations**

<i>Is this/Does this/Has this methodology</i>	<b>Ethnography</b>	<b>Case Study</b>	<b>Grounded Theory</b>	<b>Design-Based Research</b>	<b>Action Research</b>	<b>Cooperative Inquiry</b>
1. used in educational research settings?	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Orange
2. evidenced a methodology utilised in primary school classroom-based setting?	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Red
3. compatible with the role of practitioner/teacher-researcher i.e. 'insider' research?	Green	Orange	Orange	Red	Green	Green
4. often feature a declaration of positionality of the practitioner-researcher at the outset for validity purposes?	Green	Red	Red	Orange	Green	Green
5. address a concern identified at the outset by the (teacher-) researcher?	Red	Red	Red	Green	Green	Orange
6. supports a solution-focused pedagogical and methodological approach to addressing concern?	Red	Red	Red	Green	Green	Orange
7. iterative approach to addressing concern identified?	Red	Red	Red	Green	Green	Orange

<i>Is this/Does this/Has this methodology</i>	<b>Ethnography</b>	<b>Case Study</b>	<b>Grounded Theory</b>	<b>Design-Based Research</b>	<b>Action Research</b>	<b>Cooperative Inquiry</b>
8. enables systematic review of interventions with all participants?						
9. allows for emergent research questions to emanate from the data and action?						
10 supportive, in principle, initiating informed change?						

#### 4.3.1.2 Teacher-Researcher & Positionality (Consideration 3 & 4)

It was also necessary, as outlined in the third consideration, that the role of teacher-researcher or practitioner-researcher should be compatible with the methodology chosen and supported theoretically, since this was the only way the researcher, a full-time teacher and part-time researcher, could feasibly carry out the study. While such a stance is not ruled out with respect to case study, grounded theory or design-based research, it is generally accepted that the researcher is not involved as a practitioner but rather an independent researcher and observer who works within the research settings *with* professionals and participants *within* the setting. Practitioner action research, on the other hand, is an established field (Anderson et al., 2007; McDonagh et al., 2019; Somekh, 2008; Sullivan et al., 2016).

#### 4.3.1.3 Addressing a Concern (Consideration 5 & 6)

This research study was motivated by the intention to address a concern in relation to Irish language teaching and learning in an English-medium primary school, and how to approach this concern in the optimum way in terms of pedagogical interventions. Thus, there are two elements at play—addressing a concern, and doing something about it. In relation to taking a pedagogical interventionist approach within the research process, this is not in keeping with the characteristics of either case study or grounded theory, which aligns with the

commonly accepted approach of the researcher as independent from the setting (*See Consideration 3*). Both action research and design-based research, however, are somewhat similar in this regard. On closer examination, it is apparent that where action research addresses a concern at the outset, design-based research is design-led. The idea that action research is merely problem-led whereas design-based research is theory-led (Dalton, 2017) is an oversimplification. While the action research process may begin with addressing a concern, interventions are invariably grounded in theoretical or pedagogical frameworks in the field of education.

Both design-based research and action research support pedagogical intervention. Design-based research can be defined as “a systematic but flexible methodology aimed to improve educational practices through iterative analysis, design, development and implementation” (Wang & Hanafin, 2005, p. 6), and so the implementation of a theory-led design to improve educational outcomes is apparent. In relation to action research, it is generally accepted that

action research involves taking action in order to improve a given situation. Coghlan & Brannick succinctly state that “action research focuses on research in action, rather than research about action” (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014, p. 4). Taking action or the implementation of a plan is a key element in the action research cycle (Koshy, 2010; McNiff, 2011; Schmuck, 2006). Following strategic planning, action or the implementation of a plan are identified as the subsequent step in an action research cycle (For example: 1. Plan, 2. Act, 3. Observe, 4. Reflect (Zuber-Skerritt, 1996); 1. Constructing, 2. Planning action, 3. Taking action and 4. Evaluating action (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014).

#### Iterative Process & Review by Participants (Consideration 7 & 8)

In relation to question seven and eight which ask if the chosen methodology is cyclical by nature, with regular review and if the methodology enables systematic review of interventions with all participants, design-based research and action meet this criteria. Design-based research is described more frequently as *iterative* (Simonsen, Bærenholdt, Büscher & Scheuer, 2010; Wang & Hannafin, 2005) rather than *cyclical*. In essence, however, it involves, like action research, implementing an intervention whether theory-led or concern-led and reviewing said intervention. From its inception, action research has been considered a cyclical process. Lewin’s model of action research has been described as “a series of spirals, each of which incorporates a cycle of analysis, reconnaissance, reconceptualisation of the problem, planning of the intervention, implementation of the plan, evaluation of the effectiveness of the intervention” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p. 354). Kemmis and McTaggart also refer to a “spiral of action” (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1981, p. 2). O’Leary refers to action research as the pursuit of “action and knowledge in an integrated fashion through a cyclical and participatory process” (O’Leary, 2004, p. 139).

In relation to question eight, again design-based research and action research have common ground in facilitating review of interventions by participants; participatory action research (PAR) is a specific type of action research which is underpinned by participatory and emancipatory values, and design-based research “based on collaboration among researchers and practitioners in real world settings” (Wang and Hannafin, 2005, p. 7).

#### 4.3.1.4 Supportive of Emergent Outcomes (Consideration 9)

In relation to question nine, the concept of allowing for emergent research themes or research questions to emanate from the data was presented as criteria given the possibilities for this to occur in the opinion of the researcher, based on the yet-to-be known outcomes of cyclical interventions and the yet-to-be discovered inputs from research participants, children and their parents. This is certainly the case with grounded theory, given that its principal purpose is “theory construction, rather than description or application of existing theories” (Charmaz & Bryant, 2011). Case study also supports emergent research themes or hypotheses as the approach does not involve initial testing of theories, but seek patterns arising from the data.

Action research is a fluid and responsive methodology and given that the review and outcomes of one action cycle actively frame the next cycle referred to as “actionable knowledge” (Coghlan, 2007), emergent findings, concerns and feedback from participants emanate from the ongoing process. Koshy (2005) underlines the continuous, i.e. sustained, nature of action research whereby evaluation is ongoing throughout an action cycle, and the action plan is reviewed and modified prior to the following action cycle. Koshy considers action research as a “constructive enquiry, during which the researcher constructs his or her own knowledge of specific issues through planning, acting, evaluating refining and learning from the experience. It is a continuous learning process.” (Koshy, 2005, p. 9)

#### 4.3.1.5 Transformative Objectives (Consideration 10)

Finally, question ten asks if a given methodology has transformative objectives. This characteristic can only be attributed to both design-based research and action research as it is somewhat linked to the interventionist and participatory nature of both methodologies. Design-based research *can* be transformative but this is not necessarily a central goal; DBR primarily seeks to inform new design principles and new theory. While engaging with research participants and partners to facilitate this goal, it cannot necessarily be considered transformative as outcomes in relation to the lives and practices of all participants are arguably secondary to informing new design principles and new theory. Participatory action research has the potential to be transformative (Bradbury et al., 2019; Ledwith, 2011).



#### 4.3.1.6 Action Research and Language Learning Contexts

In addition to the above considerations 1-10, it is also equally important to consider participatory action research in relation to the context of both language learning and, more specifically, in relation to an endangered language context where language engagement opportunities are limited. It is contended that given the longstanding association between the applied linguistics and quantitative approaches (Filipović, 2019); the instances of application of participatory research approaches are few (Ahmadian & Takavoli, 2011) similarly in the case of action research being utilised in the sociolinguistic context (Bodó et al., 2022). Criticism of the utility of action research in linguistics is reflected in concerns in relation to teachers' capability to assume the role of researchers (Jarvis, 2001), in addition to concerns in relation to lack of empirical evidence to support its effectiveness in the context of language teaching and learning: "whether action research really does (or can) consistently lead to better teaching practices remains an open empirical question that has not yet been resolved" (Jarvis, 2001, p. 2). It is argued that action research has developed as a practical rather than critical tool (Roberts, 2000), which therefore presents the challenge of how language teachers' "reflective and interpretive capacities" (Burns, 2005, p. 69) can be supported and developed (ibid.). Notwithstanding its detractors, the potential of action research to engage language learners (Bodó et al., 2022) and improve learner language learning motivation and teacher motivation (Banegas, 2019) is nonetheless documented. In addition, it is argued that the complexity of the language learning classroom requires a responsive, critical, and reflective research approach (Aghmadian & Takavoli, 2011).

Bodos et al. (2022) identify a participatory approach as a prerequisite in language revitalisation efforts. Relatedly, it is recommended that when working with people and their language, the focus should be on the agency of participants, particularly in the endangered language context (Flores Farfán & Olko, 2021). In the Irish language context, participatory action research approach underpinned a language learning advising approach study with adult learners of Irish in the workplace which prioritised the identified needs and input of learners in relation to their Irish language learning journey (Ní Loingsigh & Mozzon-McPhearson, 2020).

Thus, based on considerations 1-10, and the endangered language context, participatory action research became the chosen methodology of this research study.

The next section will elaborate on action research methodology, with specific reference to participatory action research.

### ***4.3.2 A Closer Look at AR and PAR***

This section will take a closer look at action research and participatory action research. Elliot simply defines action research as “the study of a social situation with a view to improving the quality of action within it” (Elliot, 1991, p. 69). Kemmis & McTaggart identify the social nature of action research on a number of levels: “people can come to understand that—and how—their social and educational practices are located in, and are the product of, particular material, social and historical circumstances that produced them and by which they are produced in everyday social interaction in a particular setting” (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005, p. 565). Building on the exploration of methodology in the previous section, this section further explores three key aspects of action research relevant to this study. Firstly, action research as a cyclical process is discussed. Secondly, action research is considered in terms of being a systematic methodology. Finally, the participatory potential of action research is considered.

#### **4.3.2.1 Action Research as a Cyclical Process**

Kemmis and McTaggart refer to the cycles of action as a “spiral of action” (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1981, p. 2). A number of action research models illustrate the cyclical nature of the action research process (See Figure 4.2). Elliot (1991) begins the process with the identification of the initial idea which is followed by the reconnaissance stage. These action cycles can be further expanded to illustrate cycles plans complete with action steps. Elliot (1991) begins the process by the identification of the initial idea which is followed by the reconnaissance stage. The plan is implemented and monitored. A second reconnaissance informs a revision of the general idea and the composition of an amended second plan for the second Action Cycle. The action cycles continue in this way. Middlewood’s action research cycle (1999) adapted from Marsh (1991) would appear to build on Elliot’s model but offers more detail in relation to recommended actions to be taken at different points of the cycle. Middlewood (1999) explains that the first step of the general idea and reconnaissance is characterised by discussing, negotiating, exploring opportunities, assessing possibilities, and examining constraints. In addition, the monitoring stage typically

involves discussing, learning, reflecting, understanding, rethinking and replanning (Middlewood et al., 1999).

A four-step cyclical process for action research which can be summarised as plan, act, observe, reflect (Zuber-Skerritt, 1996; O'Leary, 2004), presents an action research cycle at its most fundamental. Coghlan and Brannick (2014) present a similar four-step model which involves constructing, planning action, taking action and evaluating action. McNiff and Whitehead (2011), on the other hand, recommend a six-step process: (1) observe, (2) reflect, (3) act, (4) evaluate, (5) modify, and (6) move in new directions.

One must also consider the number of action cycles within an action research study. Zuber-Skerritt maintains that at least two cycles are necessary; a view that is widely accepted (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014; Elliot, 1991; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1981; O'Leary, 2004). Kemmis & McTaggart (1981) describe the first step of action research and its evaluation in the sense where *step* is synonymous with the concept of an action cycle.

Finally, it is also important to consider the in-cycle and end-of cycle reflection process. Schon (1983) explores the reflection/action cycle. He differentiates between reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. Reflection-in-action occurred when reflection takes place during a process and practice may be informed by such reflection in praxis, whereas reflection-on-action suggests a post-process reflection. Coghlan (2019) illustrates the concept of concurrent cycles through the example of an analogue clock with the hour, minute and second hands completing their respective cycles at different speeds. In-cycle and end-of-cycle reflections are illustrated in Section 5.5 of the design and implementation chapter.

#### 4.3.2.2 Action research as a Systematic Methodology

While there are a number of interpretations of an action cycle and the steps within each cycle, they all share a systematic practice. McNiff (2014) notes that action research must be visibly systematic; this is achieved when the researcher demonstrates that their work is purposeful and intentional (*ibid.*).

Macintyre (2000) emphasises the need for a rigorous comprehensive self-assessment of current practice as the point of departure. The characterisation of action research as

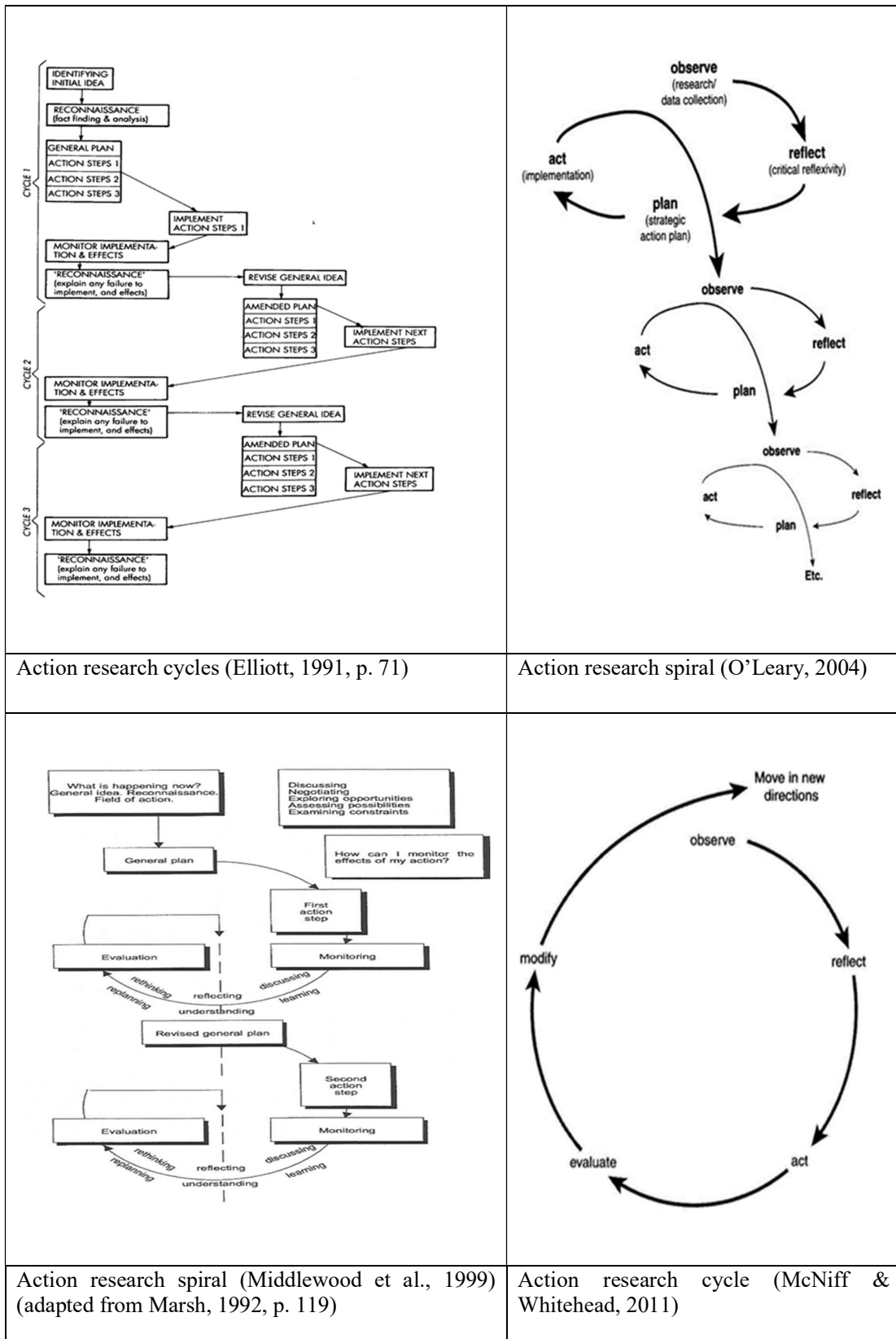


Figure 4.2. Four Action Research Cycle Models

“essentially an on-the-spot procedure designed to deal with a concrete problem located in an immediate situation” (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 93), is widely refuted (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014; McNiff & Whitehead, 2011). While action research can be flexible, it is also rigorous (MacIntyre, 2000). The systematic nature of action research is explored further later.

#### 4.3.2.3 Action Research or Participatory Action Research?

Not all action research claims to be participatory. Cohen et al. (2013) maintain that the categorisation of action research exclusively as a group undertaking may be overly restrictive; “it is possible for action research to be an individualistic matter as well” (Cohen et al., 2013, p. 301). This view is supported with reference to the ‘teacher-as-researcher’ movement (Stenhouse, 1975) and Whitehead’s explicit reference to action research in individualistic terms (1985, 1989) whereby the teacher-as-researcher asks his/herself “How do I improve my practice?” (Whitehead, 1985).

Denzin & Lincoln, on the other hand, use the terms action research and participatory action research interchangeably: “action research or participatory action research is another emergent form of qualitative research, which usually involves one researcher or a research team in the field” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 583). Similarly, Reason & Bradbury identify participation as a fundamental component of action research: “action research is a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview” (Reason & Bradbury, 2001, p. 1).

Kemmis and McTaggart emphasise that collaboration by participants is an essential element of action research coupled with a critical examination of the action of each participant in the group; action research is a

“form of collective self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices as well as their understanding of these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out” (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988, p. 5)

Kemmis and McTaggart (1992) maintain that “action research is a group activity” and that “action research is not individualistic”; to “lapse into individualism is to destroy the critical dynamic of the group” (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1992, p. 15). In short, Kemmis and

McTaggart (1988) emphasise that collaboration by participants is an essential element of action research.

Brydon-Millar & Maguire present the essential elements of participatory action research (PAR) as “principles and frameworks to enable teacher and/or school-based practitioner inquiry to become more participatory, collaborative, and democratizing in ways that meaningfully engage students, families, and other educators in the full range of the action research cycle, from problem identification to making project results and implications public” (Brydon-Millar & Maguire, 2009, pp. 82-83). Similarly, Somekh emphasises that partnership with participants is an essential element of action research: “action research provides a means whereby research can become a systematic intervention, going beyond describing, analysing and theorizing social practices to working in partnership with participants to reconstruct and transform those practices” (Somekh, 2006, p. 27).

Interestingly, McNiff and Whitehead (2011) maintain that the labels participatory action research and collaborative action research are tautological given that action research is participatory and collaborative by default. McTaggart also believes the use of the label participatory is superfluous in the field of educational research given that educators “have always assumed that participation (or collaboration) was fundamental to the idea of action research” (2006, p. 314).

It is argued that participatory action research is built on democratic processes between participants (Elliot, 1991; Grundy, 1987). This is echoed by Coghlan & Brannick who identify “egalitarian participation” as a key component of participatory action research (2014, p. 15). This resonates with the principles of student voice outlined in Section 2.5.1.

#### **4.4 Statement of Positionality**

I acknowledge that my current and past experiences in the education sector and in life in general impact notably on my ontological and epistemological assumptions as a researcher, as an educator and as an individual. My experience as a primary school teacher in a DEIS<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A DEIS school is a designated disadvantaged school which receives additional funding to non-DEIS schools in order to put additional supports and initiatives in place to improve literacy, numeracy, attendance,

school, prior to and on commencement of the study, my background as a linguist and language learner, my involvement in educational research projects prior to this study, my change of role to primary school principal in a partner DEIS school, during the latter part of the field work, as well as my life experiences in general, all shape my world view. I broadly align with a reflective and participatory constructionist-interpretive research framework.

I firmly believe that educational research should be both relevant to and useful to/part of the educational setting in which it is conducted and to the wider community of practitioners, researchers, and academics, with the aim to inform educational practice on a practical and theoretical level. I believe that partnership between all stakeholders at school level—teachers, students, parents, school management, and the wider school community— is fundamental to a progressive and shared learning community of practice. The current study seeks to explore Irish language outcomes in relation to the child and parent participants, to explore the child and parent participant learner experience and to explore the impact of a participatory approach on learner engagement during the study. In seeking democratic approaches to designing, enacting and reviewing learning initiatives, the current study seeks to transform the learning experiences and, by extension, the lives of all participants.

I am cognisant of my role as teacher-researcher within the study and as a facilitator of the student and parent participants. I view my role as an ‘insider’ researcher, which enables me to “question that which other researchers may not ask, and... see patterns that other researchers may not see” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, p. 58). I also strive to establish “equal terms” (Coghlan, 2016, p. 100) with other participants and I am committed to critical reflection in relation to all participant’s perceived positionality and establishing a reciprocal relationship (Maiter, Simich, Jacobson & Wise, 2008) between all participants through the facilitation of regular meetings with participants and the creation of dialogic spaces within a community of practice with learners.

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parental involvement and partnership with others. Band 1 refers to the level of disadvantage; Band 1 & Band 2 are the two categorisations with Band 1 representing schools of greater need. DEIS is the Irish term for opportunity, and is also an acronym for *Delivering Equality in Schools*.

## **4.5 Research Context and Participants**

The current study was carried out in a DEIS Band 1 suburban primary school. The study involved children at fourth class level and their parents. The fourth class year group comprised three classes of twenty children. The teacher-researcher had the dual role of being class teacher of one of the fourth classes, and lead researcher in the school-based study. The participatory aspect of the study primarily involved the fourth class group of children to whom the teacher-researcher was assigned as class teacher for an academic school year. The other two fourth classes of children and their parents readily took part in initial and subsequent follow-up questionnaires at a concluding stage to review aspects of Irish language engagement as a year group. The comparatively reduced level of involvement with the two neighbouring classes was indicative of the teaching context.

In relation to the fourth class assigned to the teacher-researcher, the full class of twenty children took part in the year-long study. The class comprised ten boys and ten girls. Eight of the children in the class spoke English as their second language. The other twelve spoke English as their first language, four of which had one parent who spoke English as a second language. Over half of the parents involved in the project were learning the Irish language for the first time. Two other fourth level classes also engaged with the evaluation of attitude and motivation towards the Irish language at the beginning of Action Cycle 1, and again at the end of Action Cycle 2 as reference classes in the study. The parents of the other two fourth classes also completed an initial parents' questionnaire in relation to the Irish language and their child.

## **4.6 Ethics**

This section summarises the primary ethical considerations and ethical processes of this study with reference to university guidelines and established educational practice in the context of a participatory action research approach.

Ethics can be defined as:

a practical science focused on how we put values into action. It is the study of ethical relationships we have with human beings, sentient creatures and the physical world in which we live. It is the study of what we value in these



relationships and the decisions we make based on those values (Yoak and Brydon-Miller 2014, p. 306)

This study received ethical approval from the School of Education Research Ethics Committee at the outset of the project for initial data collection, and received two further data collection approvals during the lifespan of the study. The primary ethical considerations were:

- facilitating informed consent of host institution and participants,
- ensuring anonymity of participants and data collected with reference to data retention,
- determining how to negotiate a position of power as teacher-researcher.

#### ***4.6.1 Consent of Host institution and Participants***

Proposals made to both host institution and participants were ethically constituted upon the principle of informed consent (School of Education TCD, 2013; Sullivan et al., 2016) and, as the study progressed, consent was revisited and renegotiated (Coughlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014).

In terms of the host institution, a proposal was made to the school Board of Management and the school principal, in order to outline the context and scope of the language learning project and to request permission to oversee data collections. Once approved, invitational information letters were shared and discussed with children and parents—information, comprehension and voluntary participation are considered key practices with regard to informed consent (Sullivan et al., 2016) and assent.

The invitation to students to become co-researchers and co-designers of the project with a tangible emphasis on student voice was a fundamental message to the child participants. As correctly noted in the case of children, “it is essential that consent is obtained not only from the parents, which as teachers tends to be our first consideration, but also from the children themselves” (Baumfield et al., 2013, p. 34).

#### 4.6.1.1 Ensuring Anonymity & Data Retention

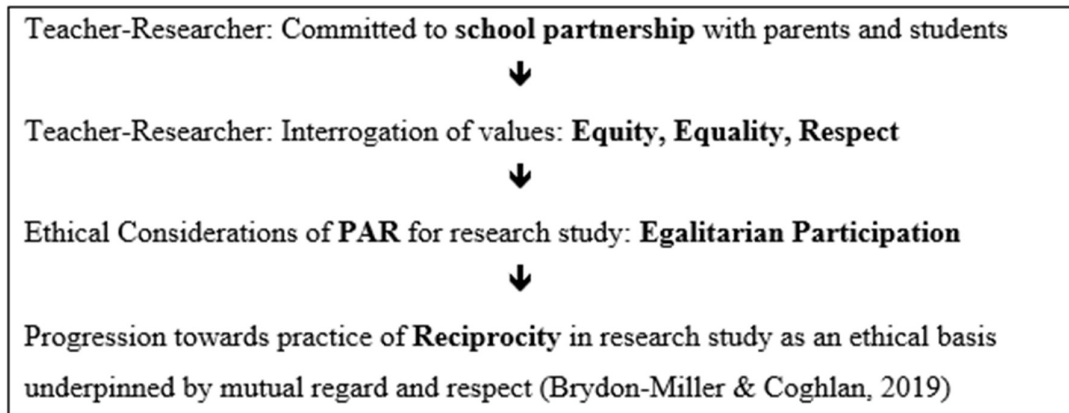
As reflected in ethical guidelines of the university, the privacy of the current study's participants in the dissemination of findings must be assured from the very beginning of the project. The right to confidentiality should include the storage of data, as well as how the research is disseminated. This is imperative in carrying out a school-based study (Baumfield, 2012). The importance of these key aspects of confidentiality and privacy are widely reflected in the educational research ethics literature (Brindley & Bowker, 2013; Cohen et al., 2018; McDonagh et al., 2019; McNiff, 2016; Robinson-Pant & Singal, 2020). In this study, children and parents were informed of the anonymization procedures at the outset and throughout the project, as well as safe and secure data storage practices and eventual secure disposal of stored data pertaining to the study.

#### 4.6.1.2 Negotiating a Position of Power as Teacher-Researcher

This ethical consideration corresponds with discussions in Section 4.3.1 and Section 4.4 in relation to the role and positioning of the teacher-researcher. Baumfield et al. (2013) recommend that researchers must, at the outset, shift their position as researchers, and ask themselves various questions in order to experience the proposed study from the viewpoint of the participant.

In this current study, the research design and methodology sought to challenge previously rigid roles within the school-home and child-teacher-parent triad, resulting in a gradual progression from initially teacher-researcher-led research to “egalitarian participation” (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014, p. 15). Informed by values of equality and respect (The Teaching Council, 2016; Zuber-Skerritt, 2003), the project sought to redress the hegemony of imbalanced educational ‘partnerships’ whereby parental involvement and student voice can be reduced to tokenistic elements of a pedagogical intervention. This was actualised by inviting children to be co-researchers and co-designers in the project, facilitating regular discussions with the children and parents respectively, providing written updates with regard to the project and facilitating a review of each cycle. This value-based approach progressed to developing the practice of reciprocity as an ethical basis for the study (Brydon-Miller & Coghlan, 2019).

**Table 4.5. Optimal Progression to Practice of Reciprocity in order to Neutralise Potential Power Relations**



The participatory action research (PAR) study sought interaction between participants as egalitarian in nature as it sought to redress the hegemony of imbalanced educational ‘partnerships’ whereby parental involvement and student voice can be reduced to tokenistic elements of a pedagogical intervention. This study’s value-based approach sought to develop the practice of reciprocity as an ethical basis for the study, and the interactions between stakeholders, in order to neutralise potential power relations, as presented in Table 4.5.

#### ***4.6.2 Conceptualisation of Ethical Considerations as an Ongoing Conversation throughout the Study***

The final ethical consideration for this action research study pertains to ongoing practice and is concerned with an awareness of, and commitment to, the ongoing nature of ethical dilemmas and challenges that might arise. The importance of the “ongoing questioning that researchers must pursue as the research develops, where we commit to the continued interrogation of *ourselves* regarding what makes for ethical research in the sites in which we carry it out” (Anderson et al., 2007, p. 134), is highlighted, and this ongoing process of interrogation is particularly relevant to action research which potentially “unfolds and develops in unanticipated directions” (ibid.). The study was carried out in the knowledge and practice that as the action cycles progressed, all aspects of the action research study were open to reflexive review and adaptation in partnership with stakeholders (Hall, 2003).

## 4.7 Research Tools

This section examines and discusses the research tools utilised in this study as part of the action research methodology employed in exploring Irish language teaching and learning. The research tools are introduced and the chronology of the data collection is firstly outlined. The research tools are then discussed in three categories: questionnaires, meetings with participants and review of other artifacts.

### 4.7.1 *Research Tools & Chronology*

A number of different research instruments were used over the course of three cycles of action research:

- Questionnaires and surveys,
- Participant lesson evaluations,
- Meetings with participants: Children’s Research Advisory Groups (CRAGs), Parent Research Advisory Groups (PRAGs),
- Reflective diary,
- Field notes,
- Technology-mediated language learning data: blog posts & social media interaction with
- Video recordings of Peer Tutoring to inform pedagogy and lesson planning.
- 

Figure 4.3 outlines the chronology of the different research tools utilised.

### 4.7.2 *Questionnaires & Surveys*

Given the participatory approach taken in this study, feedback from both students and parents was a key element of the cyclical action research process. Questionnaires designed for parents and students respectively were a rich data source that provided significant insights into the research process at specific junctures and also gave context to dialogic feedback.

Questionnaires are arguably a quick and efficient way of collecting a lot of information from a number of people (Macintyre, 2000, p. 74). Macintyre (2000) notes that the advantages of questionnaires include the provision of standardised questions, anonymity to the participant,

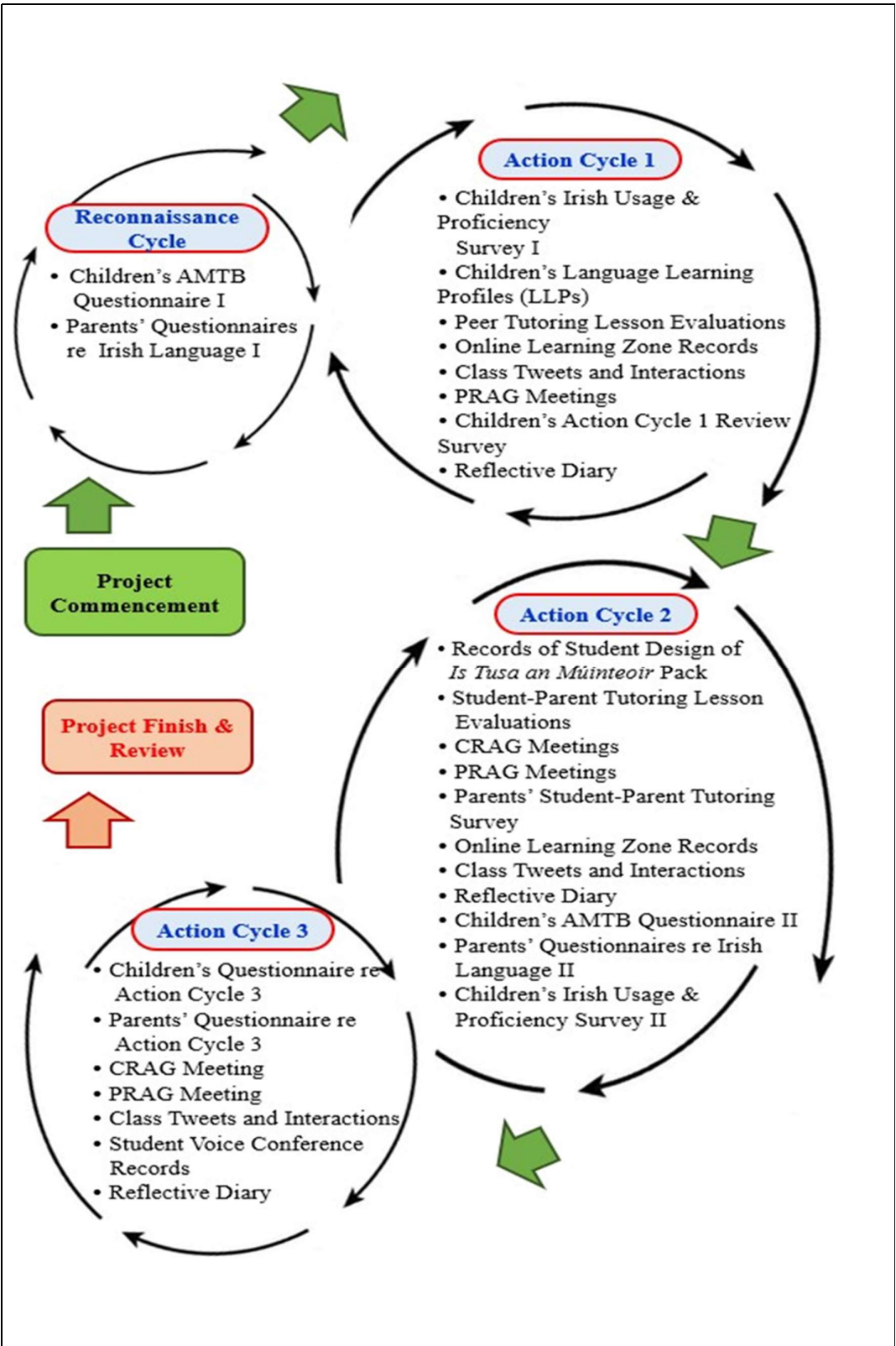


Figure 4.3. Action Cycles in relation to Data Collection Chronology

and the absence of personal bias given the lack of face-to-face interaction. The merits of using questionnaires, however, must be considered “in light of the time it will take to develop and pilot a questionnaire, and the researcher must consider its appropriateness for data collection” (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 377).

It is advised to pilot a draft questionnaire informally where individual questions can be reviewed by colleagues, friends or family. The second wave of piloting can involve respondents from the groups of interest (Robson, 2008). A more formal pre-test that involves 20% of the respondent group is recommended which may inform minor changes or indeed a return to the drawing board with a view to a second formal pre-test, should major revisions be required (Robson, 2008). De Vaus (2001) provides valuable guidance to help avoid problematic question wording such as recommending simple language and succinct wording. Avoidance of double-barrelled questions and questions in the negative is also advised (De Vaus, 2001).

Remenyi (2013) notes that the researcher must demonstrate familiarity with the literature on the previous use of the questionnaire, if a pre-existing questionnaire is utilised. Adaptations of pre-existing questionnaires in relation to the Irish language for both parents and children respectively were utilised as research tools and were also supplemented by a number of questionnaires designed by the researcher for specific stages of the research study. Table 4.6 outlines the questionnaires and surveys adopted and adapted in this study.

#### 4.7.2.1 Adoption and Adaptation of Pre-Existing Questionnaires

Table 4.6 outlines the adoption and adaptation of two questionnaires from Harris & Murtagh’s 1999 study (Irish language attitude and motivation battery (AMTB) & Parents’ Questionnaire), and the adaptation of Murtagh’s (2007) Use of Irish Questionnaire in relation to out-of-school use of Irish amongst post-primary students (2007). The choice was motivated by building upon established and validated research tools in the field while also being cognisant of meeting the needs of the study’s cohort currently. To this end the adaptations are later discussed. In terms of choice, research tools to explore Irish language learner (child and parent) language engagement and attitude were scarce.

The Irish language AMTB (Harris & Murtagh, 1999), an adaptation of the Attitude and Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) (Gardner et al., 1979; Gardner 1985), originally designed

**Table 4.6. Questionnaire & Survey Summary**

	<b>Title of Questionnaire/ Survey</b>	<b>Source</b>	<b>Phase of Study</b>	<b>Addresses Which RQ?</b>
1.	Parents' Questionnaire regarding the Irish Language	Harris & Murtagh, 1999.  Adapted by J.O'Toole	1. Reconnaissance Cycle 2. End of AC2	RQ1 & 2
2.	Pupil's Questionnaire regarding the Irish Language: Attitude and Motivation Test Battery for Irish	Harris & Murtagh, 1999.  Adapted by J.O'Toole	1. Reconnaissance Cycle June 2014 2. End of Action Cycle 2 March 2015	RQ2
3.	Use of Irish Questionnaire	Murtagh, 2007.  Adapted by J.O'Toole	1. Start of Action Cycle 1 Sept 2015 2. End of Action Cycle 2 Mar 2015	RQ1
4.	Child's Survey reflecting on Action Cycle 1	J. O'Toole	Action Cycle 1 January 2015	RQ3
5.	Parent's Survey reflecting on Action Cycle 2	J. O'Toole	End of Action Cycle 2 Mar 2015	RQ3
6.	Survey for Parents and Children on Action Cycle 3	J.O'Toole	End of Action Cycle 2 Mar 2015	RQ1,2 & 3
7.	Child's Questionnaire reflecting on Action Cycle 3	J.O'Toole	After Action Cycle 3 Mar 2016	RQ1,2 & 3

for the Canadian context, had been adapted in a number of respects to respond to the Irish language learning context, which presented as a strength from the outset. Coady (2001), in carrying out a study in relation child and parent attitudes towards bilingualism in both English-medium and Irish medium primary school settings, adapted a survey by Cazabon et al. (1993) in relation to attitudes towards bilingualism in a Spanish-English language learning context. The adapted questionnaire for students (12 statements) and parents (8 statements) Coady (2001) represented the only other sourced and trialled questionnaires in the Irish language context. While user-friendly, the questionnaires (Coady, 2001) did not have the depth of Harris & Murtagh's children's questionnaire (Irish Language AMTB 77 statements and 3 open-ended questionnaires) nor of Harris & Murtagh's detailed parents' questionnaire which also explored parent's attitudes towards their child learning Irish, and knowledge of their child's Irish language education.

The Irish language AMTB (Harris & Murtagh, 1999) consists of 77 statements, with a 5-point Likert scale response choice. While seven of the attitude/motivation scales within the questionnaire corresponded to the Irish context, two specific scales were notably modified, and two further scales added. In the *Twenty Classes Study*, the original Likert 5-point scale of the questionnaire was preserved. Wording of statements was adapted accordingly to suit the sociolinguistic context in Ireland. A specific differential scale utilised in a number of questions in the Canadian model was abandoned and replaced with three open questions in relation to pupils' learning context (Harris & Murtagh, 1999).

While a comprehensive adaptation has been completed for the *Twenty Classes Study*, a review and revision of the Irish language AMTB was overseen by teacher-researcher—which involved the piloting of the questionnaire resulting in a small number of pupil-informed revisions. A small number of minor wording adaptations were required to reflect the classroom and society of 2013, twenty-four years after the questionnaires had been administered. For example, one statement referenced the *Slógadh*, an Irish language arts & performance event for school children which had more currency in previous decades. It was decided to replace this with *Seachtain na Gaeilge* - a now-established annual festival which features in school life nationwide every March. In addition, the adopted practice of the *Twenty Classes Study* of reading the statements to the pupils when completing the questionnaire was undertaken with specific care and attention given that the respondents in this study were fourth class pupils, not sixth class pupils. Therefore, specific attention to reading the statement slowly and clearly to the pupils was necessary to ensure that reading ability did not impact the pupils' ability to respond.

At the Reconnaissance stage, the initial review of the AMTB results sought to establish the learning context of the Participative Pedagogy Class, inform pedagogic practice based on student responses and inform the ongoing methodology and research tools for the project. More specifically, the analysis of the children's AMTBs sought to:

#### Inform Learning Context

- Explore the children's attitude and motivation towards the Irish language at class level and at year group level with reference to a previous study (*Twenty Classes Study*, Harris & Murtagh, 1999).



- Explore the AMTB results with relevant aspects of the Parents' Questionnaires for context.

#### Inform Ongoing Methodology

- Review AMTB analysis in order to inform the role of further use of the AMTB at a later stage of the project.

#### Inform Pedagogy

- Review learning context to inform pedagogy.
- Examine the open-ended questions in relation to direct Irish lesson experience of the Participative Pedagogy Class with a view to reviewing/informing pedagogic practice in Action Cycle 1.

The Parent's Questionnaire (Harris & Murtagh, 1999), while a clear choice in terms of depth, explored subthemes (such as parent's views on child's Irish language learning) and status as a tried and tested instrument; it was also subject to review and the layout of the questionnaire was rearranged, placing questions relating to the parents themselves to the end of the survey and placing the focus on their child's learning of Irish with parent as facilitator and supporter. The lack of alternatives within the field was perhaps reflective of lack of outreach to parents within the context of Irish-language learning in EME.

The original questionnaire with regard to Irish Language Use and Self-Assessed Irish Ability had been intended for secondary school use. It served as a guide for a more streamlined version for primary school pupils in the absence of an established primary school equivalent. A selection of questions was drawn upon, and the referenced out-of-school Irish language domains of use options were updated to reflect modern day living.

#### Teacher-researcher and children-designed questionnaires

In addition to the traditional social science techniques, certain data collection can be incorporated into the school routine. The researcher gathered data arising from teaching and learning activities, which included two lesson evaluations of peer tutoring lessons per week, during the first action cycle. The lesson evaluations involved students identifying their

learning, what they had enjoyed, and also had an element of self- assessment. The children were involved in designing the lesson evaluations which are further detailed in Chapter 5.

In addition the questionnaires relating to Irish language use (Murtagh, 2007) and attitudes and motivation towards the Irish language (Harris & Murtagh, 1999) and lesson evaluations, the teacher-researcher designed a number of surveys as highlighted in Table 4.6 pertaining to learner experience of the pedagogical approaches in a given Action Cycle in order to inform each subsequent cycle e.g. Children’s Action Cycle 1 Survey; Parents’ Student-Parenting Survey. The purpose of each survey was to establish the nature of the learner experience promptly in order to inform the subsequent action cycle, and the study as a whole. In addition children and parents were invited to complete the surveys in advance of CRAG and PRAG meetings; thus they also served to initiate learner responses and discussion points ahead of the advisory group meetings.

### Piloting

All questionnaires, both adapted and teacher-designed, were piloted with a group of four children and a group of three parents at the outset to receive any feedback to inform design. Parents responded in writing. Small meetings were held with the children with regard the questionnaire review.

### **4.7.3 Meetings with Participants: CRAGs & PRAGs**

#### 4.7.3.1 Children Research Advisory Groups (CRAGs)

Sinner et al. (2014) acknowledge that additional factors are to be considered by the researcher when conducting focus groups with children. Single-sex focus groups are generally recommended for children (Greene & Hogan, 2005). It is considered important for the moderator to make the child participants feel comfortable and at ease in order to:

- (i) keep the group discussion focused and to ensure that all students have a chance to contribute,
- (ii) seek clarification from students if their answers are ambiguous and
- (iii) build trust, seen as is essential (Greene & Hogan, 2005). Schmuck advised to use group interviews as a “natural and integral” part of class (Schmuck, 2007, p. 45).

Murphy et al. (2010) coin the term children's research advisory group or CRAGs which seek to engage the children as co-researchers in the learning process and data collection, as well as being subjects of research.

#### 4.7.3.2 Parent Research Advisory Groups (PRAGs)

The opportunity does not always arise for the participants to explain the reasoning behind their answers when completing questionnaires (Macintyre, 2000). Koshy (2007) maintains that the purpose of interviews is to “gather responses which are richer and more informative than questionnaire data” (Koshy, 2007, p. 92). Skilful moderation of a group meeting is essential to ensure that a dominant participant does not adversely affect group dynamics (Cohen et al., 2011).

While the teacher-researcher first conceptualised organised meetings with parents involved in the project as interviews, and then focus groups, further reflection led to the realisation that the meetings that took place were primarily information exchange meetings consisting of dialogic spaces which allowed project participants, both researcher and parents, to share their experience of and reflections on the language learning interventions undertaken in school, online, and at home. Underpinned by the ethical practice of reciprocity, the discussions were characterised by reciprocal dialogue (Maiter et al., 2008) whereby the researcher and parents communicated as equals and helped each other with the exchange of information from the various domains of language use. The meetings provided an opportunity for sharing between the teacher-researcher and parents, as well as amongst parents themselves. The meetings were semi-structured. The teacher-researcher had prepared a provisional list of topics related to the language learning project and interventions. Parents were also invited to bring any topic relating to the study to the table.

#### 4.7.4 *Review of other Artefacts*

##### 4.7.4.1 Reflective Diary

Smith (2006) notes how journal or diary writing enables educators to describe an event that has happened, to add further information to an entry at a later time, to reflect on the event in question and then to act on their reflection. It is maintained that the purpose of journal writing is “to set out the teaching incident and then to interrogate it through the processes of writing,

critical reflection and (in some cases) peer or collegial discussion” (Ghaye & Ghaye, 1998, p. 146). Whitehead and McNiff recommend keeping a reflective journal in order to monitor one’s own action and learning through self-reflection. It is suggested to record one’s action, reflect on that action and the possible significance of one’s learning (Whitehead & McNiff 2006). Monitoring the actions and learning of participants can also be recorded in field notes and a reflective journal.

The reflective diary in this study was a fluid entity in the sense that it was comprised of a hand-written journal and an editable word document, and was responsive to audio and written field notes, to ensure all reflection and learning moments were captured at the point of realisation. This multi-capture approach ensured that points of note and reflections captured at a busy time could be further reflected on and expanded at a later time, which facilitated enhanced reflection. It is also important to note that ‘reflecting on’ reflections was not merely a solitary practice; reflective discussions based on the reflective diary entries took place regularly with my supervisor, critical friends and a validation group community of practice.

In a broad sense the diary ensured that project-related observations or reflections were collated and available to inform both in-cycle and end-of-cycle review. The diary also acted as a repository for the teacher-researcher’s review of video footage of peer tutoring pairs of children. Finally, the reflective diary enabled the teacher-researcher to reflect on her own evolving practice as both a language teacher and project facilitator.

#### 4.7.4.2 Field Notes

Field notes enable quick and unobtrusive recording of something that happens in the moment and allow the researcher to note an authentic event or behaviour. Whether incidental or pre-planned, it is recommended that the researcher should just describe the event at hand when recording notes, rather than offer explanations which could be speculative in nature (MacIntyre, 2000). While field notes can enable comparisons to be made over time and may prove a good source of preliminary material in a study, it is argued that they can be subjective in nature and must be analysed shortly after recording in order to recall the context (MacIntyre, 2000). Field notes can be written in situ and also after the event has occurred (Cohen et al., 2018). Spradley (1980) sets out nine dimensions which act as a check list for

field notes—space, actors, activities, objects, acts, events, time, goals, and feelings (Cohen et al., 2011; Robson, 2011). Bogdan & Biklen (1992) differentiate between descriptive and reflective field notes. In this study, field notes were used in a descriptive capacity and the reflective journal was a separate undertaking.

In this study, field note entries in the teacher-researcher's planning journal were a regular occurrence during the school day, where possible. These notes were reviewed for the purpose of lesson planning and reviewing language interventions. In addition, a number of field notes acted as reminder memos for the teacher-researcher on a number of occasions in relation to specific learning moments or developments in the project that were then further developed in a reflective diary.

#### 4.7.4.3 Video Recordings of Peer Tutoring Lessons

It was decided at the outset to film two pairs of students during the Peer Tutoring phase of the Irish lessons, which took place twice a week over a period of twelve weeks. These videos were reviewed following the lesson by the teacher-researcher in order to (i) primarily inform the planning of the next lesson (ii) reflect on the pupils' communicative language ability in relation to the specific language task assigned. Thus, the recordings were used as a reflection-in-action research tool to inform ongoing practice.

### 4.8 Data Analysis

The previous section 4.7 outlined the various research methods employed during the course of this study. Given the wide range of data sources, from detailed questionnaires to short surveys, to information exchange meetings, it is clear at the outset that data analysis for this study needed to be suitably reflective of, responsive to, and integrative of this wide-ranging qualitative data set. This section gives an overview of the theoretical approach of data analysis drawn from the qualitative research field at large, and further developed through the lens of a participatory action research methodology into a five-step approach: (1) Data Roundup, (2) Data Categorisation, (3) Data Analysis, (4) Validity of Data Analysis, and (5) Dissemination & Reporting.

**Table 4.7. Adding a Participatory Action Research (PAR) Lens to Data Analysis (Stage 1&2)**

<b>A Qualitative Approach to Data Analysis with a PAR lens</b>			
<b>Cohen et al. (2018, p.643)</b>	<b>Wellington (2015, p.267)</b>	<b>Boulton &amp; Hammersley (2006), Mason (2018)</b>	<b>PAR Lens to Data Analysis</b> (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014)
<b>1. Data Reduction</b>	<b>1. Immersion in the data</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Close reading of data (Boulton &amp; Hammersley, 2006)</li> <li>• Immersion in the data</li> <li>• Organise data</li> <li>• Recognise data</li> </ul>	<b>1. Data Roundup (J. O’Connell)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mining the data (Coghlan &amp; Brydon-Miller, 2014)</li> <li>• Deep acquaintance with the data (Coghlan &amp; Brydon-Miller, 2014)</li> <li>• Organising data (McDonagh et al., 2019)</li> <li>• Making sense of data (McNiff, 2016)</li> </ul>
<b>2. Data Display</b>	<b>2. Reflecting, standing back</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider what ‘counts’ as data</li> <li>• Understand what is required from data (Mason, 2018, pp. 188-189)</li> </ul>	<b>2. Data Categorisation</b> Participant Lens : Participant data & self-study data (McDonagh et al., 2019; McNiff, 2016)
<b>3. Data Analysis</b>	<b>3. Analysing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Examine data literally, interpretively, reflexively (Mason, 2018)</li> </ul>	<b>3. Data Analysis Processes</b> <b>Thematic Lens</b> Thematic approach (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005) (Harris & Murtagh, 1999)
<b>4. Data Interpretation</b>	<b>4. Synthesising and re-combining</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Code, index, make connections cross-sectionally (Mason, 2018)</li> </ul>	<b>Thematic Processes (3)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Statistical analysis of standardised Qs (Harris &amp; Murtagh, 1999), SPSS</li> <li>• Thematic analysis of meeting transcripts (Marshall &amp; Rossman, 2016) &amp; (Braun &amp; Clarke, 2013)</li> <li>• Scale &amp; Theme appropriate analysis of all other data– Excel/SPSS</li> </ul> Initial analysis processes then undergo: <b>Data Analysis Binding:</b> indexing, cross-sectional linkage (Mason, 2018), preparation for triangulation/integration

<b>Cohen et al. (2018, p.643)</b>	<b>Wellington (2015, p.267)</b>	<b>Boulton &amp; Hammersley (2006), Mason (2018)</b>	<b>PAR Lens to Data Analysis</b> (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014)
<b>5. Drawing and verifying solutions</b>	<b>5:</b> Relating to other work, locating data  <b>6.</b> Reflecting back; returning for more detail	• Make connections cross-sectionally (Mason, 2018)	<b>4. <u>Validity of Analysis Processes</u></b> • Reflection • Reflexivity (Mason, 2018; McDonagh et al., 2019) • Triangulation (Cohen et al., 2018; McDonagh et al., 2019; McNiff, 2016) • Integration (Coghlan, 2019) • Examination of values as criteria of judgement (McDonagh et al., 2019; McNiff, 2016)
<b>6. Reporting</b>	<b>7.</b> Presenting, disseminating, sharing the findings		<b>5. <u>Reporting &amp; Disseminating Findings</u></b> • Reflection & Reflexivity contd. • Reciprocity (Maiter et al., 2008) • Collaboration

#### ***4.8.1 A Qualitative Approach with a PAR lens***

It is noted that “qualitative data analysis focuses on in-depth, context-specific, rich, subjective data and meanings by the participants in the situation, with the researcher herself/himself as a principal research instrument” (Cohen et al., 2018). Data analysis includes the important steps of data reduction, data display, data analysis, and interpretation (Cohen et al., 2018), which lead to drawing and verifying solutions and, finally, reporting. Wellington (2015) offers a similar model but suggests an additional stage of reflecting and going back to the data prior to the final stage of reporting. Table 4.7 presents a summary of four qualitative approaches (Boulton & Hammersley, 2006; Cohen et al., 2018; Mason, 2018; Wellington, 2015), and illustrates how a 6-Step PAR Data Analysis approach evolved from an initial review of selected qualitative approaches. Key elements of participatory action research practice (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014; Makar & O'Brien, 2013; McDonagh et al., 2019; McNiff, 2016), were integrated into the overall qualitative approach, which also aligned with the thematic analysis approach (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Each step is examined in the following sections.

