

Marino Institute of Education

Philosophy with Children

How does the practice of philosophy nurture a young child's natural ability to think philosophically and encourage him/her to participate in a democratic community of enquiry?

Thesis

By

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this dissertation is a presentation of my original work. This work has not been submitted previously at this or any other educational institutions. The work was done under the guidance of Dr. Marian Farrelly at the Marino Institute of Education, Dublin.

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Abstract

Philosophy enables us to be critical, independent thinkers particularly in a fast-paced digital world. Philosophy with Children is a pedagogy whereby the voice of the child is upheld, their agency is enabled and their critical thinking is developed. The importance of Philosophy with Children is especially relevant to the current Irish Primary School Curriculum which is content heavy and where a strong emphasis is placed upon mathematical and linguistic knowledge. The dialogic nature of philosophy encounters encourages the exploration of children's thoughts and wonderings, which provokes continued curiosity and fosters intrinsic learner motivation. The beauty of Philosophy with Children is that there are no wrong answers. It is always open and interpretive in nature, giving the young child a sense of power and ownership of his/her learning.

This study utilises an action research approach to critically examine the nature of children's philosophical responses through everyday topics. It assesses the nature of their responses in terms of language, participation and confidence levels. Furthermore, it also explores the role of the classroom teacher as a facilitator of these encounters. The sessions were integrated into the weekly curriculum which provides an opportunity for this in Learn Together and Oral Language.

The results of the study show that children in the early years context are more than capable of entering into a dialogue in a community of enquiry, and that they display a range of higher-order thinking skills when doing so. Philosophy with Children is a suitable means to begin to foster the development of a critical citizenry through engagement with democratic practices in the early years context. In addition, the educator can play an influential role in creating a classroom environment conducive to dialogue.

The establishment of a calm, comfortable and supportive atmosphere is an important prerequisite of Philosophy with Children. A reciprocal relationship based on trust and equality is significant in optimising the full potential of the young child.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Why is Philosophy with Children Important?

As the education system and its' values have evolved in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the meaning of a good education for the young child has also changed. Pre-*Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* (2009), a mainly didactic approach to teaching and learning was prevalent in many Irish classrooms. Moreover, according to as recently as Alexander (2010), the most frequently observed kind of teacher–pupil talk ‘still remains closer to recitation than to dialogue’ (p.117). Murphy (2004) also conveyed that teachers dominated classroom talk in Ireland. As well as the amount of classroom talk, an emphasis was placed upon young children learning through discrete subjects in the curriculum. Now, recent publications; *Aistear* (2009) and the *New Primary Language Curriculum* (2016) recognise the interconnected nature of learning; “children learn many different things at the same time. What they learn is connected to where, how and with whom they learn” (NCCA, 2009, p.10). Furthermore, both publications stress the importance of communicative relationships; how children “build and share meaning together ... as listeners and speakers, and as givers and receivers of information” (NCCA, 2016, p. 32), and recognise the importance of oral language, acknowledging it as the strand of the language curriculum which “requires specific attention in the early years as it is fundamental to the development of reading, writing and learning across the curriculum” (p.31). The changing nature of educational values which now esteems reciprocal relationships and language as central to the cognitive, social, emotional and moral development has pedagogical implications. From this perspective, Philosophy with Children can act as a methodology to support such development as it is dialogic in nature and “provides a means for children to develop discussion skills – the capacity to engage

in thoughtful conversations with others” (Roche, 2015, p.108). The pedagogical implications of this approach are the focus of this thesis.

Research Aims

The principle of philosophy with children in this research study is to demonstrate how children in the early years’ context are capable of higher levels of thinking. and display ability in engagement with a community of enquiry through “shared experience, voluntary communication and shared understanding of meanings” (Fisher, 2003, p.60).

The argument made in this thesis is that using Philosophy with Children (PWC) Donnelly (2010) acts as a methodology unveils the potential of the children in terms of thinking, thus fostering the development of their thinking skills. In addition, it also helps to improve the listening behaviours of the child, if supported in a suitable manner. Facilitator’s, however need to be “reflective practitioners” (Schon,1983), examining their own engagement in order to be able to do this successfully.

