



**Some English-Medium Primary School Teachers' Perspectives of  
Using a Drama-Based Approach to Teach Irish**

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**Declaration**

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

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Date: 08/05/2018

**Abstract**

This dissertation examines a number of English-medium primary school teachers' perceptions of using a drama-based approach to teach Irish. A tool of communicative language teaching (CLT), drama is often employed as a methodology in additional language teaching, particularly English as an additional or second language (EAL/ESL). However, little research has been undertaken in relation to whether drama is used to teach the Irish language. What does exist contains little reference to teachers' own attitudes or experiences.

A semi-structured interview approach was taken in gathering the data. After analysing six interviews carried out with primary teachers aged 23-33, this dissertation establishes that whilst all teachers interviewed find a drama-based approach to be beneficial in the acquisition of Irish, it remains a peripheral methodology for most teachers. This is due to teachers' self-acknowledged own lack of confidence in using the Irish language. The dissertation examines the four themes that emerged through analysis of the data: drama as incentivised learning, drama as a tool for learning, transforming Irish from a subject to a language through drama, and teachers' underlying relationship with Irish.

The findings of this dissertations suggest that further research could be undertaken in this area to establish a broader breadth of coverage. In doing so, the valuable view points and experiences of teachers would be highlighted, providing a deeper insight into the relationship between the Irish language and the education system.

**Acronyms**

CA Communicative Approach

CLT Communicative Language Teaching

DES Department of Education and Science

EAL English as an Additional Language

INTO Irish National Teachers' Organisation

ITE Initial Teacher Training

NCCA National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

This dissertation is an examination of the attitudes of teachers in English-medium primary schools toward the use of a drama-based approach to teaching Irish. Although there exists a great deal of international-based research on using a drama-based approach to teach language, there is currently a lack of Irish-based, teacher specific research on the matter. It is hoped, therefore, that this dissertation may open up a discussion about how teachers perceive the use of drama within the Irish lesson.

In order to truly be immersed in a language, one must live that language (Anderson & Loughlin, 2014, Al-Mekhlafi, 2011). The primary reason for Irish being taught as part of the curriculum is as a means of preservation and the desire to restore an endangered language. And yet research shows that Ireland is still inherently monolingual (Baker, 2011). Recent government strategies and initiatives, such as the 20-Year Strategy for the Irish language, would infer that schools are seeking to move closer towards an immersive education system. However, due to the fact that in English-medium schools exposure to Irish is limited to its specific class time and instructional use of the language, students don't always have the opportunity to use Irish in a contextualised, meaningful way (Darmody & Daly, 2015).

Since the advent of CLT otherwise known as the communicative approach (CA) in the 1970s, language teaching has been transformed into a student-centred, task-based, engaging experience in which confidence and fluency comes before grammatical

accuracy (Barta, 2011, Demirezen, 2011). Within this approach the specific methodology of drama has been employed as a tool used to consolidate, assimilate and utilize language learning in a contextualised and meaningful environment. The approach is child-centred, insofar as the student is ideally provided with tools for building on their language experience and the teacher's role is relegated to one of facilitator or spectator.

This research has not only been of academic interest but also of personal relevance to me. I feel my own background as an EAL teacher and additional language learner is particularly pertinent to the development of this research and subsequent collection and interpretation of data. As both a teacher and learner of additional languages, the communicative approach has been crucial to the linguistic development and fluency of myself and my students. In particular, I have used role play and drama in many, if not most, of my lessons and have personally found it to be received positively. I have also found it to be an invaluable resource in students' language development. Returning to ITE, I have developed a strong interest in developing students' fluency in Irish through the use of drama and have become particularly interested in the ways teachers may or may not implement it in their own language lessons.

Chapter 2 of this dissertation examines existing literature relating to identified benefits of the CLT approach, with a specific emphasis on drama. It also examines the implications of the relationship between people and the Irish language, as well as current teacher and societal attitudes towards Irish. Chapter 3 discusses the methodological approach used in this dissertation, acknowledging that by investigating using an interpretivist paradigm, the responses and experiences of participants are of primary importance. Chapter 4 gives a description of the main findings of the investigation, discussing them with reference to relevant literature. Chapter 5 offers a



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conclusion to the findings of participant's perspectives of using a drama-based approach in their Irish lessons, making suggestions for further research.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Review of the Literature**

This chapter will examine the existing body of literature pertaining to attitudes surrounding Irish in the primary curriculum, with particular reference to drama, and consider how this might influence language acquisition. It will also examine research relating to language learning through drama, with reference to both national and international contexts. In doing so, it will consider how drama contextualises language learning and develop students' autonomy.

Analysis of the literature has highlighted a gap between international and national research on drama in language learning. The concept of teaching language through drama has been widely explored in the context of EAL, yet little has been undertaken in the context of Irish language acquisition.

Therefore, it should be noted that some of the literature reviewed here derives from studies in EAL or ESL in non-English speaking countries, specifically Spain, Malaysia and the Middle East. It seems appropriate to assert that a possible reason for this is due to English being marketed as an increasingly important asset in a globalised society (Baugh, 2002).

However, language acquisition methods do not necessarily need to be specific to one language. Other studies have shown the adoption of these methodologies within the Irish curriculum, and since the 1960s, the Irish classroom has adopted a more

communicative approach in its language teaching (Ó Ceallaigh & Ní Dhonnabháin, 2015).

For the purpose of this literature review, the concept of 'drama' will be used as an umbrella term to refer to any imaginative play in which the participant assumes an alternative identity, including role play, and engages with other learners in a constructive and meaningful way. Whilst some drama may emphasise the consolidation of vocabulary or grammar, other forms may focus on fluency and effective conveyance of thoughts and emotions.

### **Teachers' attitudes towards teaching Irish through drama**

As acknowledged in the introduction, there exists little research on the use of drama in the teaching of Irish. Lane also states that Irish language teacher experiences remains an under-researched area (2016). The experiences and attitudes of Irish teachers that have been documented are mixed. A study done by Hickey and Stenson found that some teachers were interpreting the CLT approach as having a primarily oral focus and the other strands were being neglected. "My priority has always been getting them to speak it – I really don't care too much about any other aspect of it" (2016, pp. 307). Conversely, Éamon Ó Dónaill, director of education at Gaelchultúr, believes that there is an emphasis on competency rather than conversation so that students are enabled to do well in exams (Kelleher, 2017). Ó Dónaill disagrees with the way in which Irish is taught, stating that the teaching of Irish is outdated as teachers do not encourage the autonomy of students and there is a serious lack of interaction between the learners.