### **4.8.2 Stage 1: Data Roundup**

As highlighted in Table 4.7, the *Data Roundup* stage is characterised by a “deep acquaintance” with the data (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014), organising data (McDonagh et al., 2019), and making sense of data (McNiff, 2016). This “deep acquaintance” (David Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014) with the data is a prerequisite for furthering each subsequent action in rounding up the data efficiently. An ongoing acquaintance with the data, as it is generated throughout the action research study, ensures that revisiting the same data later in the study is straightforward. During the process of deep or close reading and reflection on data collected, the data gathered in this study was organised into chronological order as a basic categorisation, while developing ideas for further categorisation. The data was also filed comprehensively to enable easy access and retrieval on demand. ‘Making sense of the data’ (McDonagh et al., 2019; McNiff, 2016), conveys the purpose of the deep reading. The purpose of each data source was reviewed and its relevance to the study’s research question was explored. Given the reflexive approach to data analysis at different stages, data reduction did not occur at this initial stage of the data analysis process contrary to Cohen et al. (2018). To do so would deny a different “way of knowing” (David Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014; Cook, 2009) that emerges as the action research process develops.

### **4.8.3 Stage 2: Categorisation of Data**

Figure 4.4. below expands on the categorisation process. The first delineation was made between data pertaining to the participants and data pertaining directly to the teacher-researcher. The Participant Data was further divided into two sub-categories: Child Data and Parent Data. Child and Parent Data was further categorised into the following categories in terms of specific data type: (a) Year group questionnaires, (b) Direct language learning data, (c) Class group surveys, and (d) CRAG & PRAG meeting transcripts. In a broad sense, the participant data primarily addresses the first research question regarding Irish language learning, and the self-study data primarily addresses the second research question pertaining to the methodological approach to the study.



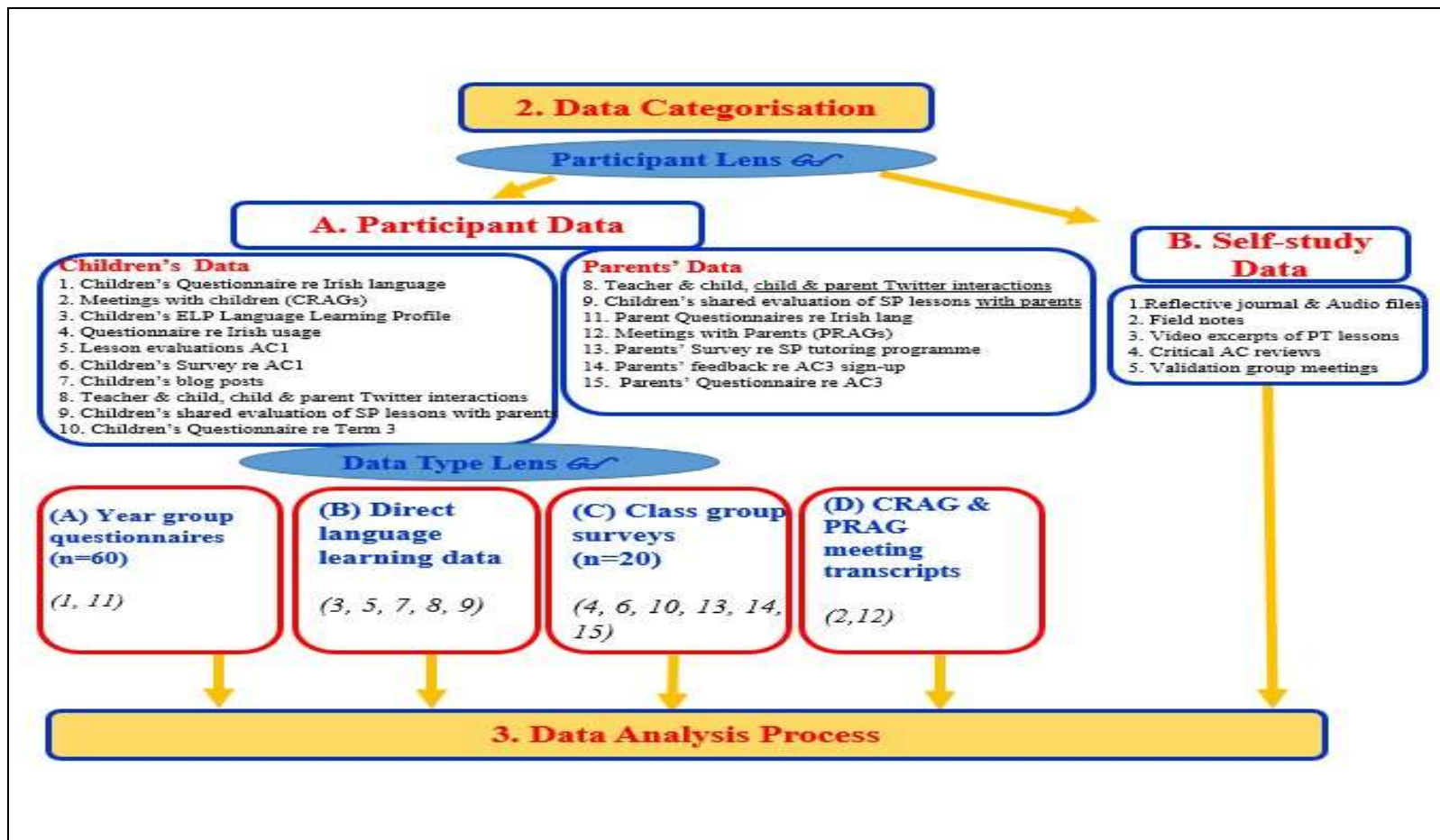


Figure 4.4. Data Categorisation

#### 4.8.4 *Stage 3 Data Analysis Methodology*

##### 4.8.4.1 Data Analysis Rationale

In order to proceed to the data analysis stage of this study, a review of several recognised data analysis methodologies was conducted in order to inform the optimum choice commensurate with the research approach of participatory action research, and of the subject field of Irish language learning (See Appendix 4 for further details).

Thematic analysis emerged as the most applicable approach given its capacity to support a priori themes in the data at the outset (Marshall & Rossman, 2011), some of which were established at the literature review stage (e.g. Irish language usage and self-assessed ability; attitudes and motivation towards the Irish language). On this premise, grounded theory was discounted as an option given that it is underpinned by a “bottom up” approach whereby the themes emerge from the analysis. It was recognised that the use of context analysis would only extend to a certain proportion of the data set which was not deemed efficient or suitable. Thematic analysis, on the other hand, extends to analysing behaviours, experiences and perspectives across a data set.

##### 4.8.4.2 Thematic Analysis Process

The approach to Thematic Analysis was informed by the six steps drawn from Marshall & Rossman (2011) on the premise that it is supportive of a priori codes codes/themes derived from the study’s framework etc. which are further developed via emergent themes derived from the data. Braun and Clarke (2013) on the other hand, specify that initial codes should emerge from the data. The six steps as recommended by Marshall & Rossman (2011) are: (1) Organise the data, (2) Generate categories or themes, (3) Code the data, (4) Test emergent understandings of the data, (5) Search for alternative solutions for the data, and (6) Write up the data analysis (See Appendix 5 for visual reference). This study draws primarily on the Marshall and Rossman (2011) steps of analysis while also incorporating elements of Braun & Clarke (2013) as illustrated in Appendix 5.

Having adopted the Pupil Questionnaire and Parent Questionnaire in relation to the Irish language from the *Twenty Classes Study* (Harris & Murtagh, 1999) at an early stage of the research design, and administered both as the first stage of data generation, the first thematic

## Initial Stages of Thematic Analysis of CRAG & PRAG Transcripts

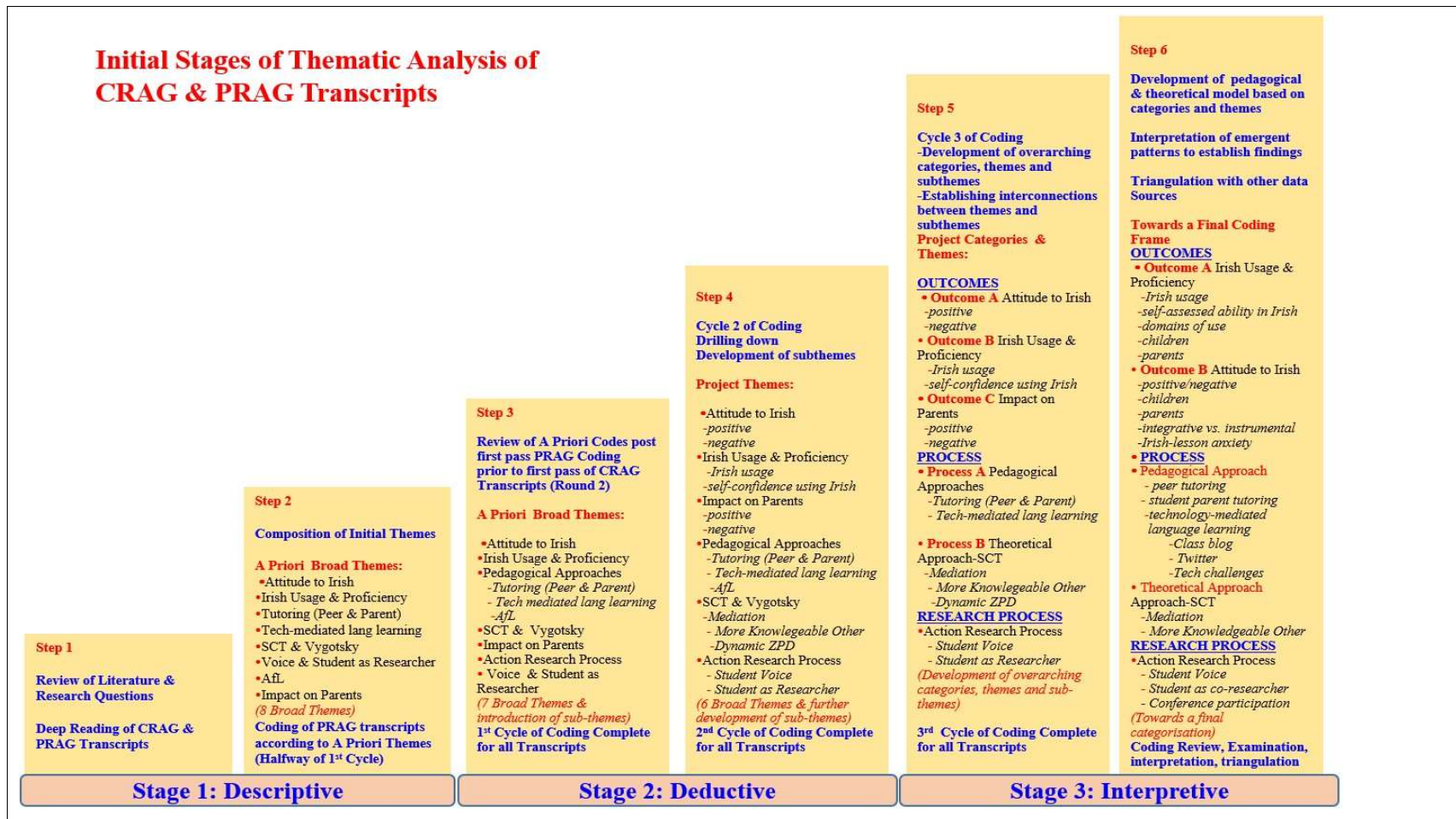


Figure 4.5. Thematic Analysis Stages

analysis approach was established, and furthermore was instrumental in establishing two of the a priori categories which would serve as a thematic lens for the entire data set. The two broad themes established from this data set were (i) Attitude & Motivation towards Irish (ii) Usage and proficiency of Irish. These themes were built upon, firstly by an a priori process, and then at a further stage by interpreting the data. The overall themes applied across the data set. A more detailed level of themes and subthemes applied to the CRAG and PRAG data as illustrated on the next page. NVivo Software was used to facilitate the deeper analysis of this data set. However, given the small scale of the study, the most effective tool was triangulation with the various data sources collected where applicable.

#### 4.8.4.3 Rationale for Presentation of Data Thematically

As outlined in Chapters 4 and 5, this study is underpinned by both a methodological framework of PAR and the theoretical framework of SCT which informs the pedagogical approaches of tutoring and ICT-mediated learning. A cycle-by-cycle presentation of the data analysis is commonly associated with Action Research studies that focus on methodology and process analysis. This structure, however, can mean a specific intervention or theme is presented in segments and is not analysed holistically in its own right. Equally, a thematic approach, which extracts the data from each cycle on a given theme, can arguably obscure action cycle-specific analysis. In considering both approaches, a thematic approach in presenting data analysis was chosen for this current study, on the informed premise that it presented the clearest structure to address the overarching research questions:

1. In what ways does a sociocultural theory (SCT)-informed pedagogical approach impact Irish language learners' Irish language use and self-assessed proficiency?
2. In what ways does a sociocultural theory (SCT)-informed pedagogical approach impact Irish language learners' motivation and attitudes towards the Irish language?
3. What were the experiences of Irish learners regarding SCT-informed Irish language teaching and learning?
4. In what ways can a participatory approach influence engagement of learners in a given study?

The first and second research questions address the outcomes of interest identified at the outset of the study. The third research question explores the pedagogical approach and its

theoretical underpinning. Structuring the data analysis according to these thematic pillars offers a clear synthesis of the outcomes and approaches.

While not presenting data analysis in a cycle-by-cycle format, the relevance of the methodological approach and cycle-by-cycle approach undertaken during the realisation of the project is not diminished. Section 4.7.1 outlines the timeline of the data collection in the context of the action cycles. In Chapter 5, Figure 5.1 illustrates the cycle-by-cycle design and implementation of the pedagogical approaches. The beginning of Chapter 6 outlines the needs analysis conducted at the beginning of the study which encompasses data collection from the Reconnaissance Cycle and early in Action Cycle 1. All further sections of Chapter 6 each clearly outline at the outset from which point in each cycle the data derives. Furthermore, the impact of the co-researcher and student voice elements of the study are explored in Section 6.6, in the context of attitude and motivation towards the Irish language. In the discussion chapter, Section 7.5 explores the impact of the research methodology in terms of its efficacy and positive influence in relation to learning and engagement, and examines the interwoven nature of methodological and theoretical approaches in the study as a whole. Chapter 8 integrates the considerations of the PAR approach when considering both the contributions of and the recommendations arising from this PAR study.

In conclusion, a thematic approach to data analysis provides clarity in relation to addressing the study's research questions and enables the teacher-researcher to present a clear synthesis of the outcomes of interest, and explore in a holistic manner the pedagogical approach taken. The methodological approach and the action cycles are nonetheless clearly referenced through this chapter.

#### ***4.8.5 Stage 4 Validity & Dissemination***

##### **4.8.5.1 Examining Validity Frameworks**

The conception of validity with positivist and constructivist or interpretivist paradigms differ widely (Cohen et al., 2018). From a positivist perspective, action research can be considered small-scale and has low external validity (Burns, 2005) due to the potentially situated nature and localised context of the research. This section draws on conceptions of validity and reliability from a qualitative research perspective which acknowledges the action research context whereby concepts such as transferability are more relevant than a positivist notion

of generalisability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Burns, 2005). Brydon-Miller, Greenwood and Maguire (2003) argue that action research meets the criteria for validity testing more effectively than other forms of social research, given that (i) action research meets the test of ‘action’, and (ii) expert and local knowledge of stakeholders combine to interpret the action research process by those best positioned to understand the context.

McNiff (2016) notes that establishing the validity of research goes beyond simply making a claim supported by evidence; personal and social validity are put forth as a combination whereby the latter ensures objective validation of self-validation processes. There are a number of validity frameworks for action research which diverge and overlap on certain concepts, three of which are presented in Table 4.8. Lincoln & Guba (1985) considered credibility and transferability as naturalistic equivalents to internal validity and external validity; for example, recommending extended field work and triangulation of data as processed, to achieve credibility. Herr & Anderson (2005) differentiate between five lenses for research validation purposes. Elliot (2007) proposes four validity checks in terms of the (1) robustness of the theoretical framework and applicability, (2) the robustness of the methodology, (3) whether there has been learning for the researcher and participants (value-for-use), and (4) whether the research has the potential to bring beneficial change to the field of action research theory and concepts, the researcher, participants, or the broader (research) community (Sullivan et al., 2016).

**Table 4.8. Validity Frameworks**

Lincoln & Guba (1985)	Herr & Anderson (2005)	Elliot (2007)
○ Credibility	○ Dialogic validity	○ Theoretically robust
○ Transferability	○ Outcome validity	○ Methodologically robust
○ Dependability	○ Catalytic validity	○ Value-for-use
○ Confirmability	○ Democratic validity	○ Potential to enable beneficial change in actions or in understanding
	○ Process validity	

Coghlan (2019) conceptualises how we can validate action research in terms of quality criteria and identifies for review: context, quality of relationships, quality of the action research process itself, and outcomes as key elements of a study.

This study identifies the following three areas as the primary methods of validation:

- (i) Data analysis binding & triangulation/integration
- (ii) Regular participation of teacher-researcher in external validation group
- (iii) Participative elements of the study such as facilitation of the Children’s Research Advisory Groups and Parents’ Research Advisory Groups and Conference Participation

#### 4.8.5.2 Triangulation & Integration

Triangulation is the principal validation process of this study. As outlined in Section 4.7 Data Analysis, the data collection comprises a combination of participant and self-study data. Participant data includes in-depth questionnaires subject to statistical analysis, participant advisory group transcripts (subject to rigorous thematic analysis), and participant evaluations (which also need to be reviewed thematically), short cycle-specific surveys, and finally, the teacher-researcher’s reflective diary. Thus, the breadth of the data collection in itself provides a strong base for validation purposes.

As Section 4.7 outlined, the process of data binding involves bringing the relevant data together where appropriate, and triangulating findings from different study participants/sources, or triangulating results pertaining to a specific pedagogic approach at various intervals throughout the study.

Triangulation can be defined as a “process where the data are looked at from at least three different perspectives” (McNiff, 2016, p. 205). While triangulation can be perceived as providing consistency across data in qualitative research, it can be interpreted as offering a deeper meaning to the research undertaken, particularly in self-study action research via multiple perspectives (Sullivan et al., 2016). Coghlan (2019) refers to the *integration* of first-, second-, and third-person perspectives as part of the research synthesis.

Triangulating data from different sources is known as methodological triangulation which is utilised frequently in this study in relation to questionnaires and responses by children, parents and teacher-researcher reflections. Furthermore, children have offered perspectives on their parents' learning and parents on their children's learning which can be compared with the learners' own responses in relation to their learning as part of a triangulation process. This could be considered triangulation via multiple perspectives (Sullivan et al., 2016). Visual examples of triangulation are provided throughout the chapter on Analysis for the purposes of clarity (Chapter 6).

#### 4.8.5.3 Validation Group

The importance of being open to critique as a researcher and actively seek constructive criticism from critical friends or validation groups is essential to testing the validity of one's knowledge claims (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011).

During the course of the action research study, data analysis and final write-up, the teacher-researcher was an active member of two external action research groups—the National Educational Action Researchers of Ireland (NEARI) and later the Collaborative Action Research Network (CARN).

Participation in NEARI consisted of attending meetings and presenting once or twice a year as part of “Round Robin” reflective presentations whereby a participant would present a research project in train or completed and would engage in discussion with fellow action researchers who engaged as critical friends. This is evidenced in Appendix 2 which contains an example of a presentation (slides) made at a NEARI meeting. Similarly via CARN, the teacher-researcher presented at the CARN Annual Conference on two occasions during the research process, whereby the conference acted as a dialogic space between presenters and fellow action researchers/practitioners.

Participation in action research groups enabled the researcher as an action researcher to critically reflect on elements of the study, both in terms of process and data analysis approaches, and provided opportunities to critically reflect with informed observers on action research theory and practice. This form of validation could be considered multiple perspective validation or outsider observer validation.



#### 4.8.5.4 CRAG and PRAG Processes

Referenced in Section 4.7.3 as part of the study’s research tools, it is important to highlight that the CRAG and PRAG meetings had a dual purpose—while the meetings served as the means of collecting children and parents’ data to review in the study, the meetings were also a dialogic space for the teacher-researcher and participants to come together, share developments in relation to the project, share experience of the pedagogic approaches, and build mutual understanding of the shared experience of participation in the study. This two-way validation process sought to ensure that all participants were up to date with how the study was progressing holistically and that the teacher-researcher was in tune with the participant experience on an ongoing basis. As a process underpinned by egalitarian participation and reciprocity, the meetings were not envisaged merely as a form of data collection, but as an opportunity for “exchange of knowledge and capacity building” (Maiter et al., 2008, p. 315).

These meetings, and further meetings in Action Cycle 3 to prepare for student and parent co-presentation at an academic conference in relation to the study, are evidence of architectures developed within the study to build dialogic processes to develop and strengthen the quality of relationships between stakeholders. This practice could be considered in relation to process validity, democratic validity and dialogic validity.

McNiff (2016) outlines the importance of disseminating work so that other people can learn from it and or adapt ideas and practice to their own context. In a participatory action research context, the understanding of ethics as an ongoing conversation between participants (see Section 4.6) is very relevant to navigating understanding and agreements regarding project dissemination. This is based on the premise that the nature of action research, in terms of being responsive, facilitates the discussion of arising in-project dissemination developments and opportunities which are subject to the consideration of all participants.

### **4.9 Limitations of the Study**

As noted in Section 4.6, the dual role of the teacher-researcher as teacher and researcher poses challenges when seeking participants’ honest and frank feedback in view of the working relationship between the teacher and children and parents. While the researcher-researcher sought to establish egalitarian participation and reciprocity between all

participants, participants may still view the teacher-researcher as the authority figure, and may feel obliged to respond positively in terms of feedback on the language learning intervention compared with feedback given to an external researcher.

Relatedly, while the positionality of the teacher-researcher is declared in Section 4.4, a continued commitment from the teacher-researcher to challenge possible underlying assumptions and ensure thorough interrogation is required (Coghlan, 2007), in order to counteract any adverse effects of the teacher-researcher's established pre-understanding of the learning context. This was aided at the outset by the Reconnaissance Cycle which facilitated collection and co-review of participants' self-reported levels of Irish, self-assessed Irish ability, and attitudes and motivation towards the Irish language at the outset, and thereafter by periodical meetings with participants (CRAGS and PRAGs) to discuss and review the implementation of the project from all perspectives.

It is also of note that the teacher-researcher's role *did* change to that of project facilitator and researcher for the course of the third action and cycle, when the teacher-researcher was appointed to a different role in the school community and another class teacher was appointed. This development challenged all participants to collaborate in a changed dynamic, while also meeting the challenge in a greater 'outside of class' focus during shared language activities.

This year-long study was carried out with fourth class students (Participative Pedagogy Class n=20) in a particular school context. The overall findings primarily informed by the broader tranche of data pertaining to the PPC are not generalisable due to the small sample size. Two further fourth classes (Reference Classes n=40) engaged with the overarching student and parent survey for the purpose of both the study and school evaluation. Comparisons between the PPC and the RC were challenging both statistically— given the sample size— and in the light of diverse class compositions. Nevertheless the limited year group (n=60) data provided a broader view of practices and attitudes. The study did not seek generalisability; the intention was to relate the experience of learners within a small-scale study in an informed way within the given context.

The class size is not representative of the national average of 23.3 (Department of Education & Skills, 2021), which may affect implementation in another setting. However, it is arguably not a critical factor in the implementation of class wide reciprocal peer tutoring.

It is of note that the study was greatly influenced by the teacher-researcher's values-based action research approach which is not necessarily easily transferable to another educational setting. In addition, the nature of in-cycle and post-cycle review, and modifications to teaching and learning practice, render the specific language lesson planning and content difficult to replicate with another class. However, the principles, the practice of SCT-informed language pedagogy, which underpin the study, are transferable and replicable; specific project design, including tutoring lesson structure and content, could be adapted and tailored to the learning needs of other children and parent cohorts, if supported by an informed approach to reframing for a new learning context.

#### **4.10 Conclusion**

This chapter outlined the methodology of the study. The philosophical underpinnings of the study were explored prior to the discussion of related approaches and paradigms. A review of several qualitative approaches identified participatory action research as the optimum methodology for this study, given its applicability to the specific educational context and its potential to facilitate participant-centred research in relation to (endangered) language learning. The research context, ethical considerations and research tools were subsequently examined. Data analysis and procedures within a participatory action research context were outlined prior to an account of the limitations of the study. This chapter set out the methodological options, and highlights an authentic conception of utilising a participatory action research approach within the language learning context of child and parent learners of Irish in the EME setting in Ireland. Piloting SCT-informed pedagogies through the medium of a PAR approach has not been explored at primary EME, and thus represents an alternative and fresh approach within a domain of education which requires renewal and innovation.

## **Chapter 5:**

### **Pedagogic Context, Design and Implementation**

The theoretical framework of an SCT-informed approach to language learning (See Section 2.1 & 2.2) is fundamental to the design of the pedagogic approaches of tutoring and technology-mediated language learning in the Irish language teaching and learning context. The participatory action research approach (See Section 4.3) also plays a significant supporting role in implementing SCT-informed Irish language teaching and learning by providing a medium whereby the children could contribute to the design process of their Irish language learning.

Section 5.1 firstly outlines the context for Irish lesson planning and design, and identifies how an SCT-informed approach was integrated into Irish language teaching and learning with reference to the Irish language curriculum. Section 5.2 outlines the ways in which tutoring support, peer mediation, and social interaction, are integrated into the Irish language lesson, and how SCT informed the design of the lessons and practice relating to student-parent tutoring. The project aimed to explore the affordances and impacts of technology as a mediating tool. Section 5.4 explores the location of a participatory approach within the curriculum. Figure 5.1 presents a chronological representation in order to illustrate when pedagogic approaches were designed, implemented, and reviewed during the course of the action research study.

#### **5.1 A Sociocultural Theory (SCT) Framework & Communicative Approach**

The sociocultural theory (SCT)-informed approach is explored in the context of identifying how tutoring and technology-mediated learning approach can be integrated into Irish language pedagogy and classroom practice. Firstly, allocated Irish language time was utilised in conjunction with designated weekly discretionary time (Department of Education & Science, 1999a,1999b), and was prioritised for the project in order to ensure adequate time for the pedagogical (Ellis, 2015; Topping 2005), evaluative and reflective elements (Little, 2022; Coghlan, 2020) of the language activities (See Appendix 7 Curriculum Reference for further details).

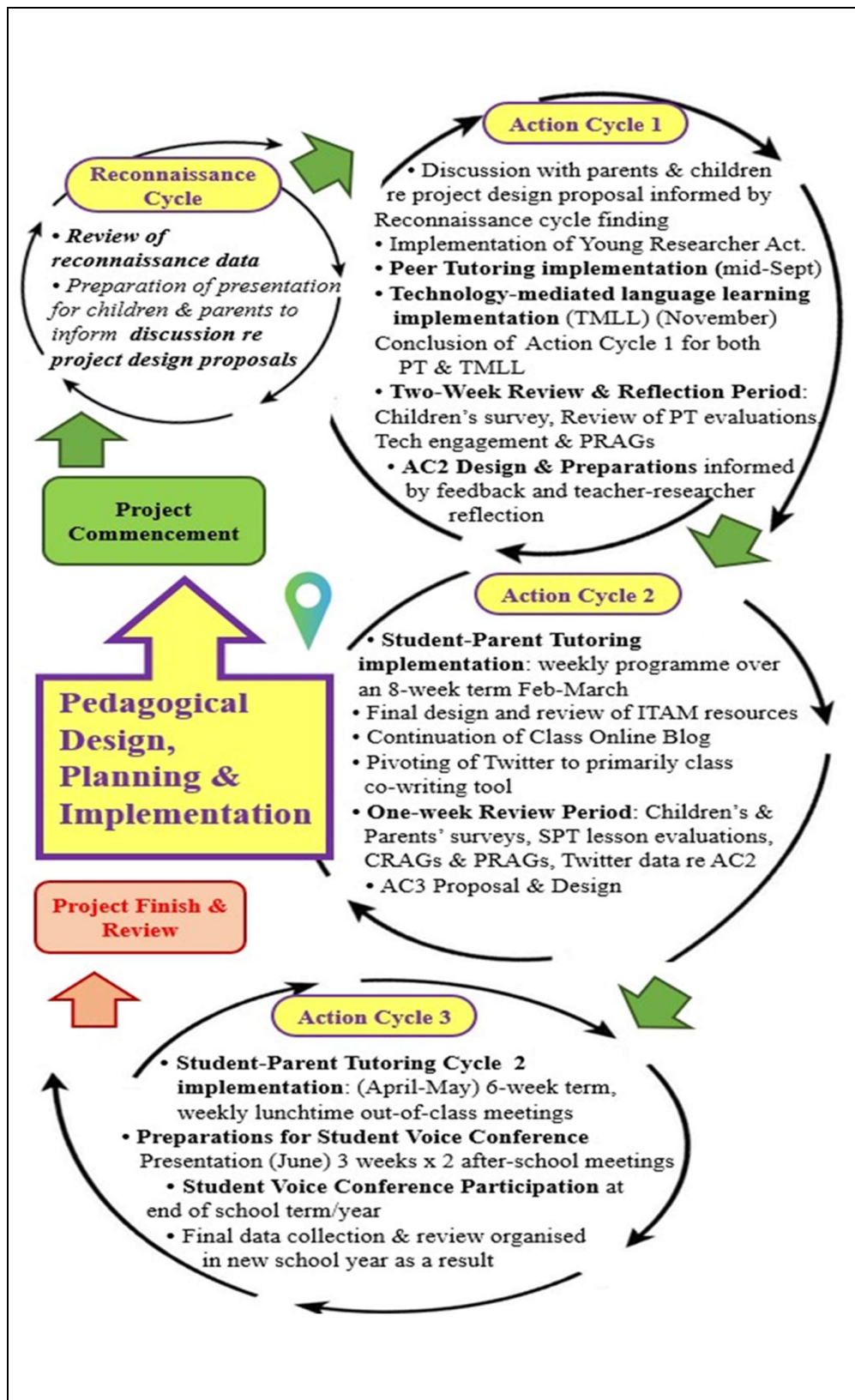


Figure 5.1. Chronological Overview of Pedagogic Design, Implementation & Review

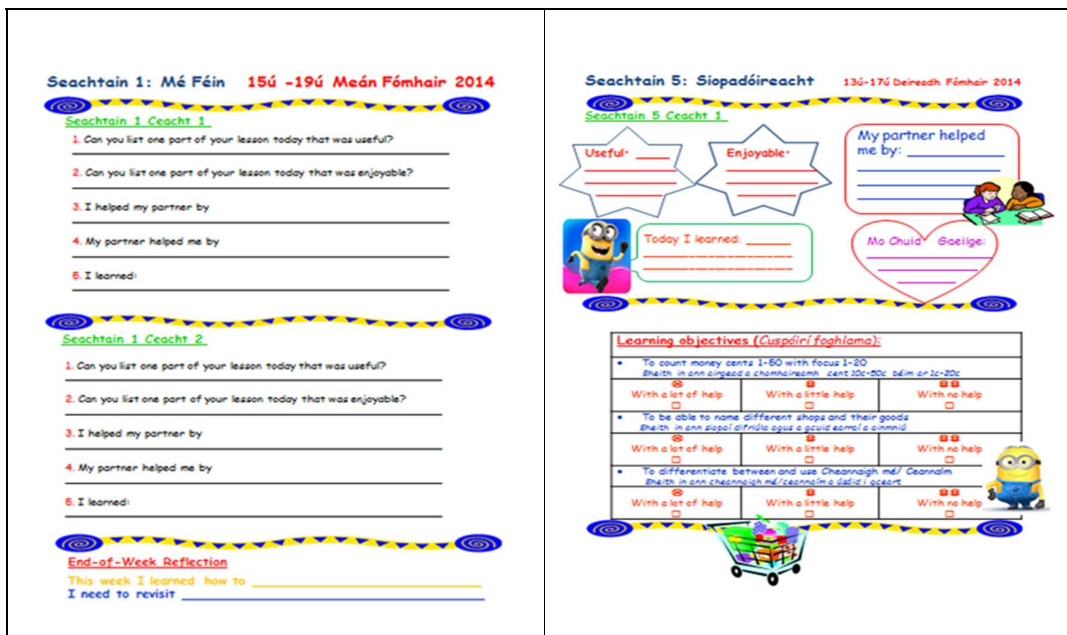


first pre-communicative phase of the lesson. The majority of language exercises were based on the tutor engaging the tutee in questions and dialogue. The post-communicative phase allowed for a range of summative activities, such as a whole-class plenary, a demonstration of a language activity by a team of students, a short follow-up written exercise, a Twitter post and the Lesson Evaluation (See Figure 5.3 for the latter). It was decided that two out of five Irish lessons a week would feature Peer Tutoring in the communicative phase on the premise of a sustainable approach to new practice. These lessons were planned by the teacher and reviewed and evaluated by the pupils. The lessons were structured into a series of 24 lessons over a 12-week period, designed to facilitate Peer Tutoring in order to give adequate time for children to develop the skills associated with Peer Tutoring. Half the children were placed in mixed ability partnerships and half the children in matched ability partnerships.

### **5.2.2 Lesson Evaluation Co-Design**

An important element of Peer Tutoring experience was to enable the children to reflect on and engage with their reflections of the language learning that took place in the lesson. This was facilitated by a discussion at the end of class scaffolded by some guiding questions which also formed a supporting written Lesson Evaluation. The teacher-researcher devised a draft Lesson Evaluation sheet as a starting point drawing on the importance of the teaching of explicit knowledge of language (Norris and Ortega, 2000; Goo et al., 2015) and nurturing language awareness in the students (Little, 2022; Ó Laoire, 2005; Ní Dhiorbháin and Ó Duibhir, 2022). The children and teacher negotiated, revised and improved the resources over the course of the first two weeks through piloting, discussion, and reflection. By Week 3, all feedback in relation to the Lesson Evaluation Sheet had been negotiated resulting in modifications including the shortening of the question format, the inclusion of learning objectives, and a more child-friendly, less linear format to record various elements of the lesson.

The phrasing of *how* one's partner had helped the other during Peer Tutoring in order to interrogate the nature of peer mediation as perceived by the children as learners. (Vygotsky, 1978; Lantolf, 2000a, 2008b; Lantolf, 2002; Hodgson et al., 2013) was discussed and resonated with the cohort. Conversely, reflecting on how one helped their partner did not yield many responses with support during the first two weeks, thus it was decided to proceed only with reflecting on the assistance and support received (Topping & Yarrow, 2001).



**Figure 5.3. Initial Teacher Design (left) vs. Student Voice-Influenced Design of Lesson Evaluation Sheet**

### 5.2.3 Student-Parent Tutoring Design

Planning and designing student-parent tutoring was a collaborative process between the children and the teacher, rooted in the understanding that each child would be taking on the role of the More Knowledgeable Other in the Student-Parent partnership. The class and teacher reflected on the Peer Tutoring process both formally and informally and the output from this review, coupled with consideration for the learning needs of parents, informed how we would design and shape a programme of lessons for parents to be taught by their child.

### 5.2.4 Lesson Design

The student-parent lessons followed the same structure as the Peer Tutoring lessons in that they followed the three-phase communicative lesson structure with a focus on peer mediation during the communicative phase of the lesson. Lesson length reflected that many parents would either be revisiting Irish after a prolonged period of not using the language, or would be learning Irish for the first time. The design of the Student-Parent Tutoring in Term 3 was informed by the feedback from participants, both children and parents, in Term 2. The overall recommendation from the process indicated that lessons needed to reflect the needs of both parents who had prior knowledge of the Irish language, and parents who were



completely new learners of Irish, as this was a recommendation made by parents on completion of student-parent tutoring in Action Cycle 2.

### ***5.2.5 Timescale and Topics***

Firstly, the timescale and the broad content were discussed by the children facilitated by the teacher. It was observed that the 12 week term tutoring children in class twice a week would clearly not translate to the home. Given parents' other commitments and in recognition of the term time available prior to the end of term, a weekly student-parent lesson over a term of eight weeks was agreed upon. The children also chose the topics to be taught to parents based on the most necessary thematic and functional language appropriate for both levels of parent learners (See Appendix 10 for more details).

### ***5.2.6 'Is Tusa an Múinteoir' Learning Pack Co-Design***

The children brainstormed what preparation and resources had been involved in implementing the Peer Tutoring lessons twice a week during Term 1. These included:

- (i) Lesson plan
- (ii) Resources for the language activities
- (iii) Copybook for any written activities
- (iv) Co-designed lesson evaluation sheet

The class considered how the preparation and resources in Peer Tutoring could be applied and supplemented in order to teach their parents Irish at home. It was also agreed that the children would practise the delivery of the lesson with a partner in class in advance of delivering the lesson at home. Furthermore, the teacher and class would compose a simple lesson plan in English for both the child and parent to reference at home. The class also decided on the lesson resources required to support the lesson including written exercises as appropriate. A lesson evaluation was deemed important as per the experience of the class. However, it was decided to simplify this element to avoid overwhelming parents, as well as to use a notebook to collate the evaluations in order to facilitate safe retention of feedback throughout the project. In addition, it was agreed that feedback from both the child (the teacher) and the parent (learner) would be valuable in order to evaluate the lesson from both perspectives. Given that most parents would be completing a lesson evaluation for the first

time, and that children would be doing so from the perspective of a teacher for the first time, it was decided to brainstorm a list of ideas and sentence starters to act as a reference resource for both children and parents to assist with this. The ideas were collated on A4 pages, laminated for ease of use, and included in the language pack (See Appendix 10 for more details).

**Is Tusa an Múinteoir!**  
**Téama:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**L.O.** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Teacher Reflection:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Student Reflection:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Student Learning**  
 😐  😊  😄

**Figure 5.4. Simplified Lesson Evaluation including Feedback from Both Parent and Child**

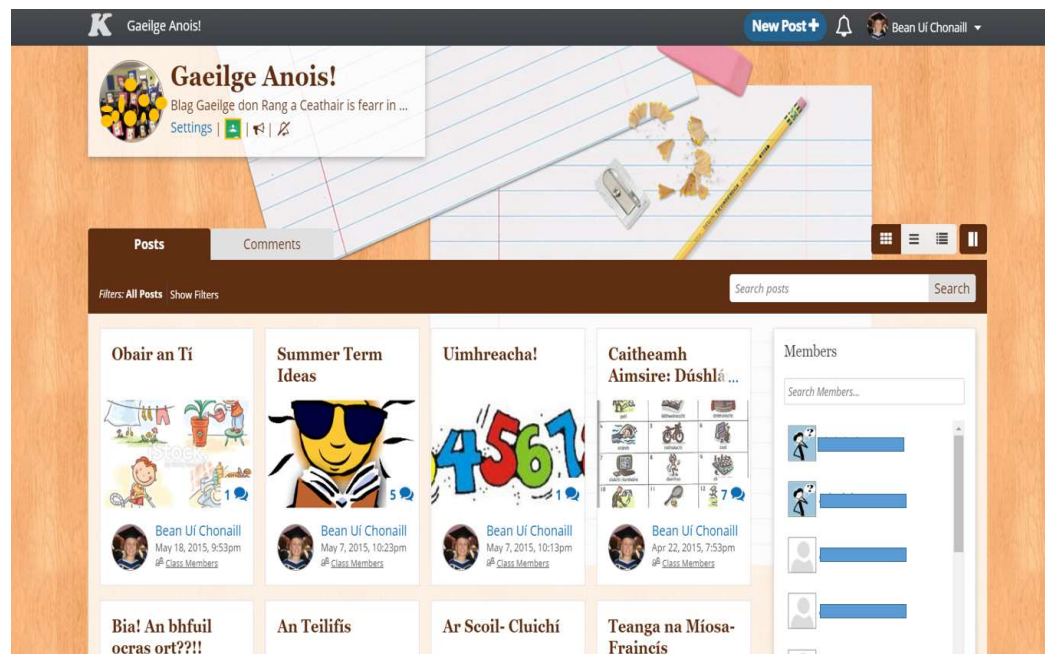
### 5.3 Web 2.0-Mediated Learning Design

#### 5.3.1 Class Online Learning Zone (Co-)Design

The Class Online Learning Zone was introduced halfway through the first action cycle as a new domain of use for the children to use the Irish language, as illustrated in Figure 5.5. The selection of *Kidblog* as host platform readily facilitated a closed learning space where children could log into a class learning space that remained closed to the general public. A guest account facility also enabled parents to be invited to log in to see their child's work,

and online interactions with the teacher also assured parents of the safe environment. It also offered parents a further avenue of involvement with their child's Irish language learning.

*Kidblog* also offered a range of options in terms of design interface. The class chose the design collaboratively, facilitated by the teacher. This included profile description, profile photograph, homepage design, post design including, fonts, colour, internal post layout and post design on the homepage.



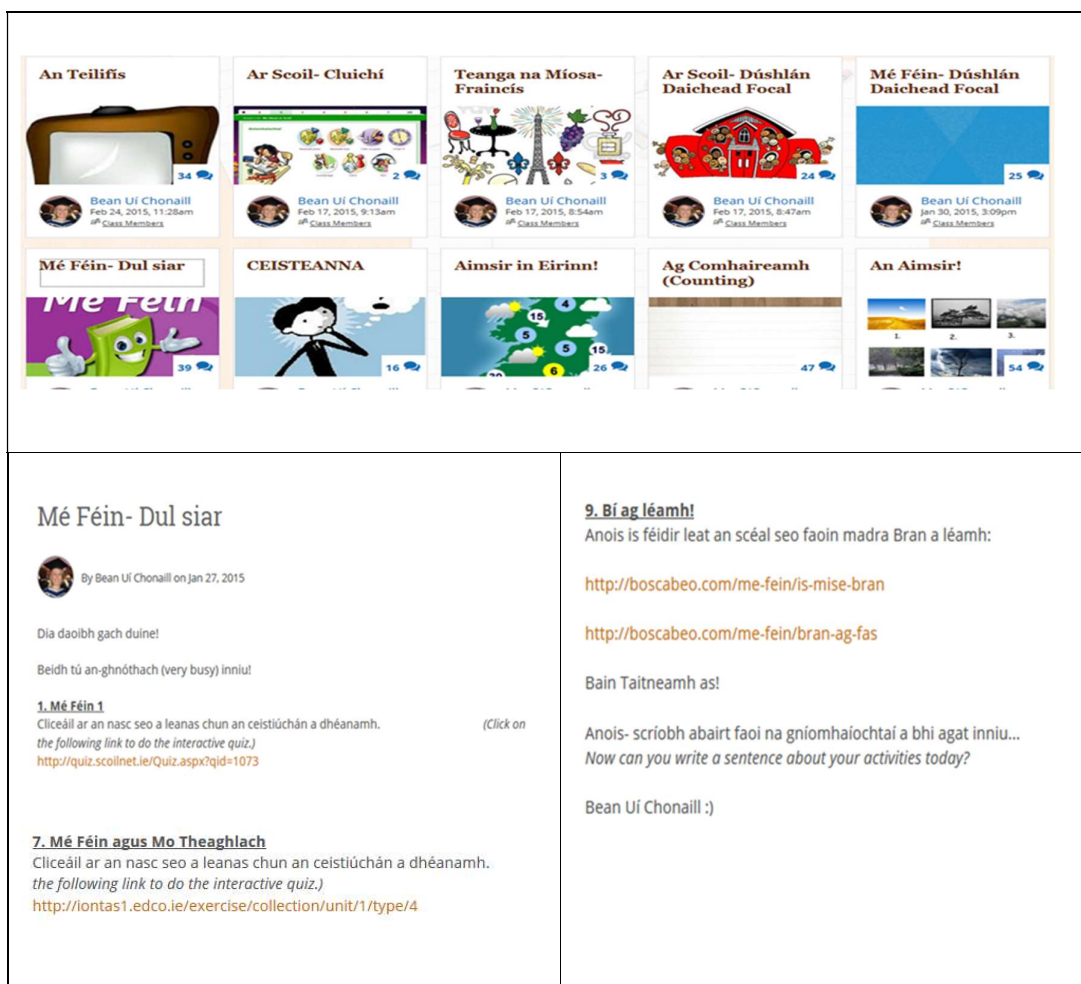
**Figure 5.5. Landing Page of the Class Learning Online Zone**

The closed Class Online Learning Zone was introduced to the class in the second half of the first action cycle. The intention at the outset was to allow the Peer Tutoring adequate time and focus before introducing another Irish language learning domain of use. After six weeks of Peer Tutoring, children were invited to take part in the Irish language online learning class space.

The introduction of the online learning zone was decidedly gentle and the teacher invited participation on a voluntary basis, for two reasons. Firstly, Peer Tutoring was underway and halfway through its first cycle. The process was very involved and there was no intention to supplant the evolution of the Peer Tutoring intervention, but to complement it, with further Irish language learning and use opportunities. Secondly, it was proposed that during the

autumn term the online learning space, proposed as an Irish language extension zone in the first action cycle, would be primarily accessed in the home. This was due to a lack of availability of devices at school during the first school term. Children and families were encouraged to get involved on a voluntary basis. For children who did not have access to a suitable device or had connectivity issues, a computer suite comprising seven PCs was provided at school during lunchtimes.

Irish language activities were devised by the teacher that (i) primarily extended the children’s learning in relation to the Irish class weekly theme or grammar points, and (ii) linked in with other areas of the curriculum like geography through the medium of Irish i.e. CLIL activities.



**Figure 5.6. Examples of Language Learning Activities in the Online Learning Zone**

Following feedback from parents and children in Action Cycle 1, it was recommended that dedicated school time should be allotted to completing online learning activities and

exercises, to ensure all students were accessing learning without facing log-in problems, availability of devices at home, etc. This coincided with the repair of the school laptop trolley, which facilitated this recommendation.

During the second action cycle, it was possible to facilitate and embed engagement with the online learning space within the classroom. This enabled more engagement with the learning platform, and allowed for troubleshooting on any technical or access difficulties that had arisen for children since the online learning zone's inception.

One Irish lesson per week was assigned to online language learning activities, which reinforced and extended the grammar and theme of the week. Children worked in pairs on activities, sharing a laptop. Each child completed designated weekly activities in class using the Class Online Learning Zone with the option of completing supplementary activities at home, or during a weekly lunch break via the school's computer suite.

### ***5.3.2 Twitter Class Account Creation***

A Class Twitter Account—curated by the teacher-researcher on behalf of the class—was suggested to the class at the same time as the Class Online Learning Zone, which would provide learners with the opportunity to write and read tweets in an authentic domain (Cunliffe, 2021). The purpose of the Twitter account was to offer a second digital domain of use to the children and teacher for communicating in Irish. The microblogging nature of Twitter which only allowed 140 characters per post (since extended), sought to create regular, short and achievable Irish language writing opportunities to a wider audience, and interaction with the Irish language community. Given that there is a minimum age of 13 requirement to set up a Twitter account, the teacher was the class curator of the language project account. It was planned that the teacher would act as a scribe for children when posting a daily Tweet e.g., a description of the weather, or class learning. Parents were encouraged to sign-up and follow the account with their child as a language learning tool, and to encourage engagement with the project. It was decided by the class during Action Cycle 2 to co-design a printed newsletter of the class's Irish language Twitter activity, which was shared regularly with parents to ensure all parents were aware of the Irish language learning and activity taking place, irrespective of joining the Twitter platform or not.

**Gaeilge Anois!** @GaeilgeAnois · 55m  
Lá Fhéile Vailintín faoi mhaise duit! (Happy Valentine's Day!) #gaeilge #grá #ócáidíspeisialta

**~Nuachtlitir Twitter~  
Catch up on last week's  
class tweets as Gaeilge!**

**Gaeilge Anois!** @GaeilgeAnois · 1h  
Cárta Lá Fhéile Vailintín le Esther! Nach bhfuil an bogha báistí go hálainn! (Isn't the rainbow beautiful?) #gaeilge

**Gaeilge Anois!** @GaeilgeAnois · 48m  
Cárta Lá Fhéile Vailintín le Shauna! Scriobh sí 'Bíodh Lá iontach agat' (She wrote 'Have a great day') #gaeilge

**Gaeilge Anois!** @GaeilgeAnois · 20m  
Cárta Lá Fhéile Vailintín anseo le clúdach ildaite ( St Val's Card with multi-coloured cover) #gaeilge #Vailintín

**Lá Fhéile**

**@GaeilgeAnois**

**Gaeilge Anois!** @GaeilgeAnois · 49m  
Ábhar=subject Ábhair=subjects Cad iad na hábhair scoile a bhíonn agat ar an Déardaoin?(what subjects do U have on Thurs) #gaeilge #arscoil

**Gaeilge Anois!** @GaeilgeAnois · 47m  
Tá na hábhair scoile go léir ar eolas ag na daltaí- the students know all the school subjects in Irish. Béarla... mata.. #gaeilge #arscoil

**Gaeilge Anois!** @GaeilgeAnois · 1h  
Tá na focail- tíreolaíocht (geog) stair (history) eolaíocht (science)..ceol (music) ..foghlamtha acu..(They have learned) #gaeilge #arscoil

**Gaeilge Anois!** @GaeilgeAnois · 41m  
Ceann nua(a new one!) SPHE=Social, Personal & Health Education-As Gaeilge: OSPS= Oideachais Shóisialta, Phearsanta & Stáinte #gaeilge #arscoil

**Gaeilge Anois!** @GaeilgeAnois · 20m  
Is é Déardaoin Ramhar (Fat Thursday) an Fhéile atá ann sa Pholainn inniu (is the d Festival today in Poland) #ócáidíspeisialta #gaeilge #bia

**Gaeilge Anois!** @GaeilgeAnois · 4m  
Thóg Michael F Paczki ísteach do gach duine sa rang! (Michael F brought in Paczki doughnuts for every1) #gaeilge #bia

**Gaeilge Anois!** @GaeilgeAnois · 35m  
Táimid i gcónaí ag foghlaim focail nua i rang a ceathair! (We are always learning new words in 4th class!) Doughnut = taoschnó #gaeilge #bia

**Pictiúr eile do Paczki ... Taoschnó Polannach (Polish doughnut) ata ann. An-bhlata! #gaeilge #ócáidíspeisialta #bia**

Figure 5.7. Example of Class Newsletter Detailing Irish Language Learning Activity on Twitter

## **5.4 Locating a Participatory Approach within the School Curriculum**

From the outset, the children in the Participative Pedagogy class were invited to participate both as co-researchers and as language learners. From the perspective of subject integration, the concept of student voice complemented aspects of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) which had a minimum weekly allocation of 30-minutes. The potential of participation in a research project as a co-researcher and learner resonated with the three highlighted objectives, with specific reference to personal development, decision-making, social responsibility, commitment to active and participative citizenship and appreciation of the democratic way of life (See Appendix 7 for further details (Department of Education & Science, 1999c. 1999d)).

