

Marino Institute of Education

Title: Parents' and Their Children's Perspectives on Emergent Writing

**Thesis by
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Declaration:

I hereby declare that this dissertation is a presentation of my original research work.

Wherever contributions of others are involved, every effort is made to indicate this clearly.

This work has not been submitted previously at this or any other educational institution. The

work was done under the guidance of Siobhan McGovern at the Marino Institute of

Education, Dublin. I agree that the Library may lend or copy this dissertation upon request.

Kerry Harkin

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	8
List of Figures.....	9
List of Tables	9
List of Abbreviations	9
Chapter 1. Introduction	10
1.1 Rationale for the Study.....	10
1.2 Research Question.....	11
1.3 Structure of the Thesis.....	12
Chapter 2. Literature Review	14
2.1 Street’s Theory of Literacy as a Social Practice	15
2.1.1 Other theoretical frameworks that support this theory.	16
2.1.1.1 Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory.	16
2.1.1.2 Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory.	17
2.1.1.3 Digital Literacy.	17
2.2 Definitions of Literacy	18
2.2.1 Definitions of emergent literacy.	19
2.2.1.1 Emergent writing.	20
2.3 The Importance of Writing.....	22
2.3.1 Writing is functional.....	22
2.3.2 Writing is used for communication.	23
2.3.3 Writing is used for self-reflection.....	23
2.3.4. Writing gives children a voice.....	24
2.3.4 The nature of emergent writing in schools.	24
2.3.4.1 Children’s identities ‘as writers’ in the classroom.....	26
2.4 Family Literacy	27
2.4.1 The importance of family literacy for English language learners.	28
2.4.1.1 Writing for English Language Learners.	29
2.4.2 The influence of digital literacy on family literacy.	30
2.4.2.1 Digital tools within the classroom.	32
2.5 Partnerships between Homes and Schools	32
2.6 Conclusion.....	33
Chapter Three. Methodology.....	35
3.1 Research Methodology: Philosophical paradigms	35
3.2 Research Sample	36

3.2.1 Participants.	37
3.3 Research Methods and Design	38
3.3.1 Journals.....	39
3.3.2 Semi-structured interviews.....	40
3.3.3 Focus groups.....	40
3.3.4 Image-based documents.....	41
3.4 Data Analysis	41
3.5 Validity and Reliability	43
3.6 Reflexivity.....	43
3.7 Ethics.....	44
3.8 Limitations	46
3.9 Conclusion.....	47
Chapter 4: Findings	48
4.1.1 The importance of writing.....	48
4.1.2 Writing development.....	50
4.1.3 The young child as a writer.....	53
4.2.2 The link between agency and motivation for writing.....	57
4.2.3 An authentic audience as a motivator for writing.....	57
4.3 Family Literacy	58
4.3.1 Reading and writing events in the home.....	58
4.3.2 Emergent writing and digital tools.....	61
4.3.3 Emergent writing in the home language.....	62
4.4 Conclusion.....	64
Chapter 5: Discussion	66
5.1 Writing is Important	66
5.1.1 Supporting children's writing.....	67
5.1.1.2 Informal literacy events are underappreciated in the home.....	67
5.1.1.3 Parental concerns on young children using digital tools.....	69
5.2 Understandings of Early Writing	69
5.2.1 Factors that influence attitudes towards early writing.....	70
5.2.1.1 Lack of public discourse on emergent writing.....	70
5.2.1.1 Experiences with other educational systems.....	71
5.2.2 Children's understandings of early writing.....	72
5.2.2 The identity of the child as a writer.....	73
5.2.2.1 The identity of boys as writers.....	75

5.2.3 Understandings of early writing in relation to home languages.....	75
5.3 The motivation for writing in the home	76
5.3.1 Social relationships.....	76
5.3.2 Self-initiated writing activities.	78
5.3.2.1 Lack of engagement in homework tasks.....	78
5.4 Conclusion.....	79
Chapter 6. Conclusion	80
6.1 Main Findings	80
6.1.2 Do parent and children understandings of early writing, reflect an emergent writing perspective?.....	80
6.1.3 What motivates children to write in the home?.....	81
6.1.3 How do family literacy practices influence the development of early writing?....	82
6.2 Recommendations for Practice.....	82
6.2.1 Emergent writing should be foregrounded in the discourse on early years literacy.	83
6.2.2 Promotion of an intervention approach based on alliances between teacher and parents.....	83
6.2.5 Adding an element of choice to homework tasks.....	84
6. 3 Recommendations for Future Research	85
6.4 Conclusion.....	86
References.....	88
Appendices.....	105
Appendix A	105
Consent Letter: Board of Management	105
Consent Letter: Parents.....	106
Letter of consent: Children	108
Appendix B	109
Participant Journal: Example Pages	109
Interview Schedule for Parents: Pre-pilot.....	111
Interview Schedule for Parents: Post-pilot	113
Focus Group Interview Schedule	119
Appendix C	120
Examples of Analysis: Coding	120
Example of analysis: Collapsing codes into Major Themes.....	122
Appendix D	123
Examples of children’s writing: Focus Group.....	123

Examples of children's writing: Home..... 126

Abstract

One of the main functions of primary schools in Ireland, is to support children in the attainment of effective writing skills. However, when children begin their formal education in primary school, they bring with them knowledge of the written language. The emergent literacy perspective appreciates that children begin their writing journey in the home, alongside their family members in social and informal situations. Reflecting this, the aim of the research in this thesis was to investigate the perceptions of emergent writing, from the viewpoints of parents and their children.

The research was underpinned by Street's Theory of Literacy as a Social Practice. His theory promotes an ideological model of literacy, which acknowledges that children experience literacy in different contexts, and thus, bring different ideas of literacy to school. He claims that there is much schools can learn from these experiences.

The findings in this study suggested that parents may not fully understand the emergent approach to early writing. As a result, the informal literacy events that occur in homes are not always regarded as valuable learning opportunities. It also found that parental understandings of early writing, influence the ethos, the opportunities and the materials available for early writing in the home. Thus, the writing development of young children is likely to be influenced by parental perceptions. Children's understandings of early writing were in line with the emergent writing perspective. The children identified strongly as writers and were motivated to write when they were in social environments and when they were active agents in their own writing activities.

List of Figures

Figure 1. Stages of emergent writing. Reprinted from Byington and Kim (2017)

Figure 2: Perspectives of parents and children on the importance of writing Figure 3. An example of writing from Junior Infant 1 and an example of writing from Senior Infant 2.

Figure 4. Reading Events occurring in the homes, as mentioned in the journals, interviews and focus groups.

Figure 5. Writing Events occurring in the homes, as mentioned in the journals, interviews and focus groups.

List of Tables

Table 1. Family Vignettes

Table 2. Description of data Sets

Table 3. A description of the six-phrase process of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Table 4. Parent Perceptions of their Young Children as Writers

Table 5. Total Number of Reading and Writing Events in the Home

List of Abbreviations

AAP	American Academy of Paediatrics
DES	Department of Education and Skills
NAEYC	National Association for the Education of Young Children
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Framework
NELP	National Early Literacy Panel
OECD	Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

Chapter 1. Introduction

Effective literacy skills are “crucial to a person’s ability to develop fully as an individual, to live a satisfying and rewarding life and to participate fully in our society” (Department of Education and Skills [DES], 2011, p. 5). Thus, an essential function of school is to enable children to achieve their full potential in literacy, by providing exemplary opportunities for literacy learning.

Nevertheless, it is inevitable that children learn about oral and written language before entering formal schooling. As Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998) stress, children learn about literacy through observing and interacting in social situations. For young children, the majority of these social interactions occur with family members, in the home (Riley, 2006). This is the foundation of an emergent literacy perspective.

Understanding literacy learning from this perspective, highlights the role of family and the wider social community in the literacy development of young children and focuses on the child as an active participant in their own learning (Clay, as cited in McKenney & Bradley, 2016). The research in this study, acknowledges that the perceptions of parents’ and children on literacy need to be examined, so that future school practices, curricula, interventions and policies can reflect these understandings.

1.1 Rationale for the Study

The vital role played by families in the education of their children, has long been established in Ireland, with the Constitution stating that “the primary and natural educator of the child is the family” (Bunreacht na hÉireann, 1937, Article 42.1).

In the last decade, new curricula and policies have been introduced in our schools, which reinstate and re-emphasise the family as the first teacher of the child. In 2009, Aistear: The early childhood curriculum framework (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment [NCCA], 2009) was introduced. It pays particular attention to the relationships

between schools and families. It stresses that positive partnerships between the two, is the key to developing and nurturing children's literacy development.

In 2011, a National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy was launched by the DES. This Strategy was initiated due to a decline in the results of students, in the 2009 Programme for International Student Assessment [PISA] (Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2010). The strategy (DES, 2011) conveys that parental support is essential for children's educational success. It documents that a key strategy in raising the literacy levels of children, is to increase parental involvement in education, especially in their early years.

In 2015, a new Primary Language Curriculum (DES/ NCCA, 2015) replaced the English Curriculum of 1999 (DES/ NCCA, 1999). The vision of this curriculum is that children develop along a progression continuum, at a pace that matches their needs. It reflects the reality that most schools include children who speak English as an additional language and are therefore, likely to develop at different rates. This is reinforced by the data in the latest Census (Central Statistics Office, 2016) which highlight that 13% of people in Ireland speak a language other than English or Irish, in the home.

The research carried out for this thesis is highly relevant to Ireland's current climate. It reflects the re-emphasis of the family's role in education, involves participants from diverse backgrounds and recognises that literacy in today's society consists of both traditional technologies and contemporary technologies.

1.2 Research Question

Evidence (National Early Literacy Panel [NELP], 2008; Purcell-Gates, as cited in Riley, 2006; Sulzby & Teale, 1991; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998) strongly suggests that the development of emergent literacy skills, is fundamental to later success in literacy. These

emergent literacy skills can be divided into three strands: Oral language, reading and writing (DES/ NCCA, 2015).

The study in this thesis seeks to focus on the strand of writing. Literature reveals that it is the area of emergent literacy which has received the least attention in research, in recent years (De Smedt & Van Keer, 2013; National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2009; NELP, 2008; Puranik, Al Otaiba, Sidler, & Grelich, 2014; Rowe & Neitzel, 2010).

This thesis also aims to illuminate the essential nature of writing. As described by De Smedt and Van Keer (2013) “effective writing skills are considered to be indispensable to participate in contemporary society” (p. 693). Literature supports the importance of writing, acknowledging that:

- Writing develops the voice and agency of the child (Johnson, 2007).
- Writing is a method of communication (Canada’s Ministry of Education, 2007).
- Writing is functional (Gillen & Hall, 2003).
- Writing develops higher mental functioning such as metacognition (Riley, 2006).

Thus, this thesis ‘*Parents’ and Their Children’s Perspectives on Emergent Writing*’ is guided by the following research questions:

- Do parent and children understandings of early writing, reflect an emergent writing perspective?
- What motivates children to write in the home?
- How do family literacy practices influence the development of early writing?

1.3 Structure of the Thesis

This study comprises of six distinct chapters. This first chapter introduces the research topic and provides an overview and purpose of this research. It also clarifies the context and relevance of the research question.

Chapter Two provides a critical review of the relevant literature, underpinning the theoretical framework on which this research is based. It also examines the key theories of emergent writing and family literacy.

Chapter Three describes the methodological aspects of this research and provides a rationale for the research design. It includes an explanation of the data collection, data analysis, the research participants and details the ethical considerations of this study.

Chapter Four presents the findings, that emerged from this research. The data is presented thematically through figures, graphs and direct quotes by the participants.

Chapter Five incorporates a detailed analysis of the research findings from Chapter Four. These findings are discussed and draw references to relevant literature from Chapter Two.

Chapter Six, concludes with a summary of the main findings, in relation to the research questions. The limitations of this study are highlighted, and recommendations for future research is proposed.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

A distinct principle of an emergent literacy perspective is that writing, reading and oral language are central and interdependent processes of literacy development (Clay, 2001; DES/NCCA, 2015; Kennedy, 2008; Kennedy et al., 2012; Lawrence & Snow, 2001; Riley, 2006; Sulzby & Teale, 1991; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). Helman (2012) defines this interdependency as a synchrony. She describes that the development of one, aids the development of the other. However, Elbow (2004) suggests that writing is often less of a priority in literacy learning, than reading. He draws attention to the phrase ‘writing and reading’, acknowledging that the phrase is usually reversed. A large body of evidence (NAEYC, 2009; NELP, 2008; Puranik et al., 2014; Rowe & Neitzel, 2010; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998; Yaden, Rowe & MacGillivray, 1995) substantiate his claim, indicating that recent research on emergent literacy has largely focused on the strands of oral language and reading, at the expense of the writing strand.

Although writing and reading are interdependent processes, the characteristic separating the two is the voice and ownership involved in the process. Ackerman (2016) states that reading expects children to interpret the ideas, messages and thoughts of someone else. In contrast, writing “is about finding...our own true voice” and gives this voice “an opportunity to be expressed” (The Duchess of Abercorn, cited in O’Toole, 2016, p.139). Similarly, Purcell-Gates (as cited in Riley, 2006) maintains that the distinct difference between written language and oral language, is that writing can be used to communicate over space and time, in the absence of a shared physical context. She adds that this makes the thoughts, beliefs and emotions of the writer permanent.

As emergent literacy encompasses that literacy develops from “womb to tomb”, it is of paramount importance that parental perceptions and children’s experiences of writing in the home is examined (Kennedy et al., 2012, p. 10). Research by Bradford and Wyse

(2013) indicate that positive parental perceptions about writing is likely to generate better outcomes for children's writing development.

This chapter firstly seeks to explain the theoretical frameworks that underpin this research. Secondly it defines and illustrates an emergent literacy perspective. Thirdly, it highlights the importance of writing, and outlines the relationship between emergent writing and school literacy. Subsequently, family literacy practices in relation to emergent writing will be examined. Finally, this chapter will establish the importance of building effective partnerships between homes and schools, so that children can experience cohesive literacy learning experiences.

2.1 Street's Theory of Literacy as a Social Practice

Street (as cited in Gillen & Hall, 2003) explains that "from different cultural contexts children would be bringing very different conceptions of literacy to the autonomous practices of school literacy" (p. 7). Street (2003a) elaborates that this autonomous approach assumes that literacy is a "technical and neutral skill" that needs to be mastered and does not consider the purposes for which literacy is used (p. 2). He adds that this approach simply imposes the values of the school onto all families, regardless of their cultures. In contrast, Street (2003a) concludes that the ideological model of literacy offers a "culturally sensitive view of literacy practices as they vary from one context to another".

Dewey (as cited in Street, 2003b) highlighted that a prominent problem in education, is that children are unable to utilize and apply the experiences they get outside of the home, to what they are learning in school. Literacy as a Social Practice aims to bridge this gap, so that children can transfer the education they receive in school to their home setting, and vice-versa. This is achieved through an ideological approach to literacy, acknowledging that young children experience literacy in different cultural, social, economic and political contexts, and bring different ideas of literacy to school (Street, 1984).

Street's (2016) Literacy as a Social Practice theory refers to the "nature of literacy in use" (p.336). It constitutes that literacy is learnt through everyday interactions in both formal and informal settings, to achieve social goals (Larson & Marsh, 2005). This brings alive the notion of 'family literacy' (Gillen & Hall, 2003, p. 7). Street (1984, 2003b) claims that there is much schools can learn from children's literacy experiences in the home. His primary belief is that all interactions are significant and need to be understood. Once these interactions are understood, literacy learning can become functional, authentic and meaningful.

2.1.1 Other theoretical frameworks that support this theory.

Larson and Marsh (2005) illustrate that educators can draw from multiple theories, to provide a balanced literacy framework for young children. Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural Theory, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System's Theory and The Digital Literacy perspective coincide with the theory of Literacy as a Social Practice, augmenting and substantiating Street's beliefs. Together, these theoretical frameworks emphasise that teachers need to recognize and appreciate the literacy practices of the family and of the wider community.

2.1.1.1 Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory.

Vygotsky is the father of sociocultural theory. Vygotsky believed that learning is inherently social and is influenced by the cultural context in which interactions occur. This concept was the basis for Street's later theories. Vygotsky's theory was founded on the belief that children first experience language around them. Through scaffolding from a more knowledgeable other, this language is internalised, and from this, understanding develops (Gillen & Hall, 2003). For a young child, a considerable amount of these interactions occur within the family (Riley, 2006). Bruner extends Vygotsky's sociocultural perspective, explaining that children negotiate their social environments and assimilate the practices of their surrounding community (Hall, 2003).

2.1.1.2 Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory.

Bronfenbrenner's (2002) Ecological Systems Theory, like Vygotsky and Street, highlights the social nature of learning. His primary belief was that social contexts play a vital role in the development of a child, as no child lives in an isolated vacuum (Hayes, O'Toole, & Halpenny, 2017). Consequently, the family plays a vital role in the development of a child, as children develop through their relationships with their family. However, children also learn through the interactions they have with their neighbourhood, community, society and public policies (French, 2007).

This theory highlights that a child's knowledge, attitudes and skills are affected by the relationship that is constructed between their parents and their teachers. O' Toole (2016) reveals that "real children with real families in real schools do not exist in compartmentalised worlds" (p. 19).

2.1.1.3 Digital Literacy.

Digital Literacy is defined as a "social practice that involves reading, writing and multimodal meaning-making through the use of a range of digital technologies" (Sefton-Green, Marsh, Erstad & Flewitt, as cited in Marsh, 2016, p. 180). Carrington (2007) highlights that this generation of children, are immersed in a technology-rich environment and have never experienced life prior to the pre-digital era. She describes that digital technologies are so integral and unremarkable for these children, that it only becomes visible in its absence.

The Digital Literacy theory suggests that there is a need to reframe and restructure the way that literacy development is approached. Echoing Street's theories, the Digital Literacy theory, emphasises that young children should have the opportunity to engage with multimodal texts, both at home and at school. From this, children can learn how to effectively participate in various literacy environments (Carrington, 2007).

2.2 Definitions of Literacy

As demonstrated by the Digital Literacy theory, literacy is a multi-faceted concept. Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998) explain that it is complicated by changing conceptualizations on what constitutes as literacy. Historically, people could be defined as being literate or illiterate: There were those who could read and write, and those who could not read and write (Street, 2016). This concept of literacy has evolved.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 2005) recognises that literacy is a tool of for empowerment, enabling individuals to achieve their goals, and leading them to the realisation that they have a voice. Writing is a fundamental way in which individuals can express their voice, as it makes their thoughts and opinions permanent. There is an onus on adults, to respect that children have the right to express their voice and their views freely in all matters affecting them (United Nations, 1989).

Multiple documents (Eivers, Shiel & Shortt, 2004; UNESCO, 2011) acknowledge that literacy has a clear functional role in society. The OECD (2006) describe being literate as having the skills to understand, use and reflect “on written texts, in order to achieve one’s goals, to develop one’s knowledge and potential, and to participate in society” (p. 1).