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In the same study, another teacher interviewed asserted that while they were confident in using spoken Irish in the classroom, they avoided writing Irish on the board as much as possible as they feared there might be errors (2016). Although this contrasts with other studies done on Irish in the classroom where there appeared to be a lack of focus on the use of oral Irish, the teachers interviewed do not specify whether the students themselves are engaging in task-based activities, or if they are just engaging in listening activities with the teacher. This lack of confidence also ties into research done by Trinity College in which it was found that primary teachers' levels of Irish were much lower than they should be (Faller, 2014).

Teachers interviewed also had predominantly negative attitudes towards Irish, both in their experience of learning the language as students and in the responses of their own students. "I think that one of the biggest challenges facing Irish is that the children don't see a use for it" (2016, pp. 310). This teacher's experience encapsulates many of the arguments that have been put forward by research in relation to the teaching of Irish. It ultimately lacks meaning for children and that this attitude is detrimental to the development of their fluency (Owens, 1991, Faller, 2014).

In her own research on teachers of Irish, Lane highlights how the attitude of teachers can shape students' learning experiences. She acknowledges that as a child she disliked Irish until she experienced a sixth-class teacher who saw "Irish as a language rather than a subject" (2016, pp. 2). The teacher in question asserted that when using Irish you are speaking it, thus emphasising its importance as a language to be used not just to be learned. Lane feels that because the teacher gave meaning to the language, it became a much more enjoyable and fruitful experience for students.

With specific relation to drama, a focus group interview carried out by the INTO found that many teachers used drama as a methodology throughout the school curriculum rather than as a stand-alone subject. Some teachers found integrating drama with another subject, such as Irish, as a means of combatting a curriculum overload (2015). However, there is also research that indicate teachers do not feel they have the skills to teach Irish using this methodology. In a report on consultation and engagement with the new language curriculum carried out by the NCCA, responses by teachers showed that there was a particular emphasis in English-medium schools placed on the need for a practice guide on teaching Irish through drama. However, the realities of the classroom in relation to size and resources were also noted as being potential difficulties (2014).

### **Current attitudes towards teaching Irish through drama in the classroom**

Irish has endured a complex and challenging relationship with its people for many years, particularly within the realm of education (Ó Ceallaigh & Ní Dhonnabháin, 2015). As a language that experienced a serious decline over many years, attempts have been made within the last century to regenerate and preserve it (Baker, 2011). Dillon suggests that Irish people's attitudes towards their language is still troubled. She states that, "it is seen to be ideologically important but of marginal practical value" (2015, pp.10). This would suggest that whilst maintaining cultural significance, Irish is not viewed as holding the same communicative value as English. There have been attempts to reconstruct these attitudes so that Irish may be utilised within society. In recent years the 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language has decreed that the emphasis on the Irish language should be a communicative one, in which people use the language in a

meaningful and contextualised way in order to develop as a truly bilingual country (Government of Ireland, 2010).

Within the classroom, however, there does exist research suggesting that teachers in English-medium schools are less likely to use task-based activities, such as role-play, with children than those in Irish-medium schools (McCoy, Smyth & Banks 2012). This results in children's disassociation with Irish as they feel it lacks value and purpose (Darmody & Daly, 2015). Similarly, Owens (1991) believes that Irish lacks context within the classroom. Owens states that English enjoys an active role in children's learning as is contextualised by virtue of its skills being used in the world and that Irish, too, must be granted a similar meaning in order for students to truly develop it.

In an Irish Times interview, Pádraig Ó Duibhir echoes Owens' concerns in his argument that the way in which Irish is implemented in schools, as a 30 or 40 minute class, is not sufficiently effective as there is little opportunity for students to practice what they have learned and they are not motivated to use the language (Faller, 2014).

An evaluation undertaken in 2007 by the Department of Education and Skills in English-medium primary schools found that there was a greater emphasis placed on reading and questioning, and that the teacher engaged in most of the talking which led to disinterest in the lessons and there lacked opportunities to practice speaking.

According to the inspectorate, "the highest point of achievement for a child in acquiring a language is that he/she creates the language him/herself" (2007, pp. 47). For drama to be created, the newly acquired language must be combined with previously learned language (Baker, 1998). Context allows the new language to be used authentically and it has been argued that drama is a lens through which this can be provided (Maley &

Duff, 1982; Muszynska, Urpi & Galazka, 2017). The inspectorate states that drama is not often emphasised in the Irish curriculum as a method of consolidation but suggests that the NCCA should include it as a central aspect to the learning of the language (DES, 2007).

The evaluation found that while drama was infrequently used within the classroom, where it did occur it was used effectively and was an important methodology in the teaching of the language. It was found that drama enabled students to better understand Irish as well as provide the tools for them to create and devise their own sketches, therefore creating an authentic communicative experience and making the language more meaningful (DES, 2007).

Based on the literature discussed above, it seems appropriate to suggest that whilst communicative activities are not always emphasised in the classroom, where they are employed they can be successful due to the fact that children enjoy being given the opportunity to practice what they have learned, apply their learning to other contexts and communicate with each other meaningfully.

### **The role of drama in the Irish curriculum**

Although there are suggestions that the way in which Irish is taught has resulted in a disconnection from the language, it must be stated that the curriculum implemented in 1999 heralded a new approach to the teaching of Irish. The curriculum itself states that, "... béim an-láidir ar labhairt na Gaeilge sa churaclam. Mar sin, is é an cumas cumarsáide an sprioc is tábhachtaí atá le baint amach ag an bpáiste" (NCCA: Gaeilge, 1999, lch. 4).

More recently, the new Primary Language Curriculum, launched in 2015, expands and develops on these approaches. Currently being implemented in the junior end of the primary school, the curriculum advocates for integrated language learning and acknowledges the transfer of linguistic skills across languages (2015). It has also forged a link with Aistear, acknowledging that play is an important element in the development of language in children. Within Aistear, drama is recognised as a form of play through which children are enabled to develop and use language (2009). The new curriculum does include drama as a learner-centred task that may enhance language learning. It is seen as one of the ways in which children are enabled to realise their learning.

The 1999 Irish curriculum also suggests that simulated settings, such as drama can encourage language function. Drama is encouraged when creating teaching and learning facilities, for example dress up and doll play, are suggested as a medium for developing students' communication skills in both English and Irish-medium schools. "Bíonn an Ghaeilge á húsáid go fíorchumarsáideach sna suímh dhrámatúla agus bíonn saoirse cainte ag na páistí taobh istigh den ról nó den suíomh" (NCCA: Gaeilge Treoirínte do Mhúinteoirí, lth. 95).