### **5.4.1 *Young Researcher Activities***

The *Young Researcher* activities were thoughtfully selected by the teacher-researcher as a pedagogic aid to introduce to children to the concept of research and being a co-researcher. Drawn from *Children as Researchers in Primary Schools: Choice, Voice, and Participation* (Bucknall, 2012), the children were introduced to a series of activities which were undertaken in the first six weeks of the autumn term. Dedicated classroom activities grounded in student voice and empowerment theory (Bucknall, 2012) brought the theory and concepts to life. A selection of classroom activities was identified and adapted to suit the research setting. Three examples of such activities were (i) Young Researcher Keywords and Loop Game (ii) Closed, Open & Leading Questions Games and (iii) Fact or Opinion Game (See Appendix 8 for further details). As a result of these kinds of activities, the children developed a research-related vocabulary which in turn enabled them to discuss aspects of the Irish language project accurately, and also developed their awareness of the role of co-researcher.

### **5.4.2 *PAR Contribution to Pedagogic Approaches***

Section 5.1 acknowledged the integration of an SCT-informed approach to the pedagogic design, supported by the participatory nature of the study's methodological approach. The concurrent implementation of SCT and PAR has realised a specific integration of both approaches as part of the pedagogic design. For example, as noted in Section 5.3, the students provided feedback on the Lesson Evaluation and worked in partnership with the teacher to



modify initial design, based on student feedback and relevance to the study. This relates to pedagogic design, but also symbolises a PAR approach and a process whereby student voice is valued. Similar design interventions, such as the co-design of the Class Online Learning Zone (COLZ) homepage and the design of the ‘Is Tusa an Múinteoir’ language pack represent a combined approach whereby PAR has contributed to the SCT-informed pedagogic design.

### ***5.4.3 Student Voice Conference Preparations***

The possibility of participation in a Student Voice Conference arose during the third Action Cycle, one month before the end of the school term. The teacher-researcher’s host institution announced a Student Voice Conference and canvassed for contributors. Given the participatory nature of the entire language project with a strong focus on student voice (Flynn, 2018; Fielding, 2004), and the participants committed involvement throughout, children and parents were invited to co-present or attend.

The prospect of co-presenting at an academic conference had the potential to further address the study’s fourth research question:

***In what ways can a participatory approach influence engagement of learners in a given study?***

A shared approach to describing, reporting on and disseminating our research, presented the opportunity to engage as co-researchers (Fielding, 2004; Rudduck, 2007), critique our practice, and receive feedback on both the pedagogical and methodological aspects of the study. Of the eleven pupils participating in Action Cycle 3 Student-Parent Tutoring, all committed to taking part. Five parents also volunteered to participate in the preparations. A schedule of after-school meetings took place twice a week during the three weeks leading up to the conference as detailed in Table 5.1.

The children and parents brainstormed the main elements of the language study over the three terms and a PowerPoint presentation was co-designed by participants in conjunction with the teacher. All the children opted to speak at the conference and speaking points for each child were decided via group discussion. Three parents also volunteered to speak during the conference presentation.



**Table 5.1. Action Cycle 3 Schedule denoting Predetermined and Interim Action Cycles from a Design/Preparation Perspective**

<b>Action Cycle 3: Student-Parent Tutoring &amp; Conference Preparation Schedule</b>		
<b>Weeks 1-5</b>	Weekly Irish Club Meeting and Weekly Student-Parent Tutoring Lesson	<i>Decided on review of Action Cycle 2</i>
<b>Week 6</b>	Review of 5-Week Tutoring Term  <b>Student Voice Conference - Discussion re potential participation</b>	<i>Review: Decided on review of Action Cycle 2 preceding Action Cycle 3</i>  <i>Conference: Proposed to participants one month in advance of conference</i>
<b>Week 7-9</b>	Conference preparation period of three weeks- two meetings after-school each week (Wednesdays and Fridays) attended by participating children and parents where possible	<i>Proposed in Week 6 of this Action Cycle (3)</i>
<b>Week 9 End</b>	Student Voice Conference takes place on the weekend of school summer closure	<i>Proposed in Week 6 of this Action Cycle (3)</i>

Once the slides and speaking points were decided, the last two meetings focused on practice and rehearsal, as well as designing an interactive experience for the conference attendees. For example, in relating the experience of the Young Researcher Activities, the children modified the Research Terminology Loop Game into a shorter interactive quiz in which the audience could participate.


The schedule of meetings enabled children who wished to be involved in the presentation content planning, and/or the presentation itself, to participate, and a shared approach to content curation was undertaken.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

This chapter firstly located the sociocultural approach within the communicative approach of the Irish language curriculum, and more broadly the Irish language project within the

### Action Cycle 1

Four actions to empower students to engage with the Irish language and build confidence using the language:





- Young Researcher Activities
- My European Language Portfolio
- **Peer Tutoring**
- ICT & Gaeilge

### Action Cycle 1

September 2014  
**Young Researcher Activities**

Terminology of research: Keywords!  
A few words a day... Loop game!

This helped us to understand the nature of research! We felt part of project from the start... Our role as co-researchers was established!

---

**Slide 1:**

Student 8:

1. During our first action research cycle - we participated in 4 main activities or initiatives in order to engage further with the Irish language and in order to build our confidence in speaking the Irish language:

Student 7:

2. The activities were 1. Young Researcher Activities 2. My European Language Portfolio 3. Peer Tutoring 4. The use of ICT with the Irish language. We are going to tell you about our Young Researcher Activities

**Slide 2:**

Student 8:

3. In order to fully understand what research means and what it means to be a researcher, our teacher organised a number of Young Researcher Activities for us!

5. In September we learned 3-4 keywords every couple of days until we built up a pretty impressive bank of research terminology! We played a class loop game where we had to listen out for the meaning of a word and match it with the right word.

7. We also played games to help us understand social research. We learned about the difference between open, closed and leading questions.

Student 7:

4. The first thing we did was make a Young Researcher's noticeboard where we shared keywords from the field or research.

6. Now let's see if anyone here can explain key research terms!! I present three terms - plagiarism, social research and anonymous. Can you match the right word to the right definition? Take it away [Student 8]!

8. We also studied and discussed the difference between fact and opinion. Fact: in the 2011 Census 1.77 million people said that they could speak Irish.

**Figure 5.8. Example of Co-design PowerPoint Slides & Children's Speaking Points**

primary school curriculum. In the previous chapter, Section 4.7 introduced the structure of Action Cycle in this study by outlining the timeline of when various Research tools were employed. Section 5.1 outlined the timeline whereby the stages of design and implementation occurred. The pedagogic design of both tutoring (peer tutoring and student-

parent tutoring) and technology-mediated language learning were explored and discussed in order to demonstrate how the design was motivated by the literature. The participatory and student voice elements of the study, both at the outset and as the study progressed, were then discussed.

# **Chapter 6:**

## **Data Analysis**

The previous chapter outlined in detail the rationale and planning of the pedagogical and methodological design of the language project. This chapter presents the results of the analysis of the data generated through the action research cycles implemented in partnership with children and parents.

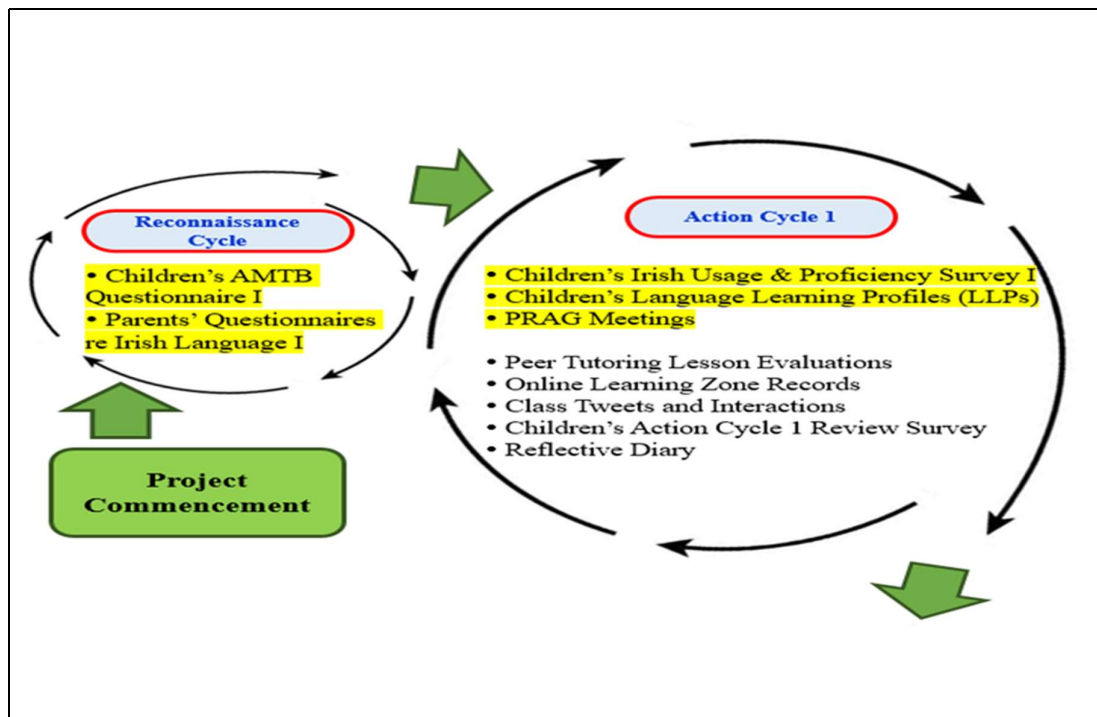
Section 6.1 presents the baseline data analysis which informed the action research study at the outset. Findings in relation to the two key outcomes of interest for the study (Irish language usage and proficiency & Attitude and motivation towards the Irish language), are presented in Sections 6.2 and 6.3 respectively. Section 6.4 also considers how the participatory approach affected the attitudes of parents and children in the study.

Sections 6.4 and 6.5 interrogate the two core aspects of the pedagogical approach: Tutoring and Technology-mediated language. In particular, the data analysis examines how these aspects contributed to the learner experience.

Finally, Section 6.6 appraises how the participatory approach affected the attitudes of parents and children in the study in the context of the overall Irish language learning initiative.

### **6.1 Needs Analysis**

The outcomes of interest in the study are Irish usage and proficiency as well as attitudes to the language. This section examines the baseline data in relation to these outcomes, generated as part of the initial Needs Analysis, incorporating the Reconnaissance Cycle data and initial Action Cycle 1 data, as detailed in Figure 6.1. The analysis of the child and parent AMTB questionnaires, usage and proficiency surveys, and discussions in the PRAG, provide a rich picture of the participants' Irish language profile, in terms of use, attitudes, and proficiency at the outset of the study.



**Figure 6.1. Needs Analysis Data**

This section sets out the findings in relation to the two overarching themes of:

- (i) Attitudes and Motivation towards the Irish Language and
- (ii) Irish Language Usage and Self-Assessed Ability for both children (6.1.1 and 6.1.2) and parents (6.1.3 and 6.1.4).

### ***6.1.1 Children's attitude and motivation towards the Irish language***

The children's PRE Attitude and Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) Questionnaires provide a rich perspective on the attitudes of the children towards Irish at the outset of the study that can be compared with benchmark data from Harris and Murtagh's *Twenty Classes Study* (TCS) (1999) where appropriate. This section explores PRE means scores for the AMTB indices and related scales, as set out in Table 6.1, and the open-ended questions of the AMTB which relate to children's experience of Irish lessons at school.

#### **6.1.1.1 AMTB PRE Index Scores and Scale Scores**

The PRE mean scores of the AMTB Indices offer a broad overview of children's attitudes and motivation towards the Irish language. The PRE mean scores are presented for the

Participative Pedagogy Class (PPC, n=20), followed by the whole year group (n=60) and the Reference Classes (RC, n=40) in Table 6.2. (Expanded analysis and calculations can be reviewed in Appendix 14: Children’s AMTB Questionnaire Analysis).

**Table 6.1. Summary of Scales and Index Composition relating to the AMTB Questionnaires (J. Harris & Murtagh, 1999)**

	<b>Integrativeness scales</b>
1.	Attitude to Irish speakers
2.	Integrative orientation to Irish
3.	Interest in second/foreign languages
	<b>Motivation scales</b>
4.	Desire to learn Irish
5.	Motivational intensity to learn Irish
6.	Attitude to learning Irish
	<b>Other scales</b>
7.	Instrumental Orientation to Irish
8.	Irish lesson anxiety
9.	Parental encouragement
	<b>Non-AMTB based scales</b>
10.	Irish ability self-concept
11.	Use of Irish at home
	<b>Index Guide</b>
A	<i>Integrativeness Index</i> : Mean score of scales 1-3
B	<i>Motivation Index</i> : Mean score of scales 4-6
C	<i>Attitude/Motivation Index</i> : Mean score of scales 1-6 minus scale 7 mean score

In relation to the benchmark TCS, (n=490), the fourth class year group (YG, n=60) study Index scores are somewhat lower than the TCS scores. However, following the filtering of outliers from the study data—as the one sample t-test requires—there were no statistically significant differences in the Index values between the TCS and the YG.

As regards the Participative Pedagogy Class group (PPC) compared with the rest of fourth class (RC), at the study outset, the PPC has slightly lower mean scores than the RC in each Index (***Integrative Index***: PPC= 87.1, RC=89.2; ***Motivation Index***: PPC=67.2, RC=69.8; ***Irish Attitude/Motivation Index*** mean score of 153.5 of the PPC was 5 points lower than that of the RC at 158.5. This highlights that the PPC is not representative of the RC in relation

to attitude and motivation towards the Irish language, and that, overall, the RC are closer in scores to the TCS national study compared to the PPC scores, or indeed the whole YG mean scores. Table 6.2 illustrates the results of the PPC, YG and RC presented in that order, with respect to the variance of respective alignment to the TCS results, to highlight this point.

**Table 6.2. AMTB PRE Index Mean Scores**

	<b>PRE Index Mean Scores</b>	<b>PPC</b> <i>(n=20)</i>	<b>YG</b> <i>(n=60)</i>	<b>RC</b> <i>(n=40)</i>	<b>TCS</b> <i>(n=490)</i>
1.	<b>Integrative Index</b> (Sum of Scales 1-3)	<b>87.1</b>	<b>88.5</b>	<b>89.175</b>	<i>94.2</i>
2.	<b>Motivation Index</b> (Sum of Scales 4-6)	<b>67.2</b>	<b>68.93</b>	<b>69.8</b>	<i>69.7</i>
3.	<b>Irish Attitude/ Motivation Index</b> (Sum of Scales 1-6 minus Sum of Scale 8)	<b>153.5</b>	<b>156.85</b>	<b>158.5</b>	<i>162.5</i>

It is of note that, while the PPC PRE mean Index scores have presented as lower scores to those of the RC, there was not a statistically significant difference in any of the three PRE Index scores between the PPC and RC (See T-Test calculations Appendix 14). While the two groups can be considered equivalent to each other statistically, the small variance observed in PRE scores did, however, identify marginally different starting points for each group at the outset of the study. Table 6.3 presents the individual mean scale scores of both (i) the scales that informed the three Composite Indices (Scales 1-6 & 8) presented, as well as (ii) the remaining scales that refer to Instrumental Orientation to Irish, Parental encouragement, Irish ability self-concept, and Use of Irish at home. Both the sum of the mean scores for each and the scale item mean scale score are presented for the purpose of clarity. Given that each scale has a different number of scale items, the scale item mean score provides a mean score between one and five, which aids comparison.

On closer examination of the individual scales, the following observations can be made:

- Children, in both the PPC and RC, demonstrate a marginally more positive attitude to learning a second language, compared to learning the Irish language (Scale 3 Interest in second/foreign languages: PPC=3.8; RC=3.9; Scale 6 Attitude to learning Irish PPC=3; RC=3.2). This is somewhat reflective of findings in the TCS; although there is a marginally higher level of interest in foreign languages reflected in the TCS scores (Scale 3 Mean scale item scores: PPC: 3.8; RC: 3.9; TCS: 4.3).



**Table 6.3. PRE Scale Mean Scores & Scale Item Mean Scores of the 11 AMTB Scales**

AMTB Scale		Scores: 1. Scale Item Mean Score 2. (Scale Mean Score)		
	<i>Integrativeness Index (Scales 1-3)</i>	PPC	RC	TCS
1.	Attitude to Irish speakers	3.5 (35.1)	3.5 (35.2)	3.7 (37.1)
2.	Integrative orientation to Irish	3.5 (14.1)	3.8 (15)	3.6 (14.5)
3.	Interest in second/foreign languages	3.8 (37.9)	3.9 (39)	4.3 (42.5)
	<i>Motivation Index (Scales 4-6)</i>			
4.	Desire to learn Irish	3.2 (22.6)	3.1 (22)	3 (21.2)
5.	Motivational intensity to learn Irish	2.9 (14.7)	3.2 (15.8)	3.2 (15.8)
6.	Attitude to learning Irish	3 (29.9)	3.2 (32)	3.3 (32.7)
	<i>Other scales</i>			
7.	Instrumental Orientation to Irish	3.5 (14)	3.6 (14.5)	3.2 (12.8)
8.	Irish lesson anxiety	2.9 (14.65)	3 (22)	2.9 (14.4)
9.	Parental encouragement	3.1 (30.7)	3.5 (35.2)	3.5 (34.9)
	<i>Non-AMTB based scales</i>			
10.	Irish ability self-concept	3 (18.2)	3.1 (18.5)	3.1 (18.6)
11.	Use of Irish at home	2.1 (6.15)	2.2 (6.6)	* (7.1)

- The *Integrativeness Index* and individual mean scores (PPC: 3.5, 3.5, 3.8; RC: 3.5, 3.8, 3.9) are higher than the *Motivation Index* and individual item means (PPC: 3.2, 2.9, 3; RC: 3.1, 3.2, 3.2). This is reflective of the differential between the *Integrativeness Index* and *Motivation Index* Scores in the TCS. This is reflective of the differential between the *Integrativeness Index* and *Motivation Index* Scores in the TCS. The Reference Classes are more representative of the TCS findings, whereas the corresponding differential is not as pronounced in the PPC scores. It could be suggested that the cohort are more motivated by a sense of Irish identity than being motivated to learn the language.



- In relation to the *Irish lesson anxiety* scale, it is of note that the higher the figure, the higher the level of anxiety. Thus, a low score is optimum. The Participative Pedagogy Class (PPC), RC, and TCS classes all indicate, according to Harris & Murtagh (1999), relatively high levels of anxiety in relation to Irish (PPC: 2.9; TCS:2.9; RC:3) at the outset of the study (See Appendix 12: Reflective Diary Excerpts regarding Irish lesson anxiety)
- With regard to Scale 7 *Instrumental Orientation to Irish*, the scale item mean score of both the PPC and RC groups (3.5 and 3.6, respectively), are notably higher than that of the TCS (3.2). Harris & Murtagh (1999) noted in their study that *Instrumental Orientation to Irish* was lower than that of any of the *Integrative orientation to Irish* scale scores (3.7, 3.6, and 4.3). In the case of the PPC, the *Instrumental Orientation to Irish* score was the same or closer in range to its corresponding *Integrativeness* scale scores (3.5, 3.5, and 3.8) at the outset of the study.
- In relation to the *Parental encouragement* scale, the PPC mean score of 3.1. was lower than that of both the Reference Classes and the TCS, which both scored at 3.5. The lower score for the PPC could reflect the proportion of children in the class whose parents were new learners of Irish compared with a relatively lower proportion of parents as new learners of Irish in the Reference Classes.

Scale 9 *Irish ability Self-concept* and Scale 11 *Use of Irish at Home* will be discussed in Section 6.1.2 in the context of Irish language usage and self-assessment.

#### 6.1.1.2 AMTB Open-End Questions in relation to Irish Lessons

The second section of the AMTB questionnaire, which consisted of three open-ended questions, was reviewed in detail, given its relevance in informing the pedagogic design of Irish lessons in the new term.

The three questions of the second section were:

- What do you *not* like about your Irish lessons?
- What do you like about your Irish lessons?
- What would you change about your Irish lessons?

The PPC cited the following three primary reasons for disliking Irish lessons as: (i) overuse of textbook, (ii) overemphasis on writing, (iii) the branding of Irish lessons as boring (See Appendix 14 for tabulation of all responses). Five children responded that they would change ‘everything’ about their Irish lessons in a related question. Conversely, acting and drama proved the most liked aspect of Irish lessons, followed by song singing and games. Children also responded that there was ‘nothing’ that they liked in their Irish lessons. When addressing what could be changed, ‘more (fun) games and activities’ was cited by the majority of students, followed by a request for more ICT/computer activities and less book work (See Appendix 12 for reflective diary excerpt in relation to use of textbook).

**Table 6.4. Student Feedback on Irish Lessons**

<b>Feedback from Student re Irish Lessons- top three responses</b> ( <i>no. of responses in brackets</i> )			
	<i>Dislike</i>	<i>Like</i>	<i>Change</i>
1.	We use the book too much (7)	We act out things (10)	More (fun) games/activities (13)
2.	We write too much (7)	We learn songs (7)	More ICT/computer activities (6)
3.	Boring (6)	We play games (4) Nothing (4)	Less book work (5)

### **6.1.2 Children’s Language Usage & Self-assessed ability in Irish**

This section draws together the findings from the AMTB and self-assessment questionnaires and ELP entries.

#### **6.1.2.1 AMTBs: Use of Irish at Home Scale and Irish Ability Self-Concept**

In relation to the *Use of Irish at Home* scale, the PPC demonstrated a scale item mean score of 2.1. With an average scale item mean score of 3.1 across the 11 scales for the PPC, the scale item mean score of 2.1 was the lowest of all PPC scale scores at the Needs Analysis stage, and in a one sample t-test, statistically, significantly lower than the score of 3.5 in the TCS ( $t=12.429$ ;  $p \leq 0.001$ ). In summary, the *Use of Irish at Home* scale scores for the Participative Pedagogy Class were relatively low, compared with (ii) PPC average scale item mean scores in general, and TCS average-scales scores. This finding was consistent for the RC and the PPC groups. In relation to the *Irish Ability Self-Concept* scale, the children in both the PPC and RC broadly scored themselves as three out of five in their Irish language ability (scale=3 and 3.1 respectively), in line with the results of the TCS study. For the PPC,

this arguably gave a more positive overall reflection of self-assessed ability than that reflected in the class survey presented in Section 6.1.2.2.

**Table 6.5. Scale 10 & Scale 11 Mean Scores & Scale Item Mean Scores**

AMTB Scale	Scores:		
	1. Scale Item Mean Score 2. (Scale Mean Score)		
	PPC	RC	TCS
Use of Irish at Home	2.1 (6.15)	2.2 (6.6)	* not available (7.1)
Irish Ability Self-Concept	3 (18.2)	3.1 (18.5)	3.1 (18.6)

#### 6.1.2.2 Irish Language Usage and Self-Assessed Ability Survey

Following the review of the AMTBs, the children were invited to complete a short survey, early in Action Cycle 1, to investigate further their Irish usage and self-assessed ability in Irish.

In relation to self-assessed ability in Irish, Question 1 of Table 6.6 above illustrates that the overall self-assessment profile is in the low ability range with 8/20 children saying they could speak ‘no’ or ‘only the odd word of Irish’. This can be interpreted as a relatively low *Irish ability self-concept* and a lack of confidence on the part of the Participative Pedagogy Class, despite five years of daily Irish lessons in school, to date. As regards the use at home, 16/20 children reported that Irish was seldom or never used at home, with 4/20 children reporting occasional use. This low rate of Irish language use was further underlined in response to the use of Irish outside of school, with 14/20 children reporting no opportunity or not very much opportunity to speak Irish outside of school.

**Table 6.6. Irish Language Usage & Self-Assessed Ability Survey Results**

<b>1. How would you describe your ability to speak Irish?</b>					
<i>No Irish</i>	<i>Only the odd word</i>	<i>A few simple sentences</i>	<i>Parts of conversations</i>	<i>Most conversations</i>	<i>Native speaker ability</i>
5	3	10	2	0	0
<b>2. How often, if ever, is Irish used by anyone in your home at present?</b>					
<i>Never</i>	<i>Seldom</i>	<i>Occasionally</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Very Often</i>	
8	8	4	0	0	
<b>3. During the past year how much opportunity have you had to speak Irish outside school?</b>					
<i>None at all</i>	<i>Not very much</i>	<i>A little</i>	<i>Quite a bit</i>	<i>A great amount</i>	
9	5	6	0	0	

6.1.2.3 Multilingual Profiles

The PPC’s Multilingual Profiles provide a perspective on what the children consider their multilingual repertoire.

The results in Table 6.7 demonstrate the rich multilingual profile of the group, with the 10/20 children listing a range of languages used in the home, including two using English and Irish. It also demonstrates that the school environment is the key setting for Irish usage and suggests the use of languages other than English and Irish at school is not commonplace.

**Table 6.7. Summary of Multilingual Profiles**

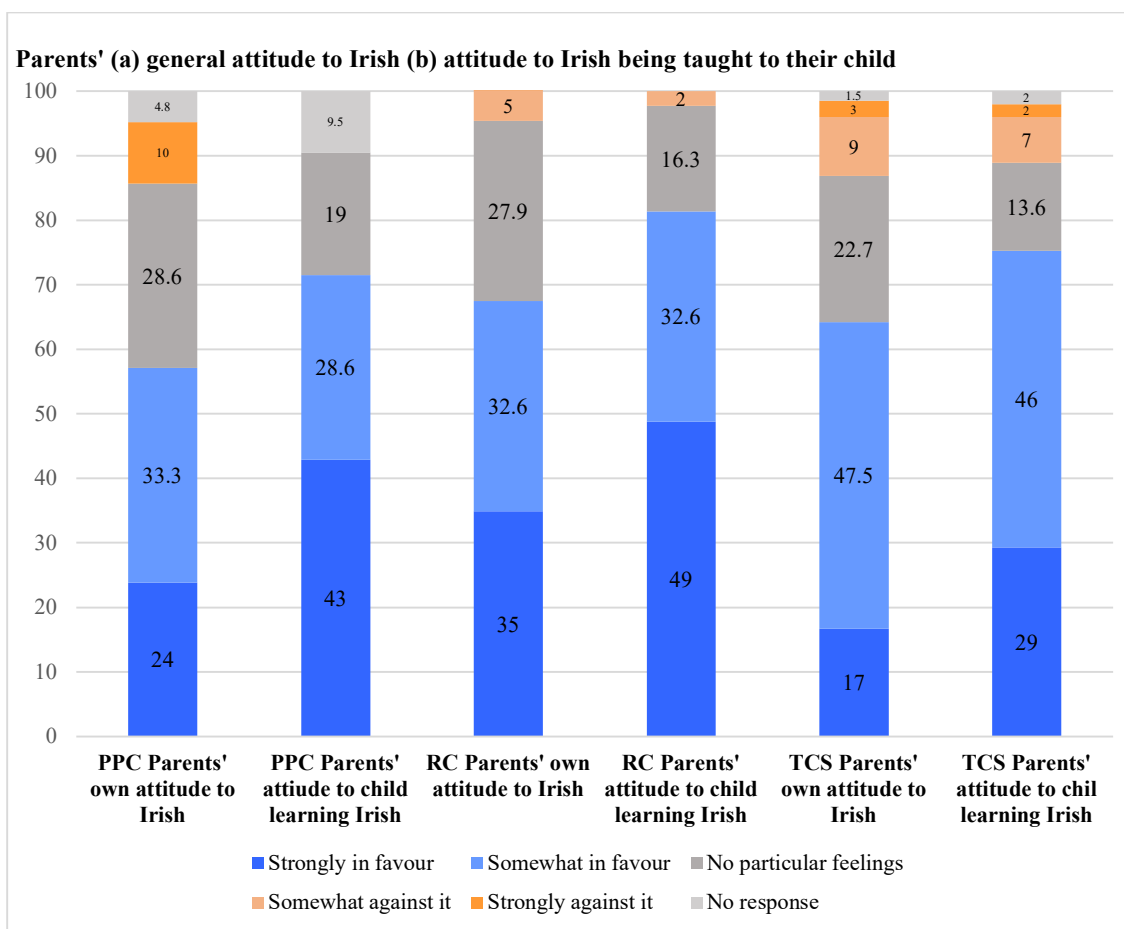
<b>A. I speak _____ with my family</b>		
	Languages at home	No. of children
1.	English	9
2.	English & Irish	2
3.	English and other language(s) ( <i>English &amp; Tagalog; English &amp; Arabic; English, Irish &amp; Romanian</i> )	3
4.	Romanian	2
5.	Other language(s) & English ( <i>Polish &amp; English; Moldovan &amp; English; Latvian, English &amp; Urdu</i> )	3
6.	No response	1
<b>B. I speak _____ at school</b>		
	Languages at home	No. of children
1.	English & Irish	16
2.	English, Irish & other language(s) ( <i>English, Irish &amp; Romanian; English, Irish, Moldovan &amp; Romanian</i> )	2
3.	Romanian	1
4.	No response	1

### **6.1.3 Parents' Attitude & Motivation towards the Irish Language**

This section presents the findings from the parents' Irish language questionnaire and from the initial Parents' Research Advisory Group meetings during the Reconnaissance Cycle.

#### **6.1.3.1 Parents' Irish Language Questionnaire**

This section summarises key findings from the Parents' Irish Language Questionnaire that the PPC and RC parents completed (n=64). Figure 6.2 illustrates the relatively positive outlook of the parents towards Irish.

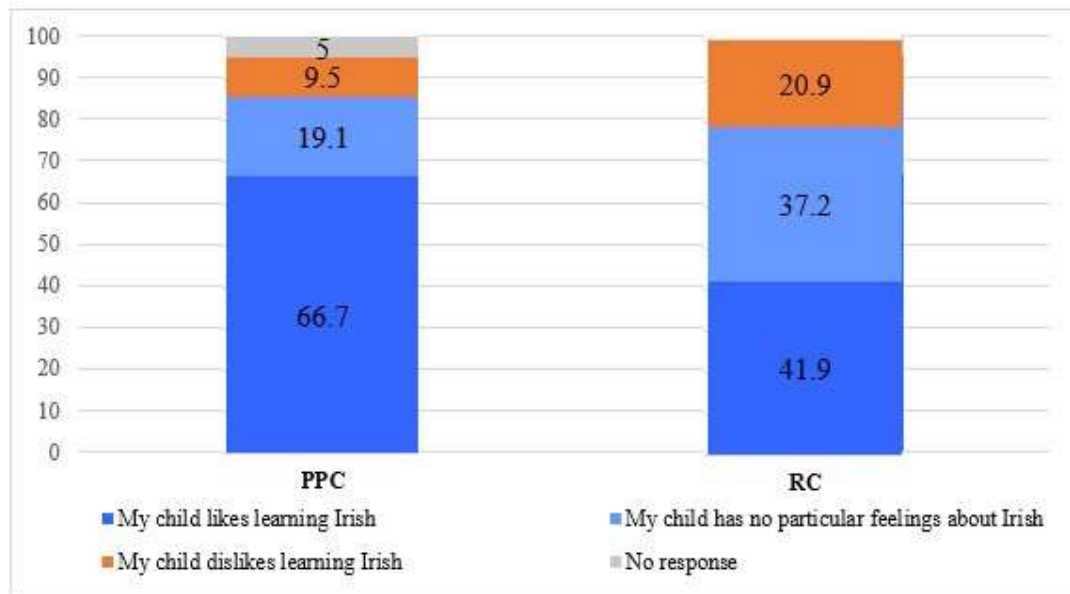


**Figure 6.2. Parents' (a) General Attitude to Irish (b) Attitude to Irish being Taught to their Child**

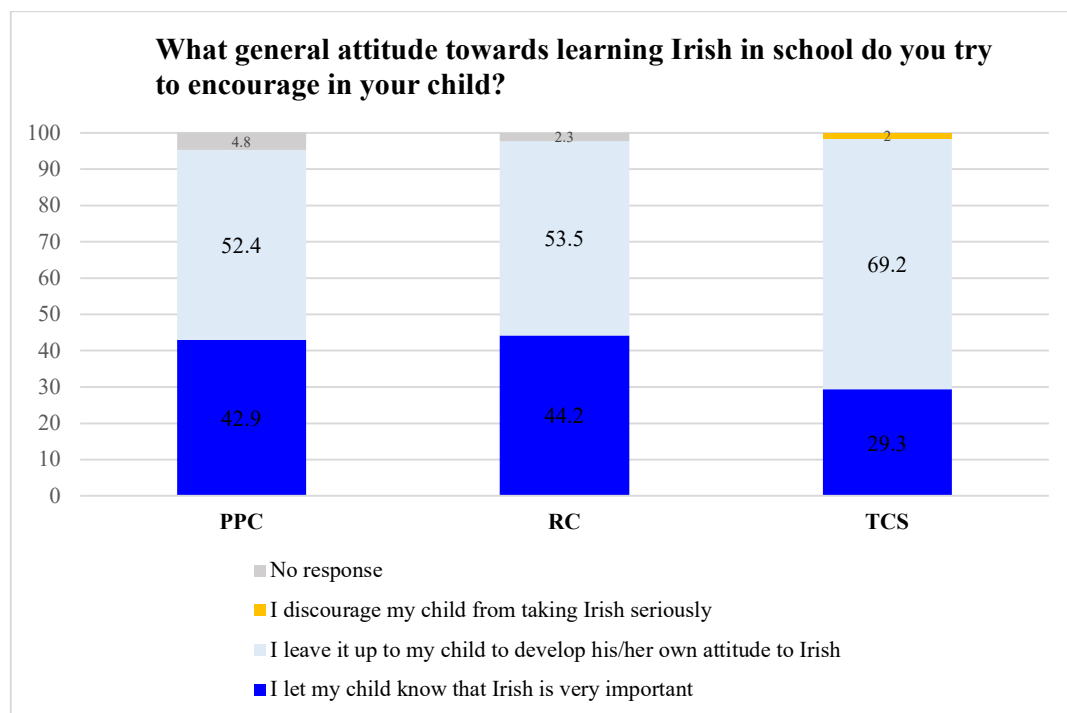
. Percentages are used to report the parent responses here for ease of comparison between classes and with the TCS. In the questionnaire, 57.3% of PPC parents reported they were *in favour* of the Irish language in general, compared to 67.6% of parents of the RCs and 64.5% in the TCS. Both PPC parents (24%) and RC parents (43%) had a higher proportion of parents in the *strongly in favour* when compared to the TCS parents (17%)—in particular, the RC parents. PPC parents also registered a notable *no feelings* towards the language (29.6%), and a number of parents were *strongly against it* (10%).

Figure 6.2 also presents parents' attitudes to their child learning Irish, which were in all cases more positive than the parents' own attitude to Irish. Parents also shared their perception of their child's attitude towards the Irish language which highlighted a higher proportion of

parents in PPC who maintained that their child liked learning Irish (66.7%) compared to that of the RC (41.9%) as illustrated in Figure 6.3.



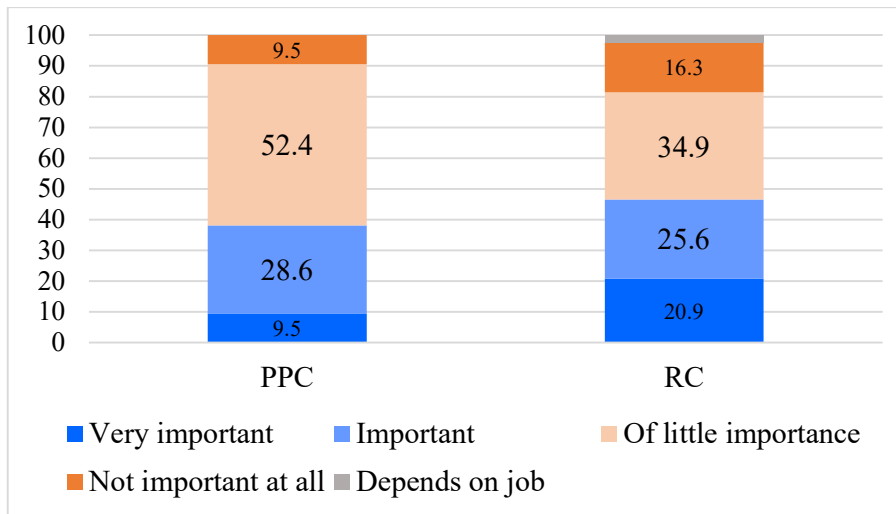
**Figure 6.3. Parents' Perspective on Child's Attitude to Learning Irish**



**Figure 6.4. Percentage Distribution of Parents according to the General Attitude towards Learning Irish that They Try to Encourage in their Child**

In addition to an overall positive parental attitude to Irish, and the teaching of Irish, a relatively high proportion of parents reported being proactive in their encouragement of their children’s attitude to Irish as illustrated in Figure 6.4. Interestingly, 42.9% of PPC parents (Q9) reported that they let their child know that Irish was *very important*, compared to 52.4% of parents who left it up to their own child to develop their own attitude. RC parents reported similar encouragement levels.

The parent cohort in this study were somewhat more proactive in encouraging their child in relation to Irish, compared to the nationally representative parent cohort of the TCS, where 69.2% of parents left it up to their child to develop their own attitude to Irish. Only 29.3% let their child know that Irish was *very important*.



**Figure 6.5. Importance of Irish in relation to Child’s Future Job**

The fact that over half of the PPC and RC parents did not give their child direction in relation to learning Irish may be related to the fact that the majority of parents (PPC: 61.9%; RC: 51.2%) thought that Irish was ‘of little’ or ‘no importance’ as far as the child’s future job is concerned; the latter reflecting relatively low instrumental motivation amongst parents for their child’s learning of Irish.

As regards the teaching of Irish at school, the majority of parents in both the PPC and the RC responded that the amount of time, and the efforts of the school, in relation to Irish were sufficient. Parents were largely satisfied with the amount of time spent on Irish (Q13) and



the school's efforts (Q18) in relation to their child's Irish. Of the minority of five respondents from the intervention group who believed that the school could do more to support Irish, one did not provide more information, one responded that they did not know, and the other three responses cited recommendations to (i) encourage daily oral use of Irish, (ii) spend more time on the subject, and (iii) make Irish more fun. Parents' responses in relation to their child's learning of Irish resonate with the findings of the TCS (1999).

### **6.1.3 Initial PRAGs in relation to Attitude & Motivation towards Irish**

The two PRAG meetings at the start of the first Action Cycle to discuss the Reconnaissance Cycle findings, provided further insight into parents' attitude and motivation towards the Irish language. PPC parents acknowledged children's dislikes in relation to Irish lessons: "Kids bring way too much writing home" (P1, PRAG 1); "There's far too much writing involved" (P4, PRAG 1) but were enthusiastic about piloting a new approach. Parents with previous experience of learning Irish recounted their own experience of learning Irish with reference to (i) boring lessons and the associated role of the teacher, and rote learning: "Well Irish was boring. At least when we had our Irish teacher, she used to jazz it up a bit with music and stuff" (P1, PRAG 1). As in the parent survey, the majority of parents expressed confidence that the school does its best with regard to teaching and learning of Irish but were unsure of how Irish is taught at school. Parents who were new to the Irish language exhibited a broader willingness to engage with both Irish language and culture, as opposed to merely the Irish language. *Riverdance* for example was referenced, and another parent noted the importance of Irish music: "My [P12], he likes the Irish music whistle" (P12, PRAG 2). Thus the presiding parent motivations that appeared to underpin parental engagement at this stage were twofold: (i) a desire from parents who had learned Irish at school to participate with their child in a more communicative and enjoyable way to learn Irish, and (ii) a desire from parents new to the Irish language that their child would continue to engage in the learning of Irish as part of a broader engagement with Irish culture.

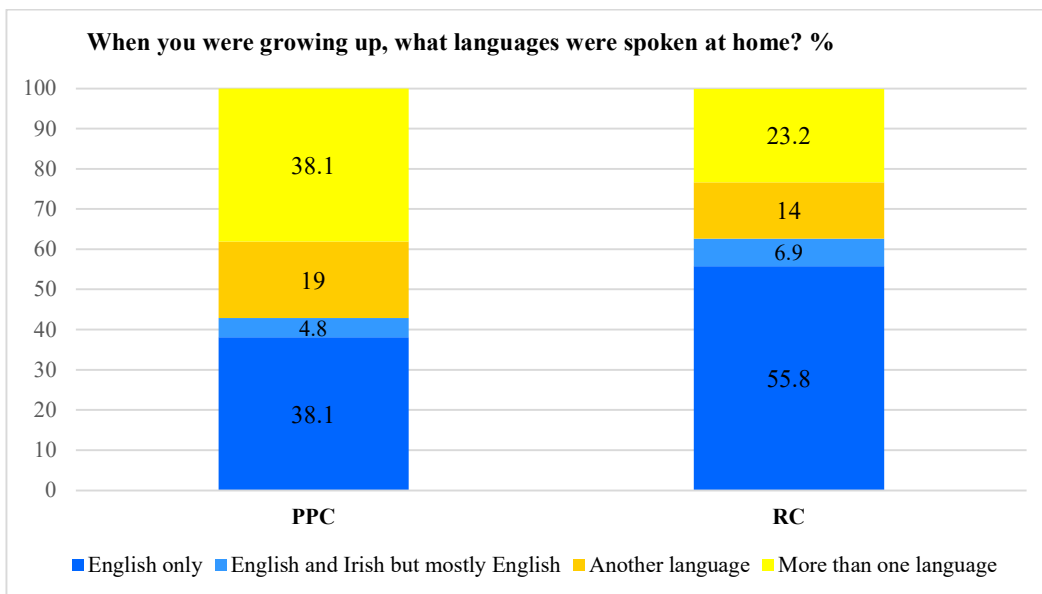
### **6.1.4 Overview of Irish language Usage and Self-Assessed Ability in Irish in relation to Parents**

This section summarises the results from the Parents' Questionnaires that relate to parental perspectives on related areas such Irish language usage and teaching at school and the area

of homework, with reference to Irish, linguistic background, use of Irish at home, and self-assessed ability in Irish.

#### 6.1.4.1 Language Background and Self-Assessed Ability in Irish

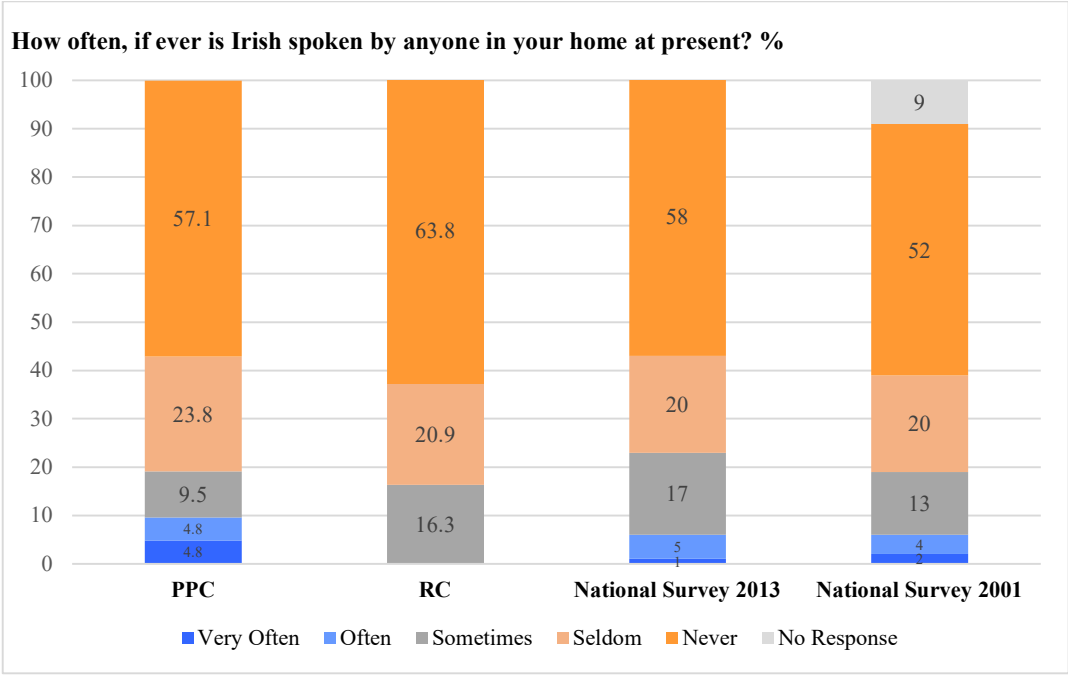
Parents' experience of languages spoken at home when growing up indicated that the majority of parents grew up in English-only homes, followed by a notable number of parents who grew up with more than one language at home. Parents who grew up with one language other than English or Irish were the third most numerous group. In terms of exposure to Irish, a total of 4/64 parents identified with the category *English and Irish, but mostly English*. No parent responded to *English and Irish half and half* or *English and Irish but mostly Irish*. In



**Figure 6.6. Parents' Language Experience at Home Growing Up**

response to the question regarding languages in the home growing up, a small number of parents had experience of a small amount of Irish. Figure 6.8 illustrates that the parents of the PPC presented as a more linguistically diverse group compared to RC parents with a lower number of *English only* responses (PPC: 38.1% (8/21 parents); RC: 55.8%), and also by a proportionally greater number of parents (PPC: 38.1%; RC: 23.2%) that grew up with more than one language at home.

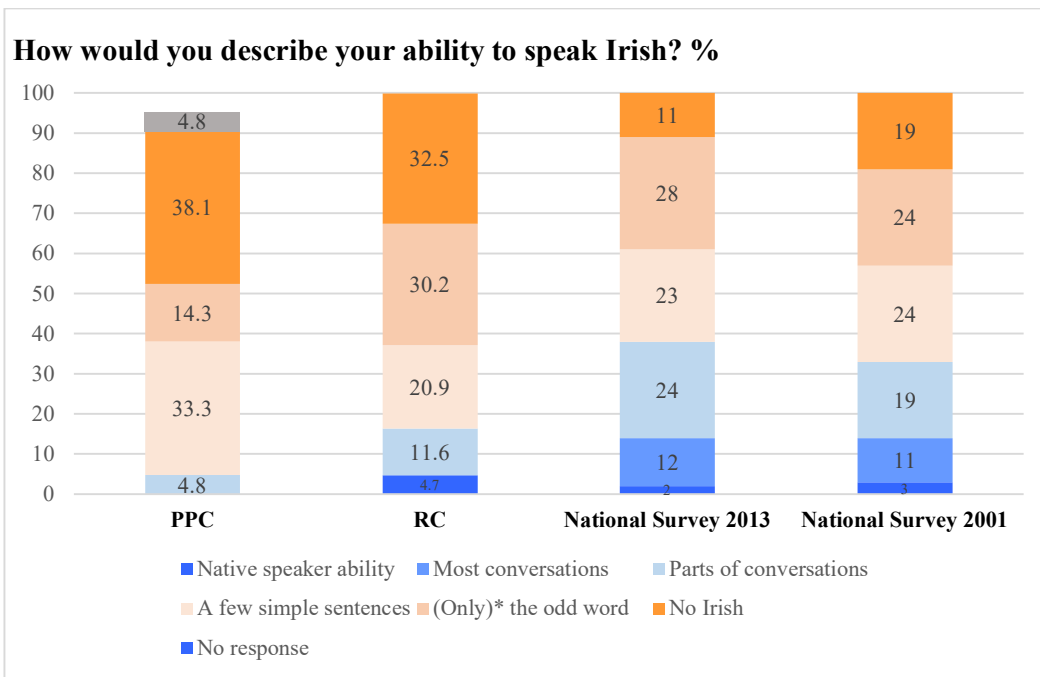
Building on parents' linguistic background, use of Irish in the home and the self-assessed ability to speak Irish as reported by parents, are now examined with reference to the last two national language surveys (Amárach Research, 2013 & Research and Evaluation Services, 2001). The comparison is aided by the fact that the multiple-choice response options in the Parents' Questionnaire relating to use of Irish and Irish ability largely correspond to response options featured in the national surveys, with the majority of the population never or very seldom using Irish in the home. The results for the PPC and RC groups, detailed in Figure 6.7, were not significantly statistically different.



**Figure 6.7. Parent’s Use of Irish in the Home compared to the National Population**

As regards self-assessed Irish ability, it can be observed in Figure 6.8 that both parents of the PPC and RC presented, overall, as having a lower level of self-assessed Irish language ability, compared to the national average (2013).

Nine parents from the year group of 64 parents (14.1%) assessed their ability as *Parts of Conversation* or better (combining the three highest ability levels), compared to a percentage of 38% for the general public in the 2013 national survey and 33% in the 2001 national survey.



**Figure 6.8. Self-Reported Ability to Speak Irish**

While two parents responded to having *Native speaker ability*, it would appear these were responses in error, based on correlating parents’ linguistic background, and considering that none of the parent cohort responded *Most Conversations* which is the next level of proficiency second to *Native Speaker ability*. The PPC had a slightly higher proportion of parents with no Irish when compared with the RC. This correlates with the findings on parents’ linguistic background, as discussed at the start of this Section. The self-assessed ability results for the PPC present overall as slightly lower than the RC. However, this difference is not statistically significant.

#### 6.1.4.2 Parents’ Perspectives on Irish Language Usage & School

Parent’s perspectives on their child’s learning and extent of Irish language engagement with reference to the school’s role in the process is explored in this section. Despite parents reporting a high proportion of satisfaction with current levels of school contact, PPC parents reported low levels of knowledge in relation to how Irish is taught in schools. Just over half of the PPC group reported that they knew nothing at all, with regard to how Irish was taught in school, compared to approximately a third of RC parents citing the same. Furthermore, approximately three-quarters of the PPC group (16/21 respondents, 76.2%) were satisfied

that the amount of time spent on Irish at school was *just right*, a higher proportion than the RC parents (25/43 respondents 58.1%)

In relation to Irish usage in the school, the majority of parents (87.5%) reported that they knew nothing or very little about how Irish is taught in the school. In relation to the use of Irish in teaching other curricular subjects, the majority of parents in the PPC and RC cohorts responded that *they did not know* or that *it wasn't used* (PPC 17/21 respondents 81%; RC: 33/43 respondents 76.8%). Parents were divided in their support of the idea of teaching a subject through Irish, with approximately half (PPC: 5/12; RC: 12/25) responding that they *would support the idea*, with half saying they *would not*.

#### 6.1.4.3 Initial PRAGs in relation to Usage & Self-Assessed Ability

In relation to Irish language usage outside of school, the PRAG discussion mirrored both the children's and parents' questionnaires in noting that there was very little opportunity for this, with the only references relating to homework, and watching Irish language cartoons on TG4, the Irish language channel. Parents with experience of learning Irish expressed doubt in their ability to help their child given the challenges in relation to dialects and pronunciation:

P1: "And then you start to wonder are you more of a hindrance to the child".

P4: "I know yeah. You don't know if you're going to advance them more or bring them down with your way of doing it. So it is very difficult..."