Drawing on the Digital Literacy perspective, there is an increasing need to broaden the understanding of what it means to be literate (Bogard & McMackin, 2012). From this viewpoint being literate involves having the skills to understand and communicate effectively “through the spoken language, printed text, broadcast media and digital media” (DES, 2011, p. 8). The Aistear Framework (NCCA, 2009) epitomises the above points and provides a dynamic interpretation of literacy, stating that:

Literacy... is about helping children to communicate with others and to make sense of the world. It includes oral and written language and other sign systems ...

Literacy also acknowledges the changing nature of information communication technology and the many forms of representation relevant to children (p. 56).

2.2.1 Definitions of emergent literacy.

It was Clay, in 1966, who first introduced the idea of Emergent Literacy. She signified that children are in the process of becoming literate, from birth (1979). Since her early work, multiple authors have expanded this area. Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998) offer many insights into the area of emergent literacy. They describe it as a “continuum” which occurs from “exposure to interactions in the social contexts in which literacy is a component, and in the absence of formal instruction” (p.848). This idea is also central to Street’s theories of Literacy as a Social Practice. The Aistear Framework (NCCA, 2009) supports an emergent literacy perspective, as portrayed in their definition of literacy.

Prior to the emergent literacy perspective, a reading readiness approach was adopted broadly across early childhood settings. This approach was founded on the belief that children were blank slates upon entering formal education (Barrat-Pugh & Rohl, 2000). It claimed that children’s agency was inconsequential, and that children needed to be manipulated and schooled by teachers in order to learn about literacy (Gillen & Hall, 2003). It also indicated that children must learn to read, before they could learn to write. Criticising this approach, Ferrero and Teberosky (as cited in Gillen & Hall, 2003) concluded that it was irrational to envisage that children, who are surrounded by print in their everyday lives, do not have any understandings of literacy until attending school.

The Aistear Framework argues that emergent literacy is the “foundation for reading and writing” (NCCA, 2009, p. 54). A large body of evidence (NELP, 2008; Purcell-Gates, as cited in Riley, 2006; Sulzby & Teale, 1991) validates this indicating that the acquisition of emergent literacy skills, is a powerful predictor for later reading and writing achievement.

Although the term ‘emergent literacy’ is absent from the Primary Language Curriculum (DES/NCCA, 2015) it nevertheless supports an emergent literacy perspective, as it acknowledges that children “come to school with different language experiences” (p. 12). It also recognises that writing, reading and oral language are interconnected, which is a key principle in the emergent literacy perspective (Kiely, 2017).

2.2.1.1 Emergent writing.

Emergent writing is the combination of scribbles, shapes, drawing, talk and gesture, letter-like symbols and invented spelling, used by a young child to express meaning in written form before they can write and spell conventionally (Byington & Kim, 2017; Gentry, 2000; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998; Williams & Hufnagel, 2005; Yaden et al., 1995).

Byington and Kim (2017) explain that emergent writing involves a child’s “first attempts at the writing process” (p.1). They identify that the first steps in the process to writing conventionally are drawing, scribbling and mark-making (see Figure 1). Therefore, children delve into writing before they have any understanding of the alphabetic principle. Rowe’s (2003) views are in line with this. She outlines that children become writers when “they indicate that they have created a message with the intention to communicate” (p. 259).

Vygotsky believes that children attempt to “draw their speech” through the act of scribbling (as cited in Williams & Hufnagel, 2005, p. 235). Research carried out by Strickland and Morrow (1989) uphold this belief. They found that children ‘read’ their drawings, as if they were words. Likewise, Riley (2006) states that it is through the construction of scribbling and drawing that children come to realise that their writing is a permanent record of their speech, and that they can use literacy and writing to reconstruct and reinvent the world for themselves.








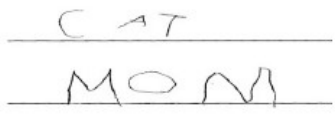

Stages of Emergent Writing		
Stage	Description	Example
Drawing	Drawings that represent writing	
Scribbling	Marks or scribbles the child intends to be writing	
Wavy scribbles or mock handwriting	Wavy scribbles that imitate cursive writing and have a left-to-right progression; child pretends to write words	
Letter-like forms or mock letters	Letters and marks that resemble letter-like shapes	
Letter strings	Strings of letters that do not create words, written left to right, including uppercase and lowercase letters	
Transitional writing	Letters with spaces in between to resemble words; letters/words copied from environmental print; letters often reversed	
Invented or phonetic spelling	Different ways to represent the sounds in words; the first letter of the word or beginning and ending sounds represent the entire word	
Beginning word and phrase writing	Words with beginning, middle, and ending letter sounds; short phrases	
Conventional spelling and sentence writing	Correct spelling of words, generally the child's name and words such as <i>mom</i> and <i>dad</i> ; sentences with punctuation and correct use of uppercase and lowercase letters	

Figure 1. Stages of emergent writing. Reprinted from Byington and Kim (2017)

Coates and Coates (2015) report their concern that literature dismisses the role of scribbling in young children's expressive and cognitive development. They emphasise that adults can better interpret the meaning behind the scribbles and drawings of young children, by paying close attention to the inner dialogue of the child whilst they engage in these activities. Valuing children's early attempts at writing is vital, as it increases self-esteem, and subsequently increases children's natural desire to write (Graves, 1984).

Ackerman (2016) illustrates that children are encouraged to talk and to speak, before they have a full grasp on oral language, likewise they are encouraged to look at books before they can read. She argues that writing, should be perceived in the same way, stating that children should “not be expected to form letters neatly, spell perfectly, or use punctuation accurately before being invited to write (p. 201)”. Furthermore, Bean and Bouffler (as cited in Kervin & McKenzie, 2005) stress that “the greatest barrier to writing ... development is the excessive emphasis given to standard spelling before children even put pen to paper” (pp. 2-3).

2.3 The Importance of Writing

2.3.1 Writing is functional.

Researchers first became interested in functional literacy after the Second World War, as they began to explore what people used literacy for in their everyday lives (Gillen & Hall, 2003). The idea that writing is used daily for a variety of purposes, directly relates to Street’s theory of Literacy as a Social Practice. In her research, Riley (2006) noticed that the literacy development of children flourishes when they use the written language for functional purposes, within the home. The United Kingdom Literacy Association (2008) support her observations, stating that the concept of literacy becomes concrete for children, when they actively use their literacy skills, for real purposes, within real contexts.

Through playing, children have the opportunity to use their writing in ways that are authentic and meaningful, but also fun and enjoyable (Boyle and Charles, 2010). The NCCA (2009) states that writing during play allows children to practice their skills, test their theories, make adaptations and discover more elaborate concepts in a non-pressurised environment. McNaughton (1997) reports that playful activities, foster a higher level of writing development as it encourages and motivates children to write functionally. Through the co-construction of narratives with peers and adults during play, children can mimic the

social world by writing for various purposes, such as invitations, menus, lists, signs, cards, letters etc. Writers thrive in this positive and pleasant environment (McNaughton, 1997).

2.3.2 Writing is used for communication.

Writing is an act of communication. Canada's Ministry of Education (2007) acknowledge that being literate is about being able to communicate your thoughts and messages to others. From this viewpoint, writing is a purposeful and essential activity. Browne (2001) explains that young children begin to comprehend the communicative purposes of writing when they realise that what they say, can also be written down.

Akin to Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, Aram and Besser-Biron (2017) advocate the importance of relationships and positive interactions, for a young child's literacy development. In their research, they found that parents frequently act as an audience for their children's writing and respond with praise. They demonstrate that these interactions build on the socio-emotional development of their children, enhancing their self-esteem. This emotional response makes children more likely to repeat the writing activity (Evans & Shaw, 2008). According to Ellison and Wu (2008), the presence of an authentic audience compels children to become more invested in the task of writing.

2.3.3 Writing is used for self-reflection.

Browne (2001) establishes that writing is a tool for recording and organising one's own thoughts. Writing enables children to think about thinking, which in turn, develops higher mental functions such as metacognition and reasoning (Riley, 2006). Hayes (1996) reinforces that "writing is an intellectual activity requiring cognitive processes and memory" (p. 5).

Kennedy's (2008) doctoral research discovered that more emphasis was placed on the development of metacognition, in writing lessons than in reading lessons, due to the reflective element of writing. The OECD (2006) refers to the importance of reflection in

their definition of literacy. Bradford and Wyse (2013) elaborate that when children use metacognitive processes during writing, then they are more likely to perceive themselves as writers.

2.3.4. Writing gives children a voice.

Ackerman (2016) emphasises that the characteristic separating writing and reading, is the voice and ownership involved in the process. She explains that writing enables children to find, develop and express their own unique voice.

According to Bakhtin, power, voice and agency are interrelated (Fisher, 2011). Hall (2010) explains that young children feel in control and powerful, when they develop their voice, through the process of writing. She explains that “power is related to agency as one cannot be powerful without agency” (p.105). This notion of power reflects the digital media age, which is saturated by bloggers who are self-proclaimed ‘influencers’. These authors use writing to become powerful, to exert their opinions onto others, and to shape attitudes of the readers (Hsu, Huang, Ko & Wang, 2014).

Multiple documents (Coople & Bredekamp, 2009; De Smedt & Van Keer, 2014; NAEYC, 2007; NCCA, 2009) exemplify that adults should assist children in developing their agency in the area of writing. Johnson (2007) outlines that having control over their own writing, motivates children to write. She emphasises that “children learn best when what they are learning matters to them” (p. 317).

2.3.4 The nature of emergent writing in schools.

As aforementioned writing is used as a functional tool, it is used to communicate with others, it enables self-reflection and it enables children to have a voice. Therefore, it is essential that teachers support children in using emergent writing in the classroom (Hall, Simpson, Guo & Wang, 2015). Disconcertingly, research in America across 81 classrooms, discovered that on average, children only participated in emergent writing activities for two

minutes a day (Pelatti, Piasta, Justice & O'Connell, 2014). Recommendations by the NAEYC (2007) suggest that teachers can facilitate a positive approach towards writing in the early years, by accepting all writing attempts, by modelling writing, by providing free access to writing materials, by using a process approach and by creating a supportive learning environment.

Beminger and Swanson (1994) describe how writing is a complex task for young children, as it places huge demands on their working memory. They explain how children have to grapple with letter formation, and the basic skills of writing words and sentences, which challenges their ability to convert their thoughts and ideas on paper. Following this, Puranik and Lonigan (2014) indicate that there are three distinct, but interrelated skills associated with emergent writing. They outline that teachers, need to model, explicitly teach and engage children in activities based on each of these three skills. They name and describe them as follows:

1. **Conceptual Knowledge:** Children recognize the purpose of writing and understand the function of writing.
2. **Procedural Knowledge:** Children acquire knowledge for writing letters and words, such as alphabetic and code-related knowledge.
3. **Generative Knowledge:** Children learn how to compose phrases and sentences, to translate meaning.

These three skills parallel the division of emergent skills into two areas: constrained skills and unconstrained skills. Lennox (2013) outlines that constrained skills, such as print knowledge, alphabetic knowledge and phonological awareness can be mastered within a limited time frame. In contrast, unconstrained skills such as vocabulary acquisition and oral language development. continue to develop thought a lifetime.

On this note, Paris and Paris (2003) were concerned that schools are teaching constrained skills in isolation, and that this may lead to a narrow approach of literacy. Their concerns are particularly relevant to the Irish context. Several documents (DES, 2005, 2011) in recent years have highlighted that Irish classrooms pay too much attention to the teaching of constrained skills.

Countering this, Vygotsky has illustrated that “children should be taught written language, not just the writing of letters” (as cited in Riley, 2006, p. 125). Likewise, Kennedy et al. (2012) recommend that the emphasis of literacy in the classroom should be focused on “meaning and communication from the outset, so children’s language skills and higher-order thinking skills are enhanced in parallel with the basic skills” (p. 15). They concede that this promotes a balanced approach to school literacy, integrating the teaching of constrained skills, whilst providing opportunities for children to apply these skills in meaningful situations. This again coincides with Street’s (1984) ideological model of literacy, in which he emphasises that literacy is not simply a neutral skill but is embedded within social contexts.

2.3.4.1 Children’s identities ‘as writers’ in the classroom.

Street’s ideological model of literacy (1984) argues that literacy is never neutral and is always influenced by the viewpoints of the participants. The ideological model of literacy outlines that people’s past experiences, influence what they read and talk about (Moje & Luke, 2009). Bearne (2005) endorses that there should be an emphasis on the children’s identities as writers, in the classroom. She adds that changing the teaching focus, from learning to write – to becoming a writer – gives children a positive mindset, embraces their backgrounds and boosts their confidence in writing. The NAEYC (2007) note that children’s motivation is increased when they are respected as authors and as learners.

Conversely, Brown, Byrnes, Raban and Watson (2012) state that children may not view themselves as writers, until they begin to write in a conventional manner. This is significant, as in order for children to *become* writers, they first must believe that they *are* writers (Ackerman, 2016). When children bring their identity to their writing, they can establish their voice and determine their ‘stance’ (Hong, 2015; Moje & Luke, 2009).

The incorporation of the ‘Writing Workshop’ in the classroom, solidifies children’s experiences and self-identification as writers. This approach was first developed by Graves (1984). It is based on the journey of a ‘real’ writer, incorporating the elements of planning, drafting, editing, revising, conferring and publishing. Kennedy (2008) notes that throughout this writing process, the focus is firmly on the writer. During the Writer’s Workshop children are free to choose their own topics and/ or their own genres, for writing. This increases their motivation, and hence increases the quality of their work (Ackerman, 2016; Graves, 1984). Allowing children this choice is important, as the personal interests of the children are embodied with their personal identities (Rowe & Neitzel, 2010).

2.4 Family Literacy

Each of the theoretical frameworks mentioned previously, highlights the social nature of literacy. In 1983, Taylor (as cited in Gillen & Hall, 2003) coined the phrase ‘family literacy’. Family Literacy practices are related to the social, naturalistic activities and practices that occur in the home, which contribute to children’s developing literacy skills. Auerbach (1995) stated that schools need to understand, recognise and embrace these literacy practices, by building on the knowledge of the children and being culturally sensitive to the literacy practices within these families. Cairney (2003) affirms this argument, adding that an “acceptance of cultural differences between home and school can lead to more responsive curricula that offer all children greater chances of success in learning” (p. 86). When teachers make connections to the children’s prior learning

experiences, they can create situations in the classroom that sustain and capture their literacy interests (Donovan, Milewicz & Smokin, 2003).

Powerful evidence (Barrat-Pugh & Rohl, 2002; Bradford & Wyse, 2013; Brown et al., 2012; Donovan et al., 2003; Pinto, Bigozzi, Gamannossi & Vezzani, 2012; Street, 2003b) show that children's first encounters with the written language are in their homes and communities, in informal reading and writing situations. In the homes, children are exposed to a diverse range of literacy practices, which may involve activities such as reading junk mail, browsing on social media, religious readings, writing thank you notes, writing emails and messages, shopping online etc (Brown et al., 2012; Donovan et al., 2003). Donovan et al. (2003) explain that exposing and involving young children in these literacy behaviours fosters their interests and positive dispositions towards writing and reading. They argue that it increases children's understandings and knowledge of a range of texts, in both traditional and contemporary forms of literacy.

2.4.1 The importance of family literacy for English language learners.

Family literacy instils within children a unique literacy heritage (Brown et al., 2012). This perspective draws attention to the fact that there is huge diversity in the literacy abilities of children when they begin school. This is especially relevant when children are English Language Learners. As highlighted above, all children's literacy learning is shaped by the literacy practices they observe and are involved with in their home. Studies involving Hebrew, Spanish and Chinese speaking families, show that this corresponds across languages (Puranik, Philips, Lonigan & Gibson, 2018).

Children who have English as an additional language, rely heavily on their families to teach and support them in the acquisition of their first language (Helman, 2012). Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory reflects this, as the child may only hear and see their first language being used in their home setting. It is vital that children learn to

interact and communicate effectively in their first language, as this serves as the foundation for a second language, and for their subsequent literacy development (DES/ NCCA, 2015; Helman, 2012; Gregory & Kenner, 2003; Kennedy et.al., 2012; Larson & Marsh, 2005).

Gregory and Kenner (2013) describe how it is common for immigrant families to access “out-of-school schooling” for their children (p.76). They state that this may take the form of language classes, cultural classes or religious classes, and helps children appreciate and stay mindful of their heritage. Gregory and Kenner (2013) further acknowledge that these classes assist children in transferring their cognitive functioning across languages. For example, a child attending Qur’an classes learns about language and literacy in their home language, which they can then transfer to English. However, they point out that not all skills transfer across all languages.

2.4.1.1 Writing for English Language Learners.

Fu (as cited in Hong, 2015) has raised questions about the writing opportunities available in schools for young language learners. She argues that schools only concentrate on the language proficiency of these children, and fail to see them as independent, thinking writers. Christian and Bloome (as cited in Hong, 2015) found evidence to support this. They maintain that children may be excluded from writing lessons, due to their language abilities. They demonstrated that the cultural capital of these children is not being utilized in classrooms and by default, these children are marginalized from the writing community in schools.

However, the narrative by Helman (2012) acknowledges that writing is hugely challenging for a young English Language Learner owing to differences in vocabulary, phonics, syntaxis, and pragmatics between the child’s first language and English. Read (as cited in Raynolds & Uhry, 2009) informs that this complicates a young child’s progression with emergent writing, as their invented spellings are likely to reflect these differences.

Read (as cited in Reynolds and Uhry, 2009) offers a possible solution to teachers, recommending that they learn the common errors between languages. In doing so, teachers would be more able to give these children individualised support. On the other hand, Araujo (2002) argues that limited oral language proficiency for English Language Learners does not constrain children's emergent writing (or emergent reading) development.

Hong (2015) indicates that research on young children's writing has primarily been conducted on children who speak English as a first language. This does not reflect Ireland's society or classrooms today, as statistics show that there are 11,900 language learners living in Ireland, and this is continuing to grow (O'Toole & Skinner, 2017). In fact, it does not reflect society in general, as 70% of the world's population are bilingual (Hancock, 2018).

Lennox (2013) suggests that researchers, policy makers, educators and parents need to seek ways to provide these English Language Learners and Bilingual children, with a rich foundation in *all* areas of literacy development. Evidence presented by Kirwan (2018), corresponds with advice from Byington and Kim (2017) that schools need to cultivate a plurilingual environment in schools, to encourage families with minority languages to get involved in activities within the school. Similarly, Street (1984) calls on schools to avoid taking an autonomous approach to literacy and instead to be culturally sensitive, bearing in mind that literacy practices, values, and languages of families will vary.

2.4.2 The influence of digital literacy on family literacy.

Family Literacy is influenced by the saturation of digital items in the home. In recent research, Neumann (2018) discovered that up to two thirds of young children have the opportunity to use digital tools for writing, in the home. This demonstrates that family literacy practices may have evolved from traditional literacies (such as the pencil and paper) to contemporary literacies (such as the phone or iPad). Writing in particular has become increasingly a technology driven enterprise, with the development of emails, phones, social

media, blogging etc (De Smedt & Van Keer, 2014). It also means that society no longer relies solely on words to write, as meaning can be constructed through the use of graphics, photographs, videos etc. (Brown, 2013; Yaden et al, 1999). Correspondingly, the emergent literacy perspective recognises that writing is multimodal.