To understand where this approach is relevant to the early years context, the historical context of the subject of philosophy needs to be briefly discussed and the current understanding of what philosophy with children is needs to be examined. As part of this, the image of the young child needs to be evaluated before studying relevant literature on the topic. Then, the study will investigate the participation of two groups of children; the pilot group and intervention group, engaged in a series of philosophy interventions in the early years context, as well as the researcher’s involvement in the study in relation to the creation of a community of enquiry in the classroom, dialogic and democratic in nature.

Research Questions

To ensure the aims of this thesis are realised, it will be driven by a set of research questions;

- Does the practice of philosophy demonstrate that the child in the early years context is capable of philosophical thought?
- Does the practice of Philosophy with Children foster the young child to successfully participate in a democratic community of enquiry?
- Does the facilitator support the children in an appropriate manner in order for the intervention to be successful?

These research questions will guide the Literature Review and will inform research design, data collection and analysis.

Personal Statements

Above all, the self-empowerment of the child as a confident co-learner who displays motivation for what he/she does is a fundamental goal of an educator who deeply resonates with modern socio-cultural views of education and current curricular aims. The principles of *Aistear* (2009) and the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999) value the “full potential of the child” and the recognition that they are “active agents in their own learning”(DES, 1999,p.8).

On the surface, it might seem that the researcher is doing a “good job”; good classroom and behavioural management, the curriculum is being “covered” and children are

generally performing at a satisfactory level in summative assessments. They appear to enjoy school and the researcher makes an effort to ensure that the classroom is a welcoming one. However, is this really enough? Are the children truly being listened to? Are their thought capabilities being stimulated to the highest level possible?

In addition to the above, the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999) states that higher order thinking and problem solving skills should be developed and that collaborative learning should feature in the learning process (p.9). The researcher chose philosophy with children for this project as it is one of the ways in which:

1. The child's voice can be listened to
2. Their natural capacity to think in an abstract manner can be nurtured
3. Their wonderings can be esteemed
4. They can practice their engagement in a democratic community of enquiry

At the heart of this study and of practising philosophy with children is a desire to reclaim education for children, to make space for their thinking and enquiry and to facilitate them being active participants in their own learning (Garside, 2014)

Thesis Outline

This dissertation follows a traditional layout. Chapter 1: The Introduction presents the study briefly outlines the research questions and gives a description of the structure of the thesis. Chapter 2: The Literature Review offers a deeper understanding of the view of philosophy adapted to the early year context in relation to current theoretical educational ideals, its' rationale for inclusion into the primary school curriculum and offers insights into literature about philosophy with children as well as the inclusion of dialogic pedagogies in the classroom.

Chapter 3; The Methodology summarise the research approach utilised. The research methods, school context, ethical considerations, issues of reliability and validity are outlined, as are relevant paradigms. Chapter 4: The Research Findings outlines the key findings of the research. Chapter 5 is a discussion of the research findings. The findings are place in context of the literature, as outlined in Chapter 2. Chapter 6 is the conclusion: a summary of the thesis. Recommendations for possible future research will be made.

Conclusion

This chapter outlined the content of this dissertation, including the research aims. In summary, the purpose of this research is to study the methodology of Philosophy with Children, taking into the account the thinking and participatory behaviours of the children. The next chapter, the Literature Review, outlines the literature relevant to the thesis research questions.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction

This aim of this chapter is discuss the rationale for philosophy with children, in conjunction with relevant educational theory and literature. The chapter will be introduced with a brief history of the subject of philosophy before attempting to define the modern view of philosophy with children. The pertinence of thinking, citizenship and democracy will be examined. The importance of dialogue with others is stressed throughout.

Historical Context

“At its’ most basic level, philosophy attempts to solve fundamental puzzles about our lives and the world in which we find ourselves” (Wartenberg, 2009, p. 4). Philosophy as a concept or discipline can be traced back to about 600BC to philosophers such as Thales of Miletus and Heraclitus, even before the time of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. Although the epicentre of philosophical thought for Socrates, one of the most influential philosophers of all time, may have been his encouragement for everyone to question and doubt regardless of age and social class, philosophy has mainly been the preserve of the wealthy, powerful and educated throughout much of time.