[PRAG 2]

Parents new to the Irish language presented as invariably positive towards the proposed expansion of domains of use of Irish. Overall, the initial PRAGs referenced limited use of Irish outside of school as per the child and parent questionnaires, openness to engage in more domains of use and evidence of concern regarding how best to support a child's learning of Irish amongst parents with experience of the language.

### 6.1.5 Needs Analysis Summary Findings

This section summarises the overarching findings of the needs analysis with reference to the outcomes of interest detailed in Section 6.1.5.1 and 6.1.5.2, and as illustrated in Figure 6.9.

#### 6.1.5.1 Irish Language Use & Self-Assessed Ability

Children in the PPC self-assessed as low-middle range in Irish language ability, while the self-assessed Irish language ability ratings amongst parents in the PPC presented as lower than the national average (2013). Furthermore, children and parents in the PPC reported relatively low Use of Irish at Home.

#### 6.1.5.2 Attitude & Motivation towards the Irish Language

The overarching results of the AMTBs observed that the year group presented with a slightly lower *Attitude/Motivation Index* Score compared with the TCS. The results of the *Motivation Index* however were extremely close across both groups. Analysis within the year group between the PPC and RC concluded that while there was no statistically significant difference between the PPC and RC Index Scores, both groups had different starting points in relation to Attitude and Motivation Scores which suggested that the PPC was not essentially representative of the whole RC group—overall, the RC Index Scores were more reflective of the YG and TCS than those of the PPC. In addition to the emergence of Irish Language Use & Self-Assessed Ability as a theme, the different starting points of PPC and RC in Index Scores informed the teacher-researcher that applicability of the AMTB should be considered within this context. Further to the Index Score analysis, Individual scale scores analysis was noted in relation to Scales 7-11, with a view to revisiting at the POST analysis stage, where appropriate and relevant .

Thus, this finding of variance between PPC and RC AMTB scores at the outset, while not statistically significant, had implications in shaping the applicability of the AMTB as a pre- and post-test for the study. The initial analysis identified that potential future comparisons at Composite Index level at the end of Action Cycle 2 would require caution, given the variance of Index scores at the outset. It was established that the primary focus of further AMTB analysis at the end of Action Cycle 2 would prioritise the analysis of PPC pre- and

post-scores, referencing comparisons of the individual scales of the PPC and RC where appropriate, and that broader Index comparatives would be secondary.

In relation to the open-ended questions regarding Irish lesson experience, the majority of children in the PPC primarily observed that Irish lessons were boring, overly dependent on textbooks and heavily featured writing tasks, noting that an increased use of song, music, drama and ICT would benefit lessons.

The attitude of the PPC parents towards the Irish language was largely positive with almost 3/5 of parents *in favour* of the language, slightly less than that of the RC and TCS respectively, but with a higher proportion of parents *strongly in favour* therein, compared with both groups. In attrition parents' attitudes to their child learning Irish was significantly higher than a parent's own attitude to the language across all three groups. Parents of the PPC also demonstrated a positive attitude towards, and trust in, the school's role in their child's learning of Irish—which was also reflected in the RC and TCS responses.

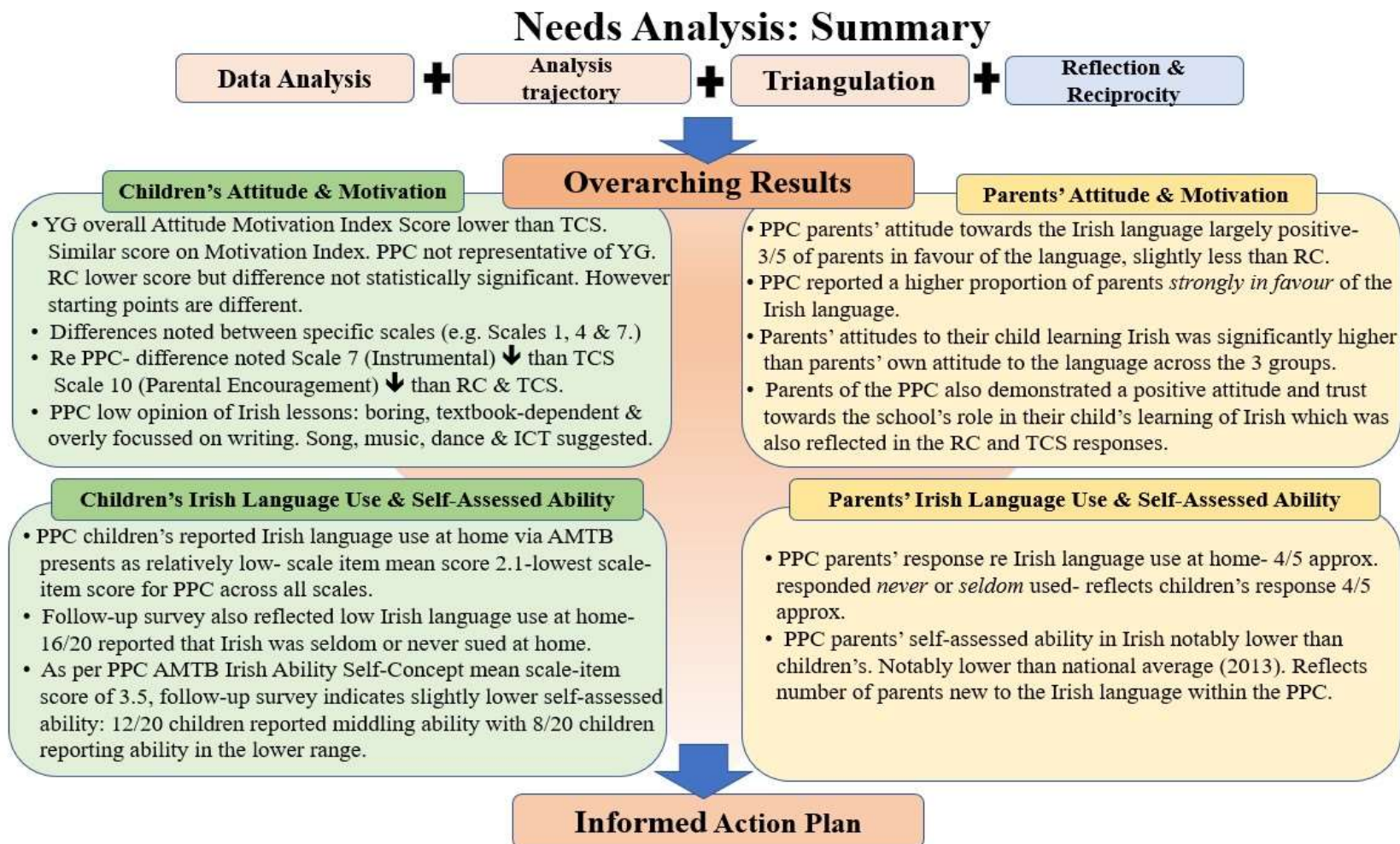


Figure 6.9. Summary of Need Analysis Findings

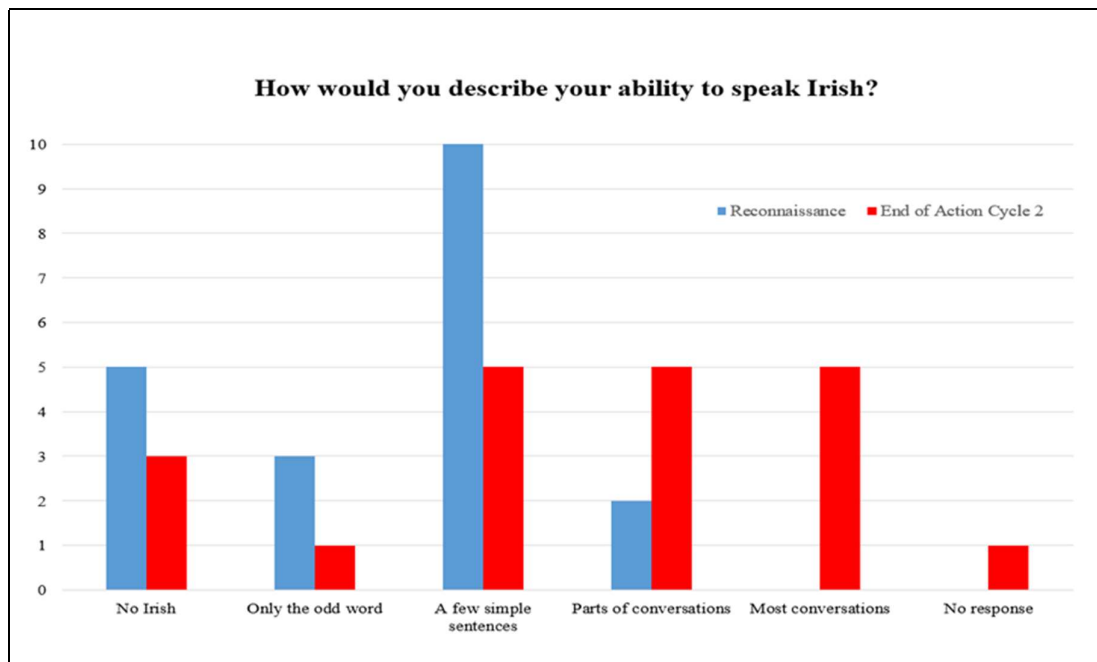


## 6.2 Outcome A: Irish Language Usage & Self-Assessed Ability in Irish

### 6.2.1 Children's Irish Language Usage & Self-Assessed Irish Ability

#### 6.2.1.1 Irish Usage & Self-Assessed Irish Ability Survey

The PRE results of Questions 1-3 of the initial Irish Usage and Self-Assessed Irish Ability Survey completed by the PPC early in Action Cycle 1 were outlined in Section 6.1.2. The children reported *very little* or *no use* of the Irish language at home, *very little* or *no opportunity* to speak Irish outside of school, and, on average, a modest self-assessment in relation to their own ability to speak Irish. In this Section, the results of the same survey completed by the class at the end of Action Cycle 2 are analysed in the context of the initial survey results. Each question will be analysed individually prior to a summary conclusion.

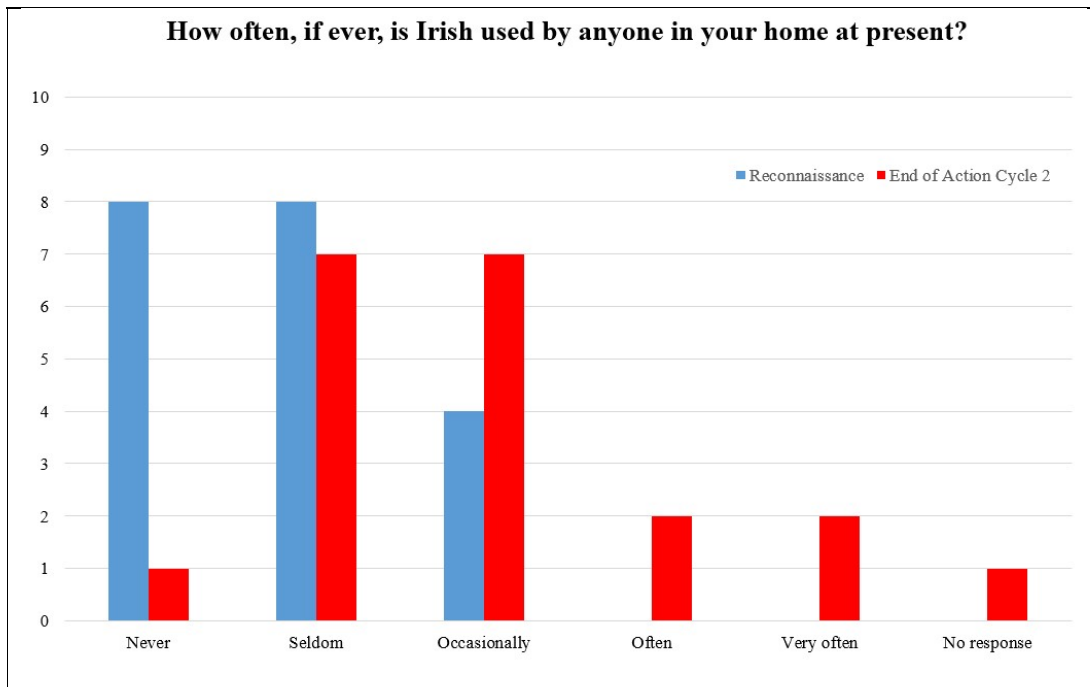


**Figure 6.10. Reported Self-Assessed Ability to Speak Irish by PPC Children**

On completion of Action Cycle 2, children were again asked to describe their ability to speak Irish. Figure 6.10 below clearly shows notable improvements in children's self-assessed ability to speak Irish on completion of the first and second Action Cycle. A decrease in references to the descriptors such as *No Irish*, *Only the odd word*, and *A few simple sentences* was identified, and relatedly a clear increase in descriptors such as *Parts of conversations*

and *Most conversations* was apparent. For example, two children identified their ability to take part in *Parts of conversations* in Irish and no children referenced their ability to take part in *Most conversations* in Irish at the beginning of the project. At the end of Action Cycle 2, five children referenced *Parts of conversations* and *Most conversations* respectively. This represents a total of ten children identifying with two upper ability categories at the end of Action Cycle 2 compared with just two children at the outset.

This highlights a notable increase of Irish language usage in the homes of the children and parents following Action Cycle 1 and 2. No child identified with the highest ability category



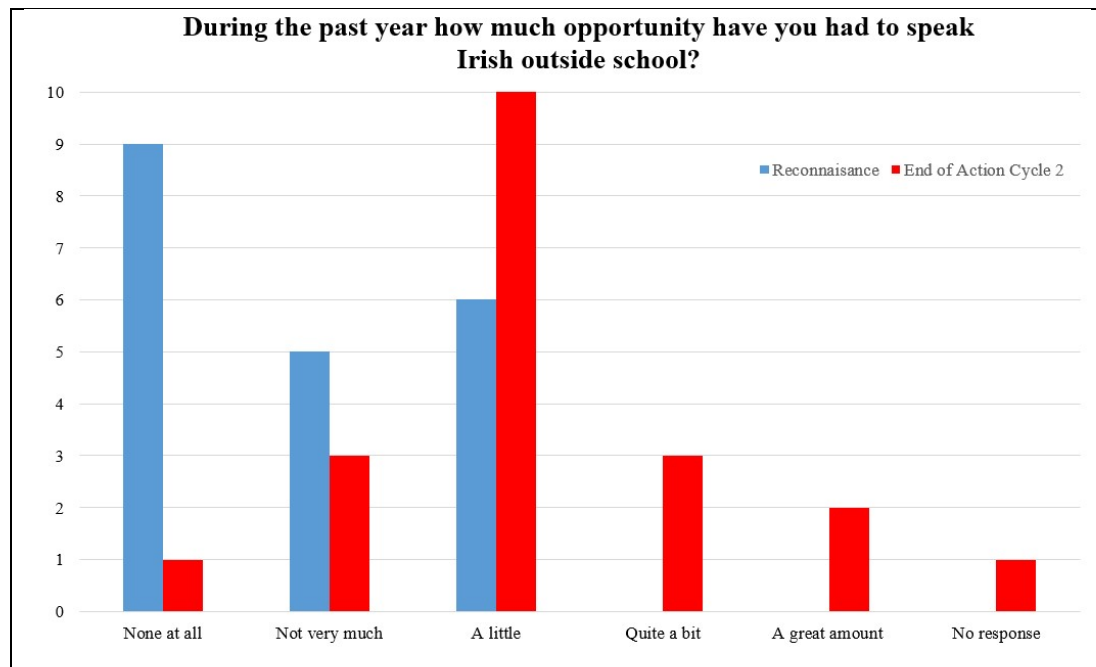
**Figure 6.11. Reported Irish Language Usage in the Home by Children**

of native speaker ability at either juncture which arguably adds credence to the validity of responses received.

In relation to Irish use in the home, Figure 6.11 clearly shows an increase in usage in the homes of the children on completion of the first and second Action Cycle. There is a marked increased progression in Irish language usage across categories. For example, there was a decrease in the number of children who reported Never from eight children to one child. Similarly the combined responses of Never and Seldom fell from 16 to eight children. Reported occasional use of Irish in the home increased from four to seven children.

Furthermore four children reported that Irish was either used Often or Very Often in the home at the end of Action Cycle 2, compared to no child identifying with either category at the outset. It is clear that there was a notable increase in the use of Irish in the homes of the children by the end of Action Cycle 2.

The third question asked children how much opportunity they had had to speak Irish outside school. The pre- and post- analysis of responses also demonstrates a clear increase in their opportunities to speak Irish outside of school (See Figure 6.12).



**Figure 6.12. Opportunities to Speak Irish Outside School**

Five children reported that they had *Quite a bit* or *A great amount* of opportunity to speak Irish, whereas none of the children responded with these categories at the outset of the language project. Fifteen children reported combined responses of *A little*, *Quite a bit* or *A great amount* of opportunity to speak Irish outside of school at the end of Action Cycle 2 compared with only six children at the Reconnaissance stage. Correspondingly, combined responses of *None at all* or *Not very much* fell from fourteen at the outset to four at the end of Action Cycle 2.

Expanding on the opportunity to speak Irish outside school, children were asked to tick any situations listed, in which they had the opportunity to speak Irish. An increased number of

examples of situations where children had used Irish outside of school by the end of Action Cycle 2 were identified (See Table 6.8).

**Table 6.8. Identification of Situations where Children have Used Irish Outside School**

<b>Q. 4 Please tick any situations where you have used Irish outside of school</b>			
	Reconnaissance	End of Action Cycle 2	Increase/ Decrease
At home with parents/siblings	5	17	+12
Occasional words with friends	3	9	+6
Friends who speak Irish	5	6	+1
So people don't understand what I'm saying	1	6	+5
On school trips	0	3	+3
In sports	0	3	+3
Watching TV	10	5	-5
Listening to the radio	0	1	+1
At Mass	3	1	-2
Using computer/tablet	0	10	+10
Using mobile phone/ smart phone	1	5	+4

The most notable increase in situations where they used Irish outside school, was *At home with parents and siblings* (+12 children) and *Using a computer or tablet* (+10 children), and *Use of a computer or tablet* and *Use of a mobile phone or smart phone* combined (+14 children), reflecting the two principal pedagogical approaches of the project. Furthermore, the increased opportunity to use Irish was reflected in a number of other situations in addition to the two main pedagogical approaches, such as, *Occasional words with friends* (+6), *So people don't understand what I'm saying* (+5). Interestingly there was a decrease in children reporting *watching Irish language TV* (-5).

Children were also invited to report any *other* situations outside school in addition to those cited in Q4, where children had experienced the opportunity to use Irish. At the outset, three

situations were cited by four children—two children referenced cartoons on the Irish language channel, one child said that they used Irish when they ‘had to’, and a fourth child cited speaking Irish with their friends on their road. In the final question, six children notably referenced the Class Blog, which added further weight to its reported use. Finally, the children were asked to expand further on any situations where they had used Irish. Out of 20 children, 17 responded.

These included nine references to the ‘*Is Tusa an Múinteoir*’ tutoring at home programme, with their parents or a sibling, four references to speaking Irish with a parent or sibling at home, three children referenced speaking Irish with a friend, and three referenced the Class Blog. The detailing of these activities broadly corresponds with the most frequent situations reported by children at the end of Action Cycle 2.

In conclusion, the pre- and post-analysis of the children’s Irish Language Usage and Self-Assessed Irish Language Ability Survey, highlight that there was a sizeable improvement in children’s self-concept of Irish language proficiency in speaking, a notable increase in the use of Irish in children’s homes and a notable increase in children’s opportunity to speak Irish outside of school. The two principal pedagogical approaches introduced over Action Cycle 1 and 2, account for the most sizeable increases in relation to specific opportunities that children cite whereby they spoke Irish outside school. In the main, there were increases in specified opportunities to speak Irish outside of school across categories, which would suggest a modest ripple effect in overall out-of-school usage for which the pedagogical approaches may have acted as a catalyst.

#### 6.2.1.2 Children’s AMTB: Usage & Proficiency-related Scales

In this section, results of the POST AMTB completed by the PPC at the end of Action Cycle 2, are examined in relation to Irish language usage and self-assessed ability. The results of the *Use of Irish at Home* scale and *Irish Ability Self-Concept* scale have been extracted for this purpose.

##### *Use of Irish at Home (AMTB Scale 11)*

The *Use of Irish at Home Pre* and *Post* mean scale item scores indicate an increase of 0.1833, which due to rounding convention presents as a 0.1 increase from 2.1 to 2.2. Table 6.9 below.

This represents a notable increase for the PPC. It is of note that the RC recorded a decrease of approximately the same proportion, while the *Pre* score was higher at the outset.

A closer look at the individual scale items for the PPC, indicated that 5/20 children agreed that their father sometimes speaks Irish at home after Action Cycle 2, compared with no child noting their father sometimes speaking Irish at all, at the Reconnaissance stage.

**Table 6.9. Use of Irish at Home PRE & POST Scale Scores**

Use of Irish at Home Scale (Scale 11)	Pre	Post	Score Inc/Dec
<i>(PPC Mean Scale Score)</i> (n=20) PPC Mean Scale Item Score	6.15 2.1 (2.05)	6.7 2.2 (2.233)	↑0.55 ↑0.1833
<i>(RC Mean Scale Score)</i> (n=40) RC Mean Scale Item Score	7.25 2.4 (2.416)	6.6 2.2	↓0.625 ↓0.216
<i>(TCS Mean Scale Score)</i> (n=490) TCS Mean Scale Item Score	7.1 *		

In addition, there was an increase of two children to a total of four who noted that their mother sometimes speaks Irish at home after Action Cycle 2. Relatively speaking, there was a notable increase in fathers' engagement with the Irish language during the first two Action Cycles.

In relation to the negatively phrased statement *No one at home every speaks Irish*, the PPC responses indicated a small decrease from 10 to 8 children in agreement, whereas the RC noted a 10% increase of agreement with the statement after Action Cycle 2 were compared to the results of the Reconnaissance phase. The PPC results modestly support the findings of children's reported increased usage of Irish outside of school in the prior Section 6.1.2. However, it is of note that the increased use of Irish is more demonstrative in said section, compared with the AMTB.

*Irish Ability Self-Concept Scale (Scale 10)*

The PPC reported a mean Irish Ability Self-Concept scale score decrease of 0.35. This translated to a negligible decrease of 0.055 at mean scale item level which, when rounding

to one place of decimals as per TCS convention, it appears that the PPC practically held steady at a mean scale item score of three. It is of note that RC had a higher mean scale score at the outset, of 18.5. This decrease to 17.7 in the POST scores, translates to a slight decrease of 0.1 at mean scale item level. Both the PRE and POST scores of the PPC and RC are largely reflective of the TCS score of 3.1, which merits discussion in the next chapter (See Section 7.3)

**Table 6.10. Irish Ability Self-Concept Pre & Post Scale Scores**

Irish Ability Self-Concept (Scale 10)	PRE	POST	Score Inc/Dec
<i>(PPC Mean Scale Score) (n=20)</i> PPC Mean Scale Item Score	18.2 <b>3 (3.03)</b>	17.85 <b>3 (2.975)</b>	$\downarrow 0.35$ <u><math>\downarrow 0.055</math></u>
<i>(RC Mean Scale Score) (n=40)</i> RC Mean Scale Item Score	18.5 <b>3.1 (3.083)</b>	17.7 <b>3 (2.95)</b>	$\downarrow 0.8$ <u><math>\downarrow 0.133</math></u>
<i>(TCS Mean Scale Score) (n=490)</i> TCS Mean Scale Item Score	18.6 <b>3.1</b>		

While Irish Ability Self-Concept scale items reflected a consolidation of scores with evidence of more overall slight decreases (4/6 scale items) compared to slight increases (2/6 scale items) for the PPC, it is interesting that both scale items which had an increased POST scale item mean score specifically referenced Irish speaking (*Item 66: I am better than most pupils in my class at speaking Irish; Item 77: I am better at speaking Irish than I am at doing Maths*). This was not the case with respect to items referencing children’s reflections on their respective self-assessed ability in Irish reading or Irish writing, for example.

If we look at item 77 more closely as an example, it was of note that within the PPC there was an increase from two to five children who were in agreement that they were better at speaking Irish than at doing maths, children taking a neutral stance decreased and in turn this is reflected in the increase of those *in agreement*. Equally, 12/20 children remained in *disagreement* with the statement. Close examination of the Irish Ability Self-Concept scale suggests tentatively that the POST scores indicate a small but positive effect on children’s self- concept of *Irish speaking* when specifically compared to that of Irish reading or writing.

**Table 6.11. Scale 10 Item 77**

<b>Scale 10: Irish ability self-concept</b>	<i>Class</i>	Strongly Agree	Slightly Agree	Neutral	Slightly Disagree	Strongly Disagree	NR
77. I am better at speaking Irish than I am at doing Maths.	PPC Pre PPC Post (n=20)	10% (2) 20% (4)	0% (0) 5% (1)	30% (6) 15% (3)	10% (2) 10% (2)	50% (10) 50% (10)	n/a n/a
	CC Pre CC Post (n=40)	10% 5%	5% 2.5%	20% 15%	17.5% 25%	47.5% 52.5%	n/a n/a
	TCS (n=490)	15.1%	12.7%	11.2%	22%	38.6%	

This could suggest that the children’s confidence in speaking Irish increased during the two Action Cycles. Irish also scored favourably with English Reading and Maths comparisons in the Miscellaneous scale items.

### 6.2.1.3 CRAGs: Irish Language Use

C1: Yeah. I knew it would help me get my Irish better because I didn’t use Irish that much before but I do now. [C1, CRAG 5]

The CRAG discussions mirror the Irish Language Use Survey results by attesting to the fact that the children cited increased use of Irish, examples of using Irish and somewhat relatedly the competence of their Peer Tutoring partner. Table 6.12 demonstrates an example of how children in PPC were of the opinion that they were using more Irish during their language activities.

### 6.2.2 Parents’ Usage & Proficiency-related Responses

In this section, the relevant responses from the Parent’s Questionnaire Irish Language Questionnaire completed for a second time at the end of Action Cycle 2 will be reviewed. Relevant findings PRAG discussions will also be explored.



**Table 6.12. Children’s Perspectives on Irish Language Engagement**

TR: <i>Do you find that you are using more Irish in your activities compared to when you first started? Can you tell each other things to do in Irish?</i>
C13: Yeah.
C14: Yea.
C17: We know loads of words now.
TR: Do you think you are using more Irish than you did before?
C17: Yeah.
TR: And how do you think we can make it more enjoyable?
C17: By adding more pair work.
TR: Yeah, so we do Peer Tutoring twice a week, would you like to do it more often than that?
C17: Yeah. <span style="float: right;">[CRAG 2]</span>

#### 6.2.2.1 Parents’ Irish Language Questionnaire

This section will examine the PRE & POST responses of language usage and proficiency-related questions from the Parents’ Irish Language Questionnaire. Broadly speaking, parents’ reported self-assessed ability at the end of Action Cycle 2 both observed a negligible increase which overall indicated reported sustained levels of self-assessed ability which given the short length of the intervention and the varying levels of completion of the 7-lesson programme is not unexpected. The number of parents who reported having no Irish decreased by one participant and the majority of parents described their ability as having ‘only the odd word’ or ‘a few simple sentences’.

In terms of Irish use in the home, the number of parents who reported that Irish was never spoken in the home decreased from eight parents to five which in turn had a positive effect on other categories of more frequent use.

In terms of school-home contact and views of Irish teaching, parents reported sustained levels of contact with the school and sustained satisfactions with such levels.

**Table 6.13. How much do you know about the way your child is taught Irish in school?**

<b>14. How much do you know about the way your child is taught Irish in school?</b>	<b>Recon Cycle</b>	<b>Post AC2</b>
(i) I know nothing about how Irish is taught	7	4
(ii) I know a little about how Irish is taught	6	10
(iii) I know quite a lot about how Irish is taught	0	0
(iv) No response	3	2

Notably, parents’ knowledge about their child’s Irish language education and engagement grew during the project; the number of parents who reported *knowing a little* about how Irish is taught increased from 6 to 10 parents and the number of parents who reported *knowing nothing* about how Irish is taught decreased from 7 to 4. No one identified with *knowing a lot about* how Irish is taught.

Parents’ satisfaction with the amount of time spent on Irish largely remained at the same level, but given the reported growth in knowledge among parents in relation to Irish language teaching and learning referenced, the result represents an arguably more informed insight from parents in relation to the time spent on Irish. The majority of parents (11/17) believed the *right amount* of time was spent on Irish, with four parents believing that *more time* could be spent on the subject.

Parents’ self-reported involvement with children’s homework remained consistent overall with a notable increase in parents reporting of assisting children with Irish spelling (increase from 4 to 10 parents). The majority of parents remained of the opinion that they were not in a position to give the school any practical support as far as the teaching of Irish is concerned. The majority of parents reaffirmed that the reason they did not help their child with Irish

homework was not being very good at Irish themselves, which correlates with majority parents' self-assessed ability of having either 'only the odd word' or 'a few simple sentences'. Finally, when parents were asked if they would support the idea of the school teaching a subject through Irish, the number of parents who agreed with this increased from 5 to 9 parents.

**Table 6.14. Would you support the idea of the school teaching a subject through Irish?**

<b>Q16 (b) Would you support the idea of the school teaching a subject through Irish ?</b>	<b>Recon Cycle</b>	<b>Post AC2</b>
(i) Yes	5	9
(ii) No	7	4

#### 6.2.2.2 PRAG & CRAG Outcomes

Both the PRAG and CRAG discussions reflected some of the findings so far in relation to parents' engagement and use of the Irish language. Parental involvement and active learning, in relation to Irish language learning, was validated by student-parent tutoring involvement, participation in PRAG discussions and in survey completion. Parents' survey responses in Action Cycle 3 supported the position that the children needed opportunities to speak Irish outside of everyday lessons in order to make Irish a living language for them. Parents voiced active support at PRAG meetings for keeping involved with Irish as a spoken language for their children. It is of note that the children in the study also reflected on their parents' potential use of Irish and potential as learners in addition to their desire for their parents to learn Irish. Examples of parent and children reflections are detailed in Table 6.15.

#### 6.2.3 Outcome A Summary

The findings indicate a clear increase in both the opportunities to speak Irish and in the use of Irish amongst the school PPC cohort at the end of Action Cycle 2. Further Irish language use and engagement was also evident in Action Cycle 3.

**Table 6.15. Children and Parents' Perspectives on Parents' Irish Language Engagement**

**Children's Perspectives on Parents' Engagement:**

4/5 students at the final CRAG noted that they had chosen **Level A** of the lessons and how that had supported their parents' level of Irish.

*I wanted to continue to improve me Mums Irish and maybe she will use it one day [C8, CRAG 5]*

*I taught my Mam and then my Dad I used lesson A I think....I was teaching my Mam reading. When I was teaching my Dad we were playing the games and then he found them really easy. Then they had no trouble with the Irish. [C10, CRAG 5]*

C7 noted how her Mum progressed to being a learner of Irish to seeking to utilise the new competence in supporting another child with Irish homework:

*I used lesson A and I used it for my mam cos she didn't know Irish at all but like when we start using it got very easy for her. When we started to learn Irish she started learning more and whenever my brother is doing Irish she always wants to get in and help him with it. [C7, CRAG 4]*

Regarding **Level B**:

*when I got the harder one I was actually teaching her [C4, CRAG 2]*

**Parents' Perspectives on Language Engagement:**

Parent noting child's use of Irish outside of school:

*And then when we go out anywhere else, like the Mosque, the hospital, GP. She has an electronic guide with the time in Irish. She will say do you know-how much time is left for the bus? And I say yes, yes it's two now. And she'll say- what Papa do you not know Irish? (laughter) [P10, PRAG 4]*

Parents [P1, P3 & P4] referencing their children's engagement with programme:

P1: I just think that way you're doing it is much more engaging.

P3: Completely, yeah.

P1: *It's much more real, you know. They are better able to refer to everyday situations when they go home whereas if it's just in the book, that book is closed and it goes back into the bag and they don't think about them. I remember being in secondary school and it was all about memorising. [P1&P3, PRAG 7]*

*She benefitted greatly, improved in conversational Irish greatly and she even participated in Gaelchampa during the summer holidays. [P4, PRAG 7]*

An increase in Irish language speaking opportunities and use were reported to have occurred in the Irish language classes themselves, at home, via teacher-researcher-mediated online platforms, and across a number of other domains of use to a lesser degree. The PPC Irish ability self-concept scores held steady overall compared with falling ability self-concept scores in (English) Reading and Maths. Within the Irish ability self-concept scale, gains were apparent in relation to Irish speaking in particular.

An increase in parents' use of Irish was also identified with a notable increase in Irish language uptake from fathers at home. While self-assessed ability of Irish remained modest amongst parents, parents' knowledge in relation to how Irish was taught to their child, support of teaching another subject through Irish, support of their child's Irish spelling homework all increased. The majority of parents were actively supportive of piloted Irish language approaches in school and in the home which facilitated Irish language speaking opportunities for children and parents. A number of parents and children identified how overall increased engagement with the Irish language benefitted multiple domains of use for children.

### **6.3 Outcome B: Attitude towards the Irish Language and Learner Motivation**

"I know since you started doing the project I have just noticed her interest in Irish just went through the roof". [Parent 7, PRAG 4]

"I've noticed since [C1] has started all this Irish, that she is more outgoing than the rest of them...even coming home from school she's smiling she can't wait to tell you what she has done, whether it's in English or in Irish since she started this programme... it's just brought her on in leaps and bounds". [Parent 1, PRAG 4, p.14]

#### **6.3.1 Children's Attitudes & Motivation Questionnaires (AMTBs)**

As noted in 6.2.1, the respective Index mean scores at the Reconnaissance Stage of the project indicated that both groups were not at the same starting point while not statistically significantly different, with the PPC presenting with overall lower motivation scores than those of the RC. This informed the focus of analysis when the AMTBs were completed after Action Cycle 2 by both the PPC and RC. While PPC and RC Index and individual scale, scores are presented, the RC Index mean scores act as a reference as opposed to a direct comparative. The focus of the analysis thus prioritises exploration of the relevant *Pre* and

Post scale scores of the PPC which present any pattern of interest, with the RC and TCS scores providing reference points.

### 6.3.1.1 AMTB Index Level Scores

The overarching PRE and POST Index mean scores are firstly presented in Table 6.16 . An independent Samples Test was carried out as part of the validation process (See Appendix 14) for the supporting calculations). Broadly speaking it is notable that in reviewing the overall *Attitude/Motivation* Index mean scores, the PPC score held steady at 153.5 which was overall a lower score than that of the TCS at 162.5. Interestingly, the *Attitude/Motivation Index* Mean score dropped slightly by 2.6 points.

**Table 6.16. Pre and Post Index Mean Scores**

	<u>Index Mean Scores</u>	<u>Integrative Index</u> (Sum of Scales 1-3)	<u>Motivation Index</u> (Sum of Scales 4-6)	<u>Irish Attitude/ Motivation Index</u> (Sum of Scales 1-6 minus Sum of Scale 8)
1a	PPC Pre	87.05	67.15	153.5
1b	PPC Post	87.93	67.23	153.5
1c	PPC $\uparrow/\downarrow$	$\uparrow 0.88$	$\uparrow 0.18$	=
2a	RC Pre	89.175	69.8	158.525
2b	RC Post	89.15	67.675	155.925
2c	RC $\uparrow/\downarrow$	$\downarrow 0.025$	$\downarrow 2.275$	$\downarrow 2.6$
3	TCS	94.2	69.7	162.5

Looking to the Indices, as Table 6.16 demonstrates, the PPC reported minor increases in both the *Integrativeness* and *Motivation Index* mean scores, but not to the level of significance. With regard to the RC, a minor decrease was noted in the *Integrativeness Index* and a more substantial decrease of 2.6 in the *Motivation Index* which represents the main contributor to the decrease in overall *Attitude/Motivation Index* for the RC.

### 6.3.1.2 AMTB Scales of Interest

This section discusses any PRE and POST scales score changes of note in relation to the PCC. Appendix Section 6.2.1 presents a table of the PRE Scale scores for the PPC and the RC and TCS scores for reference. The Instrumental Motivation Scale, the Irish Lesson Anxiety Scale and the Parental Encouragement Scale shall be explored in terms of PRE and POST scores.

#### *Instrumental Motivation Scale*

The Instrumental Orientation to Irish Scale consisted of four items referring to the importance of the Irish language in relation to (i) future job/career prospects (2 items), (ii) being respected, and (iii) becoming a more knowledgeable person.

**Table 6.17. Instrumental Orientation to Irish (Scale 7)**

<b>Instrumental Orientation to Irish (Scale 7)</b>	<b>Pre</b>	<b>Post</b>
<b>PPC Mean Scale Score (n=20)</b>	<b>13.95</b>	<b>11.7</b>
<b>PPC Mean Scale Item Score (n=20)</b>	<b>2.79</b>	<b>2.34 (↓-0.45)</b>
<b>RC Mean Scale Score (n=20)</b>	<b>14.525</b>	<b>13.925</b>
<b>RC Mean Scale Item Score (n=20)</b>	<b>2.905</b>	<b>2.785 (↓-0.12)</b>
<b>TCS (n=490)</b>	<b>14.4</b>	<b>2.9</b>

**Table 6.18. Instrumental Scale: Scale items 4, 24, 10**

		<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Slightly Agree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Slightly Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>No Response</b>
4. Learning Irish is important for me only because I'll need it for my job or career when I am older	<b>PPC Pre</b>	30% (6)	60%(12)	5% (1)	0% (0)	5% (1)	n/a
	<b>PPC Post</b> (n=20)	25% (5)	5% (1)	15% (3)	35% (7)	20% (4)	n/a
	<b>RC Pre</b>	32.5%	20%	27.5%	10%	7.5%	2.5%
	<b>RC Post</b> (n=40)	27.5%	32.5%	17.5%	7.5%	15%	n/a
	<b>TCS</b> (n=490)	21.8%	20%	9.2%	23.5%	24.1%	
24. I think it is important for me to learn Irish because it may be useful to me someday in getting a good job.	<b>PPC Pre</b>	35% (7)	25% (5)	30% (6)	0% (0)	10% (2)	n/a
	<b>PPC Post</b> (n=20)	40% (8)	10% (2)	35% (7)	0% (0)	15% (3)	n/a
	<b>RC Pre</b>	42.5%	15%	30%	7.5%	5%	n/a
	<b>RC Post</b> (n=40)	37.5%	32.5%	15%	5%	10%	n/a
	<b>TCS</b> (n=490)	20%	34.3%	7.8%	19.0%	18.2%	
10. Learning Irish in school is important for me because people will have more respect for me if I speak Irish.	<b>PPC Pre</b>	15% (3)	5% (1)	40% (8)	10% (2)	25% (5)	5% (1)
	<b>PPC Post</b> (n=20)	10% (2)	0% (0)	30% (6)	20% (4)	40% (8)	n/a
	<b>RC Pre</b>	17.5%	17.5%	42.5%	7.5%	15%	n/a
	<b>RC Post</b> (n=40)	5%	17.5%	37.5%	20%	20%	n/a
	<b>TCS</b> (n=490)	8.6%	23.5%	18%	24.7%	24.9%	

The PRE and POST mean scale scores indicated a decrease for both the PPC and the RC with a notable reduction of 0.45 for the mean scale item score for the PPC. Taking a closer



look at the responses to the individual scale items as detailed in Table 6.18, it is clear that there is a disparity between the responses to items 4 and 24 on the part of the PPC despite both items referring to future job or career. A substantial number of children (18/20), of the PPC agreed with the statement ‘*Learning Irish is important for me only because I’ll need it for my job or career when I am older*’ at the Reconnaissance Stage. This figure fell to 6/20 children after Action Cycle 2. The decrease in agreement in the PPC with Item 24 *I think it is important for me to learn Irish because it may be useful to me someday in getting a good job*, was much less, from 12/20 children to 10/20 children in the class. Children from the RC in agreement with both statements increased over the same period. Agreement with Item 4 increased from 52.5% to 60% and agreement with Item 24 increased from 57.5% to 70%.

In relation to Item 10, There was a noted increase in the number of children in the PPC who disagreed with the statement that *Learning Irish in school is important for me because people will have more respect for me if I speak Irish*; initially 7/20 children disagreed and this increased to 12/20 children following Action Cycle 2. Conversely, the number of children who disagreed with Item 10 increased amongst the RC from 22.5% at the outset to 40% at the later stage of the school year. The individual scale items provide insight into the nature of the PPC’s decrease in instrumental motivation.

#### *Irish Lesson Anxiety Scale*

**Table 6.19. Irish Lesson Anxiety Scale**

<b>Irish Lesson Anxiety (Scale 8)</b>	<b>Pre</b>	<b>Post</b>
<b>PPC Mean Scale Score (n=20)</b>	<b>14.65</b>	<b>13.35</b>
<b>PPC Mean Scale Item Score (n=20)</b>	<b>2.9</b>	<b>2.67 (↓-0.23)</b>
<b>RC Mean Scale Score (n=20)</b>	<b>15.0</b>	<b>14.825</b>
<b>RC Mean Scale Item Score (n=20)</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2.97 (↓-0.03)</b>
<b>TCS (n=490)</b>	<b>14.4</b>	<b>2.9</b>

On revisiting the Irish Lesson Anxiety Scale it is noted that the level of anxiety experienced by the children across the whole cohort decreased; the decrease for the Reference Classes in terms of the mean scale item score was 0.03 and the decrease for the Participative Pedagogy Class was a reduction of 0.23.

**Table 6.20. Irish Lesson Anxiety Scale: Scale items 28 & 45**

		Strongly Agree	Slightly Agree	Neutral	Slightly Disagree	Strongly Disagree	NR
28. I get nervous and mixed up when I am speaking in my Irish class.	<b>PPC Pre</b>	30% (8)	15% (4)	25% (5)	10% (0)	20% (3)	n/a
	<b>PPC Post</b> (n=20)	25% (5)	15% (2)	20% (3)	25% (5)	25% (5)	n/a
	<b>RC Pre</b>	10%	27.5%	25%	27.5%	10%	n/a
	<b>RC Post</b> (n=40)	17.5%	30%	27.5%	15%	10%	n/a
	<i>TCS</i> (n=490)	20%	34.3%	7.8%	19.0%	18.2%	
45. I am afraid that the other pupils in the class will laugh at me when I speak Irish	<b>PPC Pre</b>	20% (4)	10% (2)	15% (3)	10% (2)	45% (9)	n/a
	<b>PPC Post</b> (n=20)	15% (3)	10% (2)	0% (0)	5% (1)	70% (14)	n/a
	<b>RC Pre</b>	20%	20%	17.5%	12.5%	30%	n/a
	<b>RC Post</b> (n=40)	20%	17.5%	17.5%	12.5%	32.5%	n/a
	<i>TCS</i> (n=490)	12.9%	19.4%	8.8%	21.4%	36.9%	

A closer examination of the five-item scale indicated the specific scenarios whereby anxiety has been reduced for the PPC. During the Reconnaissance cycle, 12/20 (60%) of the PPC agreed with the statement *I get nervous and mixed up when I am speaking in my Irish class*;

which decreased to 7/20 (35%) children in the final questionnaire responses. The level of agreement for the RC for the same statement increased from 37.5% to 47.5% (n=40).

In relation to the statement *I am afraid that the other pupils in the class will laugh at me when I speak Irish*, the number of children in the PPC who were in disagreement with the statement increased from 11 children to 15 children, demonstrating that 75% of the PCC were not afraid of other children laughing at them when speaking in class compared to a 45% level of disagreement amongst the Reference Classes.

#### *Parental Encouragement Scale*

The parental encouragement scale consisted of 10 items which investigated children’s perceptions of how their parents supported their learning of Irish. The mean scale score for the Participative Pedagogy Class decreased from 30.7 to 30.15 whereas the mean scale score for the control classes increased from 35.225 to 37.075. Thus, the mean score of the control classes was 4.5 higher at the outset, and increased during the school year. The Participative Pedagogy Class mean scores decreased overall. Within the 10 scale items, one response bucked the overall trend for the PPC whereby the number of children who reported that their parents are usually very interested in anything to do with my Irish schoolwork increased from five children in the pre-survey to 13 children after Action Cycle 2.

**Table 6.21. Parent Encouragement Scale: Scale item 38**

		Strongly Agree	Slightly Agree	Neutral	Slightly Disagree	Strongly Disagree	NR
38. My parents are usually very interested in anything to do with my Irish schoolwork.	<b>PPC Pre</b>	20% (4)	5% (1)	40% (8)	20% (4)	15% (3)	
	<b>PPC Post</b> (n=20)	35% (7)	30% (6)	5% (1)	5% (1)	25% (5)	n/a
	<b>RC Pre</b>	17.5%	32.5%	25%	10%	15%	n/a
	<b>RC Post</b> (n=40)	12.5%	27.5%	35%	15%	10%	n/a
	<b>FCS</b> (n=490)	17.3%	31.2%	15.3%	22.4%	12.9%	

Overall, the slight decrease in the Parental Encouragement scale mean score for the PPC in the context of increase parental encouragement scores of the RC, albeit at different starting scores, is notable and will be discussed further in Chapter 7.

### 6.3.2 Parents' Perspectives

In this section, we will review parents' feedback in relation to attitudes and motivation towards the Irish language at the end of Action Cycle 2.

#### 6.3.2.1 Parents' Questionnaire

We will firstly review the relevant responses from the Parent's Questionnaire (Q2, completed for a second time at the end of Action Cycle 2.

The results of question 2 highlight that there was no significant change in parents' general attitude towards the Irish language; 12 parents in favour of the language at the Reconnaissance Stage, compared with 13 parents after Action Cycle 2. However, as noted in Section 6.3.2 parents' increased knowledge of Irish teaching, and use in the school, may have positively influenced parents' attitudes towards the use of Irish in other school subjects.

**Table 6.22. Parents' Irish Language Questionnaire: Q2 Response**

<b>Q2 What is your general attitude to the Irish language?</b>	<b>PRE</b>	<b>POST</b>
(i) Strongly in favour	5	7
(ii) Somewhat in favour	7	6
(iii) No particular feelings	4	3
(iv) Somewhat against it	0	0
(v) Strongly against it	1	1

Thus, changes in parents' attitudes towards the Irish language were discernible in relation to their child's use of Irish and school experience of Irish but did not have a significant impact on parents' own general attitude to the language according to this questionnaire.

### 6.3.2.2 Parents' Perceptions of Children's Engagement and the Pedagogic Approach

This is supported by evidence in the PRAG discussions whereby parents in the main, discussed their child's progress and experience of the Irish language study as opposed to their own personal attitudes. Parent 1 and Parent 3, for example, acknowledged the children's motivation in taking part in the programme and how the pedagogic approaches represented "a better way of learning compared to the old way" (P1), with which Parent 3 agreeing: "Yeah this way is much better than doing the same old thing". Parent 1 also notes the broader impact on their child's well-being and self-confidence by virtue of her engagement with the language study (See Table 6.23), as referenced at the beginning of this Section.

**Table 6.23. Parents' Perceptions of Children's Engagement**

<p>P1: <i>Well she was excited over it. It seems to have pump them up...compared to learning compared to the old way.</i></p> <p>P3: <i>Yeah it's a better way of learning compared to the old way.</i></p> <p>TR: <i>And I think because it is gradual and I think you need new things all the time...</i></p> <p>P3: <i>Yeah this way is much better than doing the same old thing....</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">*****</p> <p>P1: <i>I've noticed since [C1] has started all this Irish, that she is more outgoing than the rest of them...even coming home from school she's smiling she can't wait to tell you what she has done, whether it's in English or in Irish since she started this programme... it's just brought her on in leaps and bounds.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">[PRAG 4]</p>
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### **6.3.3 Outcome B Summary**

In conclusion, it can be noted that the PPC group held steady overall on examination of AMTB PRE and POST Index Scores, reporting minor increases in the *Integrative Index* and *Motivation Index*, but recording exactly the same mean score in the overarching *Attitude/Motivation Index*. The corresponding overarching *Attitude/Motivation Index* POST score of the RC dropped somewhat. However, the POST RC *Attitude/Motivation Index* score was nonetheless higher than corresponding PPC PRE & POST Index scores. This, coupled with the PRE score disparities outlined in Section 6.2.1, highlight the inapplicability of direct comparisons. As noted in Section 6.2.4, parents of both groups had differing linguistic experiences growing up and in current home life, which indicated both groups were distinctive with regard to language practice at the outset.

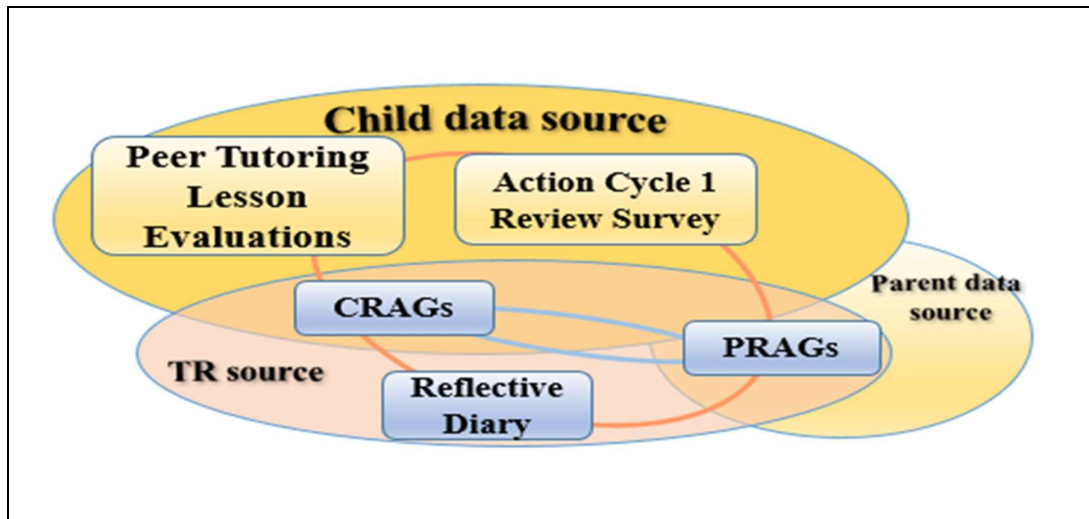
On comparison of PRE and POST scale scores, The Instrumental Scale and the Lesson Anxiety Scale demonstrated decreases which engendered an exploration of specific scale item levels. *Parental encouragement* scores held steady overall, which nonetheless merits discussion in the study's learning context.

Parent's general attitude towards the Irish language remained stable, indicating that any changes identified, were in relation to their child's engagement with the language and the teaching of Irish to their child. The Parent's Irish Language Questionnaire findings were supported by parents' perspectives shared at PRAG meetings which indicated their children's engagement and motivation towards the language project.

## **6.4 Pedagogical Approach A: Tutoring**

### **6.4.1 Reciprocal Peer Tutoring**

This section will review Reciprocal Peer Tutoring which took place in school-based Irish lessons during Action Cycle 1. This analysis draws on the children's Action Cycle 1 Review Survey, Peer Tutoring Lesson Evaluations, Children's Research Advisory Group (CRAG) discussions, the teacher-researcher's reflective diary and Parent Research Advisory Group (PRAG discussions) as illustrated in Figure 6.13. Peer Tutoring Analysis Sources below.