Findings from Gillen and Hall (2003) and the American Academy of Paediatrics (AAP, 2016) reveal that the influx of digital items in the home, has both positive and negative effects on the development of children. Marsh (2017) indicates that these tools fosters young children's interest in sounds, letters, words, mark-making and in multimodal production. She also notes that their use of these digital tools is often playful, which contributes to children's level of engagement and enjoyment in literacy learning. In contrast, Dempsey, Lyons and McCoy (2019) found that technology is having negative associations on the academic development of young children. Although they acknowledge that their research is preliminary, their initial findings suggest that children who own a mobile phone by the age of nine, are performing significantly lower in both reading and maths, when they reach the age of thirteen.

The AAP (2016) have recently developed recommendations for the use of digital media in the home. This should give parents some guidelines on using digital tools with young children in the home. They present advise that:

- Infants and Toddlers (up to the age of 18 months) should have no use of digital media, besides video calls. Instead parents should prioritize play, creative activities, talk and sleep.
- From 18 months, children should be introduced to media tools, providing that they are of high quality and have educational value.

- For children attending school, children should balance their use of media tools with other “healthy behaviours”, and parents should continue to monitor and ensure that the digital media children are engaging in, are suitable and of high quality.

2.4.2.1 Digital tools within the classroom.

Research demonstrates that Irish classrooms are slow to embrace and avail of these digital tools. Gilleece and Eivers (2018) examined the data from ePIRLS 2016 and discovered that Ireland was well below the International average for using technology in literacy lessons, with only 18% of children having access to shared computers in the classroom. This disparity challenges the continuity between children’s ‘informal’ literacy learning in the home and their ‘formal’ literacy learning in school (Marsh, 2010). Kennedy et al. (2012) stresses that the under-utilisation of digital tools in the classrooms, means that children may fail to transfer the literacy skills they have gained at home, to their classroom activities. This reflects the problem of disconnection between home and school, previously mentioned by Dewey (as cited in Street, 2003).

Both Carrington (2007) and Brown (2013) seek to remedy these problems. They suggest a blended approach to literacy learning, where digital texts share a central place, alongside traditional texts in schools. This ensures that children are creating creative dynamic texts in the classrooms, that are authentic and realistic in today’s world (Carrington, 2007).

2.5 Partnerships between Homes and Schools

As previously demonstrated, the family plays an important role in children’s literacy development. Enriched, meaningful participation in literacy occurs when home and school is viewed as complementary to each other, and connections are made between them. This is reflected in numerous policies and curricula in Ireland (DES, 2011; DES/ NCCA, 2015; NCCA, 2009). These documents emphasise that parents are the most important people in a

young child's life. However, it is essential that parents recognise the substantial influence that they assert on their children's literacy development (DES, 2011). Research by Carpentieri, Fairfax-Cholmeley, Litster and Vorhaus (2011) show that little supports have been provided to parents to assist them in this role. Schools need to empower parents and provide meaningful opportunities for them to get involved in their children's literacy learning (DES, 2011; NCCA, 2009).

The Aistear guidelines (NCCA, 2009) devotes an entire chapter of its document on the promotion of partnerships, between teachers and parents. Jackson and Doell (2017) explain that an effective partnership occurs when teachers and parents "unite for the purposes of developing a shared vision, purpose, goals, practices" (p. 324). This pedagogy is supported worldwide in successful early childhood programmes and curricula, such as the Reggio Emilia Approach in Italy, The Finnish Early Childhood Curriculum and Care Programme and New Zealand's TeWhāriki Early Childhood Curriculum. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems theory wholly supports the development of these partnerships and illustrates that parental involvement in education, is not a new notion (Yelland, 2011).

Research by Hornby and Blackwell (2018) acknowledge that factors such as family circumstances, economic issues and language abilities may present as barriers to these partnerships. However, in the last decade they have found that schools have become more supportive of parents and as a result, parental involvement in schools has increased.

2.6 Conclusion

Lennox (2013) states that enhancing children's literacy development is the primary aim for education in many countries. Emergent literacy skills are the foundation for this literacy development (Justice & Pullen, 2003). Although there is extensive research into the development of oral language and reading for young children, there is a gap in research on writing, which suggests that young children's experiences of emergent writing is

undervalued (NAEYC, 2007; NELP, 2008; Puranik et al., 2014; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998; Yaden et al., 1995).

Literacy should empower individuals (UNESCO, 2005), be functional (Eivers et al., 2004; UNESCO, 2011) and enable communication (Ministry of Education, 2007). This reflects the importance of writing in the area of literacy as writing develops the voice of the child (De Smedt & Van Keer, 2014), is a means of communication (Browne, 2001), and is functional in everyday life (Riley, 2006).

Compelling evidence (Justice & Pullen, 2003; NCCA, 2009; Sulzby and Teale, 1991; Whitehurst and Lonigan, 1998) shows that children's first experiences with writing, is through observing the naturalistic literacy practices that are woven into daily family life. In many homes, this consists of both traditional literacies and contemporary multi-modal literacies.

Kennedy et al. (2012) stress that teachers and schools need to understand family literacy practices and utilise these experiences, to actively engage children in literacy. Henderson and Berla (as cited in Travers et al., 2010) support this and state that "when schools work together with families to support learning children tend to succeed and not just in school, but throughout life" (p. 118).

Combining the evidence from literature, the following research questions were formulated:

- Do parent and children understandings of early writing, reflect an emergent writing perspective?
- What motivates children to write in the home?
- How do family literacy practises influence emergent writing?

In the following chapter the methodological approach of this research is discussed, and the methods are introduced.

Chapter Three. Methodology

The previous chapters highlighted that recent studies on emergent literacy have focused on the strands of oral language and reading, with less attention being paid to the strand of writing (Puranik et al., 2014). Puranik et al. (2008) indicated that it would be beneficial for future studies to examine the relationship between emergent writing and writing-related practices in the home. This study aims to address this gap in research and is underpinned by Street's theoretical framework of Literacy as a Social Practice (1984, 2003a, 2003b, 2012, 2016).

3.1 Research Methodology: Philosophical paradigms

There are defining distinctions between the paradigms of quantitative research and qualitative research. Lankshear and Knobel (2010) describe that the fundamental distinction between the two, is the theories that underpin them. They describe that quantitative research assumes that the world is measurable, and quantifiable, and that numbers generated through the research accurately captures the "probability of truth" (p. 29). Basit (2010) explains that the supposition of quantitative methodology is that facts can only be verified and substantiated, if they have been investigated by scientific means or have used large quantities of people in the data collection. Quantitative research views the social world as being similar to the physical world and uses statistics to explain in logical terms, clear cause and effect relationships, as well as variables in phenomena (Basit, 2010; Smeyers, 2008). This is similar to the positivist paradigm which seeks to discover universal truths, that can be applied to all contexts (Mukherji & Albon, 2015). In this sense, it claims researcher objectivity (Basit, 2010).

On the other hand, Agee (2009) maintains that qualitative research interrogates the whys and the hows of human interaction. Lankshear and Knobel (2010) add that qualitative research focuses on the contexts of people. Merriam (2009) describes qualitative research as

“understanding the meaning people have constructed” (p.13). The interpretivist paradigm is closely affiliated with this study, as the research question is based on the perspectives of the participants (Mukherji & Albon, 2015). Basit (2010) states that qualitative research is based on the premise that reality is subjective: there is no absolute truth. She adds that cause and effect statements are not always sufficient to explain social events. She offers a further explanation to this, in the following statement:

Social reality is created by human experience rather than just being discovered by individuals. Qualitative methodology thus subscribes to the alternative notion of the social world focusing on the subjective views of research participants and enabling the researcher to explain social reality as it is perceived and created by the research participants themselves (p. 16).

A qualitative design was chosen to fully explore the research questions as it aims to “understand how others understand their world” (O’Donoghue, 2007, p.10). Using a qualitative methodology, the experiences, thoughts and ideas of the participants could be sought at an in-depth level, achieving depth and breadth (Flick, 2006).

3.2 Research Sample

This research was conducted in a single site, in which the researcher also worked. This was a matter of convenience, but was also preferable to “equally suitable alternatives” as this school is under the patronage of Educate Together (Denscombe, 2007, p. 41). One of the core principles of an Educate Together school is that it is democratically run. Therefore, parents have a vital role in its daily operations. Teachers are referred to by their first names and the school emphasises parental involvement, implementing an open-door policy. This assisted in reducing the power imbalance between teacher-parent, and researcher-participant.

Initially, consent was sought from the Board of Management for this research (see Appendix A). Following this, all parents who had children in the infant classes were invited to participate in this research through letters (See Appendix A). Six parents volunteered to take part in this research, which meant that all volunteers had the opportunity to be interviewed.

3.2.1 Participants.

There were six families involved in this study. Table 1 provides a vignette for each of these families, in Table 1. The inclusion of these vignettes is crucial to the interpretation of the findings, and so that the transferability of this study can be determined by readers.

Table 1.

Family Vignettes

Family 1	This family is a Romanian family. Both the mother and father attended the interview. They have three children: a daughter in Junior Infants and two older children, who attend secondary school. The youngest child speaks Romanian to her parents, and English to her siblings. The mother and youngest daughter have lived in Ireland for less than a year, and the rest of the family have lived in Ireland for over three years. When the child started school in September, she had only a basic level of English. Both parents are highly educated. The child's father is working and is engaged in extensive study. The child's mother has chosen to stay at home, to care for her children.
Family 2	The mother of this family took part in this study. She is Polish and has two children, both of whom, are in the Infant Classes. Both of these children were involved in the study. Polish is the main language spoken in this home. The children were born in Ireland, and their parents have lived in the country for over ten years. Both parents are highly educated. The children's father works and travels with his work frequently. The child's mother chose to give up work when she had her youngest child. She is thinking about returning to work this year.
Family 3	The third family is from India. The mother took part in this study. She has two children, one in Senior Infants and an older child in the middle classes of primary school. Both these children were born in Ireland, and the parents have been living here for over eight years. Hindi is spoken in the home. Both parents are highly educated and are engaged in employment. A family friend is employed to care for the children, when their parents are working.
Family 4	The fourth family to participate was an Irish family. The mother attended the interview. She has two children, one of whom is in a Junior Infant class and a

	younger child who attends an Early Childhood Setting. English is the only language spoken in this home. Both parents are highly educated and are engaged in employment. The children's grandparents look after them, when their parents are working.
Family 5	This family is from India. The mother of the family took part in the study. She has one child who is in Senior Infants. The family have been living in Ireland for over five years. Marathi is the first language of the parents, but English is the main language spoken in the home. Both parents are highly educated, but only the father is in employment outside the home. The mother gave up work when her son was a year, so that she could focus on his development. She is hoping to return to employment shortly.
Family 6	The sixth family is from India. The mother took part in this interview. She has two children. One of her children is in Senior Infants and the other is in a Senior Class in primary school. They have been living in Ireland for just over a year. They primarily speak English in the home, although both children are currently learning Tamil, which is their parent's native language. Both parents are highly educated, and both parents are in employment. A family friend looks after the children, when the parents are at work.

3.3 Research Methods and Design

Lankshear and Knobel (2004) highlight the importance of choosing a suitable research design that is relevant to the research question and allows for the collection of high-quality data. Qualitative data is collected through the methods of interviews, observations, and the analysis of documents such as diaries and letters (Merriam, 2009). Lankshear and Knobel (2004) add that open ended surveys, journals, and artefact collections can be used in qualitative research design.

Open-ended questionnaires and interviews (focus groups, semi-structured and structured) were available for the purpose of collecting the perspectives of parents and pupils on writing. Hinds (2000) states that questionnaires are used when barriers such as language and literacy do not apply to the participant population. In this research, it was predicted that a number of the participants would have English as an Additional Language. Thus, it was derived that interviews would be a more suitable research instrument for this study. Concurrently, Hinds advises the use of interviews when "in-depth information is

required and where the issues under examination would benefit from development or clarification” (2000, p. 47). The format of semi-structured interviews was chosen, as it is more flexible than structured interviews and allowed the researcher to “follow up ideas, probe responses and investigate motives and feelings” on an individual basis (Bell, 2005, p. 157).

This research design consisted of 16 data sets, consisting of journals, focus groups, semi-structured interviews and image-based documents. Table 2 illustrates these data sets.

Table 2.

Description of data Sets

	Journals	Semi-Structured Interviews	Focus Groups	Image-based Documents	Totals
Participant 1	✓	✓			2
Participant 2	✓	✓			2
Participant 3	✓	✓			2
Participant 4	✓	✓			2
Participant 5	✓	✓			2
Participant 6	✓	✓			2
Focus Group A			✓	✓	2
Focus Group B			✓	✓	2
Total	6	6	2	2	16

3.3.1 Journals.

All six parent participants received journals, prior to the interviews (see Appendix B). Participants had the option of completing these journals by hand or on the computer. In these journals, parents recorded details about the literacy events (including writing) that happened naturally in the home. The journals were provided, so that parents could collect their personal insights and reflect on the literacy events that were occurring in the home, prior to their interviews (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004) During the semi-structured interviews,

participants received the opportunity to discuss the literacy events and the reflections recorded in their journals.

3.3.2 Semi-structured interviews.

The interview was guided by a set of questions, which were developed from combined research in the Literature Review. The interviews with participants were arranged for a time and place that suited the participant. Six semi-structured interviews with parents were conducted in total.

Piloting the interview was an important element of this study, to evaluate the clarity and the suitability of the questions. It was completed with a parent who has a young child in another school, and therefore exempt from the study. Accordingly, after the pilot interview, the interview schedule was restructured and refined, with some questions being rephrased or removed. A copy of the initial and final interview schedules can be found in Appendix B.

3.3.3 Focus groups.

Two focus groups were used to interview children, with four children in one group, and three in another. Focus groups were chosen so that the children could interact with each other, and so that data could be generated on congruent and contradictory views of the children. As the researcher, it was important to ensure that all participants had the opportunity “to contribute to the discussion without asking focus group members directly to do so” (Basit, 2010, p. 104).

Careful consideration was given to the organisation of children into their focus groups. Their teachers were consulted to get an insight into whether the children had shy or dominant personalities. The study by Bradford and Wyse (2013) was used as a basis for developing interview questions for this focus group. In their data collection, they used a hand puppet called ‘Baby Bear’ who wanted to learn how to write. They found that this engaged children and created “a climate for focused talk and response” (p. 254). Similarly,

in these focus groups a puppet called ‘Jackson the Frog’ was used (see Appendix B for interview schedule).

These focus groups were conducted after the initial parent interviews, so that recurring patterns and themes evolving in the interviews could be examined in a child friendly manner. The focus group with children was also piloted using children who were not participating in the study. Following this, writing materials were made available to the children whilst they partook in the focus group, so that they could demonstrate their understandings on writing.

3.3.4 Image-based documents.

As demonstrated above, children were free to use writing materials, in their focus groups. All children engaged in this activity. They used the materials to teach Jackson the Frog how to write and to write messages to him. In addition, parents donated with their children’s permission, examples of the childrens writing from home (see Appendix D for samples of these image-based documents). These image-based documents were a form of unstructured data and contained factual information and symbolic meanings (Denscombe, 2007). They were used to support claims made by the parents and the children. They also provided an insight into the abilities and interests of the children.

3.4 Data Analysis

“Before data can be analysed it needs to be suitably prepared and organized” (Lankshear and Knobel, p. 266). A systematic six-phrase process of thematic analysis was followed during this research (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Each of these phrases were critical to the process and are described in Table 3.

As detailed in Table 2, this study comprised 16 data sets. The analysis required each these sets to be coded and analysed in their own right, but also required detail cross-examination so that comparisons could be drawn: between all participants; between parents

and their children; between parents; between parents of similar backgrounds; between children of similar gender; and between children at similar class level.

In addition, each participant had two sets of data, for example each parent completed a journal and took part in a semi-structured interview, and the children partook in focus groups, which entailed of their answers but also the documents they completed. Therefore, comparisons had to be made between: all the journals; all the interviews; all the focus groups; all the documents; the journals and interviews of each individual; the focus groups and each set of documents.

Table 3.

A description of the six-phase process of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Phase 1: Familiarising yourself with your data	The audio recordings from the semi-structured interviews and the focus groups, were transcribed, in their entirety.
Phase 2: Generating initial codes	During this phase of data analysis, analytic codes were used. The transcripts were systematically coded line-by-line (see Appendix C), so that “patterns, communities, relationships, correspondences” could be identified and scrutinised (Cope, 2010, p. 284).
Phase 3: Searching for themes	At this stage, a list of over 100 codes had been identified. These codes were then systematically grouped into four major themes, (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004). Each major theme was then divided into sub-themes, so that data could be analysed (see Appendix C).
Phase 4: Reviewing themes	All previous data was revised so that initial codes, would be retained and to ensure that information did not get altered or lost (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004). The four major themes were reduced to three.
Phase 5: Defining and naming themes	Ongoing analysis was engaged in so that the major themes could be labelled and defined. In line with this, specific labels were given to each sub-theme
Phase 6: Producing the report	The final analysis of the data is presented in the next chapters. This involved interpreting the data and “moving data around in order to make sense of it”, whilst using concepts identified as important in the Literature Review (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004).

3.5 Validity and Reliability

This research was controlled for validity, by evaluating the “credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability” of the study (Lincoln and Guba, as cited in O’Donoghue, 2007, p. 99).

“Credibility refers to the truthfulness of the data” (O’ Donoghue, 2007. p. 9). The credibility of this study was enhanced through the use of multiple-data gathering methods. Yin (2003) refers to this as data triangulation. The data triangulation also aimed to “corroborate the same phenomenon” and develop “converging lines of inquiry” (Yin, 2003, p. 99).

As recommended by Basit (2010), the researcher gave detailed descriptions of the context in which this research was conducted, the participants involved and the specific steps and methods that were used in the data collection and clearly outlined how the data was analysed. Thus, readers can determine for themselves the extent of the transferability (O’ Donoghue, 2007).

The researcher explained the exact steps included in the data collection and the procedures followed from beginning to end in this research project. This follows Guba’s (as cited in O’ Donoghue, 2007) suggestions that “dependability refers to the criterion of rigour related to the consistency of findings” (p. 100).

The data was analysed clearly using the six-phrase process of thematic analysis, (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This ensured that logical findings were contrived. In addition, the researcher made it clear to the participants that a copy of the final work would be made available to them (Basit, 2010). This creates confirmability as the findings “are grounded in events rather than the inquirer’s personal constructions” (Lincoln and Guba, as cited in Donoghue, p.100).

3.6 Reflexivity

Debates continue on the issue of bias and reflexivity in the area of research, particularly with qualitative research. Bell (2005) points out that bias is a constant risk in qualitative research, as it is subjective in its nature. However, it is the task of the researcher to ensure that “other people’s perspectives are equally as valid” as their own (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, pp. 180-181).