Medieval philosophy (AD400-1400), approximately the period between the fall of Rome and the awakening of the Renaissance saw a period of highly academic philosophy which was closely connected to religious thought. Many philosophers of the time were educated theologians who incorporated certain elements of ancient Greek philosophy in their writings. These works spanned the thoughts of Augustine in the 5th century, monks such as St. Anselm of Canterbury and St. Bernard de Clairvaux in the 11th and 12th centuries, and later other clergymen such as Albert Magnus of the Dominicans, his pupil Thomas Aquinas and John Duns Scotus of the Franciscans. Moreover, it was during this

time that there was a move towards scholasticism; the teaching of philosophy and theology in universities.

Until recent times in Ireland, as well as in many other westernised education systems, philosophy has also been often associated with third level education and beyond. Fisher (1995) as cited in (Demisse, 2017) acknowledges the popular view of philosophy as an abstract, dogmatic and esoteric body of knowledge that is only accessible and understandable by a few. This is due to the fact that philosophy is perceived as a highly intellectual endeavour that requires the intelligence and sophisticated thought structures of “well educated” adults. Moreover, John Locke’s archaic seventeenth century image of the child as a “tabula rasa” or an empty vessel waiting to be filled with knowledge, conveys the child as an unknowing entity devoid of wisdom, therefore incapable of engaging in the above perception of philosophy.

However, the theories of leading educationalists in the twentieth century such as John Dewey, Paulo Freire and Lev Vygotsky have challenged the view of the child as incapable and instead uphold the young with reverence in terms of their wonder and potential when in mediation with others. Likewise, western education curricula have experienced a seismic shift in the latter half of the twentieth century, valuing the holistic development of the child. The *Irish Primary School Curriculum* (1999) recognises the importance of developing the full potential of the child, acknowledges the child as an active agent in his/her learning and accepts that their personal development is deeply affected by relationships (DES, 1999, p. 6-8).

Theoretically, viewing education from a mainly developmental perspective has been replaced by a socio-cultural standpoint. From a socio-cultural perspective, Jordan (2004) argues that the child is a “powerful player” (p.33) in his/her own learning.

Respectful and meaningful dialogue is at the heart of philosophical enquiry with children.

There has never been more of a rationale to include philosophy in primary school as practising philosophy with children is now officially being recognised on a national level as a subject in its very own right with the introduction of the short philosophy course at second level for the junior cycle. The emphasis of this short course is on “‘doing philosophy’ and on developing the skills needed for philosophical dialogue: careful listening, critical thinking, careful analysis, logic, argumentation, collaborative problem-solving, and reflection (DES, 2016, p.4))

Moreover, this digital age brings instant stimulation , including the false gratification of social media as well as the increasing pressure on primary schools to make students more mathematical and scientifically adept wIth interactive whiteboards, tablets and coding. Philosophy challenges people to *stop and think*, something which is hugely needed in a society that is changing at an alarming rate. Furthermore, a philosophical community of enquiry that empowers the child through dialogue with others has the potential to develop oracy in line with the new *Primary Language Curriculum* (2016) outcomes, and as well as this, it is a means to develop and compliment the themes of well-being, identity and belonging, communicating and exploring and thinking in *Aistear* (2009).

Essence of Philosophy

If we begin our journey of understanding with philosophy, with its’ original Greek meaning as “love of wisdom”, it opens up its suitability to everyone, young and old who possess a thirst for knowledge. One may even claim that young children are the

most suitable of all age groups to engage in philosophy as they begin their journey of life full of wonderment and awe, posing questions and exploring their environment.

“The first key to wisdom is constant questioning By doubting we are led to enquiry, and by enquiry we discern the truth” (Abelard, P., cited in Fisher, 2005, p.53) Questioning often forms the basis of how people and particularly young children attempt to begin their journey of meaning making with the world they experience. The infant and very young child emulates a wonderfully enthusiastic picture of inquisitiveness and curiosity whilst interacting with people and objects through the senses, before he/she begins to express himself/herself on a more sophisticated level through speech and questions. However, a didactic or monologic classroom climate where there is an absence of dialogue discourages the child’s natural propensity to question. Dunne (1998), cited in Donnelly (2001) points out that