**Figure 6.13. Peer Tutoring Analysis Sources**

6.4.1.1 Peer Tutoring Lesson Participation

The level of Peer Tutoring lesson participation by the class totalled 24 Peer Tutoring lessons in all (12 weeks x 2 PT lessons=24 PT lessons) was 92.3%. Seven students participated in all 24 lessons, and 15/20 children participated in 22 or more lessons which reflected a high attendance and participation rate. Table 6.24 below outlines the level of lesson participation by children in the PPC.

**Table 6.24. Lesson Participation by Children**

No of PT lessons	24 lessons	23 lessons	22 lessons	21 lessons	19 lessons	18 lessons	17 lessons
No of students who participated in X n. of lessons (n=20)	7	3	5	2	1	1	1

The review of the children’s experience of the Peer Tutoring process drew primarily upon the children’s Action Cycle 1 Review Survey, the Children’s Research Advisory Group (CRAG) discussions and the children’s Peer Tutoring Lesson Evaluations.

6.4.1.2 The Child’s Experience

The Action Cycle 1 Review Survey indicated that the majority of children (14/20) *agreed* that they enjoyed Peer Tutoring, with half of the class group in *strong agreement* while four

children *slightly disagreed* that they enjoyed Peer Tutoring. 13/20 of the class group also *agreed* that the self-assessment element of the Peer Tutoring class was helpful in terms of knowing what has been learned and what needed to be learned. Four children took a *neutral* stance and three children *disagreed* with the statement. Thus according to the Action Cycle 1 Survey findings, the majority of the class enjoyed Peer Tutoring and found the self-assessment element of the Peer Tutoring lessons useful.

The largely positive review of the participating children of Peer Tutoring outlined in the children's survey was also reflected in the feedback from the Children's Research Advisory Groups (CRAGs). 18/20 children reported that they *enjoyed Peer Tutoring overall*, with one child reporting that it was *enjoyable sometimes*, and another child *reserving judgement*, citing partner compatibility as a challenge. This represents a higher rate than expressed in the Action Cycle 1 Review Surveys (14/20). It is of note that the CRAG discussions took place six weeks after the Action Cycle 1 Review Surveys. The CRAG discussions facilitated the children's review of their overall Peer Tutoring experience with reference to their Peer Tutoring Lesson Evaluations folder. Each CRAG group reviewed their evaluations and discussed which Peer Tutoring lesson activities in particular were *most useful* and *most enjoyable*. The children also reflected on the self-assessment element of their Peer Tutoring experience. For this purpose, the teacher-researcher had collated the children's self-assessment element of the evaluations into one document for each child. The children discussed if their self-assessment reflected where they were at with their learning and which areas of language they would like to improve. 16/20 children expressed the wish to continue with self-assessment as part of the PT lesson evaluation.

One specific part of the written Peer Tutoring Lesson Evaluation invited each child to note how their partner had helped them during the PT lesson. The responses collected highlighted the different types of assistance each child offered their respective tutee while in the role of tutor. Out of a potential of 480 responses, 384 were recorded, representing an 80% response rate to the statement referenced over the 12 weeks. The children's comments in relation to how their partner had helped them were firstly analysed utilising the linguistic competences of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2020), as a framework to explore the types of linguistic competence that were supported by the peer tutor with respect to the tutee. It was found that approximately three-fifths (59.6%) of interactions aided general linguistic range. Almost one-fifth (19.8%) of



interactions related to vocabulary range, with the final of fifth of interactions collectively relating to Grammar and Accuracy (9.1%), Phonological Control (7%) and Orthographic Control (4.4%) as illustrated in Table 6.25.

The responses pertaining to General Linguistic Range were further analysed given the significant number of responses in this category. This identified Comprehension-Related Assistance and Language Task-Specific Assistance as two distinct sub-categories of the overall responses in this category which together accounted for approximately one-third of the total responses (32.8%), therefore reducing General Assistance within the General Linguistic range to just over a quarter of responses (26.8%).

**Table 6.25. Peer-Mediated Assistance: Linguistic Competences**

	<b>Peer-Mediated Assistance: Linguistic Competences</b>	<b>No of Responses</b>	<b>% of Responses</b>
1.	<b>General Linguistic Range</b> <i>Comprehension-related assistance – 65 16.9%</i> <i>Language task-specific assistance – 61 15.9%</i> <b>32.8%</b> <i>General Assistance – 103 26.8%</i>	229	<b>59.6%</b>
2.	Vocabulary Range	76	<b>19.8%</b>
3.	Grammar & Accuracy	35	<b>9.1%</b>
4.	Vocabulary Control	0	0
5.	Phonological Control	27	<b>7%</b>
6.	Orthographic Control	17	<b>4.4%</b>
	<b>Total responses</b>	<b>384</b>	

The identification of Comprehension-Related Assistance (16.9%), as well as Language Task Specific Assistance (15.9%) within the General Linguistic Range, supports the significant instances of Explanation and Demonstration (48.6%) through the Peer-Mediated Assistance lens (See Section 6.5.4.1). Interestingly assistance with Vocabulary Range (19.8%) equates approximately with assistance with Grammar & Accuracy, Phonological Control and Orthographic Control collectively (20.5%) and potentially reflects the underlying theme-based approach to weekly and fortnightly lesson planning and lesson teaching as referenced in the most recent and previous (Irish) language curriculum (Department of Education & Science, 1999, NCCA, 2019a). The children's feedback on how their partner helped them is examined further in the next section with reference to the theoretical framework of SCT of this study.

#### 6.4.1.3 A Closer Look at SCT Processes in Peer Tutoring

The same repository of children's comments in relation to how each child was helped by their partner during PT lessons were revisited and analysed under a second lens in terms of what kind of peer-mediated assistance the children, as tutors, offered to their partner. As per the framework (Yarrow & Topping, 2001) employed, peer-mediated assistance in the form of *practice* was the most common type of assistance reported by tutees (115 instances out of 384 responses), followed closely by peer support in the form of *explanation* (110/384). Peer support by means of *demonstration* (76/384) was the third most frequent types of peer-mediated assistance reported.

Coaching was the fourth most frequent type of peer-mediated assistance reported (69/384). Instances of clarification were low (14/384), as shown in Table 6.26.

Examples of *practice* included comments by children noting where they had both asked each other questions, e.g. (i) *Asking each other "Ar mhaith..?" [Would you like...?]* C9, Wk 6 L1 or where both children had practised a language task (ii) *In pairs we described different uniforms and shared them on board* [C17, Wk 10, L1]. Examples of explanation included comprehension-related explanations *Explaining me what the question means* C16, Wk8 L1 and language task-repeated explanations *Explaining what to do in activity C19* Wk 10 L1 which also reflect sub-categories identified under the General Linguistic Competence

category of the CEFR. Further examples of children’s peer mediation comments according to category are presented in Appendix 17.

**Table 6.26. Types of Peer-Mediated Assistance**

	<b>Types of Peer-Mediated assistance</b> (Yarrow & Topping, 2001)		<i>Instructional demand on part of tutor</i>  (Pino-Pasterak, 2014)
1.	Explanation	110	<i>Low demand</i>  (186) 48.4%
2.	Demonstration	76	
3.	Clarification	14	<i>Medium demand</i>  (129) 33.6%
4.	Practice	115	
5.	Monitoring	2	<i>High demand</i>  (69) 18%
6.	Coaching	66	
7.	Reinforcing	1	
	Total responses	<b>384</b>	384

Examining the types of peer-mediated assistance through the additional lens of the instructional demand made on the tutor (Pino-Pasterak, 2014), the analysis indicates, that assistance of low instructional demand on the part of the tutor represented almost half of the peer assistance interactions reported (Explanation & demonstration 186/384- 48.4%). Assistance requiring medium demand (Clarification & practice 129/384- 33.6%), accounted for approximately a third of interactions, while a smaller proportion again of 18% of responses accounted for peer assistance interactions of high instructional demand.

6.4.1.4 Further Analysis of Peer-Mediated-Assistance

A closer look at the distribution of coaching practice as the most frequent assistance of a higher instructional demand (66 instances) was undertaken in order to explore the frequency of distribution of coaching practice amongst the Mixed Ability partnerships (Partnerships 1-5) and Near Ability (Partnerships 6-10). The results demonstrate that, while it was a very sample of students (n=20) and learning instances (66), the children of High Ability referenced being the recipient of coaching by their learner ability partner on approximately twice the number of occasions (27 instances) compared to that of their partners (14), which was also roughly double the number of coaching instances reported by Near Ability partnerships partners (13 and 12, respectively).

**Table 6.27. Distribution of Reported Occurrences of Coaching amongst Pairs of Children during PT Lessons**

	No. of occurrences of coaching reported during PT			No. of occurrences of coaching reported during PT	
	<b>Student A</b> <b>High ability</b>	<b>Student B</b> <b>Learner ability</b>		<b>Student A</b> <b>Near ability</b>	<b>Student B</b> <b>Near ability</b>
<b>Pairing 1</b>	5	1	<b>Pairing 6</b>	4	4
<b>Pairing 2</b>	4	0	<b>Pairing 7</b>	1	3
<b>Pairing 3</b>	2	3	<b>Pairing 8</b>	4	2
<b>Pairing 4</b>	6	7	<b>Pairing 9</b>	4	1
<b>Pairing 5</b>	10	3	<b>Pairing 10</b>	0	2

A number of tentative conclusions can be drawn, bearing in mind the small sample of student partnerships (n=10) and the small sample of comments (n=66). The identification of double the instance of receiving coaching peer-mediated assistance by five children of High Ability

compared with the other cohorts in the class representing Learner Ability (n=5) and Near Ability (n=10) could suggest that,

- peer-mediated assistance of a high instructional demand was provided by and received by all three cohorts. The frequency of its provision was potentially not ability related.
- Children of High Ability were potentially more disposed to readily describing the type of peer-mediated assistance received—reporting double the amount of peer-mediated assistance of a higher instructional assistance compared with the other two ability cohorts. An under-reporting of coaching and other peer-mediated assistance of a higher instructions demand by children of Learner Ability and Near Ability is a potential interrelated consideration.
- Coaching assistance was experienced across all three groupings indicating the potential learning of all ability groupings participating in Peer Tutoring.

#### 6.4.1.5 CRAG Discussion

During CRAG discussions, children (20/20) had reported that their partner was a help to them, and over half (12/20) acknowledged that they believed themselves to be a help to their partners. In examining why this was the case, working and learning with a partner was reported by a number of children as being beneficial to learning because for example, in addition to the possibility of learning more with a partner, there was potential to learn from each other, the potential of peer support instead of working alone, and also the potential of learning from a More Knowledgeable Other (MKO). Out of 20 children, 19 agreed that they liked the format and one child took a neutral stance. Table 6.28 details some of the children's specific comments in relation to the cited benefits of peer-mediated learning.

In terms of the number of children who expressed the above views, it was found that four children in total referred to reciprocal learning taking place as per C6 in the above table. Another child reported that they “learned more working in twos” (C5) for example. Somewhat related comments referred to children linking working in twos and finding it easier to work in twos. The concept of mutual support near, or equal ability, partnership was reflected in a number of comments made by children. One child commented “*We both got a*

*shot at doing one thing*” [C7, CRAG 3] Thus, the children’s elaborations on whether their partner helped them, and/or vice versa, demonstrated the children’s support of peer-mediated assistance in the main. They also highlighted an understanding of the benefits of bi-directional or reciprocal learning. Other benefits cited included, increased use of Irish, more comfortable speaking Irish and trust built between partners.

**Table 6.28. Children’s Evaluation Comments Reflecting the Benefits of Peer-Mediated Assistance**

- *You get to learn more stuff with your partner [C18]*
- *You’re learning from each other [C6]*
- *Your partner could help you out on it so you weren’t alone doing it. [C3]*
- *Yes I liked it, because I liked working with [CX].. she knows Irish and she just...well sort of when we were starting the lesson she just moved it on, she was very good at Irish. [C13]*

In relation to Peer Tutoring, two children explicitly noted the linguistic ability of their partner, and one child referred specifically to the trust that had built up between themselves and their partner. The child, while noting that they had led in terms of Irish language and in effect identified themselves as the MKO, also duly noted that their partner had also helped them.

The majority of children’s comments however, referenced learning from each other in relation to Peer Tutoring. In addition, the analysis of the distribution of coaching instances highlights that it was the children of High Ability that identified coaching, as opposed to experienced coaching. This suggests that from a child’s perspective the children in the Learner role offered twice as much coaching to their partner than the other cohorts, or suggests the children of Higher Ability were more explicit and articulate in describing the kind of help their partner gave them. Keeping in mind that the children in Learner role or in Equal Ability partnership, report approximately the same level of coaching experienced, suggesting that learning took place for all students irrespective of ability grouping and that the role of MKO was not largely discernible by the children either for the children categorised in that role, or for the children in a partnership with a potential MKO. The

exploration of the role of MKO with reference to the children's comments must be qualified with the proviso that the comments represent the *children's perspective* of assistance received. A more in-depth study could cross-reference these perspectives with analysis of the transcript of each lesson interaction, between each partnership, where the researcher examines the reported peer-mediated assistance.

**Table 6.29. CRAG Example: Noticing Linguistic Ability**

TR: *[C14], how did you find Peer Tutoring in Irish class?*

C14: *Yeah, it was mostly me helping [C11] at the time! so it was really fun and he trusted me.*

TR: *So you were in teacher role! And do you find that since you started working with [C11] that you are using more Gaeilge than you did in the beginning let's say*

C14: *Yeah, and [C11] told me a few words that I didn't know.*

(CRAG 2)

#### 6.4.1.6 Optimisation Feedback

In terms of offering suggestions as to how Peer Tutoring could be improved as a language learning approach, the overarching recommendation put forth from the student cohort was in relation to lesson frequency, as opposed to lesson content or structure. It was recommended to increase designated PT lessons from two lessons per week to more sessions per week (11/20 children); four children cited an increase as important, and a further seven children specified an increase from two PT lessons per week to three PT lessons a week out of a total of five Irish lessons per week as a suggestion going forward. PT lessons had taken place on Tuesday and Thursday every week; five children recommended a weekly timetabling of Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, should the suggestion of three PT lessons per week be implemented. Thus, over half the class were in favour of increasing the weekly class time assigned to Peer Tutoring, which, in their own opinion afforded them more time

to speak Irish, and the opportunity to learn from each other. Two children suggested the rotation of partners would be beneficial with one of the two suggesting that it would be better if students could make their own choice of partner.

Two children specified that they were happy with bi-weekly sessions as well as being happy overall with regard to lesson content and structure.

**Table 6.30. Overarching Recommendation from Children re Peer Tutoring**

	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Children</b>	<b>Total</b>
1.	<b>Increase PT Sessions</b>  -Increase PT lessons from 2 lesson a week (3)  -Spend more time at it (1)	C18, C15, C9  C19	<b>4</b>
2.	<b>Increase PT Lessons to 3 Lessons per week</b>	C6, C8, C1, C2, C3, C4, C10	7
	<b>TOTAL</b>	As per 1&2	<b>11</b>

In terms of lesson structure once child recommended that given that sometimes the activities were not interesting, it could be considered to “*have more questions more interactive*” activities [C15], as part of the lessons. One recommended that explanations should be given in English, then in Irish [C11]. Four children noted that the PT lessons were suitably challenging and “not always easy” which was communicated positively.

Ongoing evaluation of lesson planning and outcomes informed the development of Irish language use *for* the specific language activity, *and around* the language activity. The development of these language skills was explicitly referenced by Child 4 that they and their partner were exhibiting retention and transferable skills in relation to incidental Irish language around the specific language task to hand.

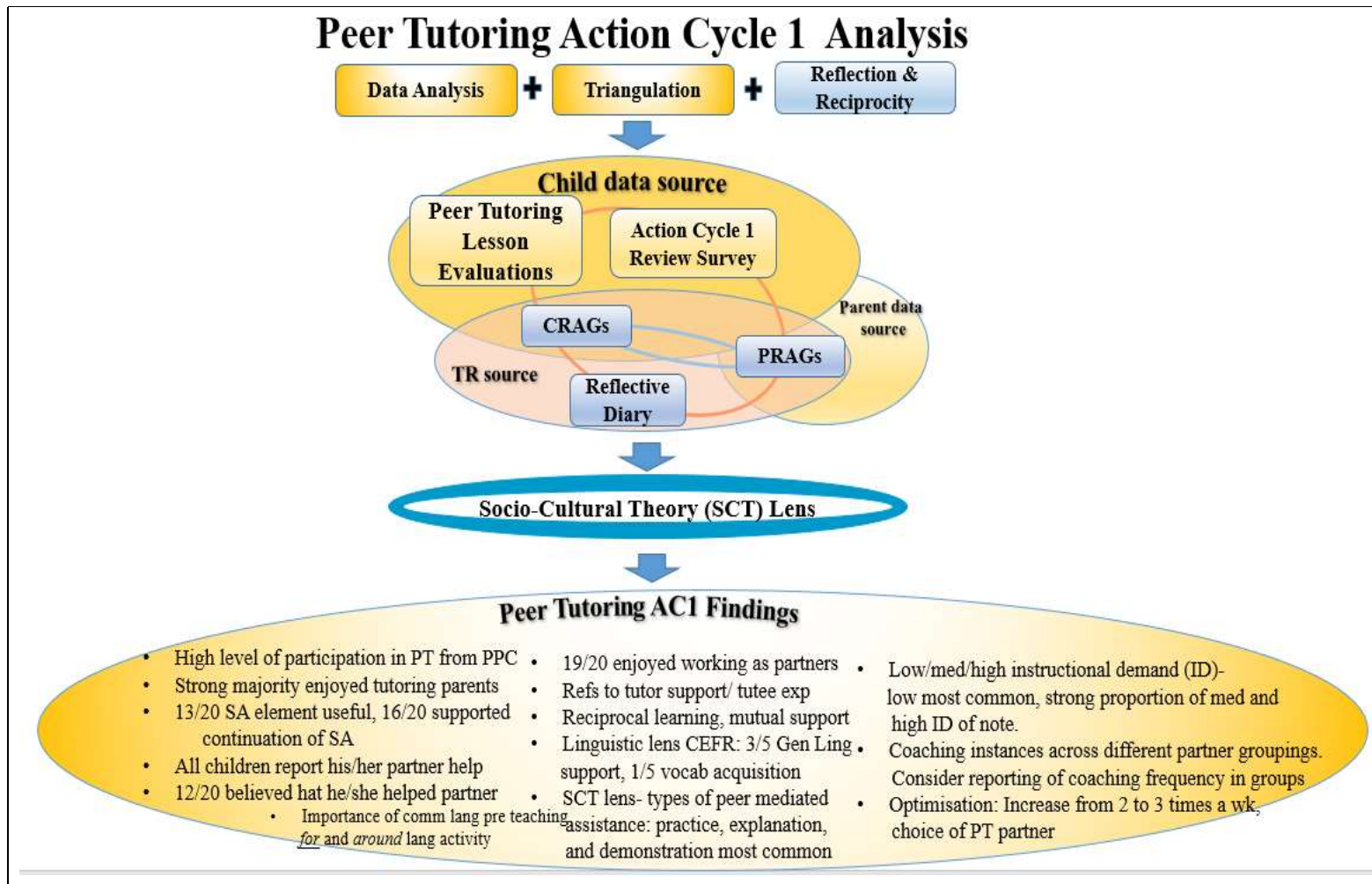


**Table 6.31. CRAG Example of Transferring Irish Acquired to Other Lessons**

TR:	<i>Yes so you're getting more oral practice?</i>
C4:	<i>Yeah.</i>
TR:	<i>Ok good and do you find that you use more Irish when you're working in pairs then when you're maybe working alone?</i>
C4:	<u><i>Yeah like we use our Irish that we've learned in some other lessons like from the games you know we use 'Mo sheans' [My turn] and 'do sheans' [your turn]</i></u>
TR:	<i>Yes excellent, exactly and I've seen that in the video clips.</i>
	(CRAG 2)

#### 6.4.1.7 Reciprocal Peer Tutoring Analysis Summary

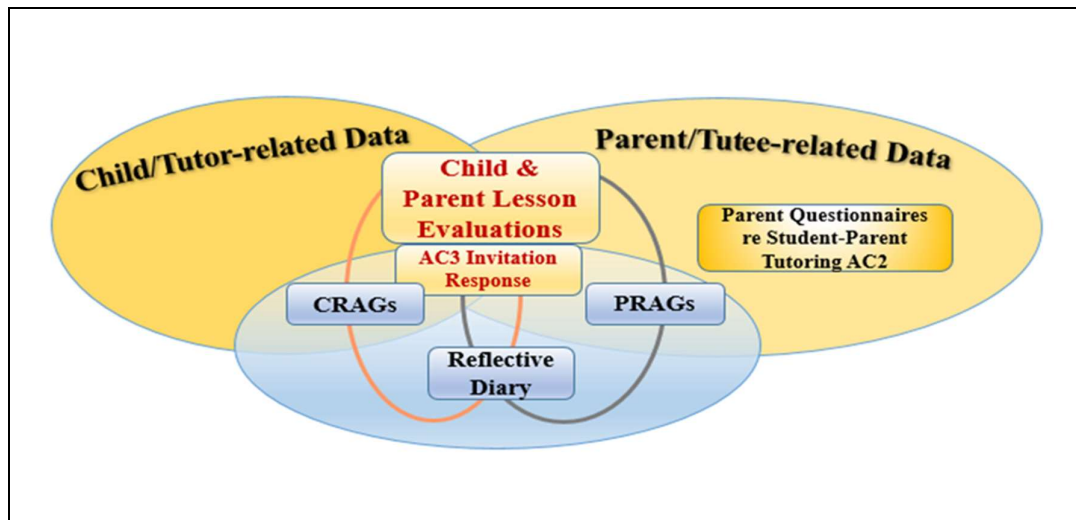
In conclusion, a strong majority of children (18/20) stated that they enjoyed the Peer Tutoring programme. Furthermore 19/20 children reported that they liked interacting as peer tutors and tutees with each other. Children noted various benefits of the Peer Tutoring lesson programme in their own opinion, citing reciprocal learning for example. The children's responses in relation to how their partner helped them in the role of tutor were analysed through the lens of the CEFR to identify the nature of linguistic assistance afforded to tutees. It was found that general linguistic competence was the most often aided competence (59.6%) and assistance with vocabulary range accounted for 19.8% of total reported peer-mediated assistance. The nature of peer-mediated assistance (Yarrow and Topping, 2001) in the context of CCT highlighted that students supported each other's learning primarily by practising language tasks, as well as by means of explaining and demonstrating—indicating an even higher relative proportion of peer support of low instructional demand compared to support of medium instructional demand, and a higher proportion of medium instructional demand compared to support of a higher demand on the tutor. There was also student reference to the development of Irish language skills and use *around* the language activity during Irish lessons, as referenced earlier in the chapter in relation to Irish language use during lessons.



**Figure 6.14. Peer Tutoring Action Cycle 1 Analysis**

## 6.4.2 Student-Parent Tutoring AC2

Student-Parent Tutoring took place in Action Cycle 2 in the Spring term of the school year and was taken up voluntarily by the entire class cohort. Analysis included the review of the Child & Parent Joint Lesson Evaluations of student-parent tutoring, Parents' Questionnaire in relation to the student-parent tutoring programme, Children's Research Advisory Group (CRAG) discussions and Parent's Research Advisory Group (PRAG) discussions in relation to student-parent tutoring respectively, as illustrated in Figure 6.15 below. Student-Parent Tutoring during Action Cycle 2 is discussed in relation to programme participation, children's experience as tutor, parents' experience as tutee, sociocultural processes, and programme optimisation.



**Figure 6.15. Student-Parent Tutoring AC2 Analysis Data Sources**

### 6.4.2.1 Programme Participation

While all the children in the class (20/20) had participated in the student-parent tutoring, 16/20 children returned their child-parent lesson evaluation booklet. Of the 16 student-parent groupings, Table 6.32 below outlines the number of lessons completed.

Varied levels of lesson evaluation completion are apparent. 6/16 families completing six or seven lessons, and 9/16 families completing four or more lessons. 12/16 families completed three or more lessons. Given that the lessons, were taken up on a voluntary basis in the home, this reflected a relatively good participation rate from the available data (16/20).

**Table 6.32. Summary of Student-Parent Tutoring Lesson Completion Rate during Action Cycle 2**

No of Lessons Completed	No. of Student-Parent Teams (16/20) who completed specified no. of lessons
1 Lesson	1
2 Lessons	3
3 Lessons	3
4 Lessons	2
5 Lessons	1
6 Lessons	4
7 Lessons	2

#### 6.4.2.2 The Child's Experience & Role as Tutor

The majority of the class (17/20 children) reported in the CRAG discussions that they found student-parent tutoring of Irish enjoyable. All parents who completed a Parent's Questionnaire (17/17) also believed that their child enjoyed teaching their parent Irish once a week. In terms of Irish language proficiency, 17/20 children were of the view that their proficiency in Irish improved as a result of the tutoring process. This was also reflected in parents' perspectives on their child's learning: 16/17 parents believed that their child's proficiency in Irish had improved since the beginning of the child-parent tutoring programme. Furthermore, the majority of parents 15/17 maintained that their child was now more motivated to learn the Irish language since the beginning of the tutoring programme.

When asked what the benefits of teaching Irish to their parents were, the concept of building up parents' capacity, so that parents could reignite prior learning and could be a support for Irish homework, was widely discussed (See CRAG example 1, Table 6.33).

**Table 6.33. CRAG Examples: Children’s Views on Tutoring Parents**

<p><b>1. CRAG examples: benefits of teaching Irish to parents</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>If they don't know Gaeilge and you have Gaeilge homework and you don't really know it, they can help you [C18, CRAG 1]</i></li> <li>• <i>I think it's really good because we learn our parents.....And if we forget something, they can tell us because we already learned them [C5, CRAG 3]</i></li> <li>• <i>Because if they learned Irish in school they might have forgotten some and then it might come back. [C6, CRAG 3]</i></li> <li>• <i>Yes because they know what you're doing with school and they get to have a chance to learn as well. [C7, CRAG 3]</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>2. CRAG examples: Programme’s potential as a revision tool</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Sometimes it helps you revise your Irish [C16, CRAG 1]</i></li> <li>• <i>I guess it sort of helps you, like it's coming back to you, like revision [C13, CRAG 2]</i></li> <li>• <i>Yeah, it was really good revision learning Irish again. Like all the words [C14, CRAG 2]</i></li> <li>• <i>Reminds you. [C7, CRAG 3]</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>3. CRAG examples: Integrativeness factor</b></p> <p>C13: <i>Yeah, it's improved their Irish a lot. She's going around asking them 'Cá bhfuil tú i do chónaí?' [Where do you live?]</i></p> <p>TR: <i>To who?</i></p> <p>C13: <i>To, in her job.</i></p> <p>TR: <i>Excellent, people in her work.</i></p> <p>C13: <i>And then they don't know what it is and my Mam explains it.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">(CRAG 2)</p>

The programme’s potential as a revision tool for the child was also cited by 11/13 children who engaged in discussions on the topic (See CRAG example 2, Table 6.33). Of the thirteen children, one child had no opinion in relation to revision, and one child noted that there was no revision benefit for them, but there was learning for his parents: *Well I already knew the Irish words so it didn't really help...but it did help my parents [C17, CRAG 2]*. In lesser-cited benefits, children also referenced the *Integrativeness* factor of parents being able to speak in Irish should they meet an Irish speaking person. Equally, one child relayed how his parent had shared newly-learned Irish in her English-speaking workplace.

The advantage of parents being able to speak a ‘secret’ language either abroad or at home were also cited by four children and reflected the children assigning to their parents potential benefits of speaking Irish that they had identified for themselves as Irish learners earlier in the programme. One child lamented however his parent gaining access and understanding to the Irish language which was previously used as a secret language on his part: *I had been actually using Irish as a secret language with my brother and all of that and since I’ve been teaching her, like, she knows more Irish she knows what we’re saying* [C14, CRAG 2]. Finally, one child simply stated the programme’s importance in terms of connecting parents to children’s learning: *because they know what you’re doing with school* [C7, CRAG 3].

While child and parent tutoring lesson evaluations focused mainly on the experience and learning journey of the parent as tutee, (i) children’s comments in the weekly evaluations in relation to their parents’ learning and the (ii) parents’ evaluations of the lessons, both provided an insight into the child’s experience as tutor. The set of evaluation comments (parent and child) were considered in turn.

Both the children’ and parents’ evaluative comments were reviewed and coded accordingly, from emerging themes. A significant number of positive references to the student-tutoring experience and references to learning informed the first three codes: (i) *Positive references*, (ii) *Evidence of learning*, (iii) *Specific reference to learning activity*. Similarly to the CRAG and PRAG coding, SCT-based codes were also applied—(iv) *Evidence of scaffolding* and (v) *More knowledgeable other (MKO)*. On further review, (vi) *references to prior knowledge of Irish/recall of Irish* and (vii) *Reference to difficulty* were apparent across both sets of evaluations. Two final codes which were mutually exclusive for each cohort were added; (viii) *Reference to improvement* which was solely relevant to the children’s evaluations and (ix) *Impact on relationship with child* which emerged in the parents’ evaluations.

In relation to the children’s evaluations of their parents’ learning, 60/65 of the evaluations were framed positively which strongly suggests that the student-parent tutoring was overall a positive experience for the children as tutors. Explicit praise by the child tutors for parents as learners was apparent, as well as identifying parents’ strengths in a particular lesson: *“Mam done good. She knew all the phrases and what to do”* [C15]. 58/65 of the children’s comments specifically referenced their parent’s learning which is reflective of the children’s awareness of learning taking place and language awareness as tutor. The majority of these

(45/58) framed parents' learning positively- for example: “*Everything went right again. My Mom got a 10/10 score*” [C19].

**Table 6.34. Analysis of Children’s and Parents Student-Parent Tutoring Lesson Evaluation Comments**

		Children’s SP Lesson Evaluations (65 in total)	Parents’ SP Lesson Evaluations (58 in total)
1.	Positive Reference (incl. fun/enjoyment etc.)	60	39
2.	Reference to learning	58	47
3.	Specific reference to lesson activity	11	26
3.	Evidence of <b>scaffolding</b>	<b>65*</b>	17
4.	Explicit reference to More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) in relation to child	n/a	14
5.	Reference to recall of language/ prior knowledge of Irish	17	6
6.	Reference to challenge of difficulty	13	9
7.	Reference to improvement	14	n/a
8.	Impact on relationship with child	n/a	13

Conversely, there were 13 references made by the children to challenge or difficulty experienced by parents. However the majority of these comments were tempered with a positive comment: “*She was struggling but she had fun*” [C14]; “*It was good overall but it was hard to get my Mam to pronounce “‘a haon’ and ‘a cúig’*” [C16], which highlighted the

tendency amongst the children as tutors to be encouraging while identifying areas for improvement.

The children also made reference to specific lesson content and lesson themes: “*Mam & Dad earned a sticker for their work in counting 1-10*” [C2]; “*My Mam did well at ‘Conas atá tú?’ but can improve at ‘Dia duit’*” [C6]. The children were also able to identify their parents’ prior knowledge of Irish during lessons: “*It was fun teaching them. They knew how to say a lot of words*” [C17]; “*I think it went well as my Mam knew all of the numbers*” [C6]. Equally, the children demonstrated the ability to identify improvements made by parents, in the context of lesson objectives and prior knowledge where applicable— “*She done much better than last time- I would give her an A*” [C12].

Thus the identification of a positive experience, learning, difficulties in the context of learning, progress within lessons, lesson-to-lesson improvements made—as well as acknowledging prior knowledge where applicable—are indicative of the children’s engagement and awareness as tutors. The skills demonstrated by the children as tutors of their parents would suggest that their experience of being tutors to each other during Action Cycle 1 was of benefit in acquiring and honing such skills.

Parents’ questionnaires in relation to SPT also offered insight into the child as tutor. Of the 13 parents, nine referenced their child in the role of tutor. While all 13 comments referenced an aspect of the parent’s experience, it is of note that overall parents commented in more detail in relation their child’s experience than that of their own. This could indicate that while the student-parent tutoring was a learning opportunity for parents, it was also an opportunity for the child to extend learning and skills. Seven parents explicitly noted that the tutoring was a positive experience for their child, and five parents explicitly noted their child’s enjoyment of teaching their parent (See Table 6.35).

#### 6.4.2.3 The Parents’ Experience as Tutee

In relation to the parents’ comments in the evaluations, approximately two-third of total comments were framed positively with frequent reference to fun or enjoyment therein (See Table 6.36). Approximately, 80% (47/58) of parent evaluations acknowledged that learning took place with evidence of the recognition parents’ own progress and/or the child’s role of tutor (See Table 6.36). Both themes reflect positively the efforts of the child as tutor. Only



**Table 6.35. Parents' References to Child as Tutor in Questionnaires**

- *My child really enjoyed teaching us, was so much fun.*
- *[C4] enjoyed teaching her Dad and I each week and has improved so much her own understanding of the Irish language.*
- *Very beneficial to my daughter. She is very eager to do the Irish pack. Definitely improves her Irish and has improved her confidence.*
- *Yes my child [C10] enjoy teaching me Irish.*
- *My son teached me Irish.*
- *My son [C3] had a lot of fun teaching me.*
- *My child enjoy doing it with his brother.*
- *My child really took pleasure in teaching me Irish.*
- *My son is good teacher.*

9/65 of the parents' evaluative comments referenced experiencing difficulty, and 6/9 were balanced with a positive statement; for example: *it was hard to understand what the teacher meant. I kind of liked it because it was fun* [P17]. There were six references to prior knowledge by parents which was relatively low given that half the parent cohort had learned Irish at school; for example: *Very good games this evening really helped us to remember our Irish words for lots of different foods* [C4]. Parents' references to scaffolding and to the MKO are explored in the next section.

As per the parents' questionnaires, 16/17 parents agreed that they enjoyed being taught by their child on the *Is Tusa an Múinteoir* programme. Ten out of seven believed that their level of Irish had improved during the course of being tutored, which could be considered a very positive response given the recorded rate of completion of lessons which was varied across the group. Out of 17 parents, 13 maintained that they would like to continue learning Irish having participated in the *Is Tusa an Múinteoir* programme. In relation to the '*Is Tusa an Múinteoir*' Irish language pack—co-designed by the teacher-researcher and the participating children—16/17 parents agreed that it was a useful resource. Five parents also made specific reference to either their own enjoyment of the lessons or the learning experience (See Table 6.36 below)

**Table 6.36. Parents’ Experience as Tutee: PRAG & Questionnaire References**

	<b>PRAGs</b>	<b>Questionnaires</b>
<b>1. References to fun/enjoyment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>It was fun learning again. It has been 20 years since I was in school. [P1]</i></li> <li>• <i>Enjoyed playing fish in the pool. It was fun. Thanks [P15]</i></li> <li>• <i>I really enjoyed the activity because I enjoyed doing something with fun with my child in Irish [P5]</i></li> <li>• <i>Really good exercise making Irish fun! [P6]</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>the lessons were fun [P2]</i></li> <li>• <i>I enjoyed doing it [P3]</i></li> </ul>
<b>2. References to learning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>I enjoyed the activity because I am starting to pick up a bit of Irish now [P2]</i></li> <li>• <i>[C13] explained the topic very well and corrected my pronunciation [P13]</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>I actually surprised myself and [C18] when I was reminded how much Irish I could remember [P18]</i></li> <li>• <i>I never had learning Irish, to me it's new experience [P19]</i></li> </ul>

Parents were asked to share any further thoughts that they had about the programme and 13/17 parents responded to the invitation. There were four references to the lesson being *easy*, with one such reference stating “*too easy, but I enjoyed doing it*” and another parent stated that the lessons were “*very easy, but in a good way*”. The four parents who referred to the lessons as *easy* had previously learned Irish. Three parents, all of whom were learning Irish for the first time referenced that the lessons were *hard*. One parent stated it “*was hard for me at the start but really enjoy them*”.

**Table 6.37. Parents' References to 'Easy' and 'Hard' Lessons**

References to 'easy' lessons	References to 'hard' lessons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>The lessons were too easy for me, but I enjoyed doing it</i></li> <li>• <i>Personally I have found the exercises quite easy as I remember quite a bit from school</i></li> <li>• <i>It was easy to go along with</i></li> <li>• <i>I found the lessons to be very easy, but in a good way</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Was hard for me at the start but really enjoy them</i></li> <li>• <i>It was very hard to understand the words, but my son taught me Irish</i></li> <li>• <i>It's hard for me but my child enjoy doing it with his brother</i></li> </ul>

The emergent theme that views on lesson level were contingent on whether one had prior knowledge of Irish, or whether one was a new learner of Irish, was further explored during the PRAG discussions. P3 elaborated on her view in questionnaire that the lessons were too easy: *You see anything she brought home I kinda knew, I remembered....it was too easy and just over real quick [P3]* while also acknowledging that a one level approach would not suit all parents: *...in saying that, if you had never seen the language before, you wouldn't have the foggiest [P4]*. As the discussion led to parents' suggestion of a beginner and intermediate lesson design, the teacher noted that that pitching the lesson at one level had been a challenge. The outcome of the discussion prompted an agreed action for the following term:

*Good suggestion because I did think about that, is this too easy or again is this too hard, it's hard to decide what to put in.....So I think the pack is something that has worked ok and the thing is to focus on the content that maybe there would be maybe different activities for different parents... [Teacher-Researcher, PRAG 5]*

As well as respective child and parent evaluative comments, the lesson evaluations also invited each child to complete a 3-item Likert scale, as part of the lesson evaluation to reflect on the tutee's learning. The 66 evaluations by the children yielded the following distribution:

**Table 6.38. Student-Parent Tutoring Lesson Ratings**

Ok 😊	Good 😊	Very Good 😊 😊
5	34	27

The child tutors evaluated their parents' learning as *good* or *very good* in a clear majority of lessons, which was a clear reinforcement on the children's and parents' overarching perception that learning took place during lessons.

In planning for the summer term, parents were asked if they wished that their child would participate in Irish language activities during the summer term. The options included participation in an Irish club during lunchtimes, continuation with student-parent tutoring and the option to continue with online Irish language learning as detailed below in Table 6.4-11. It is of note that the proposed activities would be run as extra-curricular activities given the class teacher's change of role in the new term. Out of 20 parents, 18 responded to the invitation.

**Table 6.39. Children's Sign-Up for Action Cycle 3**

	<b>Proposed Summer Term Irish Language Activities</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>No Response</b>	<b>Total Responses</b>
1.	<i>Invitation for child to participate in an Irish Club organised at lunch time once a week during Summer Term</i>	15	2	1	18
2.	<i>Invitation to parent and child to continue with 'Is Tusa an Múinteoir' student-parent tutoring in the Summer Term</i>	14	2	2	18
3.	<i>Invitation for child to continue with Irish language learning activities on class online platform in the Summer Term</i>	17	1	0	18

A clear majority of parents were positively disposed for their child to continue with the three principal Irish language learning activities proposed by the teacher, including student-parent tutoring which also required parental involvement. This supported parents' positive responses in the Parent Survey with regard to continuing the programme (13/17).

#### 6.4.2.4 A Closer Look at Scaffolding & MKO

The articulation of the role of MKO in student-parent tutoring was evident. The children were assigned the role of tutor to their parents and prepared the Irish lesson at school. By default, the child presented as the More Knowledgeable Other by virtue of the fact they were the teacher having prepared the Irish lesson at school for home use. Unlike the peer tutoring programme, there was no alternation of the tutor/tutee role. For children teaching Irish to parents learning Irish for the first time, the context clearly supported the child as being the MKO in terms of Irish language competency. In the case of children teaching Irish to parents with previous learning experience of Irish, the designation of the MKO role was not as clear cut as the programme evolved. While all children assumed the role of MKO and while the student-parent lesson evaluations largely demonstrate the child reporting of parent as learner, it is worth noting, that depending on the parent's level of Irish, or specific lesson experience, the parent was not necessarily in the learner role entirely. This was evidenced in the parents' feedback and CRAG discussions. A number of parents exhibited a knowledge and engagement with the language that reignited prior learning, and facilitated the development of a partnership developing towards *near ability*. However, for the most part, parents who shared that initial lessons were easy etc., in the main, "*went along with it*" in order to encourage their child as the MKO. Furthermore, approximately one-quarter of lesson evaluations by parents specifically referenced their child in the role of tutor positively. For example, Parent 19 reported that *my son is a very good teacher* while Parents 2, 5 and 10 all noted how their child explained the activity well and corrected the parent's pronunciation.

#### 6.4.2.5 Programme Optimisation

In terms of lesson frequency, four parents noted in the survey that once a week was a suitable arrangement. One parent also noted that trying to find time to do the weekly lesson was a challenge: *The lessons were good but I wish I had more time to do them* [P1]. This view of a weekly lesson being enough overall, as well as a challenge to complete for some families,

(depending on the week), also emerged during PRAG discussions: *I'm two lessons behind at the moment just because of family stuff and...I was just...consumed...And I'm feeling guilty with (C6) because she just wants to do it...she's eager (P6)*. Project participation rates would also indicate that one lesson per week was adequate for some but challenging for others in terms of finding the time.

Five parents also made specific reference to either their own enjoyment of the lessons; *the lessons were fun (P2), I enjoyed doing it (P3)*, or the learning experience “*I actually surprised myself and (C18) when I was reminded how much Irish I could remember*” [P18]; *I never had learning Irish, to me it's new experience (P19)*.

Parents were also asked how the programme could be improved. Six parents responded. Five out of the six supported the programme as was, which combined with the non-responses suggest the majority of parents were satisfied with the programme. An example of the comments of support included: *From the child's perspective, it works perfectly, it works perfectly. Each lesson is well prepared and easy for the child to deliver (C4)*.

*The programme is well structured so no ways I can think of (C6); Everything is fine [C10]*. One parent recommended that a focus on grammar would be beneficial, *If there was a bit more grammar involved it could be a bit better (C18)*. The same parents had commented previously about surprising themselves in terms of the Irish that came back to them. This might suggest/represent the desire for a further challenge from a parent with prior knowledge of Irish.

*I know that like there will be parents, like myself, that found the exercises very easy but other parents will have struggled with trying to get to grips with the pronunciations and so on. The other side of it is that it has to be something that they can actually teach, you what I mean, because they're only learning themselves you know [P4, PRAG 6]*

A parent who was learning Irish for the first time noted that it was necessary for her child to translate Irish to English and then Polish for her.

#### 6.4.2.6 Student-Parent Tutoring AC2 Summary

Overall, the first enactment of student-parent tutoring reported a relatively good participation over the course of the seven weeks strong indications of enjoyment, engagement, and

evidence of learning on the part of both children and parents alike. The results indicate benefits of a sociocultural-informed pedagogy in terms of the child's development in the role of More Knowledgeable Other, the introduction of Irish language engagement in the home in addition to parental engagement with their child's learning of Irish, the positive experience of sharing a(n Irish language) learning activity with their child and the opportunity to (re-) engage with the language. Child and parents feedback for optimisation also indicated how the programme could be improved while also being indicative of learner engagement in terms of review and ownership. Families' level of interest in Action Cycle 3 participation also presented positively.

### ***6.4.3 Student-Parent Tutoring AC3***

#### **6.4.3.1 Learning Context**

The second term of Student-Parent Tutoring took place during the Summer Term and was taken up by a smaller cohort of families voluntarily. Firstly, it is of note that the number of children and parents who took part in the language activities when the Summer Term commenced was less than the number of people who signed up at the end of the Spring Term. Fifteen parents had indicated their child would take part in an extra-curricular Irish Club in the Summer Term. In the end, ten students took part—nine girls and one boy—which later increased to ten girls and one boy. The decision to join in halfway through the term was the result of the Student Voice Conference arising. Thus the enthusiasm towards the programme at the end of Action Cycle 2 and commitments made to continue, did not translate into participation during the Action Cycle 3 for one-third of families (5/15).

It is important to preface the analysis of Action Cycle 3 results with the understanding that those who took part, actively supported the programme by the very nature of their commitment to continue with the programme—previously facilitated at school— outside of class time, including lunch breaks and after-school sessions. The children and parent feedback is also presented with the intention of supplementing the findings of Action Cycle 2 in terms of programme optimisation and new learnings from the second iteration of the programme, noting also that the learning parameters were slightly different.

Nine of the ten children who took part completed a questionnaire in relation to their student-parent tutoring experience during the Summer Term. Children were asked why they had

decided to continue in Term 3. Of the nine responses, four children referenced fun and enjoyment and the educational benefit of the programme was cited by four children (see Table 6.40). The educational benefit of the programme was cited by four children. In relation to reasons for continuing, a specific interest in the language was also outlined by two children. Four of the nine children cited two reasons for continuing. Children also noted their hopes at the beginning of the term. The eight responses included three references to improving one's Irish, as detailed in Table 6.40. The children's reasons for continuing the programme outside of school hours and hopes for the new term primary consisted of an expectation of enjoyment, fun, and the prospect of learning more Irish.

**Table 6.40. Children's Experience of Action Cycle 3 (Questionnaires)**

<b>1. Fun/Enjoyment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>I enjoyed doing Irish with Mrs. O'Connell</i></li> <li>• <i>I decided to continue because it is educational and fun</i></li> </ul>
<b>2. Benefit</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>to benefit my Irish vocabulary</i></li> <li>• <i>I decided to continue because I felt that the 'Is Tusa an Múinteoir' programme was helping me to improve my Irish and helping my Mum to start beginning Irish</i></li> </ul>
<b>3. Continuation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>I really wanted to continue the project</i></li> <li>• <i>I really wanted to continue</i></li> <li>• <i>I continued because I'm interested in Irish</i></li> <li><i>I decided to continue because I love Irish</i></li> </ul>
<b>4.. Improvement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>I hope to improve quite a bit</i></li> <li>• <i>My hopes were that I would be speaking fluent Irish</i></li> <li>• <i>My hope was to speak Irish better and learn lots of new words in Irish which did happen</i></li> </ul>



Of the ten parents who took part in the Student-Parent programme during Action Cycle 3, seven parents completed and returned a *Is Tusa an Múinteoir* Summer Term Questionnaire. In relation to the parents' perspective on why their child sought to continue with Irish language activities during Action Cycle 3 at the outset, parents primarily noted that (i) it would be beneficial to their child's learning (P1, P2 & P19), (ii) the children had already shown improvement (P4, P6 & P8) and (iii) their child was enjoying the programme to date (P4, P6 & P10)

**Table 6.41 Parents' Feedback in relation to Action Cycle 3 Continuation**

<b>Parent's perspectives on why child and parent continued with programme</b>	<b>Example of Parent Comment</b>
(i) Beneficial to child's learning	<i>Over the academic year, my child's understanding of the Irish language had grown and she had a keen interest in learning more, the lunchtime club gave her this outlet</i>
(ii) Child had shown improvement	
(iii) Child enjoyed the programme	<i>I wanted my child to continue because she enjoys it, has improved her Irish and makes Irish learning more enjoyable</i>

#### 6.4.3.2 Child & Parent Experience

The children' and parents' questionnaires detailed the child and parent experience on completion of the Summer Term. The children's responses to the Likert scale questions demonstrated that the majority of the nine children were positively disposed to the second term of student-parent tutoring in terms of how the project both improved each child's interest in the Irish language (8/9 children *agreed*), and the child's self-perception of improving their ability to speak Irish (7/9 children *agreed*). Parents also gave their perspective on how the second term of Student-Parent tutoring affected their child. From a total of seven parents, six *agreed* that the *Is Tusa an Múinteoir* project created a valuable opportunity for their child to engage with the Irish language outside of regular Irish lessons.

Five out of seven parents maintained that continuing with the project further improved their child's motivation to learn and speak Irish.

Parents' enjoyment of the programme was reflected in their questionnaire responses; with 6/7 parents responding that they enjoyed the Summer Term, while one parent did not respond. Reasons for enjoying the programme included, the programme being described as a new experience, fun, helpful, an opportunity to engage with one's child, and also a chance to observe their progress. Four out of seven parents believed that taking part in the Summer Term *improved* their Irish abilities, one parent did not know, one parent felt it did *not really improve* their Irish and one parent *did not respond*.

#### 6.4.3.3 SCT Focus

The children who continued the student-parent tutoring in the Summer Term reflected explicitly on being the 'expert', having taken part in two terms of student-parent tutoring. All nine children responded positively, as illustrated in Table 6.42.

Children were also asked what steps they took to become the expert at home. The lesson plan aid was cited as helpful in preparations. Listening, paying attention, concentrating, monitoring and making an effort to speak Irish were included: *I just monitored my parents and helped them out [C19]; The steps that I took was to concentrate to know and to practise [C10]*. Children reflected how the experience of being their parent's tutor affected their feelings towards the Irish language and Irish language proficiency. Six children responded positively in relation to the positive effects on their language learning by being a tutor to their parents: *Yes it did change my feelings about Irish because it makes it more fun plus yes I think it did change my language skills because it's like the first time I've taught and you learn while you're teaching and plus you have steps to do it. [C6]; I think I improved while I was teaching my Mam Irish. I really started liking Irish when I started the 'Is Tusa an Múinteoir' programme [C8]*. Relatedly, all seven parents noted that the child's role as teacher in the home improved their child's confidence in the Irish language.

A Children's Research Advisory Group (CRAG) meeting convened after the third Action Cycle also reflected on the concept of being in the role of teacher, the MOK. The overarching Action Cycle 2 feedback of the role was reinforced. All five children in attendance

acknowledged how the role of being the teacher or tutor enabled the child's as well as the parents' learning (See Table 6.42).

**Table 6.42. Children's Reflections on Role of Expert/MKO in Action Cycle 3**

<p><b><u>1. Questionnaire Reflections</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>It felt amazing to be the expert.</i></li><li>• <i>It felt good because I thought I was the teacher.</i></li><li>• <i>It felt good to teach someone who taught you so much. It was also great to know the most Irish at home.</i></li><li>• <i>It felt ok doing Irish at home with my Mam.</i></li><li>• <i>Good because when they didn't know something they would ask you and you would be able to help them.</i></li><li>• <i>It felt great because I was the teacher and I got to teach my Mam Irish.</i></li><li>• <i>It felt good.</i></li><li>• <i>It felt amazing to be the 'expert' or teacher because I knew everything.</i></li><li>• <i>It felt like I am the big boss.</i></li></ul>
<p><b><u>2. CRAG Reflections</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Cos it was helping my Irish and my Mum's Irish. [C1, CRAG 5]</i></li><li>• <i>I loved doing it at home because my parents teach me so much and it was cool that I was actually teaching them plus I just wanted to learn as much Irish as I could. [C8, CRAG 5]</i></li><li>• <i>I felt like an expert....I really liked teaching them something rather than them teaching me all the time. [C7, CRAG 5]</i></li><li>• <i>I felt like an expert and it was hard for my Mum and Dad to pronounce, especially for my Mum. My Dad was alright but my Mum was dodgy. [C5, CRAG 5]</i></li><li>• <i>It made me feel like I was the boss and I get to tell them what to do. So I know Irish more than them. [C1, CRAG 5]</i></li><li>• <i>I thought it was fun because I knew more Irish than my Mum so I got to teach it to her. [C8, CRAG 5]</i></li></ul>

The parents who took part in the Summer Term also reflected on the children's role as teacher at home. Seven of the nine parents responded to the questionnaire. Six parents responded that they felt their child had benefitted from the programme overall, and seven parents agreed that taking on the role of tutor improved their child's confidence and ability in Irish. Similarly, six of the seven parents believed that the role of tutor and 'expert' improved their child's motivation to speak and learn Irish. The children reflected further on the role of the MKO at the CRAG. Two children referenced being the 'expert' while one child referenced enjoying being the 'boss', and similarly two children were also aware that they knew more Irish than their parents (See Table 6.42).