The researcher paid attention to the recommendations of Malaurent and Avison (2017) to ensure that self-reflexivity was a component of this qualitative study. The researcher disclosed that she was a teacher in the site where the research was being conducted, as this may have had some influence on the data that was collected. For example, the teacher/researcher as an interviewer might have affected how honest the parents were in their interviews. As recommended by Dwyer and Buckle (2009), the researcher remained mindful of the potential of this personal bias at each stage of the process. The researcher strived to ensure that a dialogic approach was being used to “explore multiple representations of lived truths”, and that participants realised their perspectives, context and feelings were valued throughout the process (Whyte, 2017, p. 85). The researcher also attempted to build reciprocal relationships built on trust and made it clear to participants that their inputs were valued and respected. It was the aim of the researcher, to render the process an empowering one for the participants.

3.7 Ethics

It is vital in educational research, that the research conducted meets high ethical standards. Approval for the research in this study, was granted from the Marino Ethics Research Committee and the Board of Management in the school.

Cohen et al. (2011) state that a fundamental concept of ethical research is that of informed consent. They explain that informed consent respects the participants “rights to freedom and self-determination” (p.77). In this study, all the participants (parents and

children) had volunteered to partake in the research, and signed contracts granting this consent. The researcher had explicitly explained to all potential participants, that they were entirely free to decline participation in the project, and that it would not affect them in any way.

Stringer (2003) emphasises that participants should be clearly informed about “the purpose, aims, use of results, and likely consequences of the study” (p. 89). Initially, letters were sent to participants regarding information detailing the purpose and aims of the research. Information regarding the participants’ right to withdraw their consent, information regarding data storage and information on confidentiality and anonymity was made clear to the participants through this letter.

The researcher then contacted the participants through email or through phone calls, so that participants could vocalize any of their questions or concerns. They were advised that they could contact the researcher at any time, using the researcher’s phone number or email address.

Before conducting the interviews and focus groups, the participants were reminded of the limitations of their anonymity, due to the research being of a small-scale. All efforts were made to remove any information that might reveal the identity of the participants. As highlighted in Cohen et al. (2011) a participant “is considered anonymous when the researcher or another person cannot identify the participant” from the information provided. To achieve this, pseudonyms were used in all transcripts. Participants were all given names common in the English language, so that they could not be identified according to their ethnicity.

Recordings were downloaded onto the researcher’s personal computer on the day of recording and subsequently deleted from the Dictaphone. These recordings and related

transcripts were then kept in password-protected files. A locked cabinet was used to store any paper documents relating to this research.

Cohen et al. (2011) highlight that any circumstances in which there are two people alone, might give rise to security concerns for one of the people involved. In all instances, the participants choose the location of the interview. Safety was guaranteed when the interviews were in the school building, as there are glass panels in each room, and it is occupied until nine o'clock each night. When the research was conducted in the home of the parents, the researcher left details of the address with another person.

3.8 Limitations

As with any study, there were specific limitations of this study. These are made explicit, so that the research findings can be examined and considered comprehensively. Firstly, this was a small-scale study limited to six parents and seven children. The research was conducted in a single setting and teachers' perceptions to emergent writing were not examined. As Denscombe (2007) acknowledges, this presents limitations in terms of the generalisability of the study. Therefore, the findings in this study are not made as general claims.

Due to time constraints, this study did not acknowledge the importance of early childhood settings in the literacy development of children. This is a major limitation as children are now entitled to 2 free years of preschool under the Early Childhood Care and Education scheme. To get a broader idea of the literacy environments children were exposed to prior to starting primary school, the perceptions of the educators in these settings would need to be explored.

Basit (2010) points out that biases and distortions are always a limitation in interviews, especially when there are issues of power relationships at play. In addition, he stresses the use of diaries and journals may cause participants "to modify the very behaviour

we wish them to record... so that their diary entries can be impressive” (p. 155). The researcher’s position as the teacher also allowed for potential bias.

The majority of the participants in this study had English as their Second Language, which creates limitations of the study. Occasionally during interviews, it was clear that there were misinterpretations of the research question. In this study, there was a low number of volunteers, which might be attributed to the confidence that parents have in participating in research, that is not being conducted in their first language.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter introduced that a qualitative approach would be utilized to explore the research questions. It highlighted that interviews, focus groups, participant journals and image-based documents would be used as the primary data sources for the study. This research design allowed in-depth information to be gathered (Hinds, 2007).

Next, the researcher described how the research participants were selected and illustrated how the interview schedules were devised. Following this, the procedure undertaken during data analysis was explained and details regarding the validity, reflexivity and ethics of the research were highlighted.

The researcher drew attention to the validity and reality of the study, and evaluated its trustworthiness. The measures undertaken to promote reflexivity in the study were outlined, and the procedures that were engaged in to ensure that the research adhered to high ethical standards were described. The limitations of the study were also acknowledged. The next chapter will present the main findings that emerged during the data collection.

Chapter 4. Findings

The purpose of this research was to investigate the understandings of parents' and their children on early writing, and to determine whether their understandings align with an emergent literacy perspective. The research in this thesis also aimed to discover what motivated children to write in the home, and to explore family literacy practices that may have an influence on children's early writing.

A qualitative method design was used to fully explore, *'Parents' and Their Children's Perspectives on Emergent Writing*, consisting of semi-structured interviews, focus groups, journals and image-based documents. The data was analysed according to a six-phase process (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Three major themes were derived from this process and were divided into subsequent subthemes. This chapter is organized accordingly, which are presented below in Table 3.

Table 3

Themes and Subthemes of the Analysed Data

Theme	Subtheme
Perceptions of Emergent Writing	The importance of writing
	Writing development
	The young child as a writer
Children's Motivation to Write in the Home	Social relationships as a motivation for writing
	The link between agency and motivation for writing
	An authentic audience as a motivator for writing
Family Literacy	Reading and writing events in the home
	Emergent writing and digital tools
	Emergent literacy in the home language

4.1 Perceptions of Emergent Writing

4.1.1 The importance of writing.

Every participant (with the exception of one child, who did not respond) agreed that writing was important. They explained that writing was important for a variety of reasons, which were grouped into seven categories, as illustrated in Figure 2.

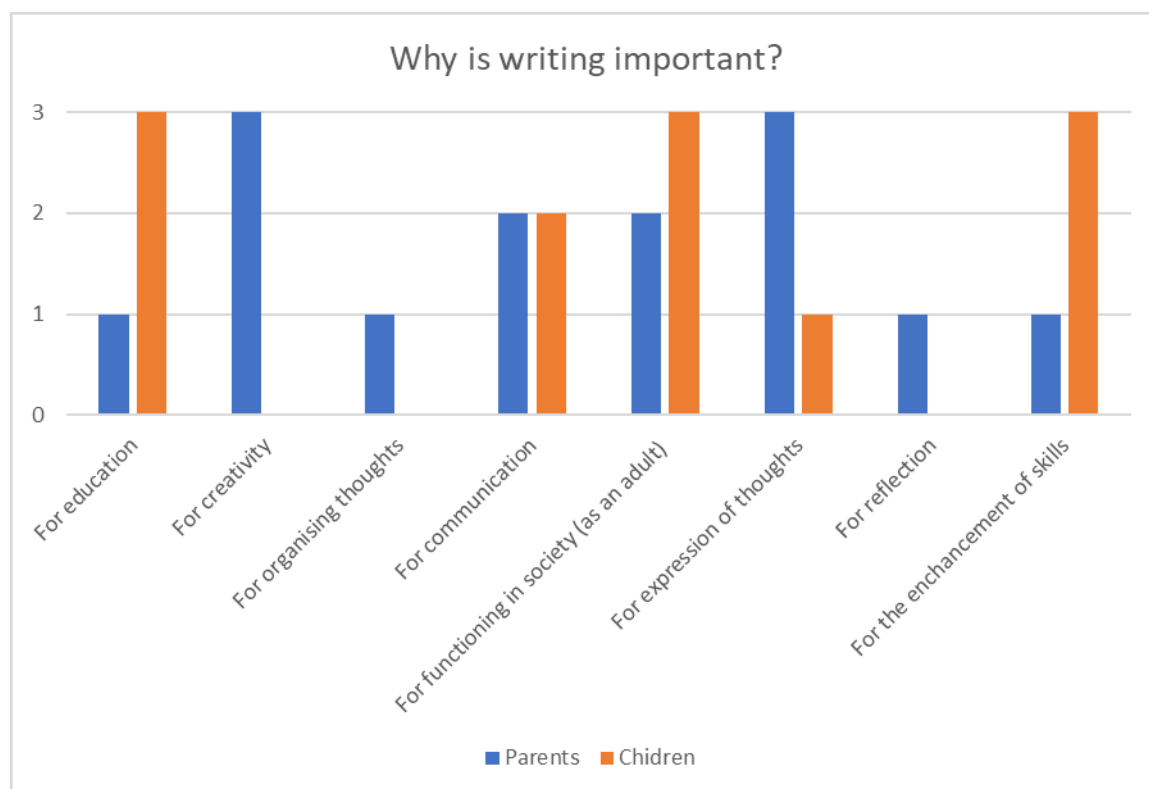


Figure 2: Perspectives of parents and children on the importance of writing

For parents, writing was most important for the expression of thoughts, and for enhancing creativity. Jack described how he felt that “*writing was an outlet*” for creative expression, and Amelia described how her son “*lives in his own world. So, it's good when he's writing, you can actually see what he thinks*”. A parent implied that writing was important for her child because she can “*tell you something through it*”. This was significant for this parent, as her child struggles with social anxiety, and finds it difficult to express herself with words, in social situations. This child did not express that writing was important for this reason. However, another child acknowledged that writing enables you to express “*anything you want that's in your head*”.

Three children recognised that writing was important for education because “*when they (the teachers) say you have to write; you have to write*”; three children implied that you need to be able to write when “*you’re big*”; and three children mentioned that the skill of writing was important because you need “*neat handwriting* and you need to be able to “*spell words*”.

Two of the children’s perspectives corresponded with the perspectives of their parents. In one case, the child rationalised that writing was important for the enhancement of skills, as you need to be able to write “*sight words*”. Similarly, her mother cited that the skill of letter formation, was most important for her young child’s writing development. Another parent outlined that writing was a huge part of her job. Her child reflected this, expressing that writing was important when “*you are in work*”. However, their answers conflicted in relation to writing in the home. The child stated that “*it’s not important to write in home*”, but her mother described how writing was used in the home, on a daily basis.

4.1.2 Writing development.

It emerged from the data that two parents’ understandings of early writing development, closely reflected the emergent literacy perspective. These parents (Emily and Lucy) acknowledged that drawing was interrelated with writing and thus, accepted drawings as valid pieces of writing. The same parents perceived that their children’s first attempts of scribbling were their “*own way of writing*”. In contrast, other parents viewed scribbling as an exploratory activity. Amelia and Lucy described the way in which their children wrote, referring to letters and invented spelling.

Emily: *She started writing letters ... just random letters.*

Lucy: *She's trying to use letters... she said do you want a drink. And I said yeah, Coke, and she wrote 'coc'. And I was like, that's actually really good.... So yeah, she's starting to write with the proper letters.*

Two parents implied that they were not aware of the emergent literacy perspective, before their children attended school.

Amelia: *I didn't know that such small kids should write... I didn't know I have to allow him for many mistakes... I wanted him to write correctly... and then it was hard for him to suddenly, write with mistakes.*

Mary: *In the beginning I was thinking writing is like, she has to do everything correctly, and has to write with exact spelling but then later I understood that it's good if she can express herself.*

Amelia also accepted that children's drawings are connected with their writing. However, she implied that she was not aware of this until her child went to school. Another parent agreed that she was transitioning from a traditional approach to writing development, towards an emergent literacy perspective.

Amelia: *I didn't know that such small kids should write... I didn't know I have to allow him for many mistakes... I wanted him to write correctly... and then it was hard for him to suddenly, write with mistakes.*

Mary: *In the beginning I was thinking writing is like, she has to do everything correctly, and has to write with exact spelling but then later I understood that it's good if she can express herself.*

Amelia signifies that she had made huge efforts with reading with her children at a young age, because she was aware of the importance of reading to kids but explained that there is less emphasis given to the importance of writing from an early age.

Amelia: *The news is all about ... reading to kids. So we knew, but writing, it is less.*

Mary points out that her prior understandings of early writing were based on the education system in India.

Mary: *I felt the curriculum here was very less...I was in the Indian timetable, and I was thinking Oh My God what is this. It's all coming wrong... In the beginning I was really scared...after that I realized, okay, this is a good thing. They are able to bring what is inside and they make them to learn by themselves, instead of memorizing everything.*

Mary described how she now accepts invented spelling from her child and understands that “*it’s better if she writes...if it’s correct or wrong.*” She demonstrated that the transition between two educational systems is a difficult process, admitting that she still worries that her child is over-confident with her inventive spelling as she does not realise that she has made spelling mistakes.

The other two Indian parents also had traditional views towards early writing. One parent explained that she didn’t want to pressurise her young child to write too early, and the other stated that her child is unable to write independently. These perceptions closely correspond with a reading readiness approach to writing development. One of these parents expressed that she was worried about her child’s spelling and stated that she would like to have more information on this area.

Jackson the Frog explicitly asked the children could they teach him how to write and made no references to drawing throughout the focus groups, yet five of the children complemented their writing with drawings. This demonstrated their beliefs that drawing is an integral part of writing. Charlotte (Lucy’s child) supported this and explained that she liked writing because she likes “*drawing pictures*”.

The children in the Junior Infant classes placed less emphasis on conventional spelling, than the children in the Senior Infant classes. An example of a conversation from the focus group reflects this:

- Jackson the Frog: *I think writing is so hard. Do you think writing is sometimes hard?*
- Junior Infant 1: *No. We can help you write.*
- Senior Infant 1: *Just sometimes.*
- Jackson the Frog: *What’s hardest about writing?*
- Senior Infant 1: *If you don’t know how to spell things.*
- Jackson the Frog: *And is it sometimes hard for you.*
- Senior Infant 2: *Yeah.*
- Jackson the Frog: *And what is so hard about it for you?*
- Senior Infant 2: *Birthday.*
- Jackson the Frog: *Why is birthday so hard?*
- Junior Infant 1: *It’s just b- r-day. It’s like this b-r-day. bbbb. First it’s b.*

Senior Infant 2: *Coz you need to put i before r, coz bir. Because r, because some words you can't sound out.*

This conversation reflects that the child in the Senior Infant class has a growing awareness of conventional spelling and that she is at a later stage in the process of early writing development. This is also portrayed in their samples of work (see Figure 3). All parents of the children in Senior Infants, conceded that their children were looking for support with spellings in the home.



Figure 3. An example of writing from Junior Infant 1 and an example of writing from Senior Infant 2.

4.1.3 The young child as a writer.

Five of the young children were viewed as writers by their parents, and two children were not. The two children who were not seen as writers by their parents, were the only two boy participants. Table 4. (see below) examines the parents' perceptions in relation to the class level and the gender of the child. It includes some comments and explanations made by the parents. This data suggests that parents are more likely to perceive their children as writers if they enjoy and are interested in writing activities. For example, Amelia (A &J) concluded that her son was not a writer. She understood that her son has a low level of

Table 4.

Parents' Perceptions of their Young Children as Writers

	Child as a writer	Class Level	Gender of Child	Stage of emergent writing (determined from work in focus groups)	Additional comments by the Parents
E & G	Yes	Junior Infant	Girl	Draws, uses random letters and shapes.	I think she is coz she likes writing. A writer is when you need to put it on paper and get it out there and words just spoken words are not enough... that's how she is
A & H	Yes	Senior Infant	Girl	No drawings. Mostly uses conventional spelling.	Since the last two weeks I would say that because she's trying to write things on her own. She's taking interest. She's trying to write a page or two a day.
L & C	Yes	Junior Infant	Girl	Draws, approximate spelling using phonemes.	She spends loads of time like writing letters, and writing cards and reading books, drawing pictures, so I'd say she is.
B & F	No	Senior Infant	Boy	Draws, approximate spelling using phonemes, some conventional spelling	No, he is not (a writer). He's not writing independently. He still needs help. He likes to draw. He writes "only for homework".
M & L	Yes	Senior Infant	Girl	No drawings. Mostly uses conventional spelling.	Yes, but that was the end of the Junior Infants. Before that she was only writing alphabets, but mostly drawings, her writing was mainly drawing
A & S	Yes	Junior Infant	Girl	Draws, approximate spelling using phonemes.	I see her as a writer, because she loves drawing so much, colouring so much and now we will be writing. She still uses mainly drawings, for her writing... she's capable of writing...when she is writing ... she is not thinking, it is just there. It's this, a writer has this.
A & J	No	Senior Infant	Boy	Approximate spelling using phonemes, some conventional spelling	James doesn't like to write, so I don't see him as anything like that. He knows he can't do it to the level he likes to do it. He struggles, see he doesn't have it in his mind how he will have it. It's just a longer process.

confidence with writing activities, and therefore does not enjoy partaking in them. All other parents, excluding one (M & L) associated their children's interest levels with their writing identity.

Six of the seven children identified themselves as writers, with one child not responding to the question. The child that did not respond, was not seen as a writer by his parent. Excluding the child who was unresponsive, Frankie was the only child who had a different response to his parent. Frankie perceived himself as a writer, but his mother did not. In this instance, his mother perceived a writer as someone who can write conventionally (see B&F in Table 4). Charlotte and Sophie both identified strongly as writers. Charlotte used the collective phrase "*We write*", showing that she associated her peers with writing and correspondingly classified them as writers. Sophie's self-identification as a writer was so strong, that she saw herself as the best writer she knew.

4.2 Children's Motivation to Write

4.2.1 Social relationships as a motivation for writing.

The children identified that their siblings, their parents, their grandparents, their teacher and their friends were writers. This illustrated that their social relationships are significant in their literacy development. Parent participants reinforced this. They portrayed how relationships with family members, especially with older siblings, motivate children to write. Amelia highlighted how her younger child was extremely influenced by her elder child. In her journal, she wrote:

"James plays a huge part in Sophies' writing and reading. When James was doing his homework in Junior Infants, Sophie would always watch him, and she would ask for homework too, so she was colouring, matching letters with James. When James was learning how to read, she would listen to him as well. Sophie is exposed to James writing on a daily basis. James engages Sophie in writing/ reading activities, they have fun playing/ learning together."