Both the 1999 and recent curricula, therefore, offer a communicative, task-based and child-centred approach to learning and strategies encouraged for developing children's communication skills, including role-play, drama and interviews. The purpose of this then is to develop a natural ability to communicate through Irish (Department of Education and Science, 2007). It seems appropriate to suggest that both curricula do emphasise the importance of communication and the necessity of creating a meaningful language experience. The implications of this will be discussed in the next theme.



### **Language acquisition through drama**

As discussed above, there exists the argument that Irish has lacked purpose in the classroom as it is neither contextualised nor utilised (Owens, 1991; Faller, 2014). This argument is encapsulated in UAE language researcher Al-Mekhlafi's assertion that "We learn to communicate in a language by actually communicating in that language." (2011, pp. 99). Al-Mekhlafi's statement highlights the fundamental purpose of the CLT method which emphasises fluency over accuracy, therefore giving students the tools to build their confidence and communicative abilities. O'Gara (2008) illustrates this in his statement that studies done in primary schools have shown that students have learned and grasped grammar better in an additional language when taught through drama. This is echoed in Maley and Duff's belief that the improvisational aspect of drama encourages the development of communication skills (1982).

Research has also emphasised the necessity of real-life practice in the learning of an additional language as it promotes engagement with the target language. (Al-Mekhlafi, 2011; Alabsi, 2016; Muszynska et. al. 2017, Gomez, 2010). From a Malaysian and American perspective, Sam and Mordecai have stated that the use of the CA in the teaching of language increases motivation in students. It is asserted that a child is more likely to focus on a task due to it being set within a meaningful context. (Mordecai, 1985; Sam, 1990)

Creating simulations of real-life scenarios places the language within a context (Muszynska, et. al, 2017; Demirezen, 2011). Through findings from research done in a number of Spanish primary schools, it has been noted that drama acts as a particularly useful portal through which students can become immersed in a language (Gomez,

2010). Through drama, students are transported to a temporary real-world scenario (Holden, 1981) in which they can participate meaningfully (Alabsi, 2016), and by virtue of the creative and active nature of drama, students feel empowered (Anderson & Loughlin, 2014, Alabsi, 2016). This cultivation of the imagination highlights how play is an important developmental process (Redington, 1983). This is encapsulated in Sam's statement that, "Drama contextualises the language in real or imagined situations in and out of the classroom. Language in the class that uses drama activities is explored, tried out and practised in meaningful situations" (1990).

Drama requires the application of a number of different learning styles. Rather than simply reading and reciting a text, learners are engaged visually, verbally and kinaesthetically. This accommodation of various styles enables students to absorb and synthesise their learning. In other words, drama has the ability to 'bring to life' literature or texts which may otherwise seem 2D or unapproachable (Boudreault, 2010).

There have been several arguments made that assert that communicative language teaching, and specifically the use of drama, has an impact on the "social, intellectual and linguistic development of the child" (Doughill, 1987). Students are required to engage in activities with each other and develop their team-work, decision making, responsibility and cooperation skills, hence informing their social awareness (McCaslin, 1996; Boudreault, 2010). Drama can be used to enhance, expand and reinforce vocabulary and grammatical structures (Sam, 1990). These arguments all seek to assert that students should be enabled to engage as effective communicators and convey thoughts and expressions in a manner appropriate for the target language.

### **Development of students' autonomy**

The use of drama as an effective means of developing students' autonomy has been observed by a number of scholars. Viewed through a Vygostkian lens, drama and role-play could be used as a form of scaffolding in which children's ability to problem solve is developed through facilitation of a teacher or a more advanced peer, such as a classmate with a stronger understanding of the language (Berk, 2009).

This corresponds with Liu and Ding's belief that in drama, the teacher's role is one of facilitator, participant or spectator (Liu & Ding, 2009). Scaffolding also occurs while children learn to engage, negotiate and learn from each other (Eunseok, 2016). This method also highlights a move away from communication entailing simply question and answer form (Carpenter, 2000). In such cases, there often exists a lack of opportunity for students to use the target language. For example, the teacher spends the majority of time talking while students listen or write (McKendry & Uí Éigearthaigh, 2006). This has also been observed in the Irish classroom, where it has been suggested that many students are not given the opportunity to practice language (DES, 2007). Research carried out by Trinity College Dublin in 2006 found that a quarter of primary school teachers felt their level of Irish to be 'weak' (Faller, 2014). It could be asserted that this lack of fluency inhibits teachers from engaging in activities such as drama and role play. Within the classroom where drama is employed, active participation is key and therefore there exists opportunities for the consolidation of learning through learner-to-learner interaction (Sam, 1990).

McKendry & Uí Éigearthaigh (2006) and NCCA (1999) both advocate for the use of task-based activities. Barta argues that the CLT approach enables a child to develop their self-confidence, control over the language and therefore a sense of autonomy

(2011). Through participation and engagement in drama, children are enabled to reflect and respond with their own thoughts and opinions (Anderson & Loughlin, 2014). These assertions reinforce the idea that the social and intellectual aspects of a child's development are provided for and nurtured (Doughill, 1987).

The purpose of this review is to analyse the current attitudes of teachers to Irish in the English-medium schools with specific relation to drama. It also discussed the potential benefits of using drama as a means of contextualising language learning and developing students' autonomy in their learning. It seems evident that compared with the immense studies compiled within the EAL realm, including the Middle East, Malaysia and Spain, there appears to be a significant lack of research on drama within the Irish language classroom. What research does exist has suggested that both teacher and student attitudes towards the Irish language in English-medium schools are predominantly negative, as many researchers and teachers feel the language lacks purpose. With this in mind, the Chapter 4 of this dissertation will provide an insight into teachers' experiences and attitudes towards Irish language teaching through drama and examine their perceptions in relation the literature discussed in this chapter.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Research Methodology**

This chapter will discuss the philosophical positioning underpinning this dissertation and how this relates to the choice of research design and its implementation. It will also consider the significance of the researcher's positionality on this topic and its potential influence on the data, as well as outline the ethical procedures that were utilised to ensure careful consideration of participants.

#### **Philosophical assumptions**

As discussed in the review of literature, this research is interested in exploring the attitudes teachers have towards drama as a language methodology. This investigation must be aligned with an underlying philosophical assumption reflected in the research question and methodology.

There exists an ongoing contestation on the choices of social researchers to apply certain philosophies to their investigation. Philosophical foundations underpin and shape the nature and perspective of the research (Denscombe, 2010). In relation to social research, there are a number of different possible approaches. I will account for the philosophical assumptions I feel to be the most relevant to this research and discuss their implications.