Another child reflected that it was enjoyable due to the authentic feeling of teaching her parents and enjoying giving back to parents who had previously taught her many things. One parent also reflected on how the tutoring materials enabled her child to advance her own learning and challenge herself:

So she became very eager to learn and very eager to research and you know a lot of the resources that you gave her she kind of clung onto and she kind of found it very easy to, if she needed to figure out how to phrase something or how to word something or what the Irish was, she was confident enough to use the resources that were there. She wasn't waiting for somebody to give her...

[P4, PRAG 7]

#### 6.4.3.4 Optimisation and Learnings

The principal objective of the second term of student-parent tutoring was to pilot differentiated Irish language lessons at two levels.

##### *Lesson Differentiation*

Children were asked to identify which lesson level they had chosen for use in the Summer Term of student-parent tutoring via questionnaire. Three children identified choosing intermediate level for their parents who had prior knowledge of Irish, and six children outlined that they chose the beginner's level. Those who taught their parents using the intermediate lesson plan, all agreed that the change to the option of two levels of lesson was helpful. Similarly, all the children who taught the beginner's lesson to their parents were in agreement that the new approach was helpful. Subsequent Action 3 CRAG aligned with the

questionnaire feedback aligned with the questionnaire feedback; Table 6.43 highlights CRAG reflections from two children whose parents were learning Irish for the first time.

**Table 6.43. Children’s Lesson Differentiation Feedback**

<p><b><u>(a) Children’s lesson differentiation feedback- Questionnaires</u></b></p> <p><i>Intermediate level lessons:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Yes- because my Dad could help me with my homework if I got stuck [C1]</i></li><li>• <i>I found it helpful because I was actually teaching my parents new things rather than what they already know [C4]</i></li></ul> <p><i>Beginner’s level lessons:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Yes because my parents got to learn some Irish [C2]</i></li><li>• <i>I found this helpful because my Mum didn't speak Irish so the beginners one wasn't too hard for her. [C8]</i></li><li>• <i>Yes because it improved my parents' language. [C10].</i></li></ul> <p><b><u>(b) Children’s lesson differentiation feedback-CRAG</u></b></p> <p><i>Beginner’s level lessons:</i></p> <p><i>I used lesson A and I used it for my Mam cos she didn’t know Irish at all but like when we start using it got very easy for her. [C7, CRAG 5]</i></p> <p><i>Yeah I did because my Mum never spoke Irish before and when I got home I was really excited to teach her and it was kind of hard for her at the start but then she started getting it step by step. [C8, CRAG 5]</i></p>
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Six out seven parents were also in agreement that the facilitation of student-parent Irish lessons at a beginner’s and intermediate level was *helpful*, while one parent *did not know*. Parents’ reasons for considering the change helpful, converged on recognising each parent had a different level of Irish to another (See Table 6.44). The PRAG discussion expanded on the questionnaire responses with regard to the piloting of lesson differentiation. Two of the three parents who participated at intermediate level noted how the change of level was beneficial to both their own experience as a learner and their child’s experience as a teacher.

It was noted that gauging the lesson at the appropriate level of the learner, facilitated ‘real’ teaching and learning as highlighted in the PRAG reflection in Table 6.44.

**Table 6.44. Parents’ Lesson Differentiation Feedback**

<p><b><u>(a) Parents’ lesson differentiation feedback- Questionnaires</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>helpful because not everybody is the same level [P1]</i></li><li>• <i>I thought it was helpful because I got the beginners one [P8]</i></li><li>• <i>because each parent's level of Irish was different [P6]</i></li></ul>
<p><b><u>(b) Parents’ lesson differentiation feedback- PRAG</u></b></p> <p>P4: <i>Yeah. It was good, I suppose for myself, for the earlier project that Anna would come home with it on a weekly basis. You kind of found yourself pretending you didn't know so that she could go through the process of teaching it to you. You know that sort of way but when it became much more difficult, it became, it might have something to do with different tense, say where you put in a "h" and how you pronounce a name, there were some very good fact sheets that she came home with. I was going "why didn't I have this when I was younger" but it was then that she really became the teacher because there was stuff that I didn't know.</i></p> <p>P3: <i>Yes, I agree</i></p> <p>P4: <i>And it was much more beneficial for her and she felt more empowered when she was teaching me because I was going "I really actually don't know this". You know. So from my point of view the great thing about it was that I was actually learning something and it was beneficially because she was learning more by really teaching me.</i></p> <p>[P4 &amp; P3, PRAG 7]</p>

On review of the child and parent feedback at the end of Action Cycle 2, it is evident that the facilitation of a beginner and intermediate level Irish lesson for parents was an informed

suggestion by children and parents in the first instance, and was a valuable and necessary intervention which improved upon the lesson provision in the previous cycle.

### *Lesson Engagement & Facilitation*

The overarching objective for the Summer Term was to continue the programme, given the expression of interest in continuing from the student and parent cohort, the success of Action Cycle 1 and the intention to implement lesson differentiation. The children were asked to reflect if the out of class facilitation of the programme compared, to the in-class running of the programme in the previous action cycle, had had any impact.

Two out nine children reported that there was no difference, whereas seven children were explicit in identifying differences. Of the nine children that responded, two did not identify any difference. Four identified the new arrangement as more challenging, as there was less time available to prepare the lessons and/or to ask the teacher questions in relation to the lesson for home (See Table 6.45). A more “spaced out” approach to the lesson preparation was also referenced.

It was noted that the lesson engagement rate was higher during the first iteration of student-parent tutoring, compared to the second iteration during the Summer Term. Children and parents offered their views on why this turned out to be the case. Some of the reasoning resonated with the differences identified in the facilitation of the lessons in Action Cycle 3. Of the eight children who responded, five referenced how the teacher-researcher was no longer the teacher, with three of the five pinpointing less reminders from the teacher-researcher by virtue of the role change. There were also, four references to not having time and two references to the project being outside of regular schoolwork were also cited.

The parents reflections on the lower engagement rate were compatible with the children’s reasonings—three of the seven parents cited lack of free time on their part, two noted that the activity facilitator was no longer in the role of class teacher, which meant limited time for the oversight of the tutoring; Another parent cited that not everyone’s Irish was as good as others.

**Table 6.45. Lesson Engagement & Facilitation Feedback**

<p><b><u>1. Children's facilitation feedback</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>There was less time to explain the lessons so no time to ask questions about the lessons. [C1]</i></li><li>• <i>It was different because there was less time to practice so sometimes I wasn't sure how to teach this to my parents. [C4]</i></li><li>• <i>It was different because during the Summer we didn't really have much help from a teacher. [C6]</i></li> <li>• <i>There was less reminders when Mrs. O'Connell wasn't our class teacher. [C2]</i></li><li>• <i>Less reminder when Mrs. Connell wasn't class teacher [C8]</i></li></ul>
<p><b><u>2. Parents' facilitation feedback</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>The involvement with teacher was limited at this time. [P6]</i></li><li>• <i>Because Ms. O'Connell wasn't class teacher anymore. [P8]</i></li></ul>

The feedback indicates the teacher-researcher did not have the same capacity to encourage engagement with the programme as when in the role of class teacher, and essentially that the role of class teacher was central in the context of leading the language engagement.

*Continued Reflection, Greater awareness of fellow learner needs*

As reflected in child and parent responses to the facilitation of the second term of student-parent tutoring, both the parent and student cohort were invite to engage and reflect on their ongoing learning and that of child/parent too. The children and parents completed a questionnaire at the end of the cycle (parents only in Action Cycle 2). The format facilitated more reflection than those of previous cycles.



For example, parents were invited to reflect on their own learning during the Summer Term. Six out seven parents responded, with four parents identifying an improvement. One, who was a new learner of Irish reflected: *It helped because I never spoke Irish before (P8). My Irish is basic—I learned words I didn't know.* Three parents with prior knowledge of Irish shared different reflections, including prior knowledge returning; *It helped to unlock a lot of Irish grammar I once knew but had forgotten (P4)* and the need to practise. Parents were also invited to consider if they thought that their child benefitted from the programme. Six out of seven responded positively, referencing a number of benefits such as boosting confidence, improving conversational Irish and providing an opportunity to talk to people in Irish; *He got to experience talking to people (P19).*

The Action Cycle CRAG and PRAG, in addition to the AC3 questionnaires, highlighted a growing awareness of the needs of the learner with specific reference to new speakers of Irish and prior learners of Irish.

Yeah I did because my Mum never spoke Irish before and when I got home I was really excited to teach her and it was kind of hard for her at the start but then she started getting it step by step. (PRAG 5)

#### Student Parent Tutoring AC3 Summary

Action Cycle 3 was reviewed very positively by children and parents alike. It must be noted that the participants in Action Cycle, represented the children and parents positively and voluntarily disposed towards a third cycle of project engagement, which is evidenced by participant feedback in relation to motivation to sign-up. Students' articulation of embodying the role of the MKO is explicit, and corroborated by parents, reflecting a growing confidence and Irish ability self-concept on the part of the children. Feedback, in relation to lesson content differentiation, indicated this modification was impactful and beneficial. The change of role of the teacher-researcher—out of the role of class teacher to an associated education role—impacted the delivery and preparation of the student-parent tutoring and oversight. This indicated the centrality of the role, and reach of the class teacher, in the implementation of a class- and home- based language learning project.

#### **6.4.4 Tutoring Summary**

Both Irish language Peer Tutoring and Student-Parent Tutoring were reviewed positively by both child and adult participants in terms of learning, engagement, and enjoyment. In the case of peer tutoring, participant feedback indicates learning took place for both tutors and tutees of all abilities. The most common types of peer-mediated assistance in the peer tutoring context reported from a sociocultural lens were practice, explanation and demonstration. In relation to student-parent tutoring, both children's and parent's lesson reviews, largely indicate the recognition of the child as tutor and the MKO both for parents beginning to learn Irish and parents with prior knowledge of Irish. Children and parents noted an improvement in Irish language proficiency on the part of the children. While the student-parent tutoring was reviewed positively, and while over three-quarters of families signed up for voluntary Action Cycle 3 participation out of class time, only half of families actually took part. Optimisation feedback indicated a desire on the part of the children to increase the number of peer tutoring sessions from two to three sessions a week. In terms of student-parent tutoring, a recommendation to differentiate lesson content for parents who had prior knowledge of Irish, and for parents learning Irish for the first time, was put forth and enacted for Action Cycle 3.

### **6.5 Pedagogical Approach B: Technology-Mediated Language Teaching and Learning**

The second pedagogical approach of technology-mediated Irish language teaching and learning, piloted from the second half of Action Cycle 1 onwards, consisted of engagement with the Class Online Learning Zone (COLZ) which is analysed in Section 6.5.1 and the Class Twitter Account engagement which is analysed in Section 6.6.2. Each of the two technology platforms are explored in relation to learners' engagement, children's feedback and parents' feedback, and SCT processes, prior to a summary conclusion.

#### **6.5.1 Class Online Learning Zone**

##### **6.5.1.1 Children's Engagement**

The review of the Class Online Learning Zone focused on Action Cycle 1 activity. While the Class Online Learning Zone continued in Action Cycle 2 & 3, it was secondary to

student-parent tutoring—which was the primary pedagogical approach of Action Cycle 2 and 3. From the mid-point of Action Cycle 1, the Class Online Learning Zone was launched. As noted in Chapter 5, the first six weeks of activities were offered online to be accessed at home. Six activities were available for children to work on from home in the first few weeks of the intervention, and then, in the final four weeks of the first Action Cycle, working on the Class Blog Zone, was made part of the school schedule whereby a further four themed activities were facilitated.

Table 6.46 below highlights how many children completed a varying number of the six activities provided.

**Table 6.46. Student Engagement in Online Learning Zone Action Cycle 1 Stage 1**

<b>Online Learning Zone Student Engagement Total number of Activities</b>						
<b>No of Activities Completed</b>	<i>6 Activities</i>	<i>5 Activities</i>	<i>3 Activities</i>	<i>2 Activities</i>	<i>1 Activity</i>	<i>0 Activities</i>
<b>No of children</b>	3	4	2	4	1	6

Overall, 14/20 of the children engaged with the Class Online Learning Zone during the first six weeks of its launch, half of whom completed five or more activities. The mid-cycle review identified that 5/14 children engaged in the Class Online Learning Zone solely at school, during lunchtimes via access to the school Parents’ Room using the desktop computers. Three children availed of both lunchtime facilities and access at home, and six engaged in the online learning exclusively from home in the first six-week period. A total of students did not or could not engage with the Class Online Learning Zone during the first six-week period nor access it during lunchtime.

In terms of student engagement during the subsequent four-week school-based Class Online Learning Zone weekly activities, all children had the opportunity to partake in the activities, given that there was access during class time with the provision of school devices.

Table 6.47 provides a visual of the children’s engagement in both the home-based (Activities 1-6; A1-A6) and school-based (Activities 7-10; A7-A10 ) Online Learning Zone Activities. The number on each highlighted lesson, references the number of Irish language posts submitted online by each child in relation to each respective activity. For example, Child 2 (C2) engaged in all ten activities, and posted one response to seven activities, two responses to two activities and three responses to one particular activity. It is clear visually that the engagement rate in the school-based Class Online Learning Zone activities was higher (87.5%), than that of home-based activities /school-assisted access to activities 1-6 at lunchtimes (44.2% activity engagement rate). Absence from school accounted for the school-based lessons activities that were not undertaken.

**Table 6.47. Online Learning Zone Activity Engagement Rate & Activity Response Rate**

Child	Activity									
	A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	A6	A7	A8	A9	A10
C1	1	2						1	1	1
C2	3	2	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1
C3								1	2	1
C4	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	1	1	2
C5							1		1	
C6							1	1	2	
C7							2	5	1	1
C8	1	2	3	2	1		1	1	1	
C9	1	2	1	2	2	2		1	1	1
C10	2	1	2	3	4				1	1
C11	2		3				1	2	1	1
C12	1	1		1	2	1	1	1	1	1
C13	4	1					1	1	1	1
C14			1				1	2	1	1
C15	1		2				1	2	1	1
C16	1	1			1		1	2	1	1
C17	3	3	5	3	3		1	2	2	
C18	1		1	1			2	1	1	2
C19							1	2	1	1
C20							1	4	1	1

Notably, while overall there was a lower rate of activity engagement during the first six weeks, there was nonetheless a higher rate of writing two or 3 posts by children when the activities took place out of class time. In relation to the first six activities, 54.7% of children

engagements in each lesson consisted of two or more posts and thus responded at least once to the teacher-researcher's feedback. In the case of the four class-based activities, 22.9% of children's engagements consisted of two or more posts. Children were less likely to log-in to review feedback when the learning activity was completed during the school timetable. Children's experience with the Class Online Learning Zone in relation to home engagement and school-based, is explored further in the next section.

#### 6.5.1.2 Class Online Learning Zone: Children's Experience

All twenty children completed the Action Cycle 1 Review Survey and all children participated in the CRAG discussion relating to ICT. Responses to the Action Cycle 1 Review Survey demonstrated that 16/20 of the class were of the opinion that Irish language activities on the Class Online Learning Zone helped them to improve their Irish. From the total of twenty, nineteen showed their strong agreement for the implementation of school-based access to the Class Online Learning Zone during Irish lessons. It is of note that 14/20 were also in agreement with home use of the COLZ in tandem with school-based access. Twelve of the twenty noted that the COLZ gave them an opportunity to use Irish outside of the classroom. In terms of COLZ activity feedback, 15/20 children attested to always reading their teacher's comments in relation to their lesson posts. Finally, survey responses also demonstrated that parental encouragement to participate in the COLZ was relatively low with 5/20 of children in agreement that they received encouragement to log on from home from Mam or Dad.

Nineteen children participated in the CRAG discussions with regard to technology-mediated learning. Children reviewed their engagement with the class Online Learning Zone, and 13 of the 19 children present, noted their participation in the Online Learning Zone outside of regular classes during CRAG discussions. This broadly aligns with the participation analysis in Section 6.6.1. and survey results. The main themes that emerged from the discussion in relation to the COLZ were, favourite COLZ activities, support of blended learning, access to devices, technical difficulties, and student co-design. Feedback from parents' perceptions of their child's engagement with COLZ and relevant reflective diary entries are also referenced in the following sections.

During the CRAG discussions, 19/19 identified the Class Online Learning Zone as enjoyable, and enthusiastically identified their favourite activities.

**Table 6.48. Children’s Favourite COLZ Activities**

	<b>Favourite COLZ Activities</b>	<b>No. of references</b>	<b>Type of Language Learning Activity</b>
1.	40 Word Challenge	8	Goal-oriented
2.	Webquests/ Quizzes	6	Goal-oriented
3.	An Tansáin [Tanzania]	6	CLIL
4.	Mé Féin [Myself]	5	Theme-based/ CLIL
5.	Games	3	Goal-oriented
6.	French	3	CLIL

The 40-Word Challenge (*Dúshlán Daichead Focal*) was the most popular COLZ activity, followed closely by Webquests/Quizzes and *An Tansáin* (Tanzania). *Mé Féin* (Myself) themed activities were also popular. The two most popular activities were goal-oriented, which in the main involved a reward on reaching a target. Interestingly, the CLIL-informed activity on Tanzania, referencing children’s geography syllabus and previous lesson was popular, as was the relatable theme of ‘*Mé Fein*’ (Myself)—arguably the most fundamental of the ten featured themes in the curriculum. It is of note that the single, French language-related activity was also popular. One child demonstrated their overall enthusiasm for the Online Learning Activities by stating “*I can’t really pick one they are all my favourite*” [C2, CRAG 3] and this was echoed by a fellow CRAG participant [C4].

All of the nineteen students who took part in the CRAG discussion(at the end of Action Cycle 2), relating to ICT-mediated learning, supported the integration of the Class Online Learning Zone activities into the school timetable. The fact that the class could work on the activities using school laptops since the commencement of the Spring term, was also supported. This was an increase from 14/19 in the AC1 Survey (Completed in Week 2 of AC2). Overall in discussions, children expressed that they felt more supported in carrying out the activities in school rather than at home. Fifteen of the nineteen children shared their views as to why a blended approach whereby school-based engagement with the COLZ

supported the use of COLZ in the home. Eight children explicitly cited the fact that support is available at school and not necessarily at home:

*Yeah because if you needed help or something you can just ask the teacher—at home you couldn't get that.* [C1, CRAG 4]

*It's very fun and I like using it more in school 'cos if you're just using it at home you might get stuck on something...if you ask you Mam and Dad for help they might not know about what you're stuck on- so you just ask your teacher.* [C2, CRAG 4]

The teacher was explicitly cited by five children, while a more general availability of help was also mentioned; C13 noted that there were 'people' to help you in school which could possibly extend to peers in the class.

*And it's better than at home because you have people to help you.* [C13, CRAG 2]

Spelling challenges were also mentioned in relation to accessing the blog from home only. One child also cited internet and device access as a challenge to participating in COLZ from home only. One child referenced the difficulty of inserting *fadas*<sup>2</sup> at home which was also noted by the parent of child.

The initial launch of the COLZ, whereby children were encouraged to take part voluntarily from home, gave rise to the issue of device access. Two of the nineteen children reported that they did not have an internet connection. Both students however, accessed it via the school-based desktops during lunchtimes. One of the 17 children who reported having an internet connection, found connectivity issues were a challenge.

*My laptop doesn't work anymore...I don't know if it's the internet or not...it just says this page cannot be recognised"* [C18, CRAG 1]

Furthermore, when establishing an internet connection, it was reported that a number of children either did not have access to a device at certain points of the study, or had to negotiate device access with other family members:

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<sup>2</sup> A *fada* is a diacritical mark used in modern Irish which affects vowel sounds. It is represented by an acute accent symbol, drawn ascending left-to-right over the vowels *á, ó, ú, í* & *é*.

*I don't have a laptop. I didn't have a laptop until Christmas so I only got it on Christmas . [C5, CRAG 3]*

While the majority of children had internet access and access to a digital device at home, it was clear that a number of children had to share access with siblings or other family members. Of the ten children that referenced device sharing, three children reported ease of access due to being an only child, due to siblings out at college, and due to lack of interest from younger sibling in tablet respectively. Of the seven children who referenced sharing, three children cited an adult family member with whom they negotiated sharing a device, and four children cited negotiation of sharing device(s) with siblings.

The various access issues in terms of internet connectivity, device access, and device sharing that arose were discussed informally during class at the time of the COLZ and Twitter launch. The challenges were partially circumvented by providing access to a suite of desktops at school during lunchtimes, within the first two weeks of the COLZ launch. The discussions also informed preparations to expedite in-class access to devices in Action Cycle 2.

References to technical challenges emerged from the children's research advisory groups (CRAGs) and were also evident in the parent discussions. It was noted in both CRAG and PRAG discussions that accessing the web page of the Online Learning Zone at home proved a challenge for some families and a difficulty arose in relation to specific browsers, for example, the use of Google Search as means of accessing the webpage: "*Yeah sometimes I went on to the wrong bar, I went in like Google and like the middle bar and I thought it just wasn't working because it was a Mac but then once you said it was meant to be the top bar, I did that and it worked*" [C18]. This was also noted by a parent in relation to using the search function; *there was a few times, was just bringing us into something but it was an American site and I was going this is not what I want at all* [P3]. It was established that there had been confusion amongst a number of families with regard to entering the COLZ log-in page address and going into the Search bar function as opposed to the web address bar.

The importance of keeping the reference details of the Class Online Learning Zone was reflected upon; I have since taped it [Information Sheet given to parents re Online Learning Zone and log-in details] to the inside of the press so I don't lose it" [P3]. One child shared that her Information Sheet had been lost and which prevented at-home access during the first



six weeks. Thus, ongoing communication and facilitation at the beginning of the process to ensure access to COLZ was important.

**Table 6.49. Examples of Children’s Comments with regard to Device Access in the Home**

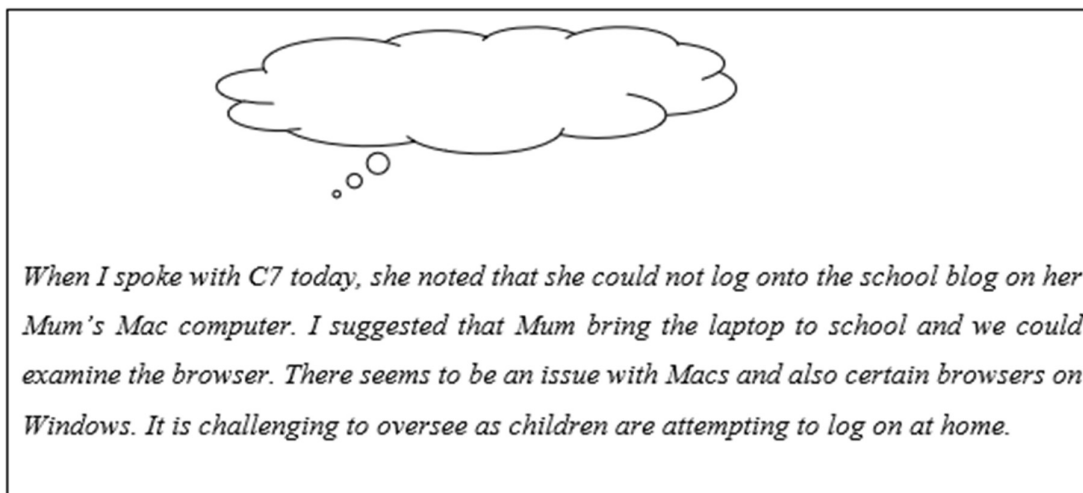
	Access to device scenario	Child’s comment	Child & Reference
1.	Example of where sharing devices at home posed no difficulty	<i>My sisters, both my sisters and both my brothers, they always go to college, they’re not really at home</i>	[C16, CRAG 1]
2.	Example of where sharing devices at home with sibling	<i>My brother always hogs the tablet cause he wants to play Clash of Clans all the time.</i>	[C7, CRAG 3]
3.	Example of where sharing devices at home with older family member	<i>My granddad uses it and I’m only allowed use it for 5 minutes.</i>	[C11, CRAG 2]
4.	Example of sharing solution by parent	<i>My Mam said we would each get an hour on it. I would go and ask to get more time to do stuff.</i>	[C1, CRAG 4]

It was reported that the choice of web browser affected access to the COLZ home page with reference to Google Chrome vs. Firefox and in relation to both Windows and Mac devices. In addition, inputting *fadas* on the Mac keyboard required special codes which the teacher-researcher furnished to both families when the issue arose: *I was able to open it in Google Chrome our problem was we couldn’t do the ‘fada’ and [C7] refused to write it without it. And then I got on to you and you gave me all the sheets.* [P7, PRAG 4]

Ongoing student feedback and input with regard to the pedagogic approaches of the study was a regular informal feature of classroom discussion on an ongoing basis. Aspects of the

COLZ platform design and practice arose during CRAG discussions both with respect to previously discussed elements of COLZ in class, and new suggestions. The majority of children were vocal in supporting the establishment of a structured blended learning schedule for the COLZ which would include weekly school and home access. The two suggestions made were the use of school laptops for COLZ once a week in school and follow-up activities once a week from home; closely followed by the suggestion of twice weekly school-based lessons involving COLZ and one follow-up session at home.

The difficulties that arose for children and parents around accessing the COLZ were addressed in class and informally at the classroom door. However, it did highlight the challenge in launching a learning programme which would be carried out at home, when the teacher-researcher would not be present. This point also led to considerations that beginning the Online Learning Zone as a class-based activity first may have been a more supportive approach for learners, as noted in the teacher-researcher's reflective diary illustrated in Figure 6.17.



**Figure 6.16. Reflective Diary Excerpt: Technical Challenges**

Lack of access to devices was also discussed, and the teacher-researcher emphasised with parents the provision available at school for children to continue Online Learning Activities outside school. It was noted that families were dependent on having kept the Information Sheet with webpage information to ensure finding the page online.

### 6.5.1.3 Class Online Learning Zone: Parent's Perceptions

*It's a nice addition for my daughter, this technology. She loves to use it. She's doing very well. She want to do straightaway if she has any blog, she quickly do it... [P10a, PRAG 3]*

Of the 13 parents that attended a PRAG Meetings (3&4) at the beginning of Action Cycle 2, all expressed support for the use of ICT as a mediating tool for Irish language learning and for a blended learning approach. Given that 1/12 parents present was active on Twitter, this suggests that the overarching support of ICT related to their child's participation in the Class Online Learning Zone in the home and/or school learning context. The content of the COLZ activities in terms of the variety of activities was noted Parent 11 noted how the use of technology had made Irish language learning more enjoyable for his child:

*I think [C11] is finding more enjoyment in Irish now than he ever had and I think it's probably because he is mad into computers and all and because it's computer-related now he finds more of a link towards it than just like books and all. [P11, PRAG 3]*

Significantly two parents, who did not generally speak very much at the PRAG meeting due to English being an additional language, notably did join in in relation to the discussion regarding COLZ activities and content:

*Yes, they enjoy the games on the computer [P12, PRAG 3]*

*Yes, the computer and games... [P20, PRAG 3]*

Another parent commented on how their child always sought to get onto the COLZ and wanted to be the first child in the class to complete the exercise. While children had reported low rates of encouragement from parents to partake in COLZ activities, it was apparent from parent feedback that a number of children were vocal at home in terms of encouraging parents to facilitate access to the COLZ, in terms of offering reminders or seeking new technology at home. The children's encouragement of parents appears to have generated parental involvement in learning more about the COLZ and what their child was doing. A small number of parents noted that in the beginning they were dubious of the Class Online Learning Zone in terms of online safety (See further PRAG reflections in Appendix 19) It was clear that, at first, the Class Online Learning Zone (COLZ) was an unknown entity, and for one parent synonymous with Facebook. The password-protected closed spaced feature,

when explained to parents, gave them reassurances in terms of online safety. One parent commented: *It's very good they have they're password and username. It's very safe* [P10a, PRAG 3]. Overall, parents had a greater understanding of, and engagement with, the Class Online Learning Zone compared to that of Twitter.

Finally, technical difficulties that arose for children were reiterated by parents. Issues with the compatibility of internet browsers and the Class Online Learning platform, and in accessing the Class Online Zone log-in page, suggested that children and parents were working together to overcome the technical challenges that arose. One parent noted that her child would not do the online activities on the Mac computer until they could work out how to insert *fadas*.

#### 6.5.1.4 A Closer look at COLZ Interactions

As noted in Section 6.5.1.1, there was a higher rate of interacting with the teacher-researcher online from children during the first 6 weeks of the COLZ compared with the final 4 weeks.

**Table 6.50. Analysis of Class Online Learning Zone Sample of Responses**

		No of Posts	(A) No. of Response to Activities	Instances of 1+ Response to one Activity	Evidence of incidental conversation in (A)	(B) Non-task related Response	
1.	C1	3	3	1	3	0	
2.	C4	11	6	1	4	5	
3.	C10	13	7	1	7	6	
4.	C13	5	2	1	1	3	
5.	C18	3	3	0	1	0	

A sample of children’s COLZ posts from the first six lessons was carried out. A random selection of five children—three girls and two boys—which were representative of varying levels of engagement, were selected during activities 1-6. This small-scale analysis (See Table 6.50) highlighted a number of practices with regard to the nature of children’s

responses. C1 and C13 were representative of a number of students who had an initial engagement with activities on commencement, but did not continue. C18 completed half of the activities, C20 completed most but not all, (despite making the most posts of sample) and C4 completed all tasks. The number of COLZ posts by a child were not synonymous with the number of activities undertaken. For example, 4/5 children in the sample, posted more than one response to the same activity. This was generally reflected in the activity responses being posted in two or three portions.

Of the sample of 35 posts, 21 (60%) were responses to activities set, and 14 (40%) were responses to teacher feedback, or self-initiated messages by children to the teacher. This relatively high rate of independent communication/writing may reflect the children's enthusiasm and comfort levels with regard to the digital platform and novel way to interact with their teacher. Furthermore, 16/21 activity-related responses evidenced the use of incidental conversational phrases and frequent use of well-established greetings in Irish such as *Dia Duit, Slán, Slán leat Múinteoir*. The responses also evidenced a willingness to engage with, and acknowledge, the written feedback received. There was also evidence of code-switching, with some English phrases juxtaposed with Irish language. In terms of initiating a conversational exchange with the teacher, two students asked questions and sought to engage with the teacher-researcher in Irish.

*Cén aois thú? Is breá liom Gaeilge* (C13) [How old are you? I really like Irish]

*An bhfuil pizza sa cuaille thuaidh? An bhfuil na elfes fháil fuar?* (C4) [Is there pizza in the North Pole? Do the elves get cold?]

The majority of posts were upbeat in tone and a number of posts were neutral in tone. There was no evidence of a negative tone in any post. The use of exclamation marks and emojis (5 instances) further exemplified the overall positivity of the majority of responses. Overall, the response sample suggested a positive disposition to the learning platform on engagement by the children with evidence of voluntary participation and learning engagement in the Irish language, in addition to the actual activities set.

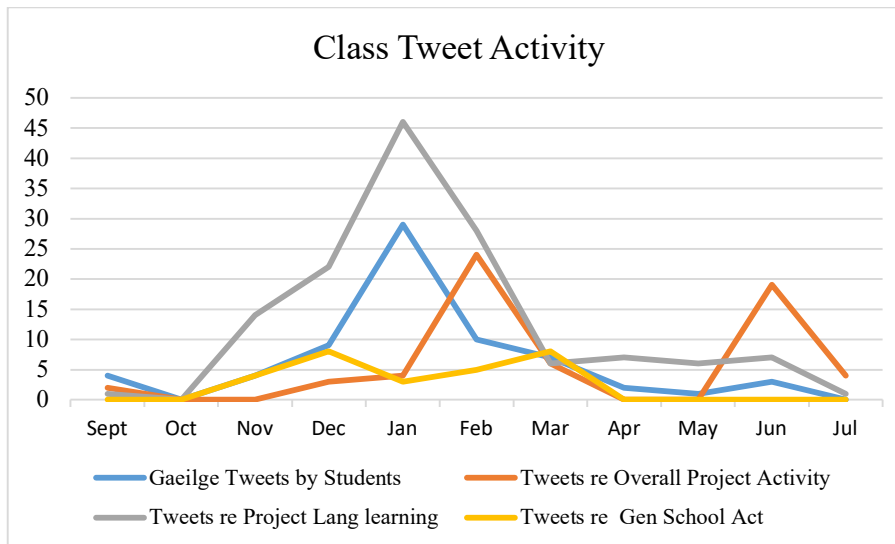
## 6.5.2 Class Project Twitter Activity

### 6.5.2.1 School-based and home-based Engagement

This section examines overall engagement with the class project Twitter activity (CPTA), launched halfway through the first Action Cycle in conjunction with the COLZ. The two overarching contexts of use for the CPTA were school-based and home-based engagement.

Figure 6.18 below documents the Tweet Activity during the school year of the project. The chosen analysis parameters of September to July of the school year, enabled analysis of the introduction of the class account, use of class account during the three actions cycles, as well as one month following the end of Action Cycle 3.

During this time, a total of 791 Tweets were curated from the Class account. Of the 791 Tweets, 332 were direct retweets from other Irish language accounts (@TG4; @TG4aimsir @cula4 etc.) and the remaining 459 were original tweets either co-written by the teacher and class cohort, or written by the children and scribed by the teacher.



**Figure 6.17. Class Tweet Monthly Activity**

A number of tweets were written by the teacher and children in September of the school year in order to provide examples to the children at the outset, in advance of the proposed introduction to the concept of Twitter in November. The co-written tweets by teacher and students, and tweets written solely by students, commenced in the November of the first

Action Cycle. Of the 459 originally written tweets over the course of the language project, 162 (35.3%) were written by the teacher, 228 (49.7%) were co-written by the teacher and children, and 69 (15%) were written by individual children as illustrated in Table 6.51. Analysis of the nature of the child-written tweets, and the teacher and child co-written tweets, demonstrated the child-written tweets (69 tweets) were consistently reflective of the child’s willingness to write something in Irish and to post a short piece of writing with the Irish language community online. The majority of these Tweets described the weather, gave details of the day or date, as well as reflecting the Irish language topic of the day. The co-written tweets (228 tweets) by the children and teacher-researcher were classified into three categories:

- (i) Tweets regarding Overall Project Activity (62 tweets)
- (ii) Irish language tweets for Irish language practice & use (138 tweets)
- (iii) Tweets about General School Activities (28 tweets)

**Table 6.51. Categorisation of Class Tweets**

<b>Breakdown of Class Tweets</b>		
<b>1</b>	<b>Total Number of Tweets</b>	<b>791</b>
	<i>Original Tweets by teacher &amp; children &amp; teacher or children</i>	<b>459</b>
	<i>Retweets</i>	332
<b>2.</b>	<b>Distribution of Original Tweets</b>	<b>459</b>
	<i>Tweets by teacher</i>	162
	<i>Tweets co-written by children &amp; teacher</i>	<b>228</b>
	<i>Tweets written by children</i>	69
<b>3</b>	<b>Co-Written Tweet Content</b>	<b>228</b>
	<i>Irish language learning</i>	138
	<i>Overall project activity</i>	62
	<i>General school activities</i>	28

A month-by-month break down of Twitter activity which is detailed in Appendix 18 demonstrates that December, January and February was the most active quarter in terms of Tweet writing by the class. This reflects the year schedule of the project, given that during

the first few months the concept of Twitter was introduced and modelled. It then became a part of classroom practice, and reached peak use towards the end of Action Cycle 1. It remained active thereafter, but the project focus from the beginning of action Cycle 2 was the Tutoring pedagogic approach which is reflective in less frequent use of Twitter as a language learning tool during Action Cycles 2 and 3.

In terms of family/parent sign-up to Twitter and following the class project Twitter account, a total of 5/20 parents signed up and followed the class project account during the course of Action Cycle 1 and 2. Two parents did so from mid-Action Cycle 1 when the information was shared with Parents. Three more parents signed up as a result of the PRAG meeting at the beginning of Action Cycle 2.

**Table 6.52. Class Project Twitter Activity Engagement by Parents**

	<b>Class Project Twitter Account Engagement</b>	<b>No. of parents</b>
1.	Number of parents/families that signed up to Twitter and followed class project Twitter account	5
2.	Stage of Sign-Up	
	On receipt of invitation during AC1	2
	At PRAG Meeting beginning of AC2	1
	Shortly after PRAG Meeting AC2	2
3.	No of parents who actively replied to school Tweets with child/ wrote Tweets with child	2
4.	No of children who reported reading class project Tweets with parents at home	3
5.	No of children who reported parental interest in printed Newsletter of class tweets	11 (including 5 parents who signed up)

Of the five parents who signed up, two parents engaged in replying to Class Tweets, or initiating Irish language Tweets. Three children reported reading Class Tweets at home with



their parents. Finally, according to the children, a substantial number of parents (11), showed an interest in the Class Tweet Newsletters that were sent home in print.

#### 6.5.2.2 Class Project Twitter Activity: Children's Experience

The children firstly shared their views with regard to Twitter via the Action Cycle 1 Review Survey. Fourteen out of twenty children agreed that Twitter was a useful tool to learn and improve one's Irish. Five children took a neutral stance and once child disagreed. Fourteen agreed with the statement; *I enjoy writing Irish Tweets and reading Irish Tweets in Irish class with teacher and my classmates* while six took a neutral stance. Finally, thirteen children agreed that Twitter allowed the class to connect with other language speakers in Ireland and around the world. These results highlighted an overall positive disposition toward the use of Twitter as an Irish language learning tool. The relatively substantial number of neutral responses could suggest the newness of the learning approach because a number of children were yet to form an opinion in relation to Twitter's potential enjoyment or usefulness.

The children's questionnaire responses were supported by the findings of the CRAGs at the end of Action Cycle 2. In addition, the children expanded on what they enjoyed about engaging in class project Twitter activities, parental involvement in Twitter activities, and how to increase engagement both in terms of children and parents. Safety concerns with regard to Twitter and some misunderstandings also emerged.

Of the eighteen children that took part in CRAG discussions, regarding the Class Project Twitter Activity, seventeen children expressed that they enjoyed co-writing Tweets with the teacher and all of the children shared that they enjoyed reading Irish language Tweets. One child who generally demonstrated negative attitudes toward the Irish language learning, differentiated between not liking writing tweets but enjoying reading Tweets. Six children were explicit in noting positive elements of co-writing and reading tweets which included the enjoyment factor, its role in supporting language learning and reference to Tweet content creation. Two children in particular shared awareness of the potential to connect with other speakers of Irish in the Irish speaking community. For example, *"I think it's really cool to see how other people and not just in school, they are actually using Irish and like what they have to say in the Irish"* [C4, CRAG 4].

Five children recommended more time to read tweets in class with one child noting that once a week was not enough. One child who supported this, also showed his keenness to participate in Irish language tweeting/reading at home but was unable to do so. It was clear that a number of children wished they could engage in Irish language Twitter from home but could not do so as their parents had either not set up a Twitter account and/or followed the class project Twitter account—or in the case of two children, *had* set up the account and followed the class, but had not engaged with the child on the platform. Of the eighteen children who discussed the matter, three had engaged with the class project Twitter account with parents, a total of ten children expressed a desire to be involved in home-based Twitter activity and/or get their parents involved—including two children whose parents had signed up but were not active. A further three children showed no opinion in relation to class project Twitter activity and two children felt that their parents would not be interested.

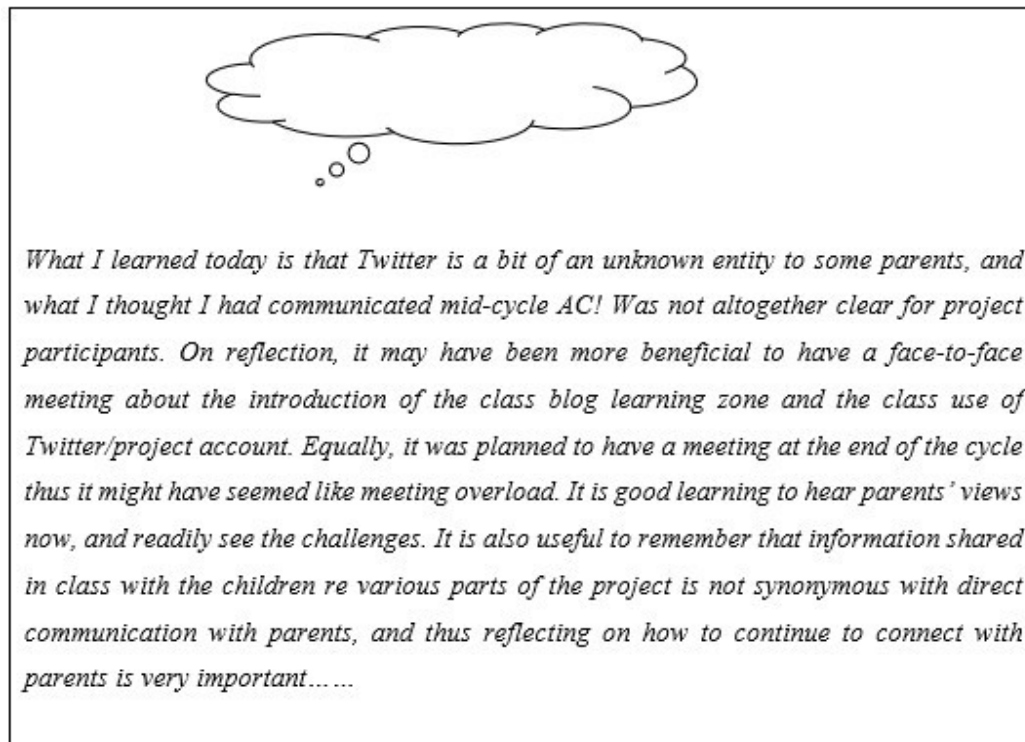
The majority of children acknowledged that the printed Twitter newsletter to parents had brought the uses of twitter to their parents' attention; and five children shared their parents' positive reaction. Equally it was reported that parents did not have time to engage with the newsletter or did not communicate any thoughts on the matter to their child. Lack of time to read the newsletter was reflective of lack of time to engage with Twitter activity overall. It was apparent that a number of children who were not partaking in home-based Twitter activity. The children concerned had asked parents to take part but parents were yet to engage. The children concerned, also expressed hope that it might happen in the future.(See Appendix 19 for examples of children's and parents' reflection in relation to Twitter and getting involved.)

#### 6.5.2.3 Class Project Twitter Activity: Parents' Perspectives

While the majority of parents supported ICT-mediated learning and blended learning in general, active support of Twitter was relatively subdued and on reflection it would appear that it was somewhat of an unknown entity to the majority of parents at the outset. Feedback from PRAG meetings was relatively limited. For example PRAG 3 & 4 took place at the beginning of Action Cycle 2 where Action Cycle 1 pedagogic approaches were reviewed. Nine parents attended PRAG 3 and four parents attended PRAG 4. One of the two parents who signed up and was active on Twitter at that stage was part of the PRAG 3&4 parent cohort. The extent of the feedback on use, came from one parent. Other parents who

referenced Twitter sought to understand further how it worked as a platform and what was involved, as well as voicing some concerns. The PRAG thus enabled the teacher-researcher to inform parents with regard to the potential of the class project Twitter account as a language learning tool.

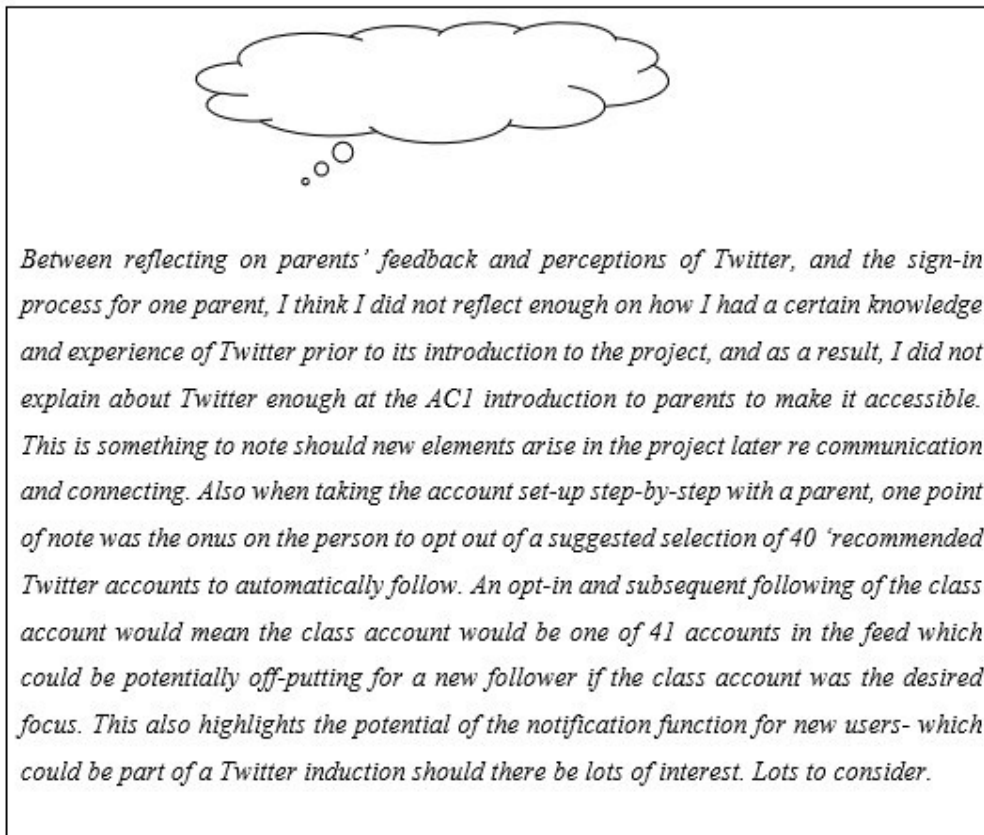
The parent who had engaged with the class project Twitter account spoke positively in relation to her and her child's engagement: *We had a lot of downtime over Christmas, so it was handy to go on and just go into Twitter and just have a look. So she has kind of kept me...keeps reminding me that it has to be done, and it's handy* [P4, PRAG 3]



**Figure 6.18. Reflective Diary 1**

It was apparent that the majority of parents in both PRAG 3 and PRAG 4 discussions expressed support for a blended learning approach in Irish language learning. For example, Parnet 1 commented, *“big difference...It's a bonus. It's literally a great bonus for them to be able to learn that way too”* [P1, PRAG 4]. Support was also expressed in relation to the teacher-researchers overview of the scaffolded co-writing of tweets; *2“it's all those small things [gradual steps in writing tweets] that help them.* [P3, PRAG 4]

It was equally clear that the majority of parents in attendance were not fully aware of how Twitter worked as a platform. There was apparent confusion regarding, in what capacity the children were ‘on Twitter’. One parent commented, “*I didn’t know that they were on Twitter I knew about the blog but not about Twitter*” [P7, PRAG 4]. Another parent did not realise that it was accessible: “*well you see I didn’t know we could go on it. For the blog, I would stand beside her, she would log-in and then show me what was on the page* [P1, PRAG 4]. The teacher-researcher had reflected on this following the meeting, noting that the introduction of Twitter to parents mid-Action Cycle 1 was not effective.



**Figure 6.19. Reflective Diary 2**

A minority of parents voiced concerns with regard to perceived safety concerns in relation to the use of Twitter. For example, Parent 3 commented “*I wouldn’t let any of mine onto Facebook or Twitter I’m funny like that I just wouldn’t let them* [P3, PRAG 3]. Also, given that some parents had expressed concern in relation to the COLZ, until they were aware that it was a closed online area, it would follow that Twitter as a platform presented as less safe

or focused. As a guided sign-up with a parent demonstrated, Twitter proved challenging with respect to the onus to opt out of recommended accounts to follow—which could potentially dilute viewing of Class Tweets without the use of the notification function.

Parents’ perspectives on parent Twitter engagement were aptly summarised by parents who participated in the Student Voice Conference in relation to the project:

*In relation to Twitter—I suppose you could call it a slow burner—5 out of 20 parents signed up. Some parents had concerns about internet safety. Others were perhaps not too sure about what exactly it offered. Jane did try to help parents set up accounts but by the time meetings were over, parents probably did not have time to hang about. To reach out to the parents who weren’t active on Twitter, Jane put some Newsletters together which were a collection of Tweets from the class account, and this was a good step to introduce to parents what was going on. [P4 Student Voice Conference Presentation Transcript]*

### **6.5.3 Technology-Mediated Language Learning Summary**

The analysis clearly indicates that children were positively disposed towards the Class COLZ platform. Goal-oriented and CLIL related activities were identified as the most popular type of activities. Dedicated analysis of children’s posts also indicates a substantial level of self-initiated posts and active engagement with teacher feedback. Student engagement with the COLZ demonstrated the benefits of in-class provision in terms of accessibility, an ICT teacher and peer support. While uptake of out of class COLZ engagement did not involve all pupils, a notable level of independent online posting of work was discernible in this setting.

The Class Twitter account was also positively received by children in class, but saw substantially lower engagement from parents and children out of class, compared to the COLZ platform. As a result, the Class Twitter Account evolved primarily as in-class learning resource. A large majority of children reported enjoyment of and the benefits of, co-writing, writing and publishing Irish language Tweets. The sharing of children’s Irish language Tweets pivoted to the medium of a regular class Newsletter so that parents could ensure a shared awareness of the learning activity.

The majority of parents reported children’s positive engagement across both learning platforms, albeit via a passive approach at home, and were largely supportive of ICT-mediated learning of Irish. Key concerns cited by parents include internet and online safety

concerns, and technology-related challenges during the course of the learning, which were largely assuaged over the course of the programme. The reported learner activity suggests that a critical factor in supporting learner engagement in ICT-mediated settings, lies in the creation of an *authentic* domain of use whereby the learner of an additional language can engage with a *real* audience.

## **6.6 Methodological Approach**

The methodological approach of participatory action research (PAR) adopted in this project, proved not only a means of data collection but, on reflection and analysis, a means of engagement with project participants in its own right. Arguably, this contributed to authenticity of participant engagement and response in the project. The methodological approach may have, in tandem with the pedagogical approaches, influenced the overarching outcomes of the project. This section reviews data pertaining to the methodological approach. Firstly, the Young Researcher activities employed at the beginning of Action Cycle 1 are reviewed in Section 6.7.1

### **6.6.1 Young Researcher (YR) Activities**

Children reflected on their role of participant and co-researcher. In the Action Cycle 1 Review, 8/20 children agreed that the YR activities helped them to help carry out research. Out of twenty, children nine gave a neutral response and three slightly disagreed. A more positive response was apparent in the CRAG discussions. All students recalled the YR activities. Nineteen of the twenty children noted that, they had *enjoyed* the activities and one child responded that the YR activities were *ok*. Of the eighteen respondents, some shared their favourite YR activity—15 children referenced the ‘loop game’, one child referenced a ‘fact vs. opinion’ game and another child, the ‘open/closed’ questions game. One child did not specify anything. Of the eighteen children who reflected on their learning as a result of the YR activities, fifteen were of the view that they learned about what research was. Two children referenced learning a little about research, and one child could not remember the activities.