Three other parent participants also acknowledged the influence of an elder sibling on the literacy development of the younger child:

- Mary:** *My elder one does really very good, so when I appreciate her, she (the younger child) wants to get that appreciation.*
- I actually make my elder one to write (the shopping lists)... and the younger one will say 'I also want to write'*
- Every day when her sister goes to write her diary, she will also take her diary and she will write.*
- Ava:** *She sees that her brother is writing. She thinks that she also needs to write something*

The children of Mary and Ava made several references to their elder siblings, throughout their interviews. Lily (Mary's child) described how it was her sister that taught her to write her name and identified her sister as the best writer she knew. Both children boasted of their sibling's achievements in writing:

- Lily: *She got her pen licence.*
- Hannah: *My brother can write in cursive writing.*

Three parents did not refer to the influence of elder siblings on their children's literacy development (one child was an only child, the other did not have an elder sibling, and the other had siblings who are older and are in secondary school). Nevertheless, these parents indicated that that their children mimic their own literacy behaviours at home:

- Lucy: *She picks up on stuff so much... even the lists and stuff, she would say, don't forget to put this on the list, like shopping, or I need this for my holidays, put this on the list.*
- Emily: *She copies my writing.*
- There's an interest in everything, I think that's one of the expressions and questions she has the most, 'what are you doing' ...she's very curious... she wants to be included in everything.*
- Bella: *If nobody is there (study desk) he will not use it, but if I am or my husband is using it, then he wants to use it...it's like motivation, 'now I also want to do it.'*

4.2.2 The link between agency and motivation for writing.

All the parent participants described the significance of agency and control, for their children's interest in writing events. They acknowledged that their children were highly engaged in the writing activities that they had initiated themselves.

Emily: *She pretends she's at school, that's her favourite activity... she is very, very eager to do that every day ... You walk into the room and see her papers everywhere, all over the place.*

Lucy: *She would start a lot of the stuff by herself... Last week, it was the teacher's birthday and she made about 15 cards ... she was just like, I just want to do one more.*

Amelia: *Recently they want me to put this (the writing table with art materials) upstairs, and they want to use it because they play sometimes school and they need it.*

Five of the parent participants described how their children were less enthusiastic, when the writing activity was initiated by their parents or when it was a homework task.

Emily: *She gets bored very fast...when we're doing homework. It's okay for the first row and then 'I want to do something else'*

Mary: *If she's not in the mood, she will not write. Even the homework, only if she wants, she will write.*

Amelia: *She says no (when asked to write) and that's it.*

Parents remained positive about homework for their young children, acknowledging that it was an important link between schools and home. They stated that homework is a “*reflection*” of what they are doing in school, and through the homework “*you see what they were learning*”. One parent acknowledged the child's agency and wished for more freedom within homework tasks. She stated, “*if your child doesn't want to do the homework...let them do something else, because parents sometimes put too much pressure, and they hate it and they are killing the learning*”.

4.2.3 An authentic audience as a motivator for writing.

All of the parent participants agreed that their children liked to have an audience for their writing. However, they emphasised that their children want to receive praise and appreciation from this audience.

- Ava: *When she is on a Skype call with the grandparents, she will show them, 'This is what I wrote yesterday' ... she is looking for... appreciation and recognition from everyone.*
- Emily: *She is very proud.... She expects things (praise) like anyone else.*
- Lucy: *She likes the praise... she feels like the accomplishment of 'I done that' ...She takes great pride in what she draws and we would as well.*
- Mary: *She'll just come and say 'Mummy, read mine', when she has written something. She is so excited. So whatever work I do, I have to stop and I have to read ... if I can't ... she will be upset. She wants me to read it.*
- Amelia: *James would be more, waiting for you to say to say 'oh, it's so beautiful.'*

Two child participants stressed the need for an audience. One described how she liked to give people her writing and another stated that she likes to show her writing to her family members.

It was evident that critical feedback was an important factor in one child's experiences of writing at home. She described how her parents tell her *"that's good, but you need more neat handwriting"*. Similarly, her parent acknowledged that in order to support her, she gives her praise but also tells her how to improve her work: *"It's my part to tell her but I will not force her."*

4.3 Family Literacy

4.3.1 Reading and writing events in the home.

The homes of all the participants were rich in literacy events. Figure 4 presents the reading events that occurred, and Figure 5 illustrates the writing events that took place in the

homes. Every reading or writing event that was mentioned or recorded by participants in the data collection was included and combined in these Figures. Some of the key findings presented in the diagrams are that:

- In all the homes, parents read and wrote emails and messages.
- In all the homes, parents read and wrote in relation to work or study.
- In all the homes, children read and wrote in relation to homework.
- In all the homes, parents read storybooks to their children.
- In all the homes, children participated in independent reading for enjoyment.
- In most of the homes (5/6) children practiced writing skills.
- In most of the homes (5/6) children wrote shopping lists.
- In most of the homes (5/6) children completed drawings.
- In most of the homes (5/6) children engaged in free writing for enjoyment.

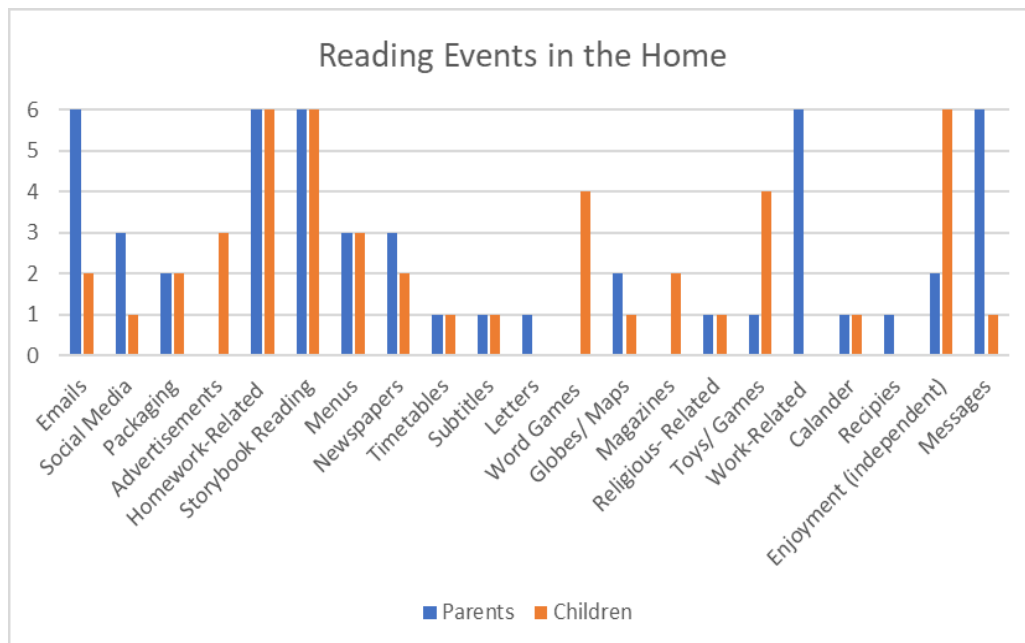


Figure 4. Reading Events occurring in the homes, as mentioned in the journals, interviews and focus groups.

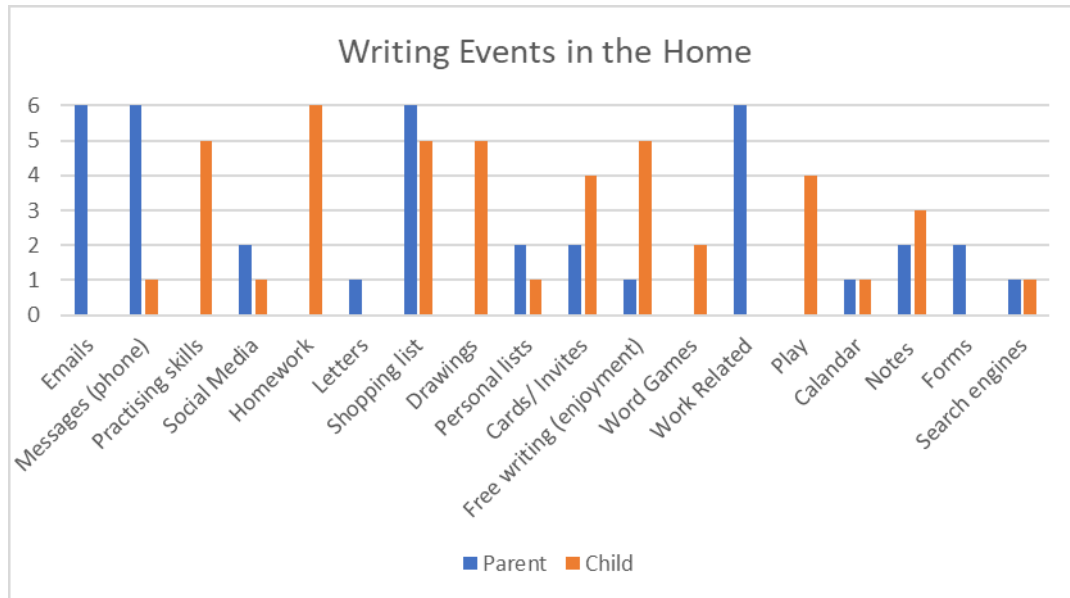


Figure 5. Writing Events occurring in the homes, as mentioned in the journals, interviews and focus groups.

Four of the parents shared the view that reading events are more commonplace in the home than writing events. However, the totals from Figures 5 and 6 signified that overall, children participated in a similar amount of reading and writing events in the home (as seen in Table 5). On the other hand, these numbers suggest that parents engage in more reading events than writing events in the home.

Table 5.

Total Number of Reading and Writing Events in the Home

	Parents	Children	Total
Reading Events in the home	52	47	99
Writing Events in the home	38	44	82

The same four parents felt that it was easier to support their children’s reading than their writing. One parent described how “writing is much less these days... reading is more

handy, you can just read anywhere, in any room. For writing, you especially have to sit down and have things to write. You have to make a proper environment.” She demonstrated that that writing is viewed as a formal task. Another parent added to this stating, *“I do things on a daily basis. I never realized that this could be counted as a literacy event”*.

One parent stated that writing only occurred at homework time: *“We only do that, we don’t do anything else”*. However, it was later established throughout the data collection with that parent, that a wide range of other writing events occurred in the home, such as emails, messages, word games, shopping lists, drawings, personal lists, cards, invites, completion of forms, study and writing in search engines. These combined statements make it clear that informal activities and interactions, are not always perceived as opportunities for literacy learning. This concurs with the findings from the children, as shopping lists and text messages were the only two informal literacy events that they referred to.

4.3.2 Emergent writing and digital tools.

Only one parent stated that her child used digital tools for writing in the home. This parent explained how her child uses a tablet to message her cousins in India, at the weekend. She described that *“they will continue for hours. I have to restrict and stop, otherwise it will keep going”*. Similarly, her child referred to this and stated that texting her friend, was her favourite type of writing.

Nonetheless, only one parent described herself as being *“anti-technology”*. The other parents in the study, mentioned that their children were *“very much exposed”* to technology and used it to play games, watch cartoons or to watch YouTube. This exposure was reflected by the children, five of whom acknowledged that their *“mum and dad use*

their phones to write messages". One parent also described how her child asks for help in spelling words when he uses a tablet, so that he can search for videos he likes. Another described how her daughter likes to use Snapchat and is aware of emojis.

Five of the parents in the study, were concerned about the impact of technology on young children. They were anxious that technology could make their children become "*obsessed*", "*lazy*", "*dependent*", "*addicted*" and could result in "*social problems*". One parent participant deemed technology to be a hinderance to their young child's literacy habits. She explained that in this modern era children do not have to write, as communication is now so instant. She noticed that her children don't send cards, or letters, or parcels to their family or friends, as they just call them instead. In contrast to this, another parent recognized that their child noticed print when using the mobile phone.

Lucy: *She's actually starting to notice the letters and even when my Mam comes up, she's like M and there's another m. And I say that says Mam.*

All parents indicated that they did not want children using technology for writing in the infant classes.

Ava: *The old way of schooling is much more beneficial for the child.*

Mary: *The writing skills should come from the hand.*

4.3.3 Emergent writing in the home language.

In this study, five of the families were immigrants who had Polish, Romanian, Tamil, Hindi and Marathi as their first languages. For clarity, these languages may be referred to as 'home' languages, in this study: This signifies that the first language of the parent is being referred to, but it is not a reflection on whether the children speak this language in the home.

The parents with Polish, Romanian and Hindi as their home language, stated that they spoke to their children primarily in this language. They cited that it is important for their children to have the ability to “*talk to her grandparents and family*”, that it is important for their children “*to know another language*” and that it prevents their children from feeling “*disconnected*”. One parent acknowledged that the home language, was part of their child’s cultural identity.

Two parents explained that they spoke English in the home, despite it not being their “*mother tongue*”. These parents chose to speak English in the home, as they were worried their children would “*lag behind*” in school without a good standard of English. However, they described that it is difficult for their children to communicate with their grandparents. Correspondingly, both parents indicated that they are now teaching their children how to speak in the home language.

The Romanian parents acknowledged that they use both Romanian and English to write in the home. All other parents stated that they only write in the home language if they are explicitly teaching the language to their children. One parent acknowledged that it was “*more handy*” to write in English, because of the script of the home language. She also stated that she wrote in English because “*it’s easy for them (her children) to understand.*” Despite this, two parents described the difficulties of writing in English, when it is a second language.

Jack: *I get a bit apprehensive to actually write.*

Amelia: *It’s difficult like to write English... to read is easier, and to write is different story... I don’t put much pressure on them, because I’m also like, I cannot write this or that...it’s like /wee/ /gee/. It’s just confusing.*

Bella: *The pronunciation is different ... the spelling is different...the phonics is different.*

Four of these parents, believed that it was important for their children to learn how to write in their home language. The dominant discourse of these parents was that children would learn how to write in their home language, after they had learnt to write in English:

Emily: *As soon as she starts reading in English....They will have to go together.*

Amelia: *I want them to absolutely like read, write later... I want him to focus on English and once he will be very good in English then I want to... you have to master one and then you go for something else.*

Ava: *We will have to (teach writing), the same way as English ...First we have to start with the alphabet. The simple alphabets. And then move on to spelling, and phonics, so it will be the gradual steps... They adapt the same kind of technologies.*

Mary: *So now they are learning the alphabet in my own language (Tamil)*

One child spoke of writing in her home language: *“My brother and my sister, spell English words, and my mum and dad spell Romanian and English words, and I spell Romanian and English”*. Her parents established that they had not yet begun to teach her how to write in Romanian, but she, nevertheless identified herself as a writer in both languages. Another child stated that she knew *“how to write in Tamil”*, whereas another child wrote a message for Jackson in Polish. This child’s mother also expressed that he had not engaged in any formal education to teach him how to write in this language.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter explored three main themes, relating to the research questions:

- Perceptions of emergent writing,
- Children’s motivation to write in the home and
- Family literacy.

Tables, figures, direct quotes and samples of children's writing were used to demonstrate the findings. The next chapter will discuss these findings, analysis the data and draw links with relevant literature so that the research questions can be answered.

Chapter 5. Discussion

The findings from Chapter 4 provides rich insights into the children's writing experiences in the home. They establish the parents' and children's understandings of early writing. These understandings impact the writing ethos created in the home and influence the writing opportunities that parents provide for their children. This chapter will discuss these findings in an analytic fashion, to investigate the main research questions posed in this thesis:

- Do parent and children understandings of early writing, reflect an emergent writing perspective?
- What motivates children to write in the home?
- How do family literacy practices influence the development of early writing?

5.1 Writing is Important

All participants (with the exception of one, who did not respond) determined that "*writing is important*". The viewpoints of the participants closely aligned with various definitions of literacy. These comparisons are interesting, as it conveys the parents' convictions that writing is a social practice, embedded with the knowledge, identity and thoughts of the writer (Street, 2003a).

Five participants illustrated that writing was important for functioning in society. This is a parallel to OECD'S (2006) definition of literacy. Four participants acknowledged that writing was important, as it is a means of expressing inner thoughts and ideas. This is concurrent with Canada's Ministry of Education's (2007) definition of literacy, which states that literacy should enable a person to communicate their thoughts effectively to others. One parent acknowledged that this element of writing was especially important for her child, who finds it difficult to communicate effectively through speech, in social

situations. This child identified very strongly as a writer, stating that she was the best writer she knew. Recently, she has begun to use writing sporadically, in the classroom as a way to communicate.

It is a consistent finding in this study that writing is an essential and important activity. This signifies that early writing should be reemphasised in research, so that schools, early childhood settings, curricula and policies ensure that it is given the equal status it warrants, in relation to oral language and reading (NAEYC, 2007; NELP, 2008; Puranik et al., 2014).

5.1.1 Supporting children's writing.

Although it was ascertained by participants that writing is important for multiple purposes, when parents discussed supporting their children in writing, four were of the opinion that it was a formal activity. Because of this, they felt that it was more difficult to support their children's writing development, than their reading development.

Correspondingly, some of the children articulated that writing is a skill-based and schooled artefact (see Figure 2). There is a profound connection between these perceptions and the autonomous approach to literacy which demonstrates that literacy is a "technical and neutral skill" (Street, 2003a, p.2).

5.1.1.2 Informal literacy events are underappreciated in the home.

The participant journal given to parents, highlighted that literacy events could either be formal or informal activities (see Appendix B). Despite this, some participants only categorised 'literacy events' as being formal activities. Statements from both parents and children made it clear that informal activities, are not always perceived as opportunities for literacy learning. The findings in this study suggest that informal activities (such as reading magazines, recipes, timetables, using social media, filling in

forms, writing to do lists) were of a low frequency in the homes. However, this may not illustrate the true picture (see Figure 4 and 5 in Chapter 4). In reality, these may have been much higher in frequency but were not recorded by the participants as they were not perceived as important literacy events.

This finding related to both traditional methods of writing and contemporary methods of writing. For example, one parent directly acknowledged that her child used digital tools for writing. In contrast, other parents indicated that their children did not use digital tools for writing, but later revealed that their child used Snapchat or used search engines. It can be contrived that both these forms of writing were not regarded as 'writing activities', as they were informal activities. Therefore at least three of the seven children in this study, engage with digital tools for writing, at home. This number may be higher, as participants may have overlooked other informal literacy events. In comparison, Neumann's (2018) research found that up to two thirds of young children engage with digital tools, for writing in the home.

Street's ideological model of literacy reiterates that the informal literacy events occurring daily in homes, should be valued and appreciated by parents as important learning opportunities. Donovan et al., (2003) stress that complex factors affect the literacy experiences children are exposed to in their home environments such as socio-economic status, home language, religion and culture. Nevertheless, they state that children will have observed much functional writing in the home such as shopping lists, tax forms, thank you notes, crosswords, notes on calendars, labelling etc (Donovan et al., 2003). The NAEYC (2007) acknowledge that children will only become empowered to write when they observe purposeful and functional writing. Kennedy et al. (2012) recommend the use of both formal and informal instruction for literacy learning. This attitude empowers parents,

as it shows them that the diverse literacy practices occurring in the home, are vital to children's learning (Moll, 2015).

5.1.1.3 Parental concerns on young children using digital tools.

The parents in this study indicated that they did not want their children using technology for writing, in the home or in school. They were concerned about the impact of technology on young children. They felt that technology might promote negative dispositions and behaviour problems in their children and deemed that it might hinder their literacy habits. However, five of the children in this study, were aware that their parent used technology to send messages to other people and to use it for work. This correlates with the literature which suggests that children's experiences with writing in the home, is completely entwined with digital media (Bogard & McMackin, 2012; Brown, 2013; De Smedt & Van Keer, 2014; Gillen & Hall, 2003; Yaden et al., 1995).