This research has sought to investigate how teachers feel about using a drama-based approach in their Irish lessons. The very nature of this research implies elements of interpretation of teachers' views and experiences. Denzin and Lincoln state that "all research is interpretive: guided by a set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied" (2013, p. 26). There are certain philosophical foundations that would oppose this position. Positivism is an approach which applies the natural science method of research to social science. This approach assumes that people do not construct their own realities, they simply exist. Positivism stresses the importance of the objectivity of the researcher, who should remain impartial to the research and findings (Denscombe, 2010). This is not appropriate for this particular research design due to the importance placed on participants', in this case teachers', experiences, motives and opinions.

The positivist approach is dichotomised by interpretivism. The interpretivist perspective views the social world as being consistently and constantly changed by the interaction between individuals and the environment. (Denscombe, 2010). If it is assumed that each individual will experience and interpret the social world differently, then it would not be theoretically possible to achieve social objectivity.

Interpretivism makes certain ontological and epistemological assumptions about the nature of social reality (Denscombe, 2010). Ontology considers the nature of social reality. Epistemology considers how it is that people know that they know something. Ontologically speaking, social reality is constructed and interpreted by people making it intangible and subjective. Humans as subjects are very different to materials in that they have an awareness of when attention is focused on them. This self-awareness must be taken into account when collecting data. Epistemological assumptions associated with interpretivism suggest that objective knowledge is not possible. By the nature of the fact

that the researcher is part of the world they are investigating, this inevitably influences the expectations, predispositions and language brought to the research (Denscombe, 2010).

The researcher is “bound within a net of epistemological and ontological premises which – regardless of ultimate truth or falsity – become partially self-validating” (Bateson, 1972, p. 314). With this in mind, there is an importance of awareness of how values may affect research, and this must be taken into consideration in the design (Denscombe, 2010) Interpretivism, by acknowledging the subjectivity of social reality, fits with this particular research paradigm. The dissertation is underpinned by this philosophical assumption and has been designed to give voice to and interpret the experiences and understandings of teachers.

However, there are also a number of considerations to be made when adopting an interpretivist approach, one of which is uncertainty. There is an open-ended appearance to interpretivist approaches as unlike positivist or other scientific approaches, there is no scientific certainty to the analysis. Another consideration is that due to its potential emergent research design, it may appear to lack rigour. A final consideration is that without being able to claim an objective truth in relation to the research, there is still the possibility of it being countered by other research. In other words, the research is relative. However, an inquiry paradigm is still deemed an appropriate tool for this research as it allows for the findings to be created (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2013).

### **Methods of data collection**

As discussed above, the interpretivist approach acknowledges and values the subjectivity of social reality. The purpose of this particular research piece was to derive from teachers their understanding and experience of drama as being a significant methodology in the teaching and acquisition of Irish. With this considered, a qualitative paradigm was decided as being the most appropriate research design for this dissertation. As a research method, this qualitative approach positions the researcher within the research environment, connecting them with the interpretive material. An interpretive practice is usually concerned with the human experience and social processes, it seeks to gain an understanding of people's rationale, understandings and motivations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013; Silverman, 2001). Qualitative research is interested in processes and meanings that are not quantifiable in terms of frequency or intensity. The influence of social construction is emphasised, unlike quantitative methods of inquiry which seek to objectively measure data numerically, rather than explore human processes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013, p. 17).

Qualitative research is often collected in the participants' natural setting, in this case the school, as this is the location in which participants experience the area of study (Creswell, 2009). It places the researcher as a key instrument, it is they who are observing participants and interpreting data. It is the researcher who decides on and devises the research instrument for data collection, which questions to ask, what to observe and how the data is interpreted. In other words, the researcher plays a key role in the collection and interpretation of data (Creswell, 2009; Fraenkel & Wallen, 1990). In relation to the previous discussion on philosophical foundations, it seems appropriate to consider the following: if the researcher is also the instrument, how can they disassociate from their own views and values? Whilst it is acknowledged that a pure



objective stance is not a realistic expectation of the researcher, it is necessary to consider how their social values may influence the research, analysis and conclusions drawn (Denscombe, 2010).

Qualitative research is, as suggested by Denscombe, interested in “the way in which people shape the world” (2010, p. 132). It enables the researcher to interpret and present the emotional experiences of its participants though drawing attention to feelings and experiences. The qualitative paradigm considers participants’ motives, how they perceive things, and their experiences of particular events. If it is accepted that knowledge is a social construction, then ontologically speaking this research is interested in how this knowledge of the social world is acquired, and through what lens it is perceived (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013, p. 22). Pragmatically speaking, this particular research is also focused on the process and development of a program for which the qualitative approach is appropriate (Patton, 2002).

Specifically, a semi-structured approach to interviewing was deemed the most appropriate and intrinsic approach to gaining insight to participants’ experiences and perceptions. The semi-structured interview allows participants opportunities to speak freely on the topic whilst still providing the researcher with control over the questioning. The interview is constructed using primarily open-ended questions which provides opportunities for substantial information to be gathered in relation to participants’ behaviours and attitudes. Miller and Brewer further this and attest that the discursive format of this instrument also provides participants to develop their answers within their own time (2003). Participants had the opportunity to delve into issues I

posed and elaborate on their ideas and I was able to probe and clarify participants' responses. (Denscombe, 2007).

Qualitative research requires an element of flexibility and adaptability to change throughout the research. The "built-in flexibility" allows responsiveness to emerging circumstances, and the researcher may change elements throughout the collection of data (Denscombe, 2010; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). However this must be done whilst still adhering to the feasibility of the research, such as time and financial restrictions.

### **Implementing research design**

My interest in the experiences and understandings of teachers' use of drama led to the selection of the interview as research instrument. I acquired participants in two ways, either through contact made during advanced school placement, or through being acquainted with them. Firstly, I made communication with a number of teachers in the school I was completing my Advanced School Placement in. Due to time constraints and personal commitments, only two teachers from this school participated in the interview. I then made contact with a number of other teachers working in English-medium schools, in both the Dublin area and the south of Ireland. Two of these teachers were known to teachers I worked with, two I already knew. Ultimately, two Dublin-based teachers, one Cork-based and a Kilkenny-based teacher took part in this research. The interviews in Dublin took place in locations convenient to participants and interviews outside of the Dublin area were done over phone.

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A total of six interviews were carried out with primary school teachers. Interviews were done with teachers individually. Prior to the interviews, participants were issued with an explanatory letter and consent form, which were discussed and signed before interviews commenced. The table below offers a description of the research participants. A sample of the research instrument can be found in the appendices.