The great weakness of conventional classroom routines is the narrowness in the range of utterance and the type of interlocutory stance that they allow to children.... Children get few opportunities to ask questions, and even less perhaps to explore a hunch, offer a tentative suggestion, make an interjection, or respond to another contribution so as to amplify or refocus it, or give grounds that strengthen it or call it in question. (p.271)

In response to such classroom environments, philosophy with children is a methodology which fosters open dialogue in the classroom and attempts to encourage the child to continue to pose questions, which provoke continued curiosity, direct paths of learning and value the child as “an active co-constructor of knowledge and a social being” (Soler & Miller, 2003, p.60). Philosophy with children endeavours to explore children’s wonderings. Philosophical questions are open to interpretation, fostering the development of more complex thought, as opposed to simply giving finite answers to

closed questions. In an education system where the transmission model of education is still prevalent, that is a teacher centred approach to teaching whereby the teacher imparts his/her knowledge onto children with the hope of them being able to regurgitate such facts and knowledge, one asks can children be educated without losing their wonder? Freire (1972) critiqued this model of education as he saw it as a form of “oppression by a power figure on a largely powerless one”(cited in Roche, 2015, p.11), quashing the questions, curiosity and self-confidence of the students. He, like Dewey and Vygotsky argued for a type of education which would seek to honour the curiosity of the child, one “where students would seek to interrogate and understand authentic and meaningful issues and create their own knowledge rather than unquestioningly to absorb the knowledge of others”. (p.11). In other words, a dialogic form of education, with reasoning and wonder at the centre, which also values all participants in the process. The practise of philosophy with children is one way to ensure that wonder not only stays ignited but also nurtures the development of critical, creative and caring thinkers through attempting to honour and explore their questions.

Towards a definition of Philosophy with Children

In order to set the tone for this research, it is necessary to underpin one’s idea of philosophy when working with children, the values and theories of which will guide the reader throughout. Engaging in philosophical discussion as opposed to learning about philosophy itself forms that basis of philosophising with children and, of this research. There are numerous terms to describe working with children philosophically, the two of which will be referred to the most during this work are Philosophy for Children (P4C) and Philosophy with Children (PWC). Philosophy for Children (P4C) was first developed by university professor of philosophy, Matthew Lipman in the early 70’s in

response to his dissatisfaction with the thinking skills of his university students in Columbia University

“Why is it”, he asks “that while children of four, five and six are full of curiosity, creativity and interest, and never stop asking for further explanations, by the time they are eighteen they are passive, uncritical and bored with learning? If, as he asks, education is supposed to be about teaching young people to think, why does it produce so many unthinking people?” (Lipman,1982, p.37).

Lipman produced a series of specially written stories that act as starting points for philosophical discussion, suitable for 3 years upwards. Discussions that are dialogic in nature are central to this approach.

PWC or Philosophy with children on the other hand is the type of philosophy that Dr. Philomena Donnelly employs in her work. It is also the approach which acts as the cornerstone of this research project. Whilst the emphasis of P4C is on coming to a consensus at the end of sessions, Donnelly’s PWC model is more organic in nature. The sessions completely follow the thoughts of the children and the dialogue is left open at the end. To foster an atmosphere conducive to equality, openness and respect, the children sit on the floor in a circle with their teacher sitting amongst them. Everyone is able to see all participants and the children take their turn to speak about a topic or question using a simple toy or speaking object. The children choose a topic/question that they themselves are interested in and participate in a philosophical dialogue. There is no compulsion on any child to speak and they can simply pass on the toy if they do not wish to do so. No end conclusion is reached and the dialogue is left open. The teacher acts as a facilitator, only contributing when appropriate so as to ensure that the children take as much ownership as possible for the session.