Marsh (2010) is concerned that an under-utilisation of digital tools in the classroom, creates disparities between literacy experiences at home and at school. She states that schools can overcome this by incorporating digital tools into the classroom. A cohesive learning environment that reflects their home literacy environments, is then provided for children. Brown (2013) agrees with Marsh's theories and advocates that practiced pedagogy must adapt to suit the changing world. However, this must be done in conjunction with families, listening to the concerns they have about technology, and adhering to strict guidelines that reflect best practice. Some studies, such as that from Dempsey et al. (2019) suggest that parents are justified in their concerns about the impact of technology on their children's academic studies. Their preliminary research found that technology may have a negative impact on young children,

5.2 Understandings of Early Writing

It emerged from the data that the understandings of two parents on early writing, closely reflected an emergent literacy perspective. These parents valued their children's first attempts at scribbling, considered drawing to be integral to writing and embraced their children's attempts at invented spelling. On the other hand, two parents had a more traditional understanding of writing, perceiving that writing should be conventional, and that children should not be asked to write independently at a young age. Interestingly, two parents demonstrated that their opinions on early writing development had shifted in the last two years and moved from a traditional stance, towards more of an emergent stance.

Riley (2006) addresses that parents and teachers may have different expectations, values and perceptions. Bearing this in point it is important that the school, do not take an autonomous approach of literacy, simply imposing their values onto the families (Street, 2012). On the other hand, it is important that parents' perceptions of writing are examined and discussed, as it is likely that the perceptions held by parents affect the writing activities and materials that they provide for their children (Bradford & Wyse, 2015). Jackson and Doell (2017) suggest that a solution is to engage in proactive collaborations with parents, so that a consistent and coherent approach to literacy can be given to children, whilst respecting the cultural values of a family.

5.2.1 Factors that influence attitudes towards early writing.

5.2.1.1 Lack of public discourse on emergent writing.

One parent indicated that her attitudes towards early writing had altered in the last two years. She explained that she been aware of the importance of emergent reading for young children and accordingly had promoted reading activities in the home, to foster a love of reading in her children. On the other hand, she had been unaware of the importance of writing for young children, as there was no promotion or publicity of emergent writing,

in the media or in the news. She described how she wanted her son to write correctly, from a young age. She added that she only learnt about the emergent writing perspective to writing development, when he attended primary school. She explained that she then had access to information on writing development, which led to the realisation, that it was okay for her child to make mistakes with his writing. This mother felt that her initial understandings and attitudes towards early writing, may have contributed to her son's lack of confidence and lack of interest in writing. This concurs with Bradford and Wyse's (2013) research, which signifies that there is a strong link between parents' perceptions of writing and the writing activities that they provide for their children in the home.

Her profound insights also resemble the research by Hall, White, Guo & Emerson (2017), who found that in a study of 146 parents, almost half of them did not value or understand the early stages of emergent writing. They add that it is "crucial that parents gain further understanding and appreciation of writing as a developmental skill, similar to learning to walk or talk" (p. 10). They also put forward that parent education about early writing could assist with this problem.

5.2.1.1 Experiences with other educational systems.

Another parent reported that the approach to teaching writing in the Indian educational system differs from the approach in Irish schools. Mary's insights described how unsettling and worrying it is as a parent, to not understand the process of her child's learning and to believe that her child is learning "*all wrong*". This parent advises schools to offer more progress and information meetings to parents such as herself, who had just moved to the country. She adds that this would offer reassurances to parents about how their children is learning in the new education system. This point is particularly relevant to

another parent participant from an Indian background, who agreed that she would like to avail of more information, to be supported in teaching her child how to write.

Soler and Miller (2003) recommend that an “ongoing dialogue” is established between parents and teachers (p. 5). In doing so, parents will be in a better position to understand the process of their children’s learning within the school, be aware of the literacy activities they are involved in and adapt these to their own cultural and diverse practices within the home. This will achieve a more coherent approach to learning. Schools can utilise various mediums to communicate with parents, and to inform them of strategies being used in the school such as parent-teacher meetings, information meetings, diaries, e-mails, texts, websites, videos, blogs etc (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011).

5.2.2 Children’s understandings of early writing.

The viewpoints of all the children on early writing were in line with an emergent literacy perspective. Five of the children demonstrated that drawings were indistinguishable to the writing process. This upholds the perspective of Strickland and Morrow (1989) that drawings convey meaning for children.

The two children who did not draw were both in Senior Infants and used mostly conventional spelling, during the focus group (see Table 4). Their lack of drawings reflected their parents’ attitudes to writing, as both these children’s parents felt that writing and drawing were separate entities. However, it is possible that these children were not reflecting the attitudes of their parents, and instead it reflected the stage in their writing development. As both children were using mostly conventional spelling, it is possible that they are in the ‘transitional’ stage of writing, thus relying less on drawings to convey their meanings (Gentry, 2000). According to NELP (2008) when children reach this stage, they then have a better capacity for editing their spellings, as they are beginning to realise that

words 'look right'. They add that it is crucial that teachers and parents, support children who are at this stage, by continuing to accept invented spelling, whilst also explicitly explaining to them about common letter patterns and alternative spellings.

No link could be established between parents' attitudes towards early writing and the children's understandings of writing. To investigate whether there is a link between the two, all the children would have to be at approximately the same stage in their writing development, and a larger number of participants would be required.

5.2.2 The identity of the child as a writer.

Participants whose views on early writing related to an emergent literacy perspective, all viewed young children as writers. All the children (excluding one, who was unresponsive) identified themselves as writers. Similarly, all the children presented with an emergent literacy perspective, towards writing. This is not surprising as a direct component of an emergent literacy perspective, is that children are active participants in their own literacy learning (Clay, 2001). Riley (2006) believes that this self-identification, enables children to use literacy and writing, to reconstruct and reinvent the world for themselves.

Overall, three parents had associated their children's identities as writers, to their ability to write conventionally. Two of these parents' approaches to writing was from a traditional stance. The third parent had highlighted that she was transitioning from a traditional stance, reflected in the Indian educational system, to an emergent literacy stance. It is noteworthy that all three of these parents were from India. This substantiates that transitioning between approaches in different educational systems is a difficult process. This finding suggests that parents who are unaware of an emergent literacy perspective, are unlikely to see their young children as writers. These findings correlate closely with the research by Bradford and Wyse (2013).

The parents who had a strong understanding that early writing was emergent, believed that their children were writers even though they were not writing conventionally. Their beliefs are supported in Rowe's (2003) definition of authoring. She states that children become authors, from the moment they make a mark and indicate to another person, that they have written a message. Ackerman (2016) also corroborates the beliefs of these parents. She illuminates the importance of early writing, stating that "students need not write conventionally to identify as writers" and that children "should not be expected to form letters neatly, spell perfectly, or use punctuation accurately before being invited to write" (p. 201).

One parent (who had two children) indicated that her younger child in Junior Infants was a writer, but that her older son in Senior Infants was not a writer. She accounted for their interest levels, when formulating this judgment. This was the parent who had moved from a traditional view of writing, to an emergent view of writing, when her son had started to attend primary school.

There was no clear link between the children's perceptions of themselves as writers and the perceptions of their parents'. Similarly, research by Hall et al. (2017) concludes that adults (both teachers and parents) do not have a significant impact on children's own perceptions of themselves as writers. They address that future studies could be undertaken to investigate whether this changes as they get older, and if so, when do children start to become affected by the attitudes of adults.

However, Bearne (2005) argues that it is important that children's perceptions of themselves are respected. Thus, if children perceive themselves as writers, adults should also regard them in this manner. She adds that respecting children's identities as writers, will give them confidence and a positive mindset towards writing.

5.2.2.1 The identity of boys as writers.

Two children were not seen as writers, by their parents. These were the only two boy participants. These findings are interesting, as Bearne (2005) reports that low achievers in writing are usually boys. She also concedes that a successful strategy in increasing the writing achievement of boys, is by broadening the view of writing for them, and encouraging a shift in attitude from “learning to write” towards “becoming a writer” (p.19). More research would need to be undertaken to determine, whether this finding is a coincidence or whether there is a connection between the perceptions of writing identity and the writing achievement of boys. It is noteworthy that one of these children did identify as a writer and the other child did not respond to the question.

Both parents expressed their concerns during their interviews, that their sons did not have an interest in writing. One parent explained that her son was more of a logical thinker, than a creative thinker. She also outlined that his main interest was playing with construction toys. Evidence by Rowe and Neitzel (2010) found that there was a clear association between the type of play that children engage in, and the writing genres in which they are interested. For a child with conceptual interests, such as the boy above, they suggest that he would be engaged in writing activities that allowed him to represent and record his own ideas. Their study could be instrumental for teachers and parents, to help them create opportunities for writing that capture and sustain the interest of the children, especially for boys (Donovan et al., 2003).

5.2.3 Understandings of early writing in relation to home languages.

Five of the parents in this research, spoke a language other than English as their home language. Four parents articulated that it was important for their children to learn how to write in their home language. The dominant discourse was that children would

learn the skill of writing, first in English, and then transfer these skills from English to the home language. Parents' whose attitudes reflected an emergent literacy perspective with regards to early writing in English, did not have the same attitude to early writing in the home language. Parents signified that learning to write in the home language was a formal activity, which had to be learnt in a strict environment.

Three children illustrated their beliefs that they were writers in their home language. It is noteworthy that two of these children had never received any formal instruction in writing, and one child had just started to learn the alphabet of her language. It is significant, that these children speak their home language to their parents and have access to storybooks in this language. This demonstrates that the skills of oral language, reading and writing are interconnected, which is a key element of an emergent literacy perspective (Kiely, 2017).

Kirwan (2018) describes how it is important to create a school environment, that values and embraces the home languages of the children. As the children in this study have shown, children should have the opportunity to use their language, for speaking, reading and writing in the classroom environment. She advises that schools encourage children to write in their home language, as well as English. To encourage this, she suggests that schools allow children to complete some homework tasks in their home languages. With an emergent literacy perspective, children might draw pictures, mark-make, use letter strings or invented spelling to write in their home language (Byington & Kim, 2017).

5.3 The motivation for writing in the home

5.3.1 Social relationships.

The participants illustrated and embraced that family interactions within the family, motivated their young children to engage in writing activities. They described how

children observe family members engaging in literacy practices, and that their children then assimilate these practices. It was evident that children admired and showed great pride in the writing abilities of their siblings. This reflects research (Hall, 2003; Larson & Marsh, 2005) and postulates theories by Street, Vygotsky and Bronfenbrenner, that literacy learning is entwined with the social interactions that occur within communities.

The children acknowledged that they liked to show their writing to their family members. Thus, their family members act as an authentic audience. Parents correlated that their children sought praise and recognition for their pieces of writing. All parents expressed their agreement, that this praise was a huge motivator for their children. The presence of an authentic audience compels children to become more invested in the task of writing (Ellison & Wu, 2008; Evans & Shaw, 2008). Aram and Besser-Biron (2017) reflect that using praise as a reinforcement, builds on the socio-emotional development of the child, increases their self-esteem and motivates them to repeat the writing activity. Some of the participants drew attention to the importance of constructive feedback, in conjunction with praise. Kennedy et al., (2012) states that this is a major characteristic of early success in writing.

Based on these insights, schools should attempt to embrace the social relationships within the school community, to increase children's motivation with writing. Bauer (2019) demonstrates that student talk during writing for young children, aids them in establishing the connection between oral language and written language. Shah and Taylor (2008) advocate the use of 'writing buddies', where young children are partnered with children from an older class, similar to the 'reading buddy' system common in primary schools. They indicate that this project is likely to enhance writing development for both the younger and older children. Boyle and Charles (2010) suggest that the use of play in the

classroom, enables children to explore their writing skills in an enjoyable way, whilst mimicking the social nature of the world outside the classroom. Before engaging in writing tasks in the classroom, teachers should be encouraged to ask their pupils two questions:

1. Who are they writing for?
2. What are they writing?

5.3.2 Self-initiated writing activities.

It was evident from the observations of parents' that children initiated numerous writing activities in the home. These tasks were centred around play, social situations or functional purposes. This reflects the above findings that children are motivated to write, when they have a sense of purpose (Kennedy et al., 2012). In addition, it substantiates the earlier claim that children's personal interests can be linked to their identity as a writer.

All the parent participants described the significance of agency and control, for their children's interest in writing events. They acknowledged that their children were highly motivated when they were engaged in writing activities that they had initiated themselves. Johnson (2007) echoes that children learn best in situations where they have an element of control, as they are then learning about things that matter to them. Teachers should reflect these findings and foster this self-efficacy within the classroom by encouraging children to initiate writing tasks for themselves. This will motivate children to engage with further writing, and open them up to further learning (DES, 2006; Johnson, 2007; Stay Strong, 2010).

5.3.2.1 Lack of engagement in homework tasks.

In comparison, to self-initiated writing tasks, parents reported that their children were unmotivated during written homework tasks. The children's lack of motivation in these tasks may reflect their lack of agency within this area. The United Kingdom Literacy

Association (2008) suggest that children may feel that their homework tasks lack a “real purpose” and warns that children are unlikely to be engaged in the task, whilst experiencing this phenomenon.

One parent encouraged schools to allow more freedom within the homework tasks. A large body of research (Coople & Bredekamp, 2009; De Smedt & Van Keer, 2014; NAEYC, 2007; NCCA, 2009) supports this parent’s statement. This research encourages adults to respect the voice of the child, and to permit them freedom in their learning. Brennan (2019), suggests that school should adopt a “differentiation through choice” pedagogy. She suggests the use of choice boards and learning menus, as a means of meeting the needs of all learners and for increasing their agency in learning. Applying these strategies to homework, might increase children’s motivation, but further research would need to be conducted to investigate this.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter analysed the findings that arouse from the collected data. The aims of this study were threefold: To ascertain the views of the parents and their children on emergent writing; to investigate what motivates children to write in the home; and to establish family literacy practices that may influence emergent writing. The next chapter will discuss the implications and recommendations of the issues discussed here, for teaching and learning.

Chapter 6. Conclusion

This research can act as a contribution to the existing literature in Ireland on emergent writing. Whilst bearing in mind that this was a small scale study and cannot be generalised or directly transferred to other settings, it provides valuable recommendations for the school in which the data was gathered. This chapter provides a summary of the key findings of the research, answers the three main research questions and outlines recommendations relating to these findings. These recommendations may be of interest to parents, early childhood settings, teachers and schools. In addition, this chapter highlights possible avenues for future research, which may be of interest to those undertaking research, in the field of early childhood literacy.

6.1 Main Findings

6.1.2 Do parent and children understandings of early writing, reflect an emergent writing perspective?

It was determined by all the participants in this study (excluding one who was unresponsive) that writing was an important, lifelong skill. However, the participants differed in their understandings of early writing:

- The perceptions of 2 parents closely reflected an emergent literacy perspective.
- 2 parents had traditional understandings of early writing, which reflected the reading readiness approach.
- 2 parents had recently moved from a traditional stance towards more of an emergent stance.
- All the children's understandings of early writing were in line with an emergent literacy perspective.

It was noteworthy that all participants (both parents and children) whose attitudes towards early writing, reflected an emergent literacy perspective, also identified that the young children were writers. No link could be established between the parents' attitudes towards early writing and their children's understandings of writing. The parents who had transitioned from a traditional perspective to an emergent perspective, established two factors that had influenced their initial understandings of early writing:

- A lack of public discourse on the importance of writing for young children, and on the stages of early writing development.
- Prior experiences within other educational systems outside of Ireland, may promote a traditional perspective towards writing development.

6.1.3 What motivates children to write in the home?

The findings suggested that there were two chief motivators for writing in the home:

- Children are motivated by their interactions with family members. The participants illustrated that children paid close attention to their parents and their elder siblings, whilst they engaged in literacy practices. The young children included themselves in these activities, by asking questions and by mimicking the behaviours of their parents and elder siblings. In addition, the children invited and expected these family members to act as audiences for their writing. Findings showed that children revelled in the praise received for their writing, which motivated them to engage in more writing activities.
- Children were most motivated to write in the home, when they had initiated the writing activities themselves. All the parent participants described the significance of agency and control, for their children's motivation in writing events. In

comparison, children had a lack of interest in the homework tasks set by their teacher.

6.1.3 How do family literacy practices influence the development of early writing?

- The findings suggest that participants underappreciate the informal literacy events that occur naturally in the home. Engagement with texts such as advertisements, social media, recipes, menus etc were not always perceived as opportunities for learning. The underappreciation of informal literacy activities related to both traditional literacies and digital literacies.
- This study revealed that parents have major concerns about the use of technology for young children. Parents indicated that technology might promote behaviour problems, encourage negative dispositions and may hinder their literacy habits. They also believed that the skill of writing for young children, should be with pen and paper.
- Parents' understandings of early writing development in the home language, heavily reflected a reading readiness approach. They felt that children needed a formal setting to learn how to write in their home languages. In addition, they illustrated that children would be better equipped to learn how to write in the home language, after they had mastered how to read and write in the English. This did not correspond with the perspectives of the children, with three children perceiving that they could already write in their home languages.

6.2 Recommendations for Practice

A number of recommendations for practice surfaced from the main findings in this study. The following recommendations may make a small contribution for future practices, policies and curricula in educational settings.

6.2.1 Emergent writing should be foregrounded in the discourse on early years literacy.

It is crucial that parents have access to information on the writing development of their young children, as an emergent literacy perspective indicates writing development, begins from birth (Hall et al., 2017). Those involved in writing policies and those delivering continuous professional development courses need to promote the concept of emergent writing, so that it becomes foregrounded in the discourse on early years literacy. If emergent writing, becomes a stronger focus for educators, then it will become a more discussed topic in the public arena, which will then transpire to more information being available to parents.

6.2.2 Promotion of an intervention approach based on alliances between teacher and parents.

Schools must provide adequate information on their approach to literacy learning, for parents. Without this information, parents (especially those from diverse backgrounds) may feel anxious about their children's literacy learning and may feel that they are unable to support them in this area. It is recommended that an alternative intervention approach based on alliances between teachers and parents, is promoted in schools. This approach was developed by Jackson and Doell (2017). Within this approach, the role of the teacher is to inform parents of specific approaches to literacy and the parents' role is to inform the teacher of family literacy practices. Together, they identify and implement targeted

support, relating to natural practices within the home for the young children. Through this approach, schools and homes become complementary to one another.

6.2.3 Cultivating a plurilingual environment in schools.

There is an onus on schools, to highlight that the development of the child's first language, in turn, develops their abilities to learn a second language. Kirwan (2018) suggests

that schools should cultivate a plurilingual environment for English Language Learners. She states that this creating this climate in schools, encourages families to embrace their linguistic abilities. She stresses that a whole school approach is needed to achieve this.