Children’s reflections on favourite activities were intertwined with identifying the learning that took place. Child 5, for example, shared her favourite activity and the rationale behind her choice: *My favourite was the ‘loop game’ because all of us got to play it. Not just a*

*partner...And we all just learned different words [ C5, CRAG 3].* When reviewing some of the research-related terminology on word cards, Child 5 also identified the term anonymous as a term that she had not previously known but now understood, offering the definition *it doesn't have a name [C5, CRAG 3].*

In differentiating between question types for example, C6 shared her understanding of the term 'data'; *Open question and a closed question and like data- which is like information [C6, CRAG 3].* C 8 and C 18 both identified the term plagiarism as something that they had learned about. Child 8 defined plagiarism as *to copy something [C8, CRAG 3].* Child 18 could not remember its meaning on further discussion, while Child 19 offered the following explanation: *Yes when you write something...but another person discovers it and he can put a name in brackets beside the word and teacher will have to use them a programme to find out who actually made up the idea [C19, CRAG 1].*

Three children in CRAG 3 outlined a broader understanding of research during discussions. Child 4 believed that the activities helped her to understand research, and understood research to be *about finding information and stuff about a particular topic and asking people some questions to see what they think or what's their opinion of it.* C1 reflected that *like when you're looking for research it's not just going to be right in front of you, you're going to have to look around for it* and Child 3 concluded, that *research helps you find stuff out about the world.*

The CRAG discussions in relation to YR activities highlighted that overall the activities had contributed significantly to children's understanding of research terminology and general aspects of the research process. It was also evidenced that a number of children had remembered specific terms but not their meaning. As a result, children who continued to Action Cycle 3 did engage in some revision and further discussion during Action Cycle 3 meetings. As evidenced at the end of Action Cycle 3, the children involved at that stage (n=11) showcased their understanding of research terminology as part of their Student Voice Conference presentation, when the children hosted a short interactive multiple-answer quiz for the audience in relation to selected research terms (See Appendix 19 for transcript excerpt) In conclusion, engagement with the YR activities contributed to an understanding of research terminology and the research process for the participative pedagogy class.

## 6.6.2 *Student Voice Conference*

### 6.6.2.1 Conference Preparation & Participation

Ten out of ten children taking part in Action Cycle 3, voted mid-cycle to take part in the Student Voice Conference, and a one further child re-joined the preparations after hearing about the conference. All eleven children expressed an interest in co-presenting at the conference. Four parents also volunteered to co-present, and a further four parents volunteered to attend the conference. For the last three weeks of the Summer Term, post-school meetings increases from one to two meetings, totalling six meetings undertaken in preparation for the conference presentation.

### 6.6.2.2 Child and Parent Reflections

Child and parents both reflected on the experience of the Student Voice Conference in respective questionnaires. In the Likert scale items, all of the ten children were in agreement, that taking part in the Student Voice Conference showed them that the *Is Tusa an Múinteoir* project really valued the student voice and participation and 9/10 were in *strong agreement*. Seven of the eight parents were also in agreement regarding the programme valuing student voice and participation. Seven out of ten agreed that taking part in the conference increased their interest in the Irish language, and 7/8 parents mirrored agreement concerning their child's increased interest in the language. In addition, 8/10 children agreed that taking part in the conference at Trinity College had inspired them to go to university in the future.

Children were also invited to describe their experience of being a presenter at the Student Voice Conference. Out of the ten, nine children responded. All responses had at least one positive reference, four had two positive references and one child shared three positive references. They described the experience as *great, enjoyable, fun* and *amazing*. Two children reflected specifically on enjoying the process of disseminating the project. One child reflected that she got to see that all the hard work paid off and another child expressed her pride in taking part while noting too that it was not what she expected. One child reported that it was *scary* to talk to the 20 to 30 people in the room but also noted that it went well. Two children referenced that they felt confident in presenting their work. During CRAG discussions, five children elaborated upon the more on the experience of being nervous



initially as a presenter at the conference, but also referenced how their confidence improved through the process of presenting.

The children whose parents attended or presented at the Student Voice Conference, were asked to reflect on how they felt about it. Five children responded. Three children referenced their parent(s) taking part while two referenced that their mother attended. Three children referenced being happy about their parents' involvement and one child said that it *felt great*. One child noted that they felt nervous for their parent.

Children were asked to reflect on what they learned from taking part in the conference. Of the eight responses, five were relevant to the question asked. One child noted *there is a lot more people than you think interested in the Irish language* [C7]. Two children reflected on learning from speaking, one child noted that they learned more about Trinity College as a result, while one child reflected on the meaning of the conference slogan, 'Nothing about us without us'.

Parents were also asked to reflect on their child's participation in the Student Voice Conference from first-hand experience or based on what their child told them. All eight reflections were positive. Three comments referenced enjoying the event, and a further comment about being happy at the event. Parents also noted the benefits of the experience in terms of their child's growth, engagement with the event and exposure to a third level institution. Parents shared how their children had reflected upon the fact that academics/college faculty members had attended and heard their work. (See Appendix 19 for further children's and parent's feedback in relation to the Student Voice Conference).

### **6.6.3 Other PAR Architectures and Practice**

Both the Young Researcher and Student Voice Participation data are overt representations of the impact of the PAR methodology. Other elements of the PAR process were intertwined into the fabric of the course during the study's enactment, and represent actions and behaviours, rather than direct data per sé. These include children's contributions to project design, as outlined in Chapter five—the enactment of the Reconnaissance Cycle and feedback to children and parents, parents' engagement with PRAGs and with each other in the dialogic space. The more implicit PAR architectures and practice, arguably contribute to

the realisation of the more explicit manifestations of PAR. This is discussed further in Section 7.6.2.

#### ***6.6.4 Methodological Approach Summary***

Clearly, both the engagement with Young Researcher Activities and the Student Voice Conference exemplify the strong role and influence that a PAR approach brought to bear on the realisation of the Irish language learning project, as both a language learning initiative, and as a shared study. It could be argued that less overt PAR practice throughout the project also contributed to this.

### **6.7 Conclusion**

In this chapter, the data analysis of this study was presented and discussed. Firstly the rationale for thematic approach to presenting the data was outlined in Section 6.1. Secondly, baseline data analysis was presented in Section 6.2, in order to demonstrate how the action research study was informed at the outset. Sections 6.3 and 6.4 explored the overarching outcomes of (i) Irish language use and self-assessed proficiency and (ii) attitudes and motivation towards the Irish language with reference to pre- and post-findings. Sections 6.5 and 6.6 explored the learners' experience of the pedagogical approaches of tutoring and Web 2.0 technology-mediated learning pedagogic approaches and finally Section 6.7 documented the specific outcomes of a student voice-informed approach as part of the broader participatory action research methodology.

## Chapter 7:

### Discussion

This chapter will locate the findings of the study within the relevant literature and will also address the research questions of the study. The discussion chapter will be structured in response to the four research questions of the study:

1. In what ways does a sociocultural theory (SCT)-informed pedagogical approach impact Irish language learners' Irish language use and self-assessed proficiency?
2. In what ways does a sociocultural theory (SCT)-informed pedagogical approach impact Irish language learners' motivation and attitudes towards the Irish language?
3. What were the experiences of Irish learners regarding SCT-informed Irish language teaching and learning?
4. In what ways can a participatory approach influence engagement of learners in a given study?

Section 7.1 will address the first research question by discussing the current study's findings in relation to the learners' Irish language use and self-assessed proficiency in the context of relevant studies. Section 7.2 will address the second research question by reporting on the study's impact on learners' attitudes and motivation towards the Irish language, in the context of the broader attitudes and motivation towards Irish and language learning. Participants' learning experience of an SCT-informed pedagogic approach will then be discussed in Section 7.3. Finally, Section 7.4 will reflect on how a participatory action research approach can influence the engagement of learners.

#### **7.1 Research Question 1: Learners' Irish Language Use and Self-Assessed Irish Ability**

This section addresses the first research question of the study:

*In what ways does a sociocultural theory (SCT)-informed pedagogical approach impact Irish language learners' Irish language use and self-assessed proficiency?*

Firstly, the question is contextualised in Section 7.1.1 by reflecting on learners' Irish language use and self-assessed ability levels at the outset of the study, in the national and educational context. Section 7.1.2 then discusses the increase in Irish Language Use and Self-Assessed Irish ability after Action Cycle 2 of the study in relation to school-based studies, national policy, and minority language policy (internationally). Related characteristics of children's Irish language use, which were identified as class-level engagement, translanguaging, and the ripple effect of increased use across domains, are then discussed in their three respective sections. Parents' Irish language engagement and use is subsequently examined in Section 7.1.6. The conclusion then summarises how a socio-cultural theory (SCT)-informed approach impacts Irish language learners' Irish language use and self-assessed proficiency, in response to the first research question.

### ***7.1.1 Learners Levels of Irish Language Use and self-assessed Irish Ability at the Outset of the Study***

This section reflects upon the findings of the Reconnaissance Cycle in relation learners' levels of Irish language use and self-assessed ability at the outset of the study. It is found that levels of Irish are reflective of national norms (Darmody & Daly, 2015), and that the Use of Irish at Home scale is statistically lower than that of other motivation-related scales.

#### **7.1.1.1 Levels of Irish Language Use Reflective of National Norms**

The establishment of baseline findings in relation to learners' Irish language use and self-assessed Irish language ability, as part of Reconnaissance Cycle at the outset of the study, merits reflection in its own right prior to discussing pre- and post-intervention findings in the context of current literature. At the outset, the levels of Irish language use and self-assessed ability concept in the Irish language of participants in this study echoes a number of studies relating to EME and IME settings (Fleming & Debski, 2007; Harris & Murtagh, 1999; Murtagh, 2007) and are also relatively consistent with national trends (Darmody & Daly, 2015). In addition, while Murtagh's study (2007) focuses on secondary school students and specifies between Higher and Ordinary level students in English-medium schools, the levels of home and out-of-school use are also relatable to the children's reported levels at the outset of this study. Thus, the class in question presented with levels of Irish use relatable

to national norms. This point warrants reflection, both in terms of the DEIS context and in relation to the linguistically diverse profile of the class.

While it is acknowledged that students in DEIS schools can face greater challenges (McAvinue, 2022), there is also a diversity of experience across DEIS schools where students can demonstrate academic resilience (Fenwick, Kinsella & Harford, 2022). This, in turn, underlines the importance of applying social and cultural capital as fixed entities with caution (Kettle and Whitehead, 2012), especially given the contextual factors at play such as specific school and family contexts (Fenwick et al., 2022). A recent DEIS Advisory Group Report restated the importance of improving learning experiences and outcomes for pupils in DEIS schools and the importance of empowering parents in the DEIS context (DEIS Advisory Report, 2022). It is suggested that a focus on assets of communities, rather than engaging a deficit perspective, is, therefore, an essential step in terms of mindset and practice when working with communities (Green & Haines, 2011).

#### 7.1.1.2 Use of Irish at Home Scale Statistically Lower

While in keeping with national norms, it is important to reflect upon the fact that children's levels of use of Irish outside of the classroom were, nonetheless, low. As outlined in Section 6.2.1, children's mean score in the *Use of Irish at Home scale* was statistically significantly lower than any other mean score across the ten other AMTB scales therein. Children's Irish ability self-concept, for example, was in the average range in comparison. Thus, within the class profile itself, the lack of opportunity to use Irish at home trumps any other area of concern, with regard to Irish language engagement and learning, in comparison with children's self-assessed ability in Irish or attitudes towards Irish for example. This highlights the complexity of the learning context for children who are positively disposed towards the language but who have little or no opportunity to speak the language at home (Harris & Murtagh, 1999; Fleming & Debski, 2007; Dunne, 2020).

It is evident that, in the Irish-medium education (IME) context, the "perennial challenge" (Ó Duibhir & Ní Thuairisg, 2019, p. 127) persists in realising the transfer of Irish language competence acquired at school to the home and community domains (ibid.). This challenge is arguably more complex in the English-medium education (EME) setting.

It is also of note that the linguistically diverse profile of the class did not have an adverse effect on the use of Irish outside of the classroom, in comparison with referenced studies. The findings were in line with national norms and studies and, while low, were stable. This suggests that multilingual families used no less Irish than monolingual or bilingual homes. As noted in the Primary Languages Curriculum (PLC), the Irish language is often a new language for children beginning school in junior infants in the English-medium education (NCCA, 2019b). As noted, increasing linguistic diversity in Ireland presents a challenge and potential opportunity for the Irish language (Devitt et al., 2018), in terms of status planning, and the teaching and learning of Irish to children whose first language is neither Irish, nor English (Ó Laoire, 2005). With dedicated outreach and support from schools and community initiatives, the linguistic capabilities of children and parents learning Irish as a third or fourth language could benefit from both the learning of Irish and English as an additional language (De Angelis, 2007; 2011), as well as opportunities provided for currently monolingual or bilingual homes where families wish to engage more with the Irish language (Harris, 2008b).

### ***7.1.2 Increase in Learners' Irish Language Use and Self-Assessed Ability***

It is found that children in English-medium primary schools have little opportunity to extend their contact with Irish beyond the Irish language lesson and beyond the school gates (Fleming & Debski, 2007; Harris 2008a). The findings of the study indicated a clear increase of the use of Irish during the Irish lesson, outside of Irish lessons and in the home among the PPC. This was the case on completion of Action Cycle 2, and was evident in the case of continuing participants in Action Cycle 3. Greater engagement with the Irish language by the parents is discussed further in Section 7.1.6. In relation to self-assessed ability, a sizeable increase in children's self-assessed Irish ability was reported by the children at the end of Action Cycle 2. This was supported by parents' perceptions of their children's engagement and increased confidence. These findings in relation to increased use, and increase in self-assessed ability amongst students, can be discussed in the context of the English-medium primary setting and national policy.

From a curriculum perspective, an outcome of increased use of the language responds to the rationale of Primary Languages Curriculum (PLC) (NCCA, 2019a), which stipulates that "children learning Irish as an L2, who have less exposure to the language, need opportunities outside of the Irish lesson to hear and listen to the language that they are learning" (NCCA,

2019a, p10). The study's outcome of increased use of Irish also resonates with the aims of the PLC. For example, teachers are encouraged to “enable children to fully engage with and enjoy a wide range of relevant and meaningful linguistic and communicative experiences with peers and adults” (NCCA, 2019a, p. 26).

The findings of increased language engagement and use of the Irish language across domains in this study aligns with the findings from other school based studies, whereby specifically planned language interventions demonstrated encouraging findings in relation to Irish language use (Merrins-Gallagher et al., 2019; Moriarty, 2015, 2017; Ní Chróinín, Ní Mhurchú & Ó Ceallaigh, 2016). This study noted an increase and recognition of heightened Irish language use in Irish lessons when participating in peer tutoring. An increase in children's interaction levels and overall participation levels was found during storytelling-themed station-teaching-supported literacy lessons in a linguistically diverse junior primary setting. Similarly, making use of one's Irish in a safe space, whereby translanguaging (discussed further in Section 7.1.4) was facilitated during an eight-week rap intervention (Moriarty, 2017), sought to encourage increased use of Irish. While caveats emerged in relation to CLIL utilising Irish in the physical education context, the study indicated “increased enthusiasm for learning and using the language” (Ní Chronín et al., 2016, p. 573) amongst the pupils.

It is also of note that this current study demonstrated an increase in children's self-assessed Irish ability. It could be suggested that increased opportunities to engage with and use the Irish language played a role in students' increasing confidence in their use of the language, bearing in mind how children reported low use of Irish in the home at the outset, for example. While the literature reports that *positive attitudes* towards the Irish language have not historically resulted in increasing the vitality of the language (Ó Duibhir & Ní Thuairisg, 2019; Dolowy-Rybińska & Hornsby, 2021), it would be useful to explore if increasing opportunities to use the language, coupled with growing self-assessed ability and confidence in the language, might produce a different dynamic. While the increase in Irish ability is self-reported and could potentially overstate (or understate) a more defined approach to assessment, it is nonetheless of note that an increase was clearly discernible amongst the Participative Pedagogy Class after two terms of the school year. This represents a very encouraging finding in light of the many hours of Irish learning experienced by children

which, generally speaking, have not yielded the proficiency levels that one might expect (Barry, 2021; Ó Laoire, 2007).

At national policy level, the increase in Irish language among the current study's participants, supports one of the three key objectives of the Twenty Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030—"creating opportunities for the use of Irish" (Government of Ireland, 2010, p. 7). It also actualises the corresponding key action—to "expand the available opportunities for use of Irish within the education system by extending Irish as a medium of instruction, as well as a subject, and by linking school language learning to the informal use of Irish in recreational, cultural and other out-of-school activities" (Government of Ireland, 2010, p. 11). By encouraging parental involvement and developing community and school programmes which are interlinked, valued and implemented sustainably, children can be empowered as learners of Irish to share their language proficiency in the home as well as in the community. The current study, while small-scale, could be piloted in other English-medium schools in order to investigate further its potential to engage learners who wish to progress to using and speaking Irish outside of the school context. Such projects, if piloted properly and sustainably, could contribute at local level to the national objective of increasing the number of speakers who speak Irish on a daily basis outside the education system (Government of Ireland, 2010).

### ***7.1.3 Translanguaging as a Linguistic and Pedagogical Resource in the Classroom***

As the previous section highlights, the children reported increased levels of speaking Irish within the Irish language lesson. This, in itself, is an indication of the use of informal English by learners during Irish lessons, historically. This was also corroborated by the teacher-researcher's observations and regular review of video footage of peer tutoring interactions to inform peer-tutoring lesson planning which inform pedagogy. As noted in considering language ideologies and attitudes more broadly, the majority language can be considered the "common sense, default option for everyday interactions" (Dolowy-Rybińska & Hornsby, 2021, p. 108). Thus, the sustained use of the minority language can be challenging, both in terms of perceptions of how it lands with fellow speakers (*ibid.*), and in terms of whether a learner's proficiency to extend to sustained engagement is realisable (Harris & Murtagh, 1999, Ní Chróinín et al., 2016).



Thus, engaging translanguaging as a proponent for learning in an (endangered) language classroom setting is a challenge to leverage for the benefit of learner (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017; Duarte, 2019), in terms of balancing majority language use (Moriarty, 2017). The rationale for translanguaging in the endangered language context is to support and protect the language without compartmentalising from other languages (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017), as in the case of Basque. The same rationale applies to Irish, which, similar to fellow endangered languages, demonstrate a vulnerability if translanguaging is not facilitated carefully in the learning context (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017).

Notwithstanding the challenges, this current study points to the benefits of reviewing and learning from the children's instances of translanguaging as a pedagogical guide to inform language lesson planning and linguistic input from the teacher's perspective. This can, in turn, gradually increase minority language proficiency and engagement in class, without the necessity of issuing a blanket ban on the majority language. Coupled with the positive findings of Moriarty's study (2017), in relation to the integrated use of Irish, English and other languages in experimenting with rap as a genre, further exploration of how translanguaging in the teaching and learning of Irish in the EME context could prove insightful.

Given the reported lack of opportunity to speak Irish outside of school (Fleming & Debski, 2007; Harris & Murtagh, 1999; Harris, 2008a, 2008b), and the potential for the compartmentalisation of Irish within the school day (Harris, 2008a), the above findings are not unusual. It was found that, while children in Irish immersion settings were more likely to change from speaking English to Irish depending on the domain of use, learners in English-medium setting were more likely to intersperse their everyday dialogue with Irish, as opposed to lead with the Irish language (Fleming and Debski, 2007).

#### ***7.1.4 Increase of Irish Language Use across Authentic Domains of Use***

It is also evident that language learning interventions of student-parent tutoring and technology-mediated language learning created a considerable level of engagement with the Irish language and are identified as specific domains of use by the children. In turn, a modest increase of Irish language use in other domains was also observed, which could be considered a ripple effect possibly instigated by the designated pedagogic approaches

undertaken. While school-related in the sense that the new domains in question were supported by a school-initiated project, children directly identified the pedagogical approaches of tutoring at home, and computer-based activities, as specific domains of use in their survey responses which suggests the potential for development of these domains for learners of Irish. Use of Irish in the home included: with parents and siblings, use of Irish via computer/tablet, and use of Irish via mobile/smart phone.

#### 7.1.4.1 Increase in School Domain

The findings indicate that children in the PPC experienced increased Irish language interaction in the Irish language lesson when participating in PT. This suggests the integration of PT into the communicative phase of the lesson, and provided more speaking and interaction opportunities for children compared to previously or with teacher-centred lesson facilitation. This current study suggests that increasing Irish language participation in the Irish classroom, in the first instance, is constructive in terms of increased engagement with the language prior to initiating a new domain of use for the language. In this case, PT also served a dual purpose in providing the children with the opportunity to develop tutoring skills for the Student-Parent Tutoring.

Increasing opportunities for Irish language interaction within the Irish lesson, by piloting new approaches to foster a more hands-on Irish language engagement and interaction (Merrins-Gallagher et al., 2019; Moriarty, 2017; Nic Réamoinn & Devitt, 2019) – such as peer tutoring (PT) in the case of this study – could arguably be the catalyst for more active Irish language learning and use within class. This, in turn, could help prepare for a structured and planned progression to CLIL in the Irish language classroom.

It is noted that over the course of the current study, parents' support of CLIL, as a potential Irish language teaching approach, increased in the context of an overall increased knowledge of how their child learned Irish at school. As noted in Chapters 5 and 6, reviewing PT lessons weekly to inform the language content of subsequent lessons was important, and ensured children had the requisite Irish language structures, to, not only carry out the language activity in question, but be able to converse more readily in Irish around the specified language activity. This suggests that children required more structured input and practice

opportunity in general language proficiency, to encourage a higher level of Irish language use in the lesson.

CLIL has been frequently recommended as a potential approach in the EME context, as it relates to the Irish language (Harris & Murtagh, 1999; Harris, 2008a, 2008b; Ní Chróinín et al., 2016 De Spáinn, 2016). However, in the context of the Irish language and teaching, as reviewed in recent Inspectorate reports (2022a, 2018), a more graduated approach such as PT is arguably more sustainable, with the potential to steadily progress to CLIL.

Ní Chróinín et al.'s study (2016), of a CLIL approach in integrating Irish language and PT, highlighted that PT learning objectives were somewhat compromised, since children's linguistic competencies influenced the PT lesson objectives. The study highlighted the complexities in achieving both the linguistic and content-specific objectives of a CLIL unit of work. This reflects the necessity for increased Irish language use and development within communicative Irish language lessons arguably prior to the introduction to CLIL, or to addressing the wider use of Irish for learners more broadly. The current study sought to firstly address Irish language use and engagement via peer tutoring prior to the introduction of supplementary domains of use in the technological domain and at home.

Thus, a considered and phased approach to the introduction of CLIL or partial immersion as an Irish language learning approach in English-medium schools, is recommended, whereby teachers may first review their current language lesson practice. For it to be successful, De Spáinn advocates that partial immersion be enacted by means of a gradual introduction (De Spáinn, 2016). He also recommends a partial immersion approach be accompanied by a language plan for the schools; a language which should arguably precede rather than accompany partial immersion. It should specify how a school could build practice and capacity to achieve partial immersion over a number of years, with reference to specific actions and practices. It is also recommended that such a plan would "identify and provide opportunities to use Irish outside of the classroom situation to reinforce and give more context to the subjects being taught through Irish" (De Spáinn, 2016, p.35).

Finally, increased use of Irish in the school yard, albeit on a small scale, merits discussion, as it presents an additional space in the school, whereby children engaged with the Irish language. In the case of Irish-medium schools, it is reported that, while the use of Irish in

class is normalised, just over half of primary IME students and one quarter of post-primary IME students acknowledge that they make an effort to speak Irish outside class in school. More specifically, 35% of primary IME students speak more English during yard time, which presents as 70% at post-primary level (Ó Duibhir & Ní Thuairisg, 2019). The efficacy of yard language supervision at primary and post-primary IME is explored (Ó Duibhir & Ní Thuairisg, 2019); interestingly, in the English-medium setting, the opposite conditions apply, whereby there was no obligation on children to use Irish in the yard, highlighting the agency of the children involved.

#### 7.1.4.2 Increase in Other Domains

The home-related domains of use which reported an increase in engagement with Irish include use of Irish with parents and siblings, use of Irish via computer/tablet, use of Irish via mobile/smart phone other domains of use most cited by the PPC, were an increased engagement in *occasional words with friends* and *using Irish as a code language*. The latter use was also discussed by two children during CRAG discussions. This section will, firstly, discuss the home-related domains and then progress to the other cited domains.

Reported increased use of Irish in home, whereby use of Irish was previously low or non-existent represents a shift in language use for the children and families. This must be qualified by the fact that the student-parent tutoring may account for the majority of such reporting; nevertheless, it is of note that engagement with the Irish language home *was realised*, largely attributable to school facilitation and encouragement and the development of a community of practice (CoP) between the children, parents, and teacher-researcher.

As Grenoble (2021) reflects:

Language use is a social act, and revitalization –by its very nature – involves social transformation. The transformation may be as basic as bringing use of the language into some domain where it was not previously found, or had not been used for many years.

(Grenoble, 2021, p. 11)

Following positive engagement with peer tutoring (PT) in the Irish language classroom, the children, supported by the teacher-researcher, brought the Irish language into their homes during student-parent tutoring. While small-scale, facilitated and time-specific, the children

initiated a new social act, whereby the linguistic norms of the household experienced a change in practice attributable to the agentic practice of the children, and indeed all members of the community of practice (CoP). It is observed that, in endangered language contexts, “a *reverse intergenerational transmission*, where adults are learning from, or because of, their children” (Olko et al., 2016, p. 667) can turn out to be the sole potential strategy in bringing an endangered language into homes (Olko, et al., 2016). Increasing the domains of use of learners of endangered language, where replicable and scalable, highlights the potential to contribute to language maintenance, or at the very least the practice of language survivance (Valdés, 2015).

Increased use of use of Irish via computer/tablet and increased use of Irish via mobile/smart phone were categorised with the home domain, given the children’s ages and supported engagement with technology by parents. These activities, however, could also be considered as a technological domain, which is discussed in more detail in Section 7.4. It is of note that, similar to the progression between peer tutoring in the class and student parent-tutoring, technology-mediated language learning was facilitated and supported by the teacher in the first Action cycle, and subsequently embedded in Irish lesson time during the second Action Cycle. Thus, the importance of context-specific school-supported facilitation of endangered language engagement (Olko et al., 2016; Zalbide & Cenoz, 2018) is apparent.

The tendency and attraction of using the Irish language as a chosen language of code is documented in other studies (Harris & Murtagh, 1999; Murtagh, 2007), and arguably represents a playful and fun engagement with the language in the English-medium education (EME) context. This is a concept that could be further developed by teachers to present and model the Irish language as a potential language of intrigue and value for learners. The exploration as rap as genre through the medium of translanguaging also indicated an enjoyable and playful context in Moriarty’s (2017) study. Valdés expresses concern about the curricularisation of endangered languages where languages are primarily identified as a school subject by learners (Valdés, 2017). Similar to the choice to use Irish in the yard, students’ choice to engage with Irish as a code language shows their ability to experiment as language learners and provides insight to their language learning autonomy.

### *7.1.5 Parents' Irish Language Engagement & Self-Assessed Proficiency*

Chapter Six findings indicate a clear increase in parents' engagement with Irish in the home, and in their child's learning of Irish. In the main, parents' self-assessed proficiency remained consistent with responses from the Reconnaissance phase. Harris & Murtagh found that parents' use of Irish at home clearly impacted on pupils' attitude/motivation, such that "initiatives which provide parents with an opportunity to improve their own command of Irish are likely to improve children's Irish proficiency" (Harris & Murtagh, 1999, p. 163). In short, the study highlights that parents with higher levels of proficiency in Irish, or who use Irish at home more often, are inclined to support their children more in learning Irish. As a result, their children tend to have higher levels of achievement in Irish and more positive attitudes towards the Irish language. In general, parents have positive attitudes towards the Irish language and to the idea of their children learning Irish. However, "actual commitment to and involvement in the process is much less common" (Harris & Murtagh, 1999, p. 171). According to an all-Ireland study (Darmody & Daly, 2015), it was found amongst the adult cohort that the incidence of Irish being spoken in the home as a child, directly influenced current engagement with the language among respondents (Darmody & Daly, 2015). An increase in the use of Irish in the home in the present study by the child cohort enables parents both new to the language and with prior engagement with the language to (re)activate their engagement with the language. This, not only increases the opportunity to seek Irish in the now, but may also have a longer-term impact on Irish language use of the PPC into adulthood.

To what extent parents of children learning Irish are invited into 'the process' of supporting their child's learning of Irish nationally in EME settings is arguable. While referencing parents of Irish children in IME settings in their study, the rationale of Kavanagh & Hickey's study (2013) is also very relevant for parents of children learning Irish in EME settings. School-led, inclusive measures such as informing parents about Irish language learning resources suitable for home use are recommended in order increase parent and student exposure to the language. "Parallel and alternative ways of helping parents to be active partners in their children's education process" (Kavanagh & Hickey, 2013, p. 448) are recommended with a view to including parents of all proficiencies in Irish from learner level upwards (ibid.). The importance of encouraging parents with low proficiency in Irish to

make use of the skills that they do have for successful involvement is also stressed in the study (ibid.).

Parents' positive engagement with the Irish language programme in this current study could be indicative of an early stage of a broader school-community effort to involve parents in their child's learning of Irish. One such model could provide parent-to-parent support in relation to the language, whereby more proficient parents would support less proficient parents in Irish (Darmody & Daly, 2015), which would also align with progression within an already existing community of practice facilitated by the teacher-researcher. A progression towards parent-to-parent mentoring in relation to Irish facilitate the fostering of communities of learners (FCL) (Conway, 2002; Brown, 1994 ), whereby learning is active, self-motivated and purposeful (Conway, 2002). The development of peer-to-peer support amongst adult learners is indicative of a more sustainable community learning model not solely dependent on the school or teacher. Thus, it is advised direct participation of the community is important where longer-term community-based programmes are supported by parallel activities (Olko et al., 2016) undertaken in community, cultural, academic, and educational spaces.

Looking more closely at the parents' responses to use of Irish in the home, which demonstrate a small proportion of modest changes, it can be observed that three families with parents who were born and grew up outside of Ireland progressed from never speaking Irish in the home to speaking the language occasionally in the home. This proportion of change within a class of 20 children with a linguistically diverse profile is notable and gives an indication that the programme undertaken was inclusive of all learners. For the first time, families who had never spoken Irish in the home, were enabled to engage with the Irish language, including parents who had no prior engagement with the Irish language. This is significant in relation to engaging parents with the Irish language and with children's learning, in general. Given the fact that Irish traditionally proved one of the more challenging areas for parents in which to support children's homework (Harris & Murtagh, 1999), the parental engagement may also be indicative of the way in which parents were involved in the project through a participatory action research approach, which encompasses a community of practice therein which is discussed further in Section 7.5. Engagement with minority or endangered languages by new learners, whereby the endangered language becomes part of a learner's broader linguistic repertoire, is also observed in the Basque and

Welsh contexts (Augustyniak & Higham, 2019). It is contended that migrant new speakers are important community members in the revival of a minority or endangered language (ibid.). An additive model of integration is recommended whereby migrants become recognised stakeholders and ‘voices’ in their own integration and language learning trajectories” (Augustyniak & Higham, 2019, p. 515).

For families already previously engaged with the Irish language, a progression of families to the higher level usage categories was not reported. This is also reflective of the scale of duration and engagement with the home-based language programme undertaken. It is of note that the children’s POST AMTB results pertaining to the Use of Irish at Home Scale (Scale 11), reinforced the Irish Language Usage Survey results cited above. An increase in the use of Irish at home was reported, which in itself was positive, given disparities between being positively disposed toward the language and active involvement in using the language (Harris, 2008a; Dolowy-Rybińska & Hornsby, 2021; Devitt et al., 2018; Ó Murchadha, 2021). A closer look at scale items revealed a notable increase in fathers’ use of Irish in the home. This correlates to the decrease in the number of families who never experienced Irish being spoken in the home following Action Cycle 2. Hart (2011) reports that mothers generally have more informal contact with the school at the ‘school gates’ level; and observes implicit school practices whereby fathers can feel excluded. It is noted that outreach in order to communicate to fathers the importance and value of their potential involvement in terms of positive outcomes for their child is essential (O’Toole et al., 2019). Both fathers with prior knowledge of Irish and fathers as new learners of Irish cited benefits to their involvement in the current study, such as, their Irish language proficiency returning, as well as facilitating their child’s learning of Irish. The home-based voluntary nature of the project represented a more informal and accessible structure to the shared learning as opposed to formal lessons at the school. Harris & Goodall (2008) emphasise that, while parental involvement in school-based activities are important at a social and community level, the engagement of parents in learning “in the home” is a much stronger indicator of achieving a positive difference in learning outcomes.

Harris & Goodall (2008) note the importance of schools programmes which involve parents already involved in their child’s learning, “as well as” reaching out to parents who have not previously engaged. At the end of Action Cycle 2, parents also reported an increased knowledge of how Irish was taught to their child. This highlighted how the programme



enabled parents to learn more about their child's engagement with the Irish language—by virtue of learning at home—and receive regular project-related updates and communications. The importance of parental engagement *with* their child's learning as the optimum type of involvement with school along the continuum is apparent (O'Toole et al., 2019; Harris & Goodall, 2008). The case for schools and school staff to initiate and drive progression of general parental engagement to more focused parental support of their child's learning “through providing levels of guidance and support which enable such engagement to take place” (Harris & Goodall, 2008, p. 286) is an essential part of the architecture for learning programmes, such as the current study, to be activated and sustained.

### ***7.1.6 Research Question 1 Summary Response***

This section sought to explore how a sociocultural theory-informed approach could impact Irish language learner's Irish language use and self-assessed proficiency in response to the first research question. The findings suggest that sociocultural theory-informed pedagogical approach enacted in this study fostered an increase in children's use of the Irish language, both in the classroom setting via peer tutoring and technology-mediated language learning, and also in the home. Furthermore, there was a modest ripple effect across other domains of use. Parents also reported increased engagement with the language primarily through the student-parent tutoring programme, and, to a notably lesser extent, through engagement with technology mediated language learning. While parents did not report an increase, this is reflective of a lesser scale of involvement compared to that of the children. There was notable support amongst parents to continue to engage with the Irish language. It is of note that the levels of Irish use amongst the child and parent cohort at the outset were reflective of national norms. The children's increased engagement with the Irish language was discussed in relation to other school-based Irish language initiatives and national policy. Language use within Irish lessons was explored through the lens of translanguaging. Children's Irish language use was also explored in relation to specific domains of use which reported an increase. Parents' engagement with the language programme was contextualised with reference to school practice and societal use of the language. The potential of engaging new learners of Irish, in addition to building on parental engagement with the Irish language, was also explored.

## **7.2 Research Question 2: Learners' Attitude and Motivation towards the Irish Language**

This section explores the findings in relation to learners' attitudes towards the Irish language and addressed the second research question:

*In what ways does a sociocultural theory (SCT)-informed pedagogical approach impact Irish language learners' motivation and attitudes towards the Irish language?*

### **7.2.1 Children's Attitudes and Motivation towards the Irish language**

Primary school-going children tend to have a stronger negative attitude towards Irish in comparison with other school subjects (Devitt et al., 2018) which was also reflected in primary children's subject preferences whereby Irish was clearly not favoured (Devine et al., 2020). As noted in Section 6.3, the overall motivation scores of the Participative Pedagogy Class held steady while those of the Reference Classes dropped somewhat. This suggests that the children's engagement with the study may have influenced the retention of consistent motivation levels over an intervention period. Relatedly, the decrease in scores for the Reference Classes, which was indicative of an otherwise potential downward trajectory. It is potentially the case that participation and engagement in the Irish language study may contribute to the maintenance of motivation scores of the Pedagogy Class. This finding of a decrease in scores amongst the Reference Classes somewhat resonates with the suggestion that maintaining a positive attitude towards the Irish language becomes more difficult as children in English-medium primary schools progress through senior primary classes (Owens, 1992). In addition, we have learned that motivation scores of 9 year-old children (McCoy & Banks, 2012; Devitt et al., 2018) presented more favourably to those of sixth class pupils in the *Twenty Classes Study* (Harris & Murtagh, 1999), which is also indicative of the senior primary EME context of learning Irish. It is also worth considering that The *Twenty Classes Study* (Harris & Murtagh, 1999) (n=490, 6<sup>th</sup> Class pupils ) demonstrated higher overall attitude and motivation scores, compared to this current study, which may represent a gradual decrease in motivation towards the language at senior primary level over the last few decades. Somewhat relatedly, MacGréil & Rhatigan (2009) highlight

that the majority of adults were more positively disposed to Irish as an adult, compared to their school-going days.

A gradual decrease in positive attitudes and motivation towards the language, as per the comparison of the Twenty Classes study and this current study, could correlate with the decrease in attainment in Irish in English-medium schools, of which the latter is more definite as a trend (Harris et al., 2006; Inspectorate, 2013, 2018, 2022a). Within the *Twenty Classes Study* itself (Harris & Murtagh, 1999), the correlation between language attainment and language motivation was established. Within this context of challenging conditions to maintain language motivation and bolster language attainment, it is of note that, relatedly, the children reported an increase in self-assessed ability in Irish, which, if considered as a related attitudinal measure, also presents a positive projection in relation to their Irish language learning journey during the course of the study.

Looking at the constituent scales within the overall attitude and motivation scores, the slight increase in the PPC's constituent *Integrativeness* Index score can be interpreted positively. Here, Harris & Murtagh (1999) note that integrative attitudes are important, as they assist in sustaining motivation during the arguably lengthy journey of acquiring Irish. Interestingly, a majority of children and parents, learning Irish as a third or fourth language, relayed a very positive attitude towards the Irish language and culture during the CRAG and, notably, the PRAG discussions. A desire to integrate in Irish society and assimilate cultural practices therein was apparent. This positive disposition among participant families is arguably reflected in the *Integrativeness* Index score. A recent case study, articulating minority language value in diverse communities in Ireland (n=11,109 adults), notes how the Irish language is "positioned as having positive potential in an increasingly diverse and multilingual population" (Murray, Lynch, Flynn & Davitt, 2021, p. 11).

In terms of developing skills to foster integrativeness within the language learning context, it is recommended to teach language learners, particularly learners of lesser used or endangered languages, integration strategies (Armstrong, 2013), in addition to the language itself, in order to equip learners with the requisite skills to join language communities.

The significant decrease in *Instrumental Orientation* to Irish among the PPC merits further discussion in the context of the otherwise steady motivation mean scores. Harris & Murtagh

(1999) note motivations such as job aspirations, earning respect, or acquiring knowledge, are representative of instrumental motivation to learn a language. The results strongly suggest that the PPC are less likely to be instrumentally motivated to learn Irish than to have integrative reasons for learning the language, a rationale which is complemented by the slight increase in the *Integrativeness* Index scores.

It could be argued that the children's engagement with the language over the course of Action Cycles 1 & 2 engendered a shift in children's perception of Irish as a school subject, or utilitarian task, to a language that has the potential to be spoken outside of class, and that serves a purpose other than school engagement. The "sealed-off nature" (Harris, 2008a, p. 63) of the Irish language in primary schools which can inhibit learners' perception of Irish as a living language; instead the language can be merely perceived as a school subject (Watson & Nic Ghiolla Phádraig, 2009). Scarino (2014) identifies the tension between an emphasis on achieving a practical proficiency in languages on the grounds of employment and economic value, instead of enabling school programmes to facilitate a focus on the educational social and linguistic benefits coupled with cultural enrichment which is inherent in language learning. The decrease in instrumental motivation in the current study may suggest a more intrinsic and integrative motivation on the part of the PPC to engage with the language, supported by the piloting of two pedagogic approaches during the study.

Competence in Irish was historically perceived as an advantage in relation to university entry and certain professions (Watson & Nic Ghiolla Phádraig, 2009), such as teaching, the civil service, and the national police force. The softening of such compulsory policies, and the repositioning of Irish among other languages in a multilingual Ireland (Cronin, 2005; Moriarty, 2017; Devitt & Ó Murchadha, 2021), and increasingly in Europe, invites a broader understanding and framing of instrumental motivation in relation to Irish at school level.

*Irish Lesson Anxiety* scale scores indicated more of a decrease among the Participative Pedagogy Class (PPC). A closer comparison of scale items with the Reference Classes, indicated a notable decrease in nervousness to speak Irish amongst children in the PPC and, similarly, an increase in relation to inhibition to speak Irish in class. These trends are encouraging, given that Harris & Murtagh identified *Irish Lesson Anxiety* rates in their 1999 study as being at a high level, which were reflective of the Irish Lesson Anxiety levels at the outset of the current study. The *Irish Ability Self-Concept* scale scores also support this

finding, indicating an increase in the self-perception of Irish speaking ability among the PPC cohort. This suggests, children's decrease in Irish lesson anxiety levels and growth in confidence to speak Irish, was potentially due to increased opportunities of peer-to-peer language learning in, and outside class in the PPC.

In a longitudinal study involving students (n=59) from both Irish-immersion education (IME) and EME settings, and who had completed secondary school, Murtagh & Van Der Silk (2004) observed that students who attended Irish-immersion schools had lower Irish class anxiety levels than students in EME schools. The study suggested that greater opportunity to use Irish in IME settings compared to EME settings was a contributing factor. Relatedly, Murtagh (2007) notes the importance of an "anxiety-free or comfortable environment" (Murtagh, 2007, p. 451) in EME settings, to enable learners to "fully explore their own potential in learning Irish" (ibid.).

Finally, children's sustained overall motivation scores should be considered in the light of the learner-centred approach undertaken at the outset of the study. Children readily identified what they liked, what they did not like, and what they would change about Irish lessons going forward. Overuse of the textbook was one such concern raised by children which informed practice throughout the school year. The interactive and agentic nature of peer tutoring and student parent tutoring offered students an alternative to a textbook-led programme. An over-reliance on textbook in the teaching of Irish in EME schools is documented to the detriment of various language skills elsewhere (Department of Education & Science, 2007; Harris et al., 2006; Inspectorate, 2013; Hickey and Stenson, 2016a). In a similar departure from a textbook-led approach whereby a school-based study explored translanguaging with rap as genre, children welcomed the change and the departure from the "Irish language textbook that had limited applicability to the everyday lives of children" (Moriarty, 2017, p. 574), to a learning environment that was visibly enjoyable (ibid.) for the children involved, which was captured in their responses.

### ***7.2.2 Parents' Attitude & Motivation towards the Irish language***

While the adult population in Ireland is generally positively disposed towards Irish, this does not readily transfer to use of Irish in the real-life domain (Dolowy-Rybińska & Hornsby, 2021; Darmody & Daly, 2015). Parents' mild support of their children to learn Irish has been

characterised by a lukewarm “hands-off attitude” (Harris, 2008b, p. 183) on a practical level. It is of note that participating parents’ attitudes towards the Irish language at the outset of the study were largely reflective of national studies, to date (Darmody & Daly, 2015; Harris & Murtagh, 1999; Ó Riagáin, 2007; MacGréil & Rhatigan, 2009), in terms of being positively disposed towards the language. There was a slightly positive increase in parents’ general attitude towards Irish over the course of the current study, and a notable increase in positive responses after Action Cycle 2, regarding how parents felt about their child learning Irish at school.

Darmody & Daly’s recent study (2015) indicates how adults in Ireland who were positively disposed towards the Irish language were more likely to speak Irish as adults if they had come from a family where Irish was spoken and where their parents were positively disposed to Irish language learning. Therefore, the parents’ positive disposition towards the language and increased positive disposition in relation to their child's learning of Irish is a positive indicator in short and longer-term support of their child as an Irish language learner. Furthermore, children who experience Irish language use in family settings are more likely to continue to use the language after leaving school. This correlates with Murtagh & Van der Silke’s longitudinal study of school leavers and language attrition. Thus, parents’ attitude to, and use of, Irish has a clear influence on the language attitudes of their children as they progress through education and into adulthood. It highlights the importance of family context in the formation and intergeneration transmission on attitudes towards Irish.

It is interesting to note that positive general attitude towards the Irish language, how Irish is taught in schools, and toward schools’ efforts in teaching Irish, despite parents knowing little about how their child is being taught the language is also reflected in Harris & Murtagh’s *Twenty Classes Study* (Harris & Murtagh, 1999). By the end of Action Cycle 2, parents’ attitudes remained steady, with clear indications of a more informed and positive stance towards their child’s learning of Irish in school and at home.

It was outlined in Section 6.4 that a notable number of parents who were learning Irish for the first time in the PPC, participated in the student-parent tutoring at home, and also attended PRAG discussions throughout the project. Parents made reference to the broader realm of Irish culture, when discussing the Irish language and Irish language learning at school and in the home. The importance of Irish dance was cited, along with Irish music, the

St. Patrick's Day festival, and some children's participation in a local St. Patrick's Day parade. It was observed that a notable proportion of parents learning Irish for the first time also had a discernible interest and admiration for aspects of Irish culture which may have been a motivating factor in wishing to learn the Irish language. It could be proposed that the practices and discernible motivations of some of the PPC parent groups, which emerged during PRAG discussions, align with the newly-identified category of "socioculturally motivated learners" (Flynn & Harris, 2016, p. 381).

Flynn & Harris (2016) note that classifications of language learning motivations, as per Gardner et al., do not encompass adult learners of Irish, who may be motivated to learn Irish by "affective factors such as identity, linguistic heritage and cultural connections" (Flynn & Harris, 2016, p. 371). These are arguably distinct from the traditional understanding of integrative motivation to date, and lacking in language motivation research thus far. It could be argued that the practices and discernible motivations of some of the PPC parent groups, which emerged during PRAG discussions, aligns with this newly-identified category of "socioculturally motivated learners" (Flynn & Harris, 2016, p. 381). Flynn & Harris (2016) concluded that their study had demonstrated that new learners of Irish may be motivated to engage the Irish language due to cultural assimilation motivations, which aligns with Murray et al.'s study (2021). It was also possible that this is an extension of the learners' new identity as residents of the country, whereby value is attached to the Irish language. A perceived significance of Irish in cultural terms could also translate to a potential "perceived irrelevance" (Murray et al., 2021, p. 11) of the instrumental value of Irish among adults. In relation to online adult learners of Irish worldwide, Mac Lochlainn et al. (2020) similarly questions if the motivation to attain proficiency for a future career has been replaced by the value of learning Irish for cultural reasons. Furthermore a more expansive understanding of the Irish language dispels the assumption that learners of white Irish backgrounds should assume a more substantial notion of ownership of the language than learners of other ethnic backgrounds (Murray et al., 2021).

Parents who had prior knowledge of Irish and who reconnected with the language are representative of the vast majority of parents nationwide. Parents exhibited a light knowledge of how Irish is taught in schools at the outset, but over the course of the study, parents' knowledge of how their child learns Irish grew. In overcoming this disconnect, parents were arguably brought closer to the language via a facilitative approach. It is

recommend for educators to equip families with language resources and strategies in order to enrich engagement with their children's learning in the home domain, which can bolster children's attitude towards language learning and literacy practices (Blanch et al., 2013), connect parents to children's learning (Harris & Goodall, 2008) and reconnect with parents' own prior knowledge.

### ***7.2.3 Research Question 2 Summary Response***

One can conclude that the sociocultural theory-informed approach to Irish language learning impacted upon both children's and parents' attitude and motivations towards the language. Children's sustained AMTB overall motivation scores in the context of a generally less-than-positive attitude towards the languages amongst primary school children, compared to other subjects, reflects positively on the SCT approach. Looking more closely at the composite scales, children's decrease in instrumental motivation and slight increase in integrative motivation could be interpreted as the children becoming more attuned with Irish in out-of-school domains. The decrease in Irish lesson anxiety is also a positive indicator in itself and in terms of confidence and engagement. We learn that the primary impact upon parents' attitudes and motivation was in relation to their child's learning of Irish while also observing a slight increase parent's own attitude and motivation towards the language.

### **7.3 Research Question 3(a): Learners' Experience of Tutoring**

This section discusses findings in relation to children and parent participants' experience of tutoring, and addresses the third research question to this end:

***What were the experiences of Irish learners of an SCT-informed Irish language teaching and learning?***

In Section 7.3.1, the children's experience of reciprocal PT is discussed with reference to the nature of peer-mediated assistance, same-age and cross-age PT studies and related reported benefits of reciprocal PT. Section 7.3.2 explores the children's progression to the role of More Knowledgeable Other during student-parent tutoring. Section 7.3.3 contextualises the tutoring experience of the children within the context of Irish language teaching and learning in English-medium settings today. Parental engagement in the tutoring programme is explored in Section 7.3.4, with specific reference to adult learners of Irish in Section 7.3.5



### ***7.3.1 Reciprocal Peer Tutoring & Peer-Mediated Assistance***

We have learned that school-going children can co-construct knowledge and understanding by means of collaborative dialogue (Mercer, 1995), and that dialogue between learners can align with instruction dialogue between teachers and learners (Swain, 1995). In addition, peer interaction enables learners to undertake the role of both expert and novice, or tutor or tutee, who can fulfil their roles according to differing levels of knowledge and expertise (Ohta, 1995; Huong, 2007). It was outlined in this current study that children readily identified their partner's capacity to help them, and to a lesser extent, their own ability to help their partner during Irish language peer tutoring (PT). Children were explicit in identifying the benefits of reciprocal PT and specific peer-mediated assistance received during PT, both in written and oral feedback.

The children's PT lessons evaluations highlighted the range and depth of peer support each child received from their learning partner, both linguistically (Council of Europe, 2020) and from a peer-mediated assistance perspective (Yarrow & Topping, 2001). The overall SCT analysis and dedicated analysis of instances of coaching reported in this study, suggest that children of a higher ability working in mixed ability partnerships were recipients of peer assistance of a high instructional demand, and thus reciprocal learning took place for each child in partnership, whether they were mixed or similar ability partnerships. It is of note that, in discussing their experience of reciprocal PT during CRAGs, the children were particularly articulate in identifying the reciprocity of their tutoring experience. This study aligns with the body of studies which identify the benefits of same or similar age reciprocal PT (Allen & Boraks, 1978; Ensergueix & Lafont, 2010; Simmons et al., 1994; Tavener & Glynn, 1989; Westwood, 2007). The findings of a small-scale study (Tavener & Glynn, 1989), which tracked the linguistic gains of PT intervention comparing the linguistic gains of a same-age two-child partnership to that of a cross-age child partnership, suggest that the selection of tutor and tutee of similar age may enhance "mutual educational gains" (Tavener & Glynn, 1989, p. 54), and provide the basis for a more balanced relationship, which makes for a "much more effective learning environment" (ibid.). Relatedly, Greene et al. (2018) identified that, while a cross-age PT mathematics programme at elementary school level was beneficial for tutees, the findings suggested that the benefits for older tutors were limited in comparison. In relation to reciprocal peer tutoring (RPT) Allen & Boraks (1978) indicated that children who had the opportunity for role reciprocity experienced greater gains in

reading than children who took the role of tutor or tutee only. The adoption of an RPT approach in a physical education lesson with adolescent participants (Ensergueix & Lafont, 2010), indicated that novice students with similar skills and of similar age could mutually support each other, if offered the requisite structure in which to help each other. Similarly to this study, it also underlined the importance of learners being able to experience both the tutor and tutee role.