**Table 1:**

**Descriptor of Research Participants**

<i>Name</i>	<i>Native Speaker</i>	<i>Attended Gaelscoil</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Current Class</i>	<i>Experience of learning Irish as a student</i>
<i>Holly</i>	No	No	23	5 <sup>th</sup>	Negative
<i>Tara</i>	No	No	27	6 <sup>th</sup>	Negative
<i>Tom</i>	No	Yes	33	6 <sup>th</sup>	Positive
<i>Orla</i>	Yes	No	27	6 <sup>th</sup>	Positive
<i>Anne</i>	No	No	28	5 <sup>th</sup>	Positive
<i>Lisa</i>	No	No	24	5 <sup>th</sup>	Negative

There existed a number of limitations that might have imposed boundaries on the extent and analysis of findings. These existed in the form of resources, time constraints and location.

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Although most teachers I spoke to were willing to participate in the research, finding a suitable time to conduct the interview was extremely challenging. Most teachers participated in school activities both before and after the school day and many had personal commitments which prevented them from participating. It was also difficult to find rooms in the school where the interview would not be interrupted, and the anonymity of the participants would be conserved. Two participants were interviewed via phone and had the letter and consent form posted to them beforehand. The lack of face to face contact was a hindrance in the interpretation of body language. However, it did provide the opportunity to interview teachers outside the Dublin region which otherwise would not have been logistically possible.

Assessors of this work may identify the limitations that the breadth of coverage may have on the validation of the data. The sample was limited to teachers aged between 23-33, which indicates that participants were not in a senior teaching position. However, I suggest the research is still valid because of the detail and honesty shown of the participants.

As discussed above, the semi-structured approach was deemed an appropriate research instrument due to its flexibility. The structure of the interview questions generally followed the same order but did vary depending on participants' responses. A variety of question styles were implemented in order to obtain the richest data possible from each participant. Interviews began with background and knowledge questions to establish rapport and general information about participants' and their experiences. I then asked a series of opinion and feeling questions. Answers provided by participants

to these question styles allowed for probing to gauge participants' experiences and behaviours toward certain areas.

### **Ethical considerations**

A number of ethical issues were considered before utilisation of the research instrument. I was familiar with some participants and this may have had an effect on participants' behaviour and response to questions. In particular, I was aware that the teachers with whom I worked in the school may have sought to address the questions in a way in which they may have interpreted as favourable to my research.

Informed consent was required from each participant which meant that they agreed to participate without coercion and were made aware of the purpose of the research (Soble, 1978). Privacy and confidentiality were also discussed in relation to the consent form assured to avoid exposure.

Interviews were recorded on two recording devices. Recordings were then uploaded and saved onto a locked file on a PC to preserve the confidentiality of participants. During the transcription process, names were then changed to protect anonymity.

An important consideration in an interview is the issue of awareness of how much information the researcher should disclose about themselves in the interview process. Given the element of flexibility and lack of formality, it could be challenging to avoid disclosing certain experiences that may bias the participant (Mertens, 2015). I was particularly aware of this when developing the research instrument, and I endeavoured to remain as impartial as possible during interviews to allow for the participant to speak freely of their own accord.

### **Positionality**

With regard to the researcher's social values, it was crucial that I acknowledge my own bias and that total objectivity would not be possible. Drawing on the ontological assumptions discussed above, this dissertation has posited that social reality is subjective therefore it is not possible for the researcher to operate totally objectively. As discussed in the introduction, my own experiences as an EAL teacher have been significant to the development of this research. Within ITE, I have also implemented a drama-based approach and have found it to be of benefit to my students. Therefore, I wish to acknowledge my own bias, both in interest and personal experience in this research. I have endeavoured to design a research instrument that does not favour my own beliefs but is still appropriately inquisitive. I also acknowledge the importance of the self-awareness of the researcher and how the researcher's 'self' may affect emerging findings.

### **Analysing the data**

The iterative process was applied in the analysis of this data. The data itself was emergent in its design in that the meanings and interpretations "negotiated with human data sources because it is the subjects' realities that the researcher attempts to reconstruct" (Cresell, 2009, p. 195; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988). Data was analysed in five stages: preparation, familiarity, interpretation, verification and representation. Due to the iterative nature of the analysis, stages were revisited and moved between throughout the analysis in what Creswell and Dey describe as a 'data

analysis spiral' (1998, p. 142; 1993, p. 53). The initial recordings were listened to a number of times post-interview. The transcriptions were then read and re-read. Initial field notes were taken during reading and interviews. The analysis relies on what Lincoln and Guba describe as the "utilization of tacit knowledge" (1985, p. 39). The initial immersion enabled me to develop a familiarity with the data and participants, particularly speech patterns, phrases and pauses to think, and eventually the emergence of codes. Each interview was coded, after which codes were merged to form categories for each individual interview. Developing the codes and categories enabled me to see the initial patterns that were beginning to emerge in each interview. The categories were then merged from all interviews to form four overall themes that emerged throughout all six interviews.

Data analysis requires the synthetisation of feelings and experiences of participants, in this context, to form a general view of teachers' use of drama in an Irish lesson.

However, "there is no single interpretive truth" according to Denzin and Lincoln (2013, p. 30) and this is a crucial aspect of the interpretivist approach.

In conclusion, this chapter has discussed the philosophies surrounding the qualitative paradigm, detailing my own position within this research. Taking an interpretivist stance, I acknowledge my own bias in this particular field. Ontologically speaking, I have aligned myself with the views of interpretivists who argue that through constructing their own knowledge, humans are inherently subjective. This has influenced my choice of research instrument, drawing on my research question which centres around teachers' uses of drama, it was pertinent to me that participants were

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enabled to speak freely on the topic as they wished in order for me to obtain necessary data.



## **Chapter 4**

### **Data Analysis and Discussion**

Arriving at this analysis from an interpretivist paradigm, this chapter seeks to examine and discuss the experiences and perspectives of teachers of using a drama-based approach in their Irish lessons. This chapter will describe and discuss the four main themes which emerged after careful analysis of the data. The themes are as follows and will be discussed in this order: drama as incentivised learning, drama as a tool for learning, transforming Irish from a subject to a language through drama and teachers' underlying relationship with Irish. The data will also be discussed with reference to relevant literature.

#### **Drama as incentivised learning**

##### ***Encouraging language use through drama***

This section examines the participants' perspectives and experiences of incorporating a drama-based approach into their Irish lesson. It will draw attention to how teachers navigate their Irish lesson and the effect that drama can have on students' attitudes toward Irish.

The overarching attitude expressed by teachers initially was that drama brought an element of 'fun' to the Irish language. Most participants felt that children enjoyed using drama in the Irish lesson because it took away from the obligatory nature that

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they tended to feel during the lesson. Tara, Anne and Lisa all noted that their students tended to have negative attitudes toward Irish and its purpose as a subject but flourished when given the opportunity to use it actively in the lesson. This suggests that Irish became less of a 'subject' and more of an active learning experience.