6.2.4 The use of 'open' apps to integrate emergent writing with digital tools.

It is recommended that high-quality 'open' apps are used in classrooms and in home, to achieve a balanced approach to literacy learning, which incorporates traditional and contemporary tools. Laidlaw and Wong (2016) explain that 'closed' apps are simply "flashier replications of traditional pedagogical forms" (p.31). In contrast, engagement with 'open' apps requires children to be creative and to write in a variety of genres. Whilst developing the writing skills of the children, they simultaneously develop children's skills in new textual literacy practices (Laidlaw & Wong, 2016; Marsh, 2017).

Research (Laidlaw & Wong, 2016; Neumann, 2018; Yelland, 2012) recommends that the following apps can be used to enhance emergent writing both at home and in the classroom: Storykit; Toontastic; Keynote; Doodle Buddy; Drawing Pad; Write My Name; Little Writer; Little Speller; Draw and Tell; New Booth App; and iWrite. In addition, the Common Sense Media website is a useful guide for parents and teachers, for choosing effective apps that foster creativity for literacy learners (Marsh, 2017).

6.2.5 Adding an element of choice to homework tasks.

To promote motivation and engagement in homework tasks, an element of choice, which reflects various interests of individuals in the class, should be incorporated into the homework for young children. Schools could add choice boards and learning menus to the homework, so that children can choose from a range of writing activities (Brennan, 2019). They could also incorporate elements of informal literacy practices (such as creating labels for their toys, for example ‘do not touch’) to these choice boards and learning menus. This would help parents and children to realise, that writing can be incorporated into everyday tasks. Marsh (2017) suggests the use of apps, as a homework task. She claims that this may enhance children’s creativity in homework, and thus, increase their motivation.

6.3 Recommendations for Future Research

A number of opportunities for future research has been identified in this thesis. Some of these are related to the limitations as addressed in Chapter 3 and others are related to the findings in the study:

- This research could be conducted on a much wider scale, interviewing more participants, across several settings, including early childhood settings. Quantitative research could be used in order to expand the scope of the research. Interviewing the perceptions of childrens’ teachers, would give the research an additional layer. It would also enable the researcher to compare family literacy practices and school literacy practices in more detail.
- Similar research could be conducted with participants that speak the same language. Clearer comparisons could then be made between the cultural family literacies practices that occur and the linguistic experiences that the young children receive in the home.

- This research found that the only two boy participants, were the only two children not seen as writers by their parents. Further research would need to be undertaken to determine, whether this was a coincidence. Research could also investigate whether writing identity, relates to the underachievement of boys in writing.
- This study, and a study by Hall et al. (2017) found that the perceptions of adults do not have a significant impact on children's own perceptions of themselves as writers. As stipulated by Hall et al. (2017), it would be interesting to investigate whether this changes as children develop into conventional writers, and if so, the factors involved in this change.

6.4 Conclusion

One of the main functions of primary schools in Ireland, is to support children in the attainment of effective writing skills, so that they can participate in contemporary society, express their voice and communicate with others over space and time (De Smedt & Van Keer, 2013; O'Toole, 2016; Purcell-Gates, as cited in Riley, 2006). However, no child lives in an isolated vacuum (Hayes et al., 2017). Therefore, when children begin primary school, they bring with them the knowledge and experiences of the written language that they have gained in their homes, with their family members.

Thus, the aim of this research was to investigate the perceptions of emergent writing from the viewpoints of parents and their children. The study in this thesis found that parental understandings of early writing, influence the ethos, the opportunities and the materials available for early writing in the home. Thus, the writing development of young children is likely to be influenced by parental perceptions. Children's understandings of early writing portrayed that an emergent writing perspective leads them to identify strongly

as writers. It was suggested that children were motivated to write when they were in social environments and when they were active agents in their own writing activities.

Street (1984, 2003) claims that schools should learn about children's literacy experiences in the home, so that children can transfer the skills they receive in their home setting to school, and vice-versa (Street, 1984, 2003). He adds that literacy should be meaningful and authentic for children. As explained by a parent, children should be "*able to bring what is inside out*" so that they can "*learn for themselves*".

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Appendices

Appendix A

Consent Letter: Board of Management

Dear _____,

I am a Master of Education Student in Marino Institute of Education [MIE]. This year, I hope to complete a study entitled 'Parents' and Their Children's Perspectives on Emergent Writing'. As part of this study, I would be conducting research to examine the following questions:

- a) Do parent and children understandings of early writing, reflect an emergent writing perspective?
- b) What motivates children to write in the home?
- c) How do family literacy practises influence emergent writing?

I wish to seek permission from the Board of Management, to invite parents and children from the school to participate in this research. It will be made clear that there is no obligation on any individual to participate. I assure that the risks of participation in this study are very low and of a social or reputational nature. Any data collection will be carried out in a sensitive and non-stressful manner.

Through this research, I hope that the school can continue to build positive partnerships with the parent community, that parents can feel more supported and empowered to guide and instruct their children, and that the school can use the children's funds of knowledge more effectively in the classroom.

If you have any questions or seek clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me. This study has been considered from an ethical perspective by the Marino Ethics in Research Committee.

Thank you in advance for your support.

Yours sincerely,

Kerry Harkin

Consent Letter: Parents

Dear Parents/ Guardians

I am a Master of Education Student in Marino Institute of Education [MIE]. This year, I am completing a thesis to explore, "*Parents' and Their Children's Perspectives on Emergent Writing*". I will be conducting research to examine this question.

I am writing to all parents, with children in the infant classes, to look for volunteers to take part in this study. However, there is no obligation on any individual to participate. You also have the freedom to withdraw from this research at any stage.

The process would involve the parent/s completing a journal for a week to record the literacy activities occurring in the home. The parent/s would then take part in a one-to-one interview. Following this, your child will then take part in a focus group, with other children (Your child will be asked for their permission before proceeding with the research).

I feel that this research is extremely important so that the school can identify whether parents feel supported in teaching their young children on how to write. It is also important for the school to find out the children's experiences of writing in the home, so that we can use these to enrich their learning in school.

No names will be used in the research, and any identifiable information provided will be removed from the data that you provide. However, as this is a small-scale research project, there is no guarantee of absolute anonymity. All data will be kept confidentially. Any data gathered must be kept for 13 months, for examination reasons and following this, will be destroyed.

I would like to be able to use the data generated in this research to:

- (a) To be used in my thesis.
- (b) To present and show the information gathered to the staff in the school, so that the school can use the findings to create more supports for parents.
- (c) To use the data generated to show and inform members of the wider teaching community

The risks of participation in this study are very low and of a social or reputational nature and I assure that any data collection will be carried out in a sensitive and non-stressful manner.

My contact details are kharkinmece17@momail.mie.ie. If you have any questions or seek clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me. You may also contact my supervisor for the project: siobhan.mcGovern@mie.ie. This study has been approved from an ethical perspective by the Marino Ethics in Research Committee. It has also been approved by the Board of Management in the school.

By signing the attached consent form, you are volunteering to participate in my study. Unfortunately, due to time constraints, I will only be able to interview a small number of participants, so it may not be possible to interview all volunteers. I nevertheless thank and value every volunteer.

Thank you in advance for your participation and support,

Statement of Consent:

Please read the questions below and indicate whether, or not you would be willing to participate in the study as described.

Do you consent to be interviewed based on the above questions?

Yes No

Do you consent to your child being interviewed as part of a focus group?

Yes No

Do you consent to having the interview audio recorded?

Yes No

Do you consent to having examples of your child's work included in the thesis?

Do you consent to participate in further research, such as a questionnaire or focus group, if required?

Yes No

May I use the data generated to show and inform members of the school staff?

Yes No

May I use the data generated in later research?

Yes No

May I use the data generated to show and inform members of the wider teaching community?

Yes No

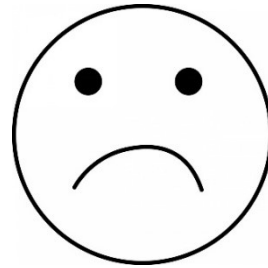
Parent / guardian signature _____ Date: _____

Letter of consent: Children

Dear children,

I am writing a book for college, to help me understand how you and your parents' feel about writing.

1 Colour the happy face if you would like me to ask you and your parents some questions about writing. And colour the sad face if you would not like me to ask you any questions.



Other people like students, principals, teachers and parents, will be able to see this book as it will be kept in a library.

2 If you allow me to put photographs of your writing in my book, then colour the happy face. Colour the sad face if you do not allow me.



If you say that it's ok now, but then change your mind later, then that is fine too.

Thank you,

Kerry

Write your name

Appendix B

Participant Journal: Example Pages

a) Front Cover



b) Inside Cover

Instructions:

1. Keep the journal for 5-7 days.
2. Keep a record of any literacy events that are occurring in everyday life.

This can be **ANY** type of writing or reading.



Reading events include: reading text messages, emails, Facebook messages, Instagram posts, iPads, newspapers, menus, instruction guides, mail, junk mail, posters, signs, travel brochures, picture books, encyclopaedias kindles, postcards, train tickets, reading holy books, etc



Writing events include: drawing pictures, writing on calendars, shopping lists, to-do notes, notes for people, invitations, cards, thank you cards, emails, text messages, What's App, posting pictures/messages on Instagram, Facebook, writing budgets, creative writing, doing homework, writing checklists, labelling, writing projects, writing on envelopes, crosswords etc.

c) Recording pages (7 in total of the same layout)

Day One.

Date: _____

READING EVENTS

	Reading done by parents/ older children	Shared reading events (done by young child AND somebody else)	Independent reading by the child
What was read? Who read it? Where was it read? Why was it read? What language?			

WRITING EVENTS

	Writing done by parents/ older children	Shared writing events (done by young child AND somebody else)	Independent writing by the child
What was written? Who wrote it? Where was it written? Why was it written? What language?			

ADDITIONAL REFLECTIONS (e.g.how long? Distractions? Easy/difficult to complete this today? Why? Who started the activity? What equipment was used? Did the child look for/ get feedback? What motivated the child to write? Did they enjoy the writing? What did they do with it afterwards?)

--

Interview Schedule for Parents: Pre-pilot

Introduction:

- Explain rationale and procedure
- Explain confidentiality and limits of confidentiality
- Obtain verbal consent and check participant has signed consent form
- Ask if the participant has any questions

To begin, I would like you to tell me a little bit of general information about your family.

- How many children do you have?
- What age are they?
- Where are you from?
- What is your first language?
When did you come to Ireland? Did you come on your own?
- Did you learn English before coming or did you learn it when you got here?
What members of your extended family are still in your home country?

I would just like to find out a little more about your own home language and your experiences of literacy, before you came to Ireland?

- Apart from _____ and English, do you speak any other languages?
- Do you remember what age you were when you started to read and to write?
- Do you remember anything more about being taught how to read and write in school?
- With regards to reading and writing, is the script similar or different to the alphabetic system in English?
- Does ____ have any older brothers and sisters?
- Did any of ____'s brothers or sisters attend school in _____ (above country).
- What was the major differences in the way that _____ is learning how to write and how to read?
- Is _____ your children's first language as well?
- What are the most challenging things about ensuring that your child can speak in your home language?
- When your child learns to read and write in school, they learn in English. Is this a difficulty?
- Will they learn to read and write in _____, as well?
- How will they learn this?
Would you like to see the school do more to support your child with their home language?
- Do you have any ideas on what the school could do?
What kind of contact do you have with your family in your country of origin – or wherever they are now? How do you communicate with them? How do they keep in touch with your children? Do they send cards/presents?

You kept a journal, over seven days, keeping a record of the literacy events that were happening in the home. What was this experience like for you?

- What kinds of literacy events did you notice happening in the home?
- Did you notice any literacy habits of your own?
- Or of your children?
- What language were they occurring in?
- What is writing used for in your home?
- Can you explain to me what writing is used for in your home?
- Who is involved in these?
- Who started these?
- What literacy events did your child seem to have the most interest in?
- Did your child engage in any reading or writing?
 - Was this associated with work, or was it fun for them?
 - Did they do it alone or with people?
- In the home, do they write in _____ or in English? Or a mix?
- Did you notice whether writing is being done in the traditional sense with pen and paper, or being done with technology, on laptops, I-pads, phones etc? when is writing done with pen/paper and when are phones/ipads/tablets used?
- Would you like to see more technology being used in the school, to help your child how to write and read?

The rest of the questions are going to concentrate specifically on early writing.

- In your eyes, do you see writing as an important skill for your young child?
- What do you see, as being the most important part about writing?
- Would you say that scribbling is important for a young child?
- Your child is in ___ class, do you see them as a writer yet?
- Do you remember when you first saw them in this way?
- How would you describe a writer?
- What kind of writing were they able to do before going to school?
- What, in your opinion, are the most important activities, to help your child with their writing development?
- How would you like to see your child develop with writing over the next year?
- What are the challenges for you, as a parent in helping support your child with their writing, or with their overall literacy development?
- Do you feel supported by the school, in teaching your young child how to write?
- Are there any additional supports, that the school could provide?

Before we end,

- Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Interview Schedule for Parents: Post-pilot

*Important Note: These questions and prompts were cut up and transferred onto presentation cards

Introduction:

- I just want to check whether I have your consent to audio record this interview.
- I want to clarify again that everything said will be confidential, your name will be changed in the thesis and that every effort will be made to ensure your anonymity, however as it is a small-scale research, there's always a small chance that somebody could figure out who you are. Is this ok?
- Do you have any questions before we begin?

General Information about the family:

- Can you give me some background information about your family?
 - ❖ Where you are from?
 - ❖ How many children are in your family?
 - ❖ What age are they?
 - ❖ What classes are they in?
 - ❖ Do you and your partner, work away from the home or inside the home?
 - ❖ Does any extended family live with you?
 - ❖ Do you have any extended family or close family friends living near you?
 - ❖ Would you mind if I just asked you your age bracket, are you between 20-29, 30-39, 40-49, over
 - ❖ What does a typical day look like in your family?
- Do any of your family live in ____?
 - ❖ What kind of contact do you have with them?
 - ❖ How do you keep in touch with them?
 - ❖ How does your children keep in touch with them? (email/ cards/ presents/ skype/ text/ phone calls/ letters, what's app/ social media)

Home Language

- What is the language spoken in the home?
 - ❖ Is this your first language?
 - ❖ Do you speak any other languages?
 - ❖ Did you learn English before coming here or how did you learn English?
 - ❖ How long have you lived in Ireland?
 - ❖ Did you come on your own?
 - ❖ Did any of your children live in ____?
 - ❖ Did they attend school there?
 - ❖ Do you see Ireland as your home now, or do you still see _____ as home?

- ❖ Can you tell me why?
- How important is it to you that your children speak _____?
 - ❖ Is it difficult ensuring that your children speak both _____ and English?
 - ❖ How do you help them with this?
 - ❖ Would you like to see schools do more to support the development of your school's home language?
 - ❖ Do you have any ideas of what they could do?
- Will your children learn how to write and read in _____?
 - ❖ How will they learn this?
 - ❖ When you write at home like shopping lists or to do notes etc, what language would you write in?
 - ❖ Do you read at all in _____, or would you read mainly in English?

Parent's Literacy Experiences

- What is the education system like in _____?
 - ❖ Do you mind, if I ask you what level of Education you completed?
- What age were you when you first started learning how to read and how to write?
 - ❖ Where did you learn this?
 - ❖ Do you remember any activities that were done to help you learn reading and writing?
 - ❖ Was it an enjoyable experience or not?
 - ❖ Did you have any family members helping you?
 - ❖ What language did you learn this in?
 - ❖ Was the script, similar to the alphabetic system or different?
 - ❖ When then did you learn how to write and read in English?
 - ❖ Was this difficult or easy?
 - ❖ What was difficult/ easy about it?
 - ❖ Is the way you learnt similar or different to the way your children are learning how to read and write now?
 - ❖ Do you think there's anything we could use now that could help us, teach children how to read and write?

Early Writing

- Would you say that writing is an important skill for your young child?
 - ❖ For you, what is the most important part about writing?
 - ❖ Did your child ever scribble in the home?
 - ❖ Did you mind this?
- At the minute, how would you describe your children's writing?

- ❖ Do they mainly use drawings? Do they use some random letters? Do they spell some words correctly? Do they use spaces/ full stops?
 - ❖ Does it worry you if your child doesn't spell everything correctly?
 - ❖ What age do you think they should be when they start to spell most things correctly?
 - ❖ What kind of writing were they able to do, before going to school?
 - ❖ When your child writes, what do they write about?
 - ❖ Are there any messages in their writing?
 - ❖ What would you say drives them to write?
 - ❖ Who, what audiences, does your child write for?
 - ❖ Is your child aware of the reader, when they write?
 - ❖ Can your child express themselves through their writing?
 - ❖ Is there anywhere in the home, that your child is able to display their writing?
 - ❖ Who decides what is displayed?
 - ❖ How is it decided?
 - ❖ How would you like to see your child develop with their writing over the next year or two?
 - ❖ What would you like to see the school do to help your child get to this point?
- Your child is in _____ class, do you see them as a writer yet?
 - ❖ Do you remember when you first seen them this way?
 - ❖ How would you describe a writer?
 - ❖ Do you think your child would see themselves as a writer?
 - ❖ In your opinion, does your child have good confidence with writing?
 - ❖ Do you see yourself as a writer?
- In the home, does your child use technology to write?
 - ❖ Do you think it's important that children learn how to write using technology at a young age?
 - ❖ Would you like to see schools use technology more to help your child write and read?
- As a parent, would you say that you like to be involved in the education of your child?
 - ❖ What kind of skills/ topics do you teach your child about in the home?
 - ❖ Do you think you play an important role in their literacy development?
 - ❖ Would you say this lessens/ grows stronger/ or stays the same as your child gets older?
 - ❖ How do you help your child with their writing (letter formation, phonics, writing creatively/ shared writing etc.)
 - ❖ What are the challenges for you, as a parent in helping support your child with their writing development?

- ❖ Would work demands/ family commitments/ child's behaviour/ partnerships with the school/ language barriers/ ever present as challenges for parents in helping support their children?
- ❖ What does the school do to help parents support their children's educational development?
- ❖ Is there anything more that schools could do to support parents, with their children's learning?
- ❖ How do you know what the child is learning in school?
- ❖ Is there anything that the school could do to inform parents about what their children is learning?
- ❖ How can schools learn more about the children's home experiences of writing?

The Journal

- You kept a journal over seven days, recording literacy events that were happening in the home. How did you find this experience?
 - ❖ I included a list of the types of literacy practises that were happening in the home, were you surprised that I had included reading menus, writing on social media, reading emails, labelling things, looking at holiday brochures, reading the mail etc?
- What kinds of reading did you notice that you were engaged in yourself?
 - ❖ What language was the reading done in?
 - ❖ When you were engaged in this, were your children in the room?
 - ❖ Did they notice/ show an interest in what you were doing?
- What kinds of shared reading (reading that happens with two people) happened in your home?
 - ❖ What was read?
 - ❖ Did your child enjoy this type of reading?
 - ❖ Did you enjoy this type of reading?
 - ❖ What does your child do or say during these readings? (Where do they sit/ do they notice letters, do they try to read after you, do they ask questions)
 - ❖ Other than books, was there any other types of reading that happened naturally in the home?