It was noted in Chapter 6 how the PPC reported instances of peer-mediated assistance, indicated proportionally more instances of assistance of a low instructional demand (48.4%) on the tutor, compared with instances of assistance of medium (33.4%) or high demand (18%) (Pino-Pasternak, 2014). While the data collected is based on children's reporting, as opposed to classroom observation and/or analysis of children's transcripts, this finding is nonetheless broadly reflective of other PT studies that explore the nature of peer-mediated assistance in terms of quality/effectiveness and/or benefit to the tutee (Berghmans, Neckebroek, Dochy & Struyven, 2013; Graesser, Person & Magliano, 1995; Roscoe & Chi, 2007; Yarrow & Topping, 2001). While using a different lens to categorise peer interactions in the primary classroom, Gnädinger (2008) noted a correlation between the most reported types of assistance, and the types of instruction used by the class teacher, which may reflect the social nature of learning in the classroom.

The children also identified increased language use, being more comfortable speaking Irish and building trust with one's tutoring partner, as additional benefits of PT. In terms of increased language use, this is corroborated by the children's Irish Language Use surveys and the subsequent engagement with student-parent tutoring. This suggests that the reciprocal PT programme was instrumental in creating a learning environment, whereby children's Irish language speaking opportunities increased in the classroom. The RPT class affords students more speaking opportunities, compared to a more didactic approach. The potential of peer interaction for collaborative dialogue (Mercer, 1995), and leveraging expert-novice/tutor-tutee across varying competencies (Ohta, 1995) within the peer-peer setting supports this finding, whereby the active role of the learner is central in preference to a dominance of teacher-led transmission (Huong, 2007). Reports of being more comfortable speaking Irish support the findings of the AMTB results, which indicated a decrease in the Irish lesson anxiety scale. Pair work and working in small groups have been identified as learning approaches to decrease anxieties in the language learning classroom (Koch &

Terrell, 1991; Young, 1991). Other studies in relation to the use of PT to alleviate anxieties were in relation to maths learning (Moliner & Alegre, 2020). In the Irish context, it is recommended to reduce whole-class level pupil speech and place a greater emphasis on small group work which allows for meaning negotiation, whereby the “more private and negotiable context of language use should reduce some of the social risk for less able pupils who wish to make use of whatever Irish they have” (Harris & Murtagh, 1999. p. 335). The children’s reference to building trust with one’s Irish language partner reflects on the relationship building that can take place during reciprocal PT and resonates with the identification of emotional support as a principal element of scaffolding (Hughes, 2015). This is discussed in more detail in relation to parents’ engagement with student-parent tutoring.

### ***7.3.2 Child as More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) in the Endangered Language Context***

The student-parent lesson evaluations also provide an insight into a child’s self-assessed ability in the role of teacher, and expert. In addition, parents shared their reflection in relation to the student-parent lessons via evaluation and PRAG meeting. Children’s ability to enact the role of tutor or MKO was confirmed. This was the case, both with parents who had prior knowledge of Irish, and parents being introduced to Irish for the first time. The benefits to children in exercising the role of MKO are inherent with those discussed in the previous section, with regard to peer tutoring.

The child as MKO in the Irish language context, as per this current study, holds further relevance from a sociolinguistic perspective. As highlighted, the education system is central to language maintenance efforts of the Irish state (Walsh, 2002; Harris, 2008a, 2008b, Ó Laoire, 2012) which is seen to compensate for the lack of success in natural transmission of Irish outside the Gaeltacht areas in Ireland. For the vast majority of school-going children in EME, Irish is spoken or referenced very little or not at all at home. The children often represent the most Irish language-active member of the family. In this present study, approximately half of parents demonstrated prior knowledge of Irish from school-going days, while half the parents took on learning the language with their child for the first time.

The concept of reverse intergenerational transmission (Olko et al., 2016), aligns with a child undertaking the role of more knowledgeable other (MKO) in the home domain. Reverse intergenerational transmission in the endangered language context is considered a language revitalisation or maintenance strategy, whereby parents or adults are “learning from, or because of, their children” (Olko et al., 2016, p. 667). For learners of Irish who are reconnecting with prior knowledge, the input of the child can provide the necessary stimulus to activate previous knowledge and capacity to speak Irish. In time, the reconnecting learner’s competence may grow and surpass that of child. It was the case in the current study that some parents found the initial pitching of student-parent lessons too easy, but were more challenged in the second term of student-parent tutoring when differentiated lessons were provided. Parents in this case exhibited a willingness to play the role of language novice (Smith-Christmas, 2021), for the benefit of the child’s learning. In the case of multilingual families, it is observed in a family study based in Ireland whereby Polish was the mother tongue, that “Irish provides a third linguistic space” (Smith-Christmas, 2021, p. 13), where parents may try to capitalise on the potential for more equilibrium in terms of learning with the child, given that the child in this study had greater competence in English than her parents (ibid.). In terms of parents as new learners of Irish in this study, the competence of their child in Irish was readily identified as the more knowledgeable other as opposed to working towards a more levelled perception of shared ability. This is attributable to the children being at fourth class level and thus having learned Irish for 6.5 years previously at the time of the tutoring. However, the concept of engaging with Irish as an additional linguistic space, whether second, or third, or any number, is representative of the recognition of a new domain if use for the language learners of Irish. This space, created by the child leading an Irish lesson at home, also connects with the concept of a family *mude* (Walsh & O’Rourke, 2014), whereby Irish is brought into the family domain, albeit in a school-supported structured capacity.

The development of children as the more knowledgeable other (MKO) in home domain during tutoring, not only demonstrates positive outcomes for the child, but also indicates how parents were afforded the opportunity to (re)connect with the Irish language through the accommodation of reverse intergenerational language transmission (Olko et al., 2016); the child’s agentic enactment of tutor and MKO at home represents the creation a new linguistic space or *mude* for Irish to be spoken in the home and family context.

### 7.3.3 *Perspectives on Parents' Engagement with Student-Parent Tutoring*

The concept of a broader vision of parental engagement in children's learning as a progression from parental involvement which may present as a parents-supporting-schools model (Goodall & Montgomery, 2013), to a more dedicated engagement in a child's learning, was discussed in Chapter 3. Avoidance of one-off events to more sustained outreach to parents was also noted. Indeed, parents' engagement with student-parent tutoring from Action Cycle 2 onwards benefitted from their familiarity and engagement with the project as a whole from the beginning of the school year.

Parents' accounts of learning – both of their child's and their own – during student-parent tutoring is a clear indicator of their engagement in the teaching, learning, and engagement with the Irish language as a family during the programme. Parents readily recognised the progress of their own child and, in many cases, how the children had developed skills as a teacher or tutor. It is noted how, generally speaking, parents can question if they have the requisite skills and subject knowledge to assist their child's learning, which can emanate from parents' education levels and related self-efficacy stance (O'Toole & Hayes, 2016). Relatedly, parents' belief that they have the capacity to assist with their child's learning and support their child to succeed is fundamental to progressive engagement (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). The student-parent tutoring in this study was led by the child which was invitational in approach to parents by both the teacher-researcher and the child. Children asked their parents to take part in a lesson as a learner, not a teacher, in a form of traditional role reversal in terms of established homework procedures. Parents were readily able to recognise the value in participating as a learner in terms firstly and primarily their child's development as a tutor and Irish language development. Thus, programmes, where the child is central to the activity, is recommended as encouraging parental engagement in their child's learning.

The centrality of the child, not only as a learner, but also as a child to a parent, was demonstrated in the number of comments made by parents in relation to the opportunity afforded to spending time with their child through the lesson (For example, *I would like the lesson to be longer so we spend more time together* [P3]). From a sociocultural perspective, the parents' recognition of the relational aspect of the language activity identifies emotional support being one of the types of support shared during scaffolding (Hughes, 2015). In this case, student-parent tutoring presents to the parent as an opportunity to spend time with a

child, arguably one-to-one time and the potential learning context is an added benefit. The potential for school-related home activities to provide a space for learning, as well as relationship-building or bonding, is possible. Indeed, a recent study involving five primary schools found that junior primary children who had input into the content of alternative homework reflected that enjoyable engagement with homework was also considered quality time with his/her parent (Kiely et al., 2021).

Finally, parent-to-parent support also emerged as another important aspect of parental engagement with student-parent tutoring. During PRAGs, parents discussed with each other how they were progressing with student-parent tutoring, and the challenges that arose for them. Parents with prior knowledge of Irish commended parents who were new learners. New learner parents consulted reconnecting learners on points of interest. Parent mentoring was identified as a means of support for parents learning Irish (Darmody & Daly, 2015; Kavanagh & Hickey, 2013) as an alternative or complementary practice to school-parent support. This practice of peer support is also reflective of the community of practice which developed during the study, supported by the overarching participatory action research approach.

#### ***7.3.4 Holistic & Innovative Approach for the Endangered Language Context***

As noted, the teaching and learning of an endangered language provides its unique set of challenges (Valdés, 2017). Given that contact with Irish is almost entirely in the school domain during Irish lessons for the vast majority of English-medium primary school-going children, “methodological choices and innovations potentially play an important role in realising the aims of national language and education policy” (Batardière et al., 2022). In addition, the importance of high-quality input during the hours in which children do engage with a school-based language is crucial (O’Grady, 2018).

The rooting of this current study in class-based teaching during the first action cycle is an acknowledgement of the necessity to utilise the curricular time afforded to the Irish language in the optimal way as a springboard to increasing engagement with the Irish language. Indeed, there was a 93% attendance rate for PT, given that it was during the dedicated school day. Peer tutoring provided the approach to ensure more dedicated peer-peer interaction during the communicative phase of the Irish language class. Children learned the skills of

tutor and tutee which equipped them to progress to student parent-tutoring. Children also reported an increase in Irish language use during class.

The introduction of peer tutoring, a new teaching and learning practice in the Irish language context, was preceded by inviting learners to be a part of an action research project and community of practice therein, signifying a holistic, participatory and consultative approach. In this context, peer tutoring was not merely a new approach for the teacher, it was a shared endeavour informed by and reviewed by learners. Student-parent tutoring was reviewed and interrogated in the same vein. Ó Laoire (2007) notes the importance of reflective-type activities in the Irish language classroom which have the potential to engender positive attitudes. The importance of attaining the ‘inside’ perspective of learners of Irish and the necessity of more studies which enable teachers and learners to reflect on Irish language teaching and learning and teachers’ own practice is highlighted (Ó Laoire, 2007).

The facilitation of student-parent tutoring was successful, given the building blocks of peer tutoring, technology-mediated language learning, and a community of practice has been put in motion over the course of the school year. Thus, it required commitment and preparation prior to its inception on the part of the teacher-researcher and children at the outset. It required a leap of faith on the part of parents, which was leveraged by the community of practice that had been established overtime. Innovation alone in an endangered language learning is potentially not sufficient; the complexity of learner trajectories in the case of Irish requires a simultaneous holistic approach that is invitational and accessible to learners at a local level. While schools are not the sole solution to the Irish language challenge, it is proposed that they are appropriated as strategic resources in the case of supporting language maintenance to this end (McCarty, 2018; McCarty, 2008).

### ***7.3.5 Tutoring in relation to Curriculum & Language Policy***

At a curricular level, PT and student-parent tutoring reflects and supports the rationale and key objectives of the recently redrafted Primary Languages Curriculum (NCCA, 2019a). The rationale of the PLC underlines how “children learn through interactions” (NCCA, 2019a, p. 8), as well as the importance of the home, and communities of children, in providing such opportunities: “language learning occurs when child and adult or child and child have

meaningful interactions and conversations”. Both the PT cycle and child-parent tutoring are comprised of a series of language interactions between tutor and tutee in learning Irish.

Students’ enjoyment of the PT programme was evidently reflected in the children’s feedback, which is consistent with a number of PT programmes internationally with children of primary school age (Medcalf, Glynn & Moore, 2004; Tavener & Glynn, 1989), and in the case of PT studies at university level. Support of the self-assessment aspect of the PT review process and a clear majority willing to continue with self-assessment, indicated that the children developed the capacity to reflect on their own language learning, regularly and periodically. The collation of a child’s learning portfolio enables such review, and facilitates learners to clarify objectives and recognise the next step in learning (NCCA, 2008), in addition to fostering learner autonomy and agency

The analysis of the children’s feedback in relation to how their PT partner helped them, using the CEFR linguistic competencies as a lens, merits further discussion. Children reported twice as many instances of assistance with vocabulary from their partner (19.1%), in comparison to assistance with grammar & accuracy (9.7%). This could reflect that children were more capable of assisting their peers in relation to standalone vocabulary than grammatical structures or whole sentences, and could, in turn, reflect a tradition of theme-based pedagogy in previous curriculum (Department of Education & Science, 1999a). Despite the introduction of the Primary Languages Curriculum (NCCA, 2019a), a theme-based approach remains pervasive in commercial textbooks and programmes.

It was noted in the data analysis chapter that the consideration of children’s linguistic competency in relation to the ability to carry out the prepared task, and also the broader range of linguistic competency required around the specified language task, was observed and reflected upon early in Action Cycle 1. Lesson planning was, accordingly, informed by the ongoing observations and reflections made by the teacher-researcher in this regard. A similar challenge, whereby language acted as a challenge to pedagogical strategies, was also noted in a recent study (Ní Chróinín et al., 2016). PT and student-parent tutoring were proposed as opportunities to develop language competency, with ongoing review of lessons to ensure that the language input must be carefully planned and informed to provide class-cohort-specific scaffolding and language development. The child and parent review of the first term of student-parent tutoring informed the necessity of a more differentiated approach in the



second term, whereby the Irish language competency of the parent informed the selection of a two-level differentiated Irish lesson format. Ní Chróinín et al. also noted that “ways to differentiate learning, in a second language needs further investigation” (Ní Chróinín et al., 2016, p. 573).

### ***7.3.6 Research Question 3(a) Summary Response***

The participating children reported high participation rates and strong levels of enjoyment in relation to peer tutoring. Relatively good participation levels in student-parent tutoring were apparent with equally positive feedback in terms of enjoyment. The development of the child as tutor, tutee and More Knowledgeable was a distinctive feature of their children’s learning experience. The children demonstrated a range of skills in supporting their partner’s learning, and their parents’ learning. Parents engaged with lessons enthusiastically and reported the reignition of prior learning or the beginning of a new language trajectory. While parents’ own learning of Irish was relatively modest during the seven weeks, parents’ knowledge of and engagement with their child’s learning clearly developed and presents as a key motivator in parental engagement in this study.

## **7.4 Research Question 3b: Learners’ Experience of Technology-Mediated Language Learning**

This section explores the findings of this study in relation to technology-mediated language learning, and similarly to Section 7.4, addresses the third research question in this regard:

*What were the experiences of Irish learners of an SCT-informed Irish language teaching and learning?*

### ***7.4.1 Blog Platform as a ‘Gateway’ to Further Technology-Mediated Learning***

It was clear during this current study that the majority of children actively engaged with the Class Online Learning Zone in a blended learning context, and all children were actively engaged and committed during in-class COLZ activities. The positive engagement with COLZ, arguably acted as a support in establishing engagement with the less-known platform of Twitter. In addition, the high level of engagement out of class on COLZ and the minority of parents who, with their child, engaged with the Class Twitter Account (CTA) also

indicates the evolvment of learner agency and autonomy in relation to their Irish language engagement.

Tay et al.'s (2014) primary school based study identified the high usage rate of blogs, coupled with teacher feedback, which detailed a range of blog-based activities that in turn informed the finding that the blog platform acted as a gateway to the uptake of other online software applications (Coppens et al., 2013). The use of blogs for learners of the English language was explored, establishing their potential to increase the use of more authentic language learning materials, exploring their wider influence and how the affordances of blogs ultimately increase the opportunities for language teachers to progress students' learning and motivate students. Similarly, the use of an L2 blog, as part of an Italian language course (Miceli et al., 2010), provided the opportunity of authentic interaction for students of Italian at third level.

#### ***7.4.2 Online Learning Activity Student Preferences***

While the results represent the findings from a relatively small class group, it is nonetheless of note that goal-oriented computer-based language activities were deemed the most enjoyable kind of activities via the COLZ, followed by CLIL-related activities.

Similarly, in relation to goal-oriented technology-mediated learning, Dalton & Devitt (2016) demonstrated in their research into 3D virtual learning environments through the medium of Irish that, while one of the key affordances of virtual learning environments were open-ended tasks, initial findings suggested that children "may prefer a more game-like environment with clearly defined goals and tasks" (Dalton & Devitt, 2016, p. 30). A further primary school-level study (Lye et al., 2012) demonstrated how online quizzes engaged and motivated pupils (n=51) in Science, Maths, and English activities and how the designed online activities addressed learning gaps identified in the physical classroom lessons. This resonates with how positively disposed children were to the quiz activities during COLZ engagement. It is interesting to note, therefore, that Lye et al.'s study (2012) also indicated that students, who engaged more frequently with online quizzes to reinforce learning, outperformed their counterparts.

Challenges and potential solutions in relation to the implementation of CLIL at English-medium primary level were discussed in Section 7.1.4.2 Its prominence in the study in

relation to technology-mediated language activities is suggestive the potential of TMLL to support the implementation and resourcing of Irish language CLIL programmes at primary level. It is found that CLIL can be enhanced by the multimodal nature of supporting technologies potential of TMLL as evidence in a pan-European CLIL study at secondary school level (Gimeno-Sanz, Ó Dónaill & Andersen, 2014). The integration of multimodality and multimedia, coupled with provision of interactivity such as Web Quests, was acknowledged as facilitating CLIL through active participation, whereby a number of suggestions emerged (Instituto Politécnico de Castelo Branco, 2018).

### **7.4.3 Technology-Related Challenges**

As detailed prior, children's and parents' most cited challenges with engaging with online language learning from home, in highest instance order, were:

- device access,
- device sharing,
- lack of in-person teacher support, low instance of parent support,
- navigating access to COLZ webpage and internet access,
- concerns regarding internet safety (parents), and
- Irish spelling and *fadas*.

While representing a small sample of children and parents, and while relating to pre-pandemic times, a number of the challenges identified are reflective of recent studies relating to online learning and engagement in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic (Burke & Dempsey, 2020; Devitt, Bray, Banks & Ní Chorcora, 2020; Flynn et al., 2021), which witnessed transitions to remote learning in first, second and third level education.

For example, all children in this study supported the integration of COLZ activities into the school timetable, and children felt more supported in COLZ activities at school rather than at home, citing the ability to be able to ask the teacher for help if needed. This corresponds with a finding from a recent national study in relation to '*schooling at home*' during the first Covid-19 lockdown. It related to school closures from March-June 2020 and reported that primary school children did not enjoy doing work in relation to school subjects where they felt they needed support from their teacher, such as Irish (Flynn et al., 2021). While Devitt

et al.'s study (2020) relates to secondary school teachers perspectives, it nonetheless highlights the same barriers concerning lack of support in the home, limited access to devices and limited technical know-how as barriers to secondary school student engagement. Interestingly, the remaining principal barrier cited—lack of interest—is not apparent in this study.

The importance of keeping children and parents informed of good practice in relation to the chosen platforms, and addressing technology-related concerns harboured by participants, was also established. The challenge that arose in relation to navigating access to the COLZ home page and logging in, in class and at home, required support and updates to maximise the use of class time for learning activity engagement instead of technical issues. In relation to effective use of ICT-mediated learning class time, Ward (2020) also identifies the importance of maximising the use of ICT-allocated timeslots and, accordingly, teachers sought to ensure that devices were ready ahead of each designated session.

The only applicable challenge reported that can also be attributed to the Twitter Class Account and Twitter engagement, is safety concerns. Given the low engagement with Twitter by parents and children, the lack of challenge reported essentially reflects low rather than seamless engagement and, by extension, a potential wariness of a less-known platform. The low level of parental support reported by children in relation to COLZ (whereby parents had a dedicated log-in), proved somewhat of an indicator, that seeking parental involvement in a second concurrent Web 2.0 technology, which required more oversight by parents, would yield a limited response. Uncertainty regarding privacy, lack of experience and a negative attitude towards ICT can present potential barriers to engaging with social media in an educational context (Van Den Beemt et al., 2020). Lack of familiarity with a given platform can also be an inhibitor (Hattem & Lomicka, 2016; Stewart, 2015) which can fuel safety concerns. The importance of adequate training for participants prior to engaging with a new platform is apparent through the literature (Hattem & Lomicka, 2016; Stewart, 2015; Barrot, 2021). In arriving at an understanding of social media use in the classroom, Van Den Beemt et al. (2020) identify recommendations for the school, teachers, and children only; this study highlights that at primary level it is important to factor parents into the equation too.

Concerns with regard to challenges in achieving orthographical accuracy when engaging with technology for the purposes of communicating in Irish was also noted in Fleming & Debski's school-based study (Fleming & Debski, 2007). This is reflective of the fact that spell checkers or predictive text may not be installed or readily available on mobile devices or word processing devices, coupled with the added challenge of inputting Irish diacritics could deter learners from engaging with Irish by means of technology. This scenario highlights that, while young learners are generally adept and comfortable with technology, extra support is needed with respect to specific language learning context (Elliot, 2021). While small-scale and localised, the challenges with regard to navigating Irish orthography and diacritics on the average mobile device is nonetheless representative of learner challenges when using a minority language in a technological context whereby the language is not as readily supported as the lingua franca. The fact that translation and localisation of open-source software into Irish is principally carried out on a local volunteer basis is indicative of the ongoing need for more comprehensive resourcing in this domain (Lynn, 2022). This is challenging in the endangered language context of ongoing updates in relation to software, apps, and programmes, however (Elliot, 2021).

#### ***7.4.4 Reflecting on Class Engagement with Twitter Going Forward***

The current findings suggest that the children were positively disposed towards the use of Twitter for Irish language purposes. Parents' feedback indicates that family use of Twitter outside the classroom may have been affected by unfamiliarity with the application and potential intervention overload. The importance of the role of the teacher as curator and facilitator also emerged, which is discussed further in Section 7.4.6.

While the uptake with the Class Twitter Account from parents and children out-of-school was relatively low, the emergence of Twitter as a classroom/lesson-based tool revealed insights to learner engagement with and experience of a social networking platform in this context facilitated by the class teacher. The utilisation of Twitter as a scaffolded writing tool facilitated an agentic approach to Irish language writing, which enabled learners to engage with the language in a new and authentic domain of use (Cunliffe, 2021). The learners' engagement with realisable writing and reading tasks resonated with Fewell's study (2014), in relation to utilising Twitter to facilitate the teaching and learning of modern foreign languages at secondary school level, and align with the broader identification of Twitter as

a veritable communication and language tool (Hatten & Lomicka, 2016; Gao et al., 2012). The findings in relation to microblogging address a research gap, both in terms of exploring the use of social networking sites such as Twitter for language learning at primary level and in terms of the potential of such a platform in an endangered language context.

#### ***7.4.5 A Real Audience as an Authentic Domain of Use***

Both the Class Blog and Twitter provided the learner with a real audience—a virtual space to engage in Irish with the class teacher on the COLZ platform and shared participation in the Class Twitter account curated by the teacher-researcher which connected with the Irish language community and wider world online. As Chapter 6 concluded, the current findings suggests that a critical factor in supporting learner engagement in technology-mediated settings lies in the creation of an *authentic* domain of use, whereby the learner of an additional language can engage with a *real* audience, or within a community of learners (CoL).

The students' responses to structured activities, as well as more informal posts on COLZ, represented a new form of language exchange between the teacher and children extending beyond the classroom walls. The creation of this domain is particularly relevant in the minority language context, where few opportunities exist to practise or use Irish (Murtagh, 2007). A pilot study in Wales, of bringing adult learners of Welsh together online as a community of learners, identified the prospect of “authentic conversation” (Henry, Carroll, Cunliffe & Kop, 2018) as the “hook of motivation” (ibid.) in the minority language learning context whereby other domains of use were limited or unavailable.

The introduction of the virtual world of Irish language Tweets and Tweeteters may have played a role in positively influenced students' integrative motivation levels, and contextualises the Irish language as an international, global language. Children were empowered to co-write and write Tweets with the teacher as curator, as well as read Tweets from a small number of parent and child partnerships in the class, as well as other Irish language Tweets. The majority of children expressed enjoyment in relation to use of Twitter in the Irish language class and in relation to co-writing Tweets. While research in relation to social media use in the classroom largely explores social media affordances, there is a dearth of research in relation to the effectiveness of social media in relation to learning and literacy practices. In

relation to the production and dissemination of Irish language tweets via the Class Twitter Account, it represents an agentic approach to Irish language sharing in a new and authentic domain of use (Nic Giolla Mhichíl, Lynn, and Rosati, 2018).

It is contended that, when contemplating the social use of an endangered language, it will be progressively important to conceptualise “online and offline social networks as a single, inseparable social network” (Cunliffe, 2021, p. 91). Thus, language policy and education policy should reflect the growing significance of technology mediated communication (Cunliffe, 2021) as an emerging and potential enduring medium particularly in the context of language learning communities. In the Irish context, it is observed that “considerable additional resources and strategic thinking are required if the state is to support Irish speakers more actively and robustly in increasingly diversified geographical communities and online spaces” (Walsh, 2022, p. 306).

#### ***7.4.6 The Pivotal Role of the Teacher in (Implementing) Technology-Mediated Activities***

In this study, the teacher-researcher created, compiled, and published the tailored Irish language content for the online learning zone, as well as ensuring an active online presence for the students. The teacher-researcher also curated the Class Twitter account and increased the focus of the Twitter Class account use as a classroom-based co-writing tool in the context of a low uptake from parents to sign-up to Twitter. The vital role of the teacher can relate to the language learning content and design, in addition to overseeing, facilitating activities, and having an online presence for learners.

A number of studies also highlight the instrumental role of teachers in navigating and overseeing the implementation of technological platform for class learning use (Callaghan, 2021; Lye, Abas, Tay & Saban, 2012; Tay et al., 2014; Ward, Mozgovoy & Purgina, 2019). Lye maintains that the blending of online space into classroom practice is hugely reliant on teachers’ belief that technology-mediated learning can potentially enhance the learner experience (Lye et al., 2012). The study’s expanded rationale identifies the importance of the role of the primary school teacher in the physical classroom and thus conceptualises the online space at primary level as a medium which builds on and enhances the teaching and learning that takes place in during face-to-face lessons in the school context.

The critical role of the teacher in relation to the use of social networking sites is highlighted in Callaghan & Bower’s study (Callaghan & Bower, 2012) relating to two classes of Year 10 students and noted that ultimately the extent to which learning outcomes are achieved in school-led SNS “depends on the way the SNS learning activities are implemented by the teacher” (Callaghan & Bower, 2012, p. 16) argument.

Relatedly, the importance of the teacher at primary level in relation to the teaching and learning of Irish where students may have little Irish language contact other than school is noted (Devitt et al., 2018; Ó Duibhir & Ní Thuairg, 2019; Harris & Murtagh, 1999)

#### ***7.4.7 Research Question 3(b) Summary Response***

Children engaged positively with technology-mediated language learning and demonstrated high levels of enjoyment. A notable proportion of children engaged with the Class Online Learning Zone initially from home or outside the Irish lessons and continued in this vein. Regular in-class COLZ access was effective and the platform constituted a gateway to the lesser-known platform of Twitter for learners. Goal-oriented tasks and CLIL activities proved most popular and the importance of a real audience both in COLZ and with the Class Twitter Account was apparent. The use of a curated Class Twitter Account emerged as a constructive in-class writing tool. Out-of-class use of Twitter by parents and children was relatively low, reflecting parents’ potential unfamiliarity with the platform and/or potential programme overload. Learners encountered technical challenges across both platforms in the blended learning setting. The importance of the role of teacher as a facilitator of learning and navigator in order to engage and assist learners was also evident.

### **7.5 Research Question 4: Participatory Action Research & Learning Engagement**

This section addresses the fourth and final research question:

***In what ways can a participatory approach influence engagement of learners in a given study?***



### **7.5.1 Impact of PAR in Fostering Connection and Partnership with Participants**

Meaningful engagement with children as (research) partners is advocated in school life (Fielding, 2004; Lundy, 2007; Rudduck & MacIntyre, 2007) in favour of tokenistic child participation (Kidd & Czerniawski, 2011). Relatedly, it is recommended that teachers and schools should conceptualise parental engagement as a *process* as opposed to a *one-off event* (LaRocque et al., 2011). The journey of participants in this study through a series of stages over the school year characterised by engagement with language learning activities, periodic review, incremental involvement and sharing of voice demonstrated an evolving ownership of the project amongst participants. Engagement in the learning process and periodic in-cycle and end-of-cycle review of the learning approaches and processes is evidenced in Section 7.3 and Section 7.4, coupled with child and parent readiness to embrace and participate in the Student Voice Conference. Children's and parents' engagement trajectory reflects a progressive practice of reciprocity (See Section 4.6.1; Brydon-Miller & Coghlan, 2019) whereby traditional power relations are unpacked and democratic processes underpin practice of the collective (Reason & Bradbury, 2001).

In discussing the collaborative and democratising practice of participatory school-based inquiry, Brydon-Millar and Maguire specify participation in the “full range of the action cycle from problem identification to making project results and implications public” (Brydon-Millar & Maguire, 2009, p. 82-83; See Section 4.3.2). More specifically, the Young Researcher activities and Student Voice Conference participation findings are overt representations of the positive and potentially transformative impact of the PAR methodology as a group endeavour. Other elements of the PAR process are intertwined into the fabric of the course of the study's enactment such as children's contributions to project design outlined Chapter 5. In addition, the enactment of the Reconnaissance cycle which sought children's and parents' views from the outset of the study, children's engagement with CRAGs, parents' engagement with PRAGs and with each other in the dialogic space, and children's agentic participation throughout all serve to demonstrate the collaborative nature of the project. Participants clearly engaged with a full range of activity which culminated in the progression towards conference participation to disseminate findings to date.

There lies a practical and evidence-based rationale behind conducting an action research Reconnaissance Cycle, whereby a needs analysis not only yields valuable information with regard to children's and parents engagement with the Irish language to date, but is also representative of the PAR commitment to address a specific concern communicated through the voice of participants. There is also, arguably, a symbolic resonance that lies at the heart of a such a PAR approach that actively seeks genuine engagement from the outset, conceives schools as potential focal point for community-wide projects, and drives a "broader mandate for collaborative social change by involving those with a stake in the changes" (Brydon-Miller & Maguire, 2009, p. 88)

### ***7.5.2 Facilitates Participant Voice, and Participant-Informed Design and Practice***

The student voice methodology, identified as an essential strand of the study at the outset, complements and enriches the overarching participatory action research methodology effectively. As an approach it was extremely effective and a powerful vehicle in engendering a sense of co-ownership and agency in the children from the very beginning which grew over the course of the study. The importance of student agency, developing capacity to be a reflective language learner and the importance of consulting students in relation to design of Irish course materials is highlighted by Murtagh in her study of in school and out-of-school use of Irish at secondary school level (2007). In relation to the latter, Murtagh maintains that it is vital for students to be consulted in relation to the design of learning resources and activities if such resources are to be "accessible, attractive and inherently interesting" (Murtagh, 2007, p. 451).

Notably other Irish language-related studies have also identified the necessity of student voice and consultation in the creation of Irish language approaches and programmes (Harris, 2008a; Moriarty, 2017) in order to ensure students come on board and identify with the resources. Dalton & Devitt (2016) also share findings of the effectiveness of student voice in establishing project ownership and learner autonomy during a design-based research approach to piloting a 3D virtual world environment through the medium of Irish in a primary class setting. Kang, Chen, Miaou, and Chang (2020) document the importance of consultation with learners in relation to technological tools for learning and identify action research as the bridge between what researchers think learners need, and what is actually

needed. The centrality of student voice is all the more vital in the endangered language context where the support of student agency and voice provides an added connection to the language for learners.

### ***7.5.3 Importance of Local Facilitation; “Bottom-Up” Approach***

Valdés (2017) highlights the complexity of teaching (minority) languages as a subject in school which correlates with the limited success of language teaching efforts. It is noted that positioning of the teacher is central to how an endangered language is affirmed and legitimised amongst learners (Ó Laoire, 2012) whereby classrooms (and by extension schools) have the potential to be transformed into “powerful communities of practice for language learning” (Ó Laoire, 2012, p. 23). The importance of approaching endangered language learning through the eyes of the learner whereby teachers and facilitators in an advisory an advisory role develop as “skilled architects of learning spaces” (Ní Loingsigh & Mozzon-McPherson, 2020, p. 3; Ní Loingsigh, 2015) in the facilitation of learners of Irish to overcome their potential anxieties in relation to the Irish language (ibid).

It is argued that grass root initiatives provide the best avenues for extending the use of Irish outside of the school domain (Edwards, 2017; Ó Giollagáin & Charlton, 2015; Ó Duibhir & Ní Thuairisg, 2019). In terms of an integrated approach with schools the Ulibarri programme whereby teacher support centres support schools by funding a range of extra-curricular activities in the Basque language to build on school learning (Zalbide & Cenoz, 2018, Ó Duibhir & Ní Thuairisg, 2019) also serves as an inter-school project funded at government level. GAA clubs that embrace the use of Irish are another example (Ó Duibhir & Ní Thuairisg, 2019).

Ó Ceallaigh and Ní Dhonnabháin (2015) reflect on the potential small-scale qualitative research being undertaken in the area of Irish-medium Immersion by practitioners and research students in relation to informing policy as well as outline what works and what challenges arise. The same principle applies to Irish language teaching and learning in English-medium schools, whereby practitioner research has the potential to inform practice policy (Harris, 2009) in an area where research is scarce (Harris & Murtagh, 1999) and where overarching policies such as the Irish Language Strategy 2010-2030 which do not appear to

be actioned in an integrated way in education or broader society (Walsh, 2022; Devitt et al., 2018).

As highlighted by Harris:

The aim should be to achieve the maximum Irish programme that each school locally, and each set of parents, is willing to implement. Where the teacher's own outlook and motivation make it possible to place a special emphasis on Irish in a particular school, and where local parental attitudes permit it, there should be easy access to the support, structures, training and materials to capitalise on that potential and to deliver that more ambitious programme

(Harris, 2008b, p. 188)

#### ***7.5.4 Research Question 4 Summary Response***

It is noted that participatory action research approach was effective in fostering a connection with child and parent participants through regular meetings, consultations and feedback processes. The Reconnaissance Cycle was indicative of the value placed on participant perspectives how such perspectives informed the study. PAR provided the architectures for a collaborative and democratising approach to shared learning and developing a community of practice. Clearly, PAR readily supported the practice of student voice, and engaging the children (and parents) as co-researchers as well as language learners. The participatory approach also supported the development of a community of practice between the teacher-researcher, children, and parent. PAR supported the language learning process CoP development through its architectures and as outlined in Chapter four, resonating with the rationale of its potential, particularly in an endangered language context.

#### **7.6 Conclusion**

This chapter sought to discuss the findings of the study with reference to the overarching research questions. The learner outcomes relating to learners' Irish language usage and self-assessed ability and learners' attitudes and motivation towards the language were firstly discussed in relation to Irish language EME and the broader context of endangered and minority language learning. Findings in relation earner experience of the two SCT-informed pedagogical approaches were then discussed with specific reference to tutoring and technology-mediated language learning and practice. Finally the influence of the

participatory approach on learner engagement was explored which highlighted the potential of this methodology to support and engage Irish language learners in the EME primary school context. The research questions were addressed in each section. Building on the findings and discussion of the study, the next chapter outlines the contribution of this study, recommendations for practice, research and policy and future work relating to Irish language learning and teaching in EME settings.

## **Chapter 8:**

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This chapter revisits and discusses the aims of the study presented in Chapter 1. Section 8.2 focuses on the contributions of the study to the field. Recommendations for practice, policy, and research are presented in Section 8.3, with suggestions for future work in Section 8.4, followed by the chapter conclusion in Section 8.5.

#### **8.1 Introduction**

This study sought to address the concern that the majority of children attending English-medium primary schools in Ireland have limited opportunity to speak the Irish language at school (Harris & Murtagh, 1999; Fleming & Debski, 2007) and limited or no opportunity to speak the Irish language outside of school (Harris & Murtagh, 1999; Harris, 2008a; Murtagh, 2007). Additionally, this current study sought to examine how a sociocultural theory (SCT)-informed Irish language teaching approach might influence Irish language engagement among learners and create meaningful domains of use for children and parents. To this end, learners' attitudes and motivation towards the Irish language and learning the Irish language, learners engagement with and use of with the Irish language, and learners' experience of the pedagogical approaches were explored.

Chapter 2 presented a brief overview of language acquisition theory and interrogated the selection of SCT as the theoretical framework of this study. Language acquisition as a mediated process was explored prior to the discussion of the two SCT-informed pedagogical approaches, tutoring and technology-mediated language learning. This chapter also introduced the partners of the study through exploration of student voice and parental involvement and engagement in primary education, and associated language learning practices.

The national context for learners of Irish as an additional language was explored in Chapter 3 together with a focus on relevant education policy and a closer look at Irish language

teaching and learning in English-medium schools in Ireland. Language policy and practice from other endangered language contexts were also explored.

Chapter 4 explored the philosophical roots of the project in relation to the research methodology and described the processes involved in identifying participatory action research (PAR) as the chosen methodology. Requisite research methodology elements such as teacher-researcher positionality, research context, ethics, research tools employed, data analysis approach and the realities of the project were all presented and discussed.

Chapter 5 enabled the teacher-researcher to illustrate how both the theoretical framework and methodology approach combined to inform the planning and creation of the pedagogical approaches at classroom level. This chapter also outlined the action cycles and decision-making process in relation to each action cycle.

Chapter 6 presented the data analysis of the study. The needs analysis pertaining to the Reconnaissance Cycle was firstly presented which informed the study from the outset. Thereafter, the data analysis reports were structured to identify the key outcomes, investigate the learner experience of both pedagogical approaches of tutoring and technology-mediated language learning. Findings in relation to PAR-related data analysis were also presented.

Chapter 7 responded to the data analysis results and discussed the findings in the context of relevant literature. The chapter discusses the findings of the study in relation to learners (i) Irish language usage and self-assessed ability, (ii) attitudes and motivation towards Irish, learners' experience in relation pedagogical approaches, and the influence of a participatory approach on learner engagement with the project.

That leads to this chapter, Chapter 8. Having summarised the thesis trajectory to date, this chapter moves forward to outline the contributions of this study, present recommendations based on the findings of this study in the areas of practice, policy and research, and identifies future work in this field both for the teacher-researcher and collaborators.

## **8.2 Contributions of this Study**

This current study makes a range of contributions to the primary education sector, Irish language teaching and learning in English-medium education, technology-mediated

language learning, and the action research community. In summary, the study specifically informs Irish language teaching and learning at primary level through the application of sociocultural theory, tutoring and technology-mediated learning, the use of participatory approaches including student voice, has highlighted how a theoretical framework of sociocultural theory (SCT) can support and enhance the teaching and learning of the Irish language in English-medium primary schools. The various strands of the project are briefly reviewed in terms of their contribution.

The study seeks to engage learners of Irish as additional language by creating meaningful domains of use for learners to have the opportunity to learn and speak Irish. This was enacted firstly in the Irish language lesson itself by introducing a peer tutoring programme to increase language interaction and engagement in class. Other targeted domains of use were the home domain and the technological domain. Children's engagement with the Irish language in all three domains and additional domains was realised. The study can inform practice in other EME setting in terms of creating and sustaining domains of use for learners.

The study has demonstrated the positive effects of an integrated SCT-informed pedagogic approach which complements both the previous and more recent Irish language curricula (1999, 2019). The development of children as the more knowledgeable other (MKO) in Irish language student-parent home-based tutoring following a successful iteration of reciprocal PT, not only demonstrates positive outcomes for the child, but also enabled parents to (re)connect with the Irish language through the accommodation of reverse intergenerational language transmission (Olko et al., 2016).

The creation, piloting, and review of Irish language peer tutoring planning and resources, student-parent tutoring lesson planning, language activities and learner pack for the IAL learners and teachers of Irish are central to the study's objectives. These resources can be reviewed, collated, and disseminated in the future for use in the English-medium education sector in order to support further piloting of and engagement with peer tutoring for children learning Irish as an additional language. The resources can support existing programmes such as the *Gaelbhratach* [Irish Flag] or school self-evaluation (SSE) processes.

The study empowered students as co-designers, co-researchers, and agents of change supported by a student voice methodology intertwined with the overarching participatory



action research (PAR) approach. The most recent *Looking at Our Schools* (Inspectorate, 2022b) guidance for primary and post-primary has given greater prominence to student voice as an important component of school architectures and lived practice. This study demonstrates how student voice can be channelled for the benefit of innovative and student-centred design of a specific curricular area, and in turn, show evidence of learners' engagement with the programme to which they have contributed to design, pilot and shape.

In addition to sustained student participation and engagement, the study shows how to engage parents with their child's learning of the Irish language. Parental engagement in the current study was supported by teacher-researcher/child/parent partnership, underpinned by a PAR approach and enacted through a community of practice of learners. This could be an exemplar for other school-home (Irish language) learning initiatives in the future and could support school evaluation (SSE) processes.

The study provides an in-depth qualitative analysis of the child and parent learner experience as learners of Irish as an additional language in an English-medium setting. Specifically, learners share their experiences of student-parent tutoring, whereby both child and parents reflected on their own engagement and that of their child/parent, peer tutoring and technology-mediated language learning in the Irish language teaching and learning context. This provides insights into the linguistic and social experience of learners of Irish at primary level and also, to a lesser degree, engagement with Irish as an adult learner.

### **8.3 Recommendations for Practice, Research and Policy**

This section will present recommendations for practice, research, and policy based on the findings of the current study.

#### **8.3.1 Recommendations for Practice**

Broadly speaking, the development of the teaching and learning of Irish as a social practice is fundamental to the progression of Irish as an additional language as a school subject to a language of relevance and purpose in learners' lives. This can be achieved by creating meaningful domains of use for learners, both inside and outside the classroom, on a phased basis. An overarching recommendation for practice constitutes the piloted implementation of SCT-informed approaches on an integrated basis with the Primary Languages Curriculum

and current school Irish language resources and the development of a professional space to discuss such practices. This can be divided into a series of strategies, which could operate as suite of options for practice, or progression along a continuum of practice.

This current study initially explored peer tutoring (PT) in the Irish language classroom with one class. Development and design of PT frameworks and lesson plans which could be integrated with both Primary Language Curriculum objectives and schools' respective whole school planning, schemes of work and chosen textbooks would facilitate a class-level or school-level piloting of PT in English medium schools. The piloting of PT could be considered as part of a broader language plan for the school which would assess the scale and pace of initiative introduction upon a language teaching and learning continuum. Developing students' capacity to be engaged tutors and tutees during PT phase in turn facilitates a later introduction of child-parent tutoring. Similarly, PT child-parent tutoring can draw on dedicated resources which at a lesson level complement ongoing Irish language teaching and learning in the class, and at a participatory and evaluative level facilitate all stakeholders to review and evaluate learning progress regularly and cumulatively. It is also recommended that technology mediated language-learning is utilised and optimised in order to create a virtual domain of use for learners to engage with the Irish language (e.g. a class online learning zone, and/or the curated use of social media). Given the recent advances in online learning at primary level due to school lockdowns during the pandemic, teachers of Irish can optimise the most effective approaches in utilising technology. In addition to the introduction of SCT-informed language learning approaches from a pedagogical and design perspective, it is also recommended to establish Communities of Practice (CoP) in relation to discussing and sharing practice of SCT-informed Irish language teaching and learning. A CoP could have different compositions for different purposes; a teacher-child-parent CoP, as evidenced in this current study, can seek to collectively design and evaluate language teaching and learning in relation to a class-level experience. A school-level CoP could consist of teachers sharing their experience of SCT-informed ILTL, to inform best practice at class and school level. A local or regional CoP could consist of teachers from a cluster of schools working together to share best practice in relation to SCT-informed ILTL.

### ***8.3.2 Recommendations for Research***

Recommendations for research are closely related to developing and exploring practice further in relation to Irish language teaching and learning in English-medium education (EME).

This current study reviewed the implementation of SCT-informed Irish teaching and learning at class level. A broader pilot and evaluation of SCT-informed Irish language teaching and learning (peer tutoring, student-parent tutoring and technology-mediated language learning or combination therein) across a number of classes and/or schools would inform practice further. Review and evaluation of in-class peer tutoring is recommended as a priority starting point. To this end, it is recommended to develop research-informed Irish language support materials for teachers and learners of Irish as an additional language that would assist and inform a broader engagement with this teaching approach.

The current study concentrated on exploring (i) the impact on learner Irish language usage, self-assessed Irish ability, attitudes, and motivation, (ii) learner experience during the learning journey, and (iii) the influence of a participatory approach. While the teacher-researcher reviewed video analysis of in-class peer interaction to inform lesson planning and content, student interactions were not formally analysed through an applied linguistic lens. It is recommended that a further pilot would include or prioritise social discourse analysis (Mercer, 2004) of peer-peer interactions during peer tutoring, in order to track Irish language proficiency, and explore instances of translanguaging further (Duarte, 2019).

Relatedly, the development of assessment resources in order to equip Irish language educators and learners on their teaching and learning journeys is essential. Development and piloting of a suite Irish language assessment tools & learning portfolio dedicated to the English primary sector is recommended. Ideally, these evaluative tools and resources would include learner proficiency, use & engagement, attitudes and motivation, language awareness, and language learning autonomy. It is proposed that assessment tools and resources would complement and support the rationale of the integrated Primary Languages Curriculum (NCCA, 2019a) and demonstrate cognisance of the endangered, additional, and multilingual language context.

In terms of technology-mediated Irish language learning (TMLL), European-funded research could explore future possibilities in this regard in partnership with other international partners researching TMLL at primary level, with respect to other endangered language contexts such as the Basque Country, Wales, and Scotland.

In relation to communities of practice (CoP), it is recommended that research in relation to the development, coordination, maintenance and learning outcomes of communities of practice (CoP) with regard to Irish teaching and learning be explored, which would involve school, learner, and community partners. The involvement of educators, learners of Irish, and relevant community and inter-agency stakeholders to inform how to develop the teaching and learning of Irish in English-medium schools at local level could inform a broader national effort.

### ***8.3.3 Recommendations for Policy***

Building on the recommendations for practice and research, recommendations for policy will now be suggested. Firstly, the consideration of appropriate terminology that relates to learners and speakers of Irish is recommended on a consultative basis whereby learners are included in the process (examples of some terms: Irish as a second or additional language (Dunne, 2020), new learner, learner of Irish, reconnecting learner of Irish, new speaker (O'Rourke et al., 2015), Irish as an additional language) Consideration of the term 'Irish as an Additional Language (IAL) as an alternative term to L2 Irish is recommended as a global term which encompasses children learning Irish as a second, third, fourth, or an additional language starting out as new Irish learners in junior primary, as well as learners of Irish of all ages for whom Irish is not their native or home language. This would reflect the reality of a multilingual Ireland across all ethnicities, including Irish people. It would also be valued to explore the established term 'new speaker' (O'Rourke et al., 2015), in relation to new learners of Irish and reconnecting learners of Irish.

It is recommended that Irish language bodies and government departments build on the global advances in technology-mediated learning in order to support the development of learning platforms, teacher competency, student and parent ICT skills in this domain. In addition, it is proposed that the state, as funder and research partner, support and enact policy development in relation to engagement with digital, blended, and remote learning, to develop

an evidence-based hybrid approach of digital and face-to-face learning of Irish as an additional language.

It is recommended that national initiatives set out in policy (Government of Ireland, 2010) are visibly and meaningfully enacted in order to increase the number of active Irish speakers, by funding and connecting Irish language family-focused initiatives, based in the community in partnership with schools to create authentic domains of use for learners of the language. This would enable learners of Irish to experience the language as a social act (Grenoble, 2021). As well as “top-down” approach where the government leads with Irish language programme implementation and funding, mechanisms whereby the state can channel and support the potential of micro-agents or ‘bottom-up’ approaches lead by educators and/or language activists in Irish language learning communities around the country should also be explored.

It is essential at policy level to ensure the provision of further, ongoing continuing professional development and language proficiency development for teachers of Irish as an Additional Language (IAL). This, in turn, assists the integration of training and support from the Department of Education and school-level support such as the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) English-medium schools to fully embrace the potential of the new curriculum. It is important that continuing professional development also contextualises the teaching and learning of Irish and addresses the “complex issues that affect teaching Irish as both a medium and as a subject in the primary sector” (Ó Ceallaigh & Ní Dhonnabháin, 2015), and the complexity of teaching and learning an endangered language. In addition, funded or subsidised language programmes for teachers is essential (as evidence in Wales and the Basque country (Van Donghera, 2017), especially at primary level, where teachers in the English-medium sector are not necessarily Irish language subject specialists in the English-medium sector.

#### **8.4 Future Work**

This study piloted and reviewed two SCT-informed approaches to Irish language teaching and learning supported by a participatory methodology. The findings indicate positive outcomes in terms of increased language use, increased self-assessed Irish ability and promising indications in terms of attitude and motivation towards the Irish language. Based

on these findings, it is intended to create teaching resources both in terms of principles of practice and adaptable language teaching resources, to support other practitioners to pilot PT in the Irish language classroom, and facilitate student-parent Irish language tutoring as a school-home initiative.

While engagement with the pedagogic approaches of tutoring and Web 2.0 technology-mediated learning were reviewed and analysed, the scope of the current study specified (i) Irish language use and self-assessed Irish ability and (ii) Attitude and motivation towards the Irish languages as the measurable outcomes. The data collection predominantly involved student and parent feedback, coupled with teacher-researcher reflection.

PT, student-parent tutoring, and technology-mediated language learning in the context of Irish as an Additional Language (IAL) would all benefit from dedicated research in their own right. Specific study and analysis of peer-peer interactions during PT from an applied linguistics approach over the course of a school term or year, would further inform the effectiveness of PT in the IAL context. It would shed light on the nature of peer-peer interactions, the role of tutor/tutee and the level of L1 mediation in addition to Irish language exchanges. Student-parent tutoring would also benefit from analysis and review of child-parent language interactions.

A more in-depth design and analysis of technology-mediated language learning and pedagogy, supported by the input of educational technologists or Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) researchers to inform on best practice is a potential next step in developing the technology-mediated language teaching and learning approaches. With specialist input and support, the appropriate technologies could not only be utilised for language learning but technological means could be employed to monitor learner engagement. Further exploration of technological affordances and development of web-based IAL resources for both children and families is also a priority.

We can reflect that “while the challenges in revitalising an endangered language are significant, it is argued that “the way forward is also better defined than before, as a clearer understanding emerges of what is needed” (O’Grady, 2018, p. 332).

## 8.5 Conclusion

This chapter has revisited and discussed this study's aims as set out in Chapter 1. The contributions of this research have been summarised in relation to both Irish language teaching and learning and participatory methodologies. Building on the research in this study, future work and avenues of research have been explored and discussed.

The integration of a sociocultural theory-informed approach to Irish language teaching and learning seeks to support and enrich an existing communicative approach while creating opportunities for peer interaction, as a potential catalyst to increase Irish language interactions for children in English-medium schools. Further Irish language opportunities relating to other parts of the school day and school-led home-based activities could also enrich Irish language opportunities by (re)introducing Irish to children's homes, empowering the child as the More Knowledgeable Other and providing a springboard for shared family and community Irish language activities and engagement. While the current study was implemented on a small-scale in a particular context, the underpinning theories are transferrable, the pedagogical approaches and resources are adaptable, and the principles of a participatory approach can be embraced by a willing collective. At a pivotal time for the teaching and learning of Irish as an additional language (Hickey & Stenson, 2016a), this current study can inform policy in order to implement sustainable efforts to increase Irish language engagement opportunities for our learners and citizens in a multicultural society.

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