Tara: "I think they place a value on the language that way, they don't just see it as a task they have to complete every day."

Lisa: "they enjoy getting up out of their seats and doing things so that's helping them, they're having fun with it... they're trying to use it as much as they can."

Anne: "Am... I suppose for me anyway, it's a great way cos they enjoy it! 'Cos there's no point with them sitting in a class doing Irish that they really don't like. Or just reading something like they would have done years ago. It can inspire an interest in them."

This 'fun' element of learning was probed in the hopes of uncovering the underlying beliefs and experiences of teachers. Throughout each interview, students' engagement or lack of engagement with Irish was an emerging trend and drama appeared a deciding factor in gaining students' interest. All participants felt that drama gave their students a positive experience of learning and using Irish.

Holly remarked: "Oh, it's drama, it's not just Irish. I think it makes it more active. It's bringing in stuff they enjoy. It does help a lot with them having a positive opinion of Irish."

There was stark contrast between children's engagement with an Irish lesson when it was through drama compared to a non-drama-based lesson.

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Holly on a non-drama-based lesson: "They definitely see it as, like if I say, 'oh we're going to do Gaeilge now!' and they give a bit of a groan, and I think they see it as a chore."

She goes on to discuss another teacher's attitude to Irish: "one teacher wouldn't do Irish on a Friday, and they loved not having to do Irish on a Friday. Which is a shame."

Holly's observations of her students and colleagues coincide with Lane's research on teacher/student attitudes toward language. She argues that the relationship a teacher has with the language can influence how a student relates to the language (2015).

The transformative ability of drama was apparent in all interviews. Through drama, Irish became, in many of the teachers' eyes, fun and enjoyable. On a much deeper level, this 'fun' aspect relates to the real-life appeal of language. Where the teachers took the initiative to let students use and explore Irish, it became a purposeful exercise in what Holly described as "real life" language use. However, although the participants admit to doing drama initially, throughout the interview their responses suggest that its use is more peripheral than integral to the Irish lesson. Lisa admits that approximately "one third" of her Irish lesson is conversation-based and Holly has only used this approach for *Seachtain na Gaeilge*, suggesting it is only used when required to mark an occasion. This is consistent with Dillon's views that Irish is "ideologically important but is of marginal practical value" (2015, pp. 10). These views and inconsistencies will be explored in more detail in the third section.

## **Drama as a learning tool**

### *Active language learning through drama*

#### *i. Developing creative agency*

Each participant mentioned at some point the important role that the active learning and group work aspects of drama played in students' engagement. A number of reasons for these were highlighted. The first being the idea of creating through language. The idea that the children are 'doing' something, creating something which gives the task more meaning. For example, Tara stated that a drama-based approach allowed her students the freedom to explore vocabulary and topics.

Boudreault suggests that unlike literature, drama is more accommodating to children of various learning styles, which is why it can be so engaging (2010). This engagement is of particular significance to Lisa who says,

“if you're doing a story to be able to dramatize it and put it into their own words and stuff, they love doing that.”

Tom's experiences of using drama echo Lisa's, reflecting the freedom of experimenting with language:

“they can just you know use words off the top of their head, so they might have a small bit of a script they'd be doing and they'd use their own words then if something came to them off the top of their head, it wouldn't be rigid, they wouldn't have to stick to them.”

This also ties in exploration and problem solving which are seen as being an important components of language acquisition (Sam, 1990; Berk, 2009).

Lisa goes on to say: "it's kind of peer-teaching as well while they're doing it.

And ya, it encourages them to use Irish themselves amongst their friends."

Lisa is drawing on Vygotsky's theory that students working and problem-solving with more advanced peers can inform their language development (Berk, 2009). This scaffolding element of drama is also suggested by Anne who models tasks for her students before they work on them. (Eunseok, 2016).

Anne: "you might model it for them. And then eventually they'd be able to do it ... on their own."

Scaffolding, whether through peer or teacher-based learning is recognised by most participants as an important component of a drama-based approach.

## *ii. Skills development*

Decision making, team-work and responsibility are identified by McCaslin and Boudreault (1996, 2010) as being important outcomes of drama use. These outcomes are also identified by Orla, Tara and Lisa. Orla discusses how drama involves an important group work, problem-solving aspect;

"they just love being up and discussing oh, what will we say here and where will we throw this in and how will we make this look, how can we mime this out".

This can be seen in relation to Maley and Duff's research which has found that drama can help develop communication skills (1982) and the DES inspectorate's suggestions that children need to be given opportunities to create language themselves (2007).

Anne, Tara, Lisa and Tom suggested that drama was an important tool in developing students' confidence and competence. In particular, Lisa said of her lower-ability students:

“you do find that the ones who would struggle if they're put on the spot with questions that they do kind of... come out a bit more?”

Anne also said of her students:

“it can inspire an interest in them... using the language with confidence and competence, to be able to talk out loud in front of others.”

Only Anne and Tara specifically referred to 'consolidation' throughout the interview to describe how they used drama. Descriptions given by other teachers also suggested that they also used it as consolidation. Lisa, for example, explains that she used a drama-based approach to allow her students to apply previously-learned vocabulary. A report compiled by an inspectorate for the DES suggested the NCCA that drama should be used as a method in the teaching of languages (2007).

### *iii. Drama in lower and mixed-ability classes*

All participants discussed their experiences and challenges of teaching Irish to lower and mixed-ability classes. There were a number of contrasting opinions to approaching this matter.

Lisa found that using a drama-based approach sometimes meant there was “more Irish than other times” but was clear in her assertion that peer-teaching in drama worked well for her current class. She has found that some of her class love Irish, whilst others have

a negative attitude and using drama helps as it “encourages them to use Irish themselves amongst their friends.”

Similarly, Orla places her class in different mixed-ability groups each week. She has found that she has had to stipulate that all students have an equal role to avoid some students using minimal, if any language in the drama:

“[the] disadvantage to that is that they can be kind of left to the stronger ones, like one might pretend to be a dog on the ground, so I’ve tried to kind of stop that and make sure everybody has some sort of equal role in it.”

Conversely, Holly concedes that she prefers to use reading and writing activities for her lower ability classes, which she states, is because they cannot understand what she is saying.

“I found I got them to do a lot of reading and writing because their level was so low and they wouldn’t really speak.”