-For routine related activities such as ordering food, shopping online, reading chore, reading the post, reading notes on the calendar, reading to-do lists, checking weather,

-For entertainment, such as story book reading, reading instructions for games, reading text on apps, you-tube, reading newspapers,

-For school-related activities, homework, projects,

-For religious related activities

-For communication such as sending texts, skyping, emails, social media, Instagram, what's app.

-Work-related activities – writing emails, writing presentations, reading for study, reading forms,

- Did your child engage in any reading independently?
 - ❖ What did they read?
 - ❖ Did they enjoy it?
 - ❖ Where did they read?
 - ❖ Similar to all the different types, of natural reading practices, did your child do any of these independently.
 - ❖ Did they look for praise or recognition that they were reading independently?
 - ❖ Did they discuss any of their reading with you?

- What kinds of writing did you notice that you were engaged in yourself?
 - ❖ What language was the writing done in?
 - ❖ When you were engaged in this, were your children in the room?
 - ❖ Did they notice/ show an interest in what you were doing?
 - ❖ Do you enjoy writing?

- What kinds of shared writing (writing that happens between two people) happened in your home?
 - ❖ Was writing used for routine related activities, such as writing shopping lists, budgets, filling forms, writing cards, notes, to-do lists, checklists, on calendars.? (Who were involved?)
 - ❖ Was writing used for any entertainment, such as diaries, journals, story-writing, drawings crosswords, etc? (Who were involved)
 - ❖ Was writing used for any school-related activities, doing home-work, labelling books, writing projects? (Who were involved)?
 - ❖ Was writing used for religious related activities?
 - ❖ Was writing used for communication, such as writing emails, posting pictures on Instagram or Social Media, writing on Twitter, writing texts, what's apps, writing invitations, writing invitations, notes, letters, post-cards, cards.
 - ❖ Was writing used for work-related activities, filling in forms, writing emails, writing presentations, etc.
 - ❖ When shared writing is happening, what does your child do or say? Do they write alongside you? Do they watch you? Do they ask questions?

- Did your child engage in any writing independently?
 - ❖ What did they write?
 - ❖ Did they enjoy it?

- ❖ Where did they write?
 - ❖ Similar to all the different types, of natural writing practices, did your child do any of these independently.
 - ❖ Did they look for praise or recognition that they were writing independently?
 - ❖ Did they discuss any of their writing with you?
 - ❖ What did they do with their writing piece when it was finished?
- When your child was engaging in writing events (either independently or with other people) what kinds of materials did they use?
 - ❖ Was there any materials that you used, but that your child did not use?
 - ❖ Would your child know where to find writing materials in your home?
 - ❖ What writing materials are your child's favourite to use?
 - In the journal, there was a space for you to write some reflections. Did you have any reflections?
 - ❖ What literacy events did your child seem to have the most interest in?
 - ❖ Were you surprised at the amount of literacy events happening in your home?
 - ❖ What literacy events do you enjoy the most yourself?
 - ❖ What kind of distractions or challenges occurred, during the week, maybe stopping these literacy events from occurring?
 - ❖ Would you say that pen and paper or modern technology is used more for reading or writing in your home?
 - ❖ What are the main things technology (laptops, phones, i-pads) are used for in your home?
 - ❖ What language was the majority of the events occurring in?
 - ❖ What kind of reading is most important in your family?
 - ❖ What kind of writing is most important in your family?

End the interview

- Before we end, is there anything else that you would like to add?
- Do you have any questions about what we have been talking about?

Thank the participant.

Focus Group Interview Schedule

Initial Prompts from Jackson the Frog

- ❖ I'm really sad.
- ❖ I'm sad because I don't know how to write.
- ❖ Do you know any writers that could help me?
- ❖ How could they help me?

Potential Questions:

- Are you a writer?
- Can you write?
- Who taught you how do write?
- Can you teach me how to write?
- How would you do it?
- Do you like writing?
- Why do you like/ not like writing?

- What's hard about writing?
- Is it easier to read or to write?
- What's your favourite thing to write?
- What languages do you write in?
- What do you do if you can't spell a really long word?
- Do you be proud of your writing?
- Who do you like to show you writing to?
- Is it important to write? Why/ Why not?

- Where do you write?
- What kind of things do you write in school?
- What kind of things do you write at home
- What's the same/ different about writing at school and in home?

- Who is the best writer you know?
- How do you know they are the best?
- Are your mums/ dads/ sisters/ brothers writers?
- What do they write?
- When do you see them writing?

Appendix C

Examples of Analysis: Coding

Kerry: [00:06:50] So you obviously enjoyed writing then did you?

Lucy: [00:06:50] Yeah. **Yeah (enjoyed it).** Still now, I **write lists for everything.** I nearly have lists for the lists

[Informal literacy/ Parents' engagement / Enjoyment]

Kerry: [00:07:14] I know I do as well, my mum buys me a new notebook every year.

Lucy: [00:07:17] **Even holidays like, lists for** everything every day, **especially with the two kids.**

[Context / functionality/ family literacy practices/ parents' engagement]

Kerry: [00:07:31] And do you notice anything like in the way that you learnt how to read and write, and how it compares with how Charlotte is learning how to read and write?

Lucy: [00:07:40] **She enjoys it,** coz like I read, **I write and read.** She really enjoys it, especially **like bedtime stories,** she **never goes to bed** without a bedtime story, so I think **that's passed down** because I read before going to bed and she **picks up on stuff** so much and even the lists and stuff, she would say, **don't forget to put this on the list.** Like **shopping,** or I need this for my holidays, put this on the list.

[Context / functionality/ family literacy practices/ parents engagement with literacy/ Enjoyment/ Modelling/ Reading events/ storybook reading/ routine/ informal literacy/ Child interactions/ shared writing]

Kerry: [00:08:00] Yeah and I noticed when she makes pictures, you always scribe for her.

Lucy: [00:08:15] Yeah I do.

Kerry: [00:08:15] I do sometimes for the kids as well. But I noticed that's always something you do for her.

Lucy: [00:08:20] **Well she done it for herself tonight.** I nearly see myself **trying to take over** because she had **one word on one line and another word on another line.** And I said **would you not move it.** And she said **No.**

[Independent/ scribing/ modelling / positive learning dispositions/ interest/ self-initiated activity/ Feedback/ independent/ emergent writing/ child's ability/ Agency/ identity/ positive learning dispositions / confidence/ Perceptions of ew/ acceptance]

Kerry: [00:08:21] Yeah, sure that takes time. It's quite advanced.

Lucy: [00:08:21] **I know that it's her trying to write**

[Perceptions of ew/ acceptance]

Kerry: [00:13:10] And would you say then that writing is an important skill, for your young child?

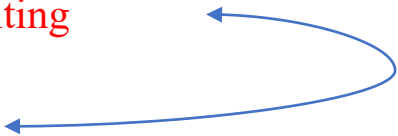
Lucy: [00:13:11] Yeah. Yeah. **Definitely** yeah.
[importance of writing]

Kerry: [00:13:14] For you, what's the most important part about writing?

Lucy: [00:13:28] Just I suppose cause **we use it so much**. You know, **I still use it**. People use it a **lot on their phones** but I still use it, **like to write a lot of lists**, and leave **notes like for Noah** where he can see it, **just a little quick message** and **for their education the** whole way up. **And my job I** write like all day as well. Some people's **writing is so hard to understand** where you're like Oh my God, please write bigger or ... **You nearly need it for everything**.

[Perceptions of ew/ acceptance/ Functional, reflection, communication, engagement with literacy, informal, importance, education, work, formal, skill of writing, society]

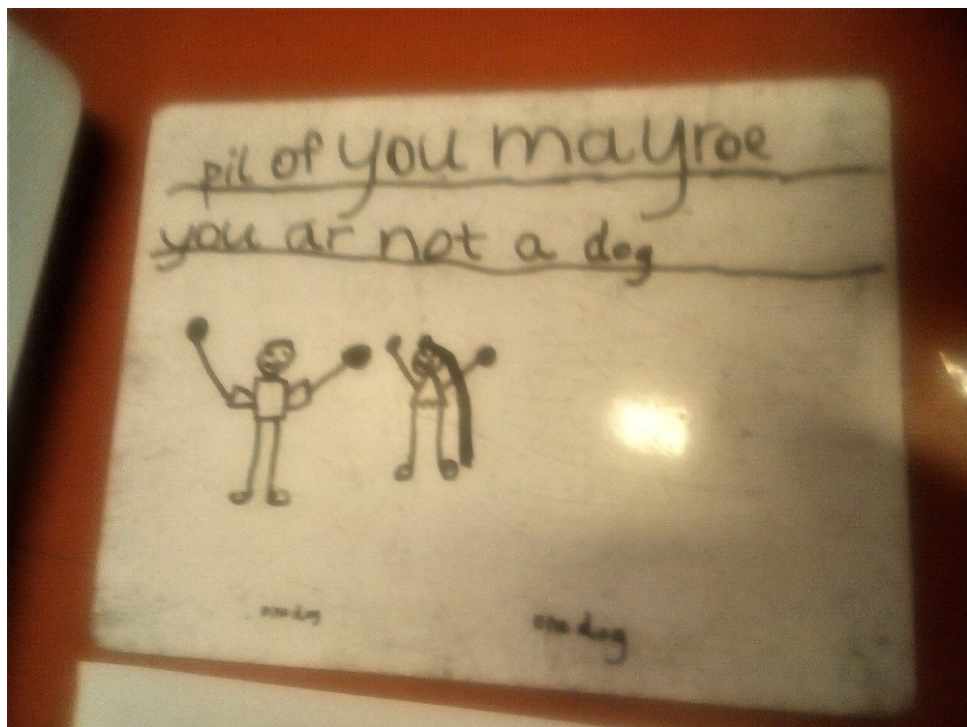
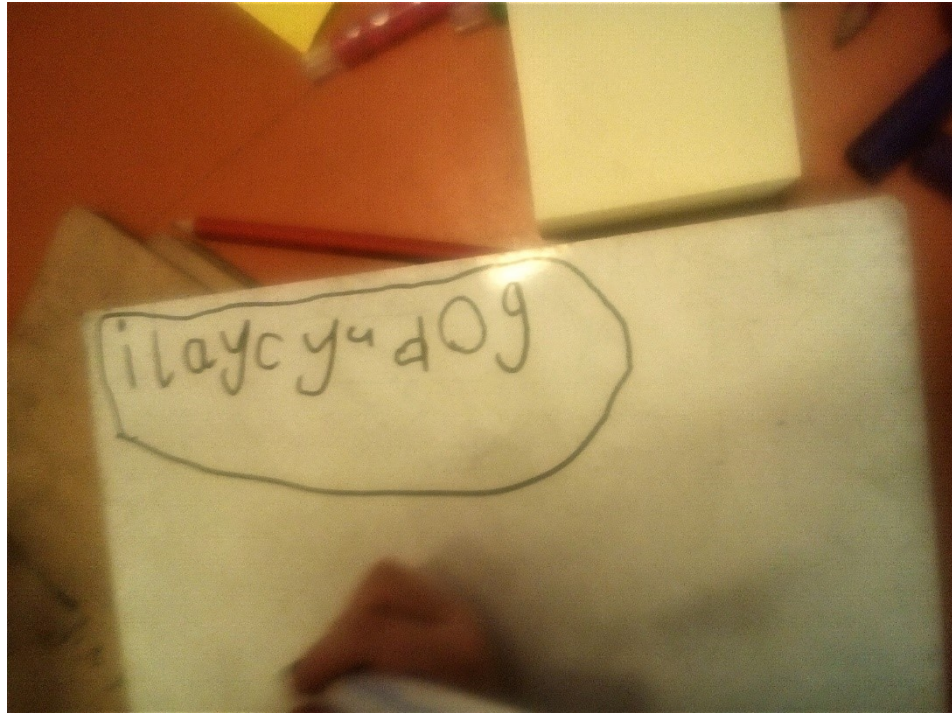
Example of analysis: Collapsing codes into Major Themes

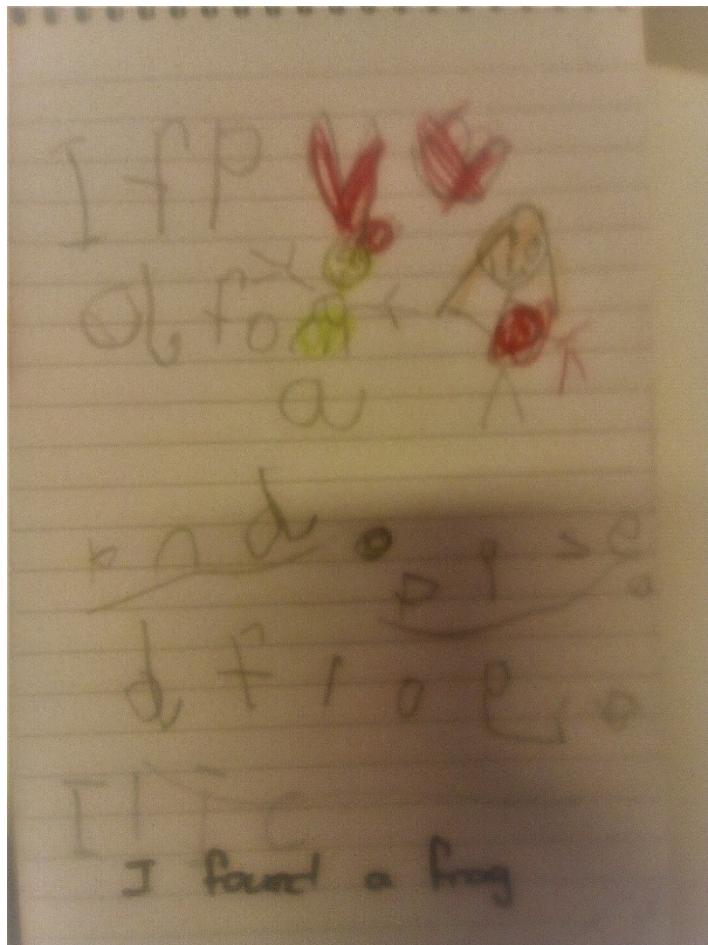
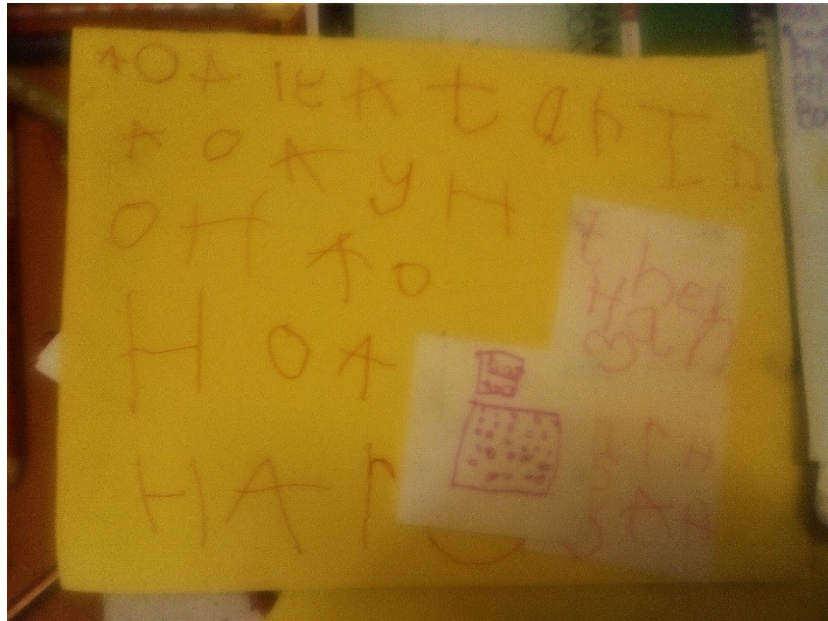
- 1. Perceptions of Emergent Writing
 - 2. Motivation to Write
 - 3. Identity
 - 4. Family v School Literacy
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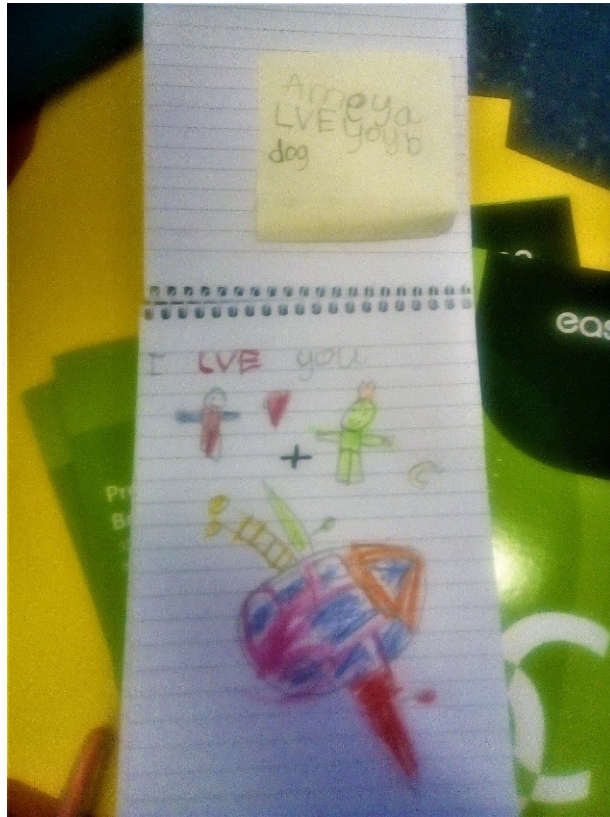
<p>Siblings – How many: Language Parents learnt language Years in Ireland Home Topics like to write about Carnivale Parents writing Reading v writing Purpose of writing Best writers Purposes of own writing Writing in school Writing in home Importance of writing Own Identity Teaching writing Methods to teach Teachers Own ability Materials Interests Get stuck Enjoyment of writing Drawing Technology Writing as an adult Texting Emails Calls Handwritten mail Social media Video calls Role of parent Perceptions of early writing What is a writer</p>	<p>Development over two years Positives in school School Disparity Advice How informed School as a child School home country Types of writing Writing initiated by child Writing initiated by parent Reading initiated child Reading initiated by parent How to teach reading home language Age for reading HL Homework Importance of reading Reading v writing perceptions Reading v writing habits Ability Homework Technology in school Description of children’s writing Spelling conventionally Ability to express Purpose of child’s writing Use of technology Scribbling Identity as a writer - child Drawing emergent writing</p>	<p>Home language – with parents Home language- sibling Reading readiness Importance of home language Speaking in home language Supports in home language Importance of English Comparison with English Writing and reading home language Shared writing -support Direct teaching Encouragement and support Giving time to reading Materials = traditional Modelling Positive dispositions Praise/ recognition Display/ storage Homework Challenges Spellings Pride Completion of writing task Views of technology Technology and writing Technology and reading Technology for communication Helping with technology Experiences as a child Enjoyment Communication Child’s enjoyment - home Trad vs modern writing Siblings influence Child ability</p>
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Appendix D

Examples of children's writing: Focus Group







Examples of children's writing: Home