Holly’s approaches contrast with Tara and Tom’s view that the weaker the students the more conversational Irish was needed. Holly’s reluctance to encourage spoken Irish amongst weaker students could be an implication of her self-acknowledged anxiety around using Irish. The lack of confidence could affect her own understanding of how to communicate to weaker students through the medium of Irish. “you’d be worried... you wouldn’t have the Irish”. The issue of confidence will be explored in more detail in the final theme.

**The transformative ability of drama: Irish as a subject or language**

*Instilling value in Irish through drama*

This section will draw on the work of Dillon (2015) valuing language; Lane (2015) viewing Irish as a language rather than as a subject and Owens (1991) giving language purpose, whilst discussing the experiences and opinions of participants.

A common thread that flowed throughout all interviews was that Irish seemed to be viewed as an emblem of identity rather than a utilised, living language. All participants saw Irish as an important language, due to its connections with cultural identity, but many saw it as a struggle as a subject.

Tom: "it's one of the most important things that we teach in the school. I think we need to embrace the fact that we do have our own language."

Holly: "...how proud we should be that we have our own language and how rare it is that a colonized country to still keep their native language. I think they [students] probably don't understand the importance as much as they should."

Similarly, in her research on teachers of Irish, Lane relates her own experiences as a language learner. She found that a teacher's view of Irish as a language rather than as a subject transformed her attitude toward Irish (2016). This transforming attitude is explored by Tom who has observed, what he views as a dichotomy between English and Irish.

Tom discussed how students usually enjoyed English as a subject because they could relate the language to novels they were reading but were indifferent to Irish because they only knew it as a subject they had to do, with no relevance outside of the



classroom. This is also suggestive of Dillon's belief that Irish doesn't hold the same value as English (2015).

“Even, tógaigí amach bhur lón, using small words like that throughout the day it would definitely break down the barrier of having it as a subject.”

This correlates with Owen's views that the discrepancy between Irish and English lies in English having an active role in children's learning (1991).

Most participants were advocates of maintaining the Irish language because it is a signifier of culture. Only Tara observed that as a language, it is intended as a communication tool. This view is perhaps due to her experience as a language teacher. Tom also inferred its importance as a means of students interacting with each other.

Tom: “that also helps with their aimsirs, so you know, if someone might say, ‘chuaigh mé go dtí sacar anocht’ you could say, ‘rachaidh mé’, so you're actually teaching them informally as well.”

Tara was probably the most articulate and clear about how she felt drama benefited her class. She made frequent references to her previous experiences as an English language teacher in Spain, which she felt influenced her Irish language lessons greatly. She also disclosed that she had studied drama as an undergraduate before training as a teacher, a background which informed her approaches to all subjects, but, she noted, specifically Irish.

“I find role-plays give a nice context, a nice real-life context to the language input that you're teaching. I would use role play and drama as often as I could ...I think a lot of my Irish lessons would be [conversation based] and that might be because of my previous experience of teaching English abroad that I would focus on the more conversational aspects of the language.”

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Tara also emphasised purposeful language use as being the primary benefit of using drama. By placing children in drama situations in which they are invested, she felt they were more motivated to resolve conflict and express themselves and understand what people are saying. She summed up her point by stating that:

“communication is the main purpose of a language, far more so than being accurate grammatically.”

Tara's understanding of the communicative approach to language teaching and her utilization of drama is echoed in Al-Mekhlafi's research which positions communication at the forefront of language (2011). Similarly, Sam and Mordecai's research on using communicative methods in language teaching, such as drama, can increase motivation in students (Mordecai, 1985; Sam, 1990). This is reflected in Tara's understanding of drama as a language methodology.

Both Lisa and Holly express struggles they have experienced with trying to instil an interest in Irish. Anne also echoes these concerns. She says her own class enjoy Irish, but many teachers have difficulty with encouraging students. When probed about whether a teacher's interest can affect students' interest she admits that once teachers are qualified there is no incentive for them to improve their Irish.

Anne: “You know, it's very easy to pull out a Bun go Barr book and say, ‘read an essay, answer those questions’. You know the level of comprehension among the children wouldn't be good. They wouldn't have the language to understand what they're reading, you know?”

Anne's observations about her peers correlate with a DES evaluation which found that teachers over-emphasised reading and writing aspects of language lesson and there lacked opportunity for conversation (2007).

### **Underlying relationships between language and teacher**

#### ***The impact of confidence levels on language use in the classroom***

This section will consider how teachers' own self-perceived fluency in Irish has or may affect their drama lessons. Research carried out by Trinity College Dublin and the NCCA has indicated that primary teachers' Irish is not of a sufficiently high standard to promote fluency in the language (2014). Out of the six teachers interviewed for this dissertation, three stated that they were fluent, if not very comfortable, with their use of the Irish language. They credit both their educational backgrounds and their genuine interest in Irish for this. Tom attended a Gaelscoil as a primary student, and both Anne and Orla stressed that they particularly enjoyed learning Irish as students which they felt contributed to their appreciation of the language.

Orla: "I would be a big Gaeilgeoir. I loved it in school... I'd be confident speaking it...I had a very passionate, interested teacher who invested in teaching and the language and stuff."

Anne had a similar positive experience of learning Irish:

"In primary school, my experience was very positive. We would have done a lot of ról-imirt trí mheán na Gaeilge. And our teachers would have had a real passion for it, even though they would have been brought up, you know, with

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different canúints... they really did foster the love of Irish in us and would have done an awful lot of it with us.”

The three remaining teachers were strikingly honest in acknowledging their own challenges in using drama with Irish in the classroom. This is particularly interesting given that the question did not specifically ask about the teachers' own language skills, but rather of teachers in general.

Tara was the most astute in her answer:

“Well that, in short probably no. Certainly I've found it a big challenge myself, and I would be very aware of the vocabulary and the grammatical accuracy when I'm trying to incorporate drama into an Irish lesson.”

Lisa was also very honest in her acknowledgement that she struggled with Irish in the classroom.

“Even now I'd be in class, and I'd be like, aw I can't remember the word for that! I just haven't got the vocabulary sometimes that you'd need. And I'd say that happens quite a lot.”

Holly also seemed phased by the prospect:

“I would have to learn phrases, I wouldn't be able to just go in and do it. So I think that maybe it does make teachers feel a bit anxious about trying to do a full lesson, like ... drama, through Irish... so ya I think it would make teachers a bit nervous that they wouldn't have the Irish.”

It is interesting to note that the teachers interviewed who acknowledged that they struggled with using Irish in the classroom were faster to answer and seemed more sure

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of their answers. This could perhaps be because they are younger teachers who have only been teaching for two years and may have encountered similar levels of Irish during their initial teacher training.

Throughout some of the interviews, there was a sense of discomfort and uncertainty when asked about teachers' levels of Irish. The self-described more fluent teachers, Anne, Orla and Tom initially seemed apprehensive about drawing attention to what they deemed to be poorer levels of Irish. Anne, in particular, appeared to feel almost guilty as though it was a topic that shouldn't be discussed, and seemed wary of appearing overly critical. She was quick to offer suggestions of how to rectify the situation.

“I suppose.. that’s a hard one... but I suppose if they can get through... I don’t know if I should say this... but if they can get through college... but you know maybe the standard of certain leaving cert students might not be great... But it can always be improved.”

Orla was particularly critical of the level of teachers' Irish,

“Honestly, no I don’t. And that’s not really speaking about this school in particular but I think that there is generally not a high enough standard of Irish and it’s just a shame it’s being passed on... shouldn’t we be looking more toward keeping a positive attitude towards the language, speaking and beatha teanga í a labhairt and all that.”

When considering this question, Tom recalled an experienced teacher he worked with when he was completing his initial teacher training with 6<sup>th</sup> class. He felt that she used English throughout her Irish lessons which prevented children from gaining adequate exposure to the Irish language.

“there would have been an over-emphasis, in my opinion, on teaching the words in English also, rather than trying to explain them in Irish.”

This, he felt, was detrimental to children's learning and is the root of students' indifference to the language. This coincides with director of Education at Gaelchultúr Éamonn Ó Dónaill, who argues that teachers are not sufficiently interacting with students through Irish to enable them to develop a positive relationship with the language.

To conclude this chapter, the analysis has suggested that drama is viewed by all participants as being a valuable methodology in some way. Some teachers, such as Tara, saw it as an integral part to language acquisition. Other teachers, such as Holly saw it as an occasional treat for students to enjoy. It appears that a drama-based approach, whilst employed at times, is more of a peripheral methodology for some teachers, depending on the ability of the class and teachers' own confidence in using Irish. Where it is implemented, teachers reported that students were more likely to engage positively with Irish as a language as they were given the opportunity to use and experiment with it. The implications of the findings will be considered and suggestions for further or additional research given in the following chapter.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusion**

This dissertation has illustrated how a number of primary teachers in English-medium schools view the use of a drama-based approach to teach the Irish language. It has found that the participants of this research find drama to be useful when seeking to engage students in active learning as a means of consolidating or introducing a topic.

Teachers felt students come to value the language more through their ability to use it, which allows Irish to transcend its role as a mandatory subject. Drama allows students to experience Irish as a language rather than as a subject (Lane, 2016).

The fun element of drama provides students with a positive experience of the language. Teachers reported Irish seemed like less of a task and more of an activity. By doing or creating something they are given the freedom to explore language. This can be done through peer-teaching.

The analysis has found that in spite of the positive attributes ascribed to this approach, it remains a peripheral methodology for many teachers due to their self-acknowledged self-consciousness about Irish use. The teachers' underlying feelings toward Irish in terms of their confidence have an influence on their use of drama and all participants felt poor Irish or lack of confidence can be a hindrance to using this approach.

### **Recommendations**

As discussed in the introduction, whilst a vast amount of research has been undertaken in relation to the use of drama in additional language teaching, there remains little research specifically relating to Irish. Most literature pertaining to Irish relates to school-based attitudes toward the language rather than methodologies employed, and little of it gives voice to teachers' experiences and perceptions. Teachers have a valuable role in imparting knowledge to their students and can offer important insight into the effectiveness of their methodologies. It is hoped, therefore, that this research serves as an indicator that further research in teachers' attitudes towards using a drama-based approach to teach Irish is an area that could be pursued. Given the limitations of this research in terms of number of participants and breadth of coverage, it is suggested that more detailed research would also provide a deeper insight into the relationship between the language and the primary education system.



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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix 1: Interview Schedule**

1. Are you a native Irish speaker?
2. Did you attend a Gaelscoil or an English-medium primary school?
3. What was your experience of learning Irish as a primary school student?
4. Which textbook(s)/resources do you use for teaching Irish?
5. Could you describe your experience of teaching Irish to senior level students?
6. What methodologies do you use?
7. Do you think that teachers over-emphasise the writing and reading aspects of the Irish lesson?
8. How much of your Irish lesson is conversation based?
9. Do you use drama in teaching Irish? If yes, how?
10. What are the benefits to using a drama-based approach to teaching Irish?
11. Do you think teachers have the Irish to use an unstructured, drama-based approach?
12. Do you think that children in general have a poor attitude to learning Irish? If so, why do you think that is?
13. What are your feelings around the importance of the Irish language, both in school and in the wider community?

## Appendix 2: Information Letter

### REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN SCHOOLS

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

My name is Jennifer Barry and I am a PME student at Marino Institute of Education. The research I wish to conduct for my Master's dissertation involves researching the perceptions that English-medium primary school teachers have on using drama as a method for teaching Irish. This project will be conducted under the supervision of \_\_\_\_\_.

I am hereby seeking your consent to carry out an interview with you to discuss your perceptions and experiences on this matter. The interview and the information provided will be entirely confidential and personal details will not be identified in the dissertation.

I have provided you with a copy of the consent form to be used in the research process. In order to use information collected as part of my school placement for my research project, I require your signed, informed, consent. To this end, I would really appreciate if you would read the consent form carefully and sign. I am happy to discuss any questions and concerns you might have regarding my research project at any stage.

Upon completion of the study, I undertake to Marino Institute of Education with a bound copy of the full research report. If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me on [jbarrypme16@momail.mie.ie](mailto:jbarrypme16@momail.mie.ie). Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Yours sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_

Jennifer Barry

Marino Institute of Education



### **Appendix 3: Consent Form**

**An investigation into English-medium primary school teachers' perceptions of using a drama-based for teaching Irish**

**Consent to take part in research**

- I..... voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.
  
- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.

  - I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview at any stage with no reason necessary, in which case the material will be deleted.
  - I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.

- I understand that participation involves answering questions on and discussing my perceptions and experiences of teaching Irish.
- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.
- I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.
- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.
- I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about.
- I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the researcher's dissertation in text form.

  - I understand that if I inform the researcher that myself or someone else is at risk of harm they may have to report this to the relevant authorities - they will discuss this with me first but may be required to report with or without my permission.

- I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained on a password-secure computer for up to 13 months after which it will be destroyed.
- I understand that a transcript of my interview in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for 13 months.
- I understand that under freedom of information legalisation I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.
- I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

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Signature of research participant -----

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of participant

Date Signature of researcher

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study

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Signature of researcher

-----

Date

# TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES OF USING DRAMA TO TEACH IRISH