It is essential to mention that even within these two terms P4C and PWC, there are many variations in which philosophy is carried out. However, it is important to note the democratic community of inquiry is at the foundation of both. To add to that, both schools of philosophy implement what one might call the Socratic method “philosophy as “practised” rather than as known or applied ... a form of life ... something that any of us can emulate” (Lipman, 2003, p. 12). Here, the emphasis is placed upon the process of philosophising itself, the process of thinking rather than the outcome. It is important to highlight the fact that good philosophical questions almost never have one clear answer as they are often open-ended. Therefore, “the emphasis is not on facts but defending what you think by providing good reasons for thinking what you do” (Wartenberg, 2009, p. 20). Engaging in philosophical thinking with children has the potential to develop independent thinkers who go beneath the surface to think critically, without the fear of feeling that one is wrong. Within the open nature of philosophical dialogue, children encounter at first hand a community of enquiry in which children are exposed to and internalise the skills and habits of higher order thinking. (Fisher, 1995,1998). In a community of enquiry, children learn how to ask their own questions and raise issues for discussion, explore and develop their own ideas, views and theories, give reasons for what they think, explain and argue their point of view with others, listen to and consider the views and ideas of others and change their ideas in the light of good reasons and evidence (Fisher, 2007, p.626). It is fair to say that the process of philosophising is similar to what Roche (2015) articulates about knowledge, that it “it is a process of meaning making and is always incomplete, fluid and dynamic” (p.12). Philosophy too, is always incomplete and open to interpretation, encouraging critical and reflective thought.

Rationale for Philosophy with Children

Engaging children in philosophy is more pertinent than ever on both a national and international level in helping to develop a citizenry that is caring, reflective, democratic as well as improving the thinking skills and cognitive development of the young child. The next section will explore the educational and societal rationale for the inclusion of philosophy in the early years.

Philosophy and Educational Theory

Having a more complex understanding about what philosophy with children is, it is pertinent to begin to explore why engaging in philosophy with children is one of the most significant debates in education and society today. Firstly, philosophy with children echoes the educational ideals of some of the most influential theorists of our time such as Dewey, Vygotsky and Freire, all of whom foster the empowerment of the child and value dialogue with others as an important facet to cognitive development.

Central to Dewey's philosophy was the concept that learning is grounded in enquiry and reflective thinking. Philosophy with children is a means by which children can engage in careful reflection of their own thoughts and experiences whilst also building upon the thoughts of others in a community of enquiry. Dewey (1933) defines such thinking as "active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it It is a conscious and voluntary effort to establish belief upon a firm basis of reasons. (p.6)

As previously mentioned, the dialogic nature of philosophy with children upholds the values of Paulo Freire (1972). In his book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* he states "For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human.

Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other.” (p.72) A philosophical community of enquiry reflects a social-interactionist approach to learning and emulates the core values of Vygotsky’s outlook on cognitive development, “What children can do with the assistance of others might be in some sense even more indicative of their mental development than what they can do alone”

(Vygotsky, 1978, p.85). The “social” element puts forward the powerful role that social relationships and language play in the advancement of ideas which are hugely influenced by the cultural contexts in which learning is taking place. Philosophy with children upholds such ideals as children interact with each other on a social level through language and engage in topics/questions that are meaningful and interesting to them, therefore making it a culturally appropriate endeavour. Vygotsky (1978), the godfather of this perspective viewed learning as an extrinsic affair; a social process whereby development first takes place on a social level during an interaction with another person or tool for learning, before development can take place on an individual level by internalising information to form more complex forms of understanding or higher mental functions. “Every function in the child’s cultural development appears twice: first on the social level, and later, on the individual level” (p.57).

Philosophy and the Curriculum

Philosophy with children possesses a compelling rationale for its inclusion in the education system based on how it can support the fulfilment of the aims and principles of *Aistear* (2009) and the *Primary Language Curriculum* (NCCA 2016).

With the introduction of *Aistear* (2009), the focus has shifted from a mainly content and topic based curriculum to one which values learning dispositions, personal growth and the development of skills. The four themes of *Aistear* are 1. Well Being 2. Identity and Belonging 3. Communicating 4. Exploring and Thinking (NCCA., 2009, p.13). Communicating as well as exploring and thinking are at the centre of philosophical dialogue, which in turn help to foster a sense of wellbeing and identity and belonging in connection with co-learners. At the heart of the *Primary Language Curriculum* (2016) are three elements of language: 1. Developing communicative relationships through language 2. Understanding the content and structure of language 3. Exploring and using language (p.30). Communicating with others through language is the foundation of philosophy with children. Children communicate their thoughts and ideas through speech but they also have the opportunity to internalise the viewpoints and language of others, supporting the development of listening skills, vocabulary development and thinking. The merging of *Aistear* (2009) and the *Primary Language Curriculum* (2016) now esteems the development of the whole child and places an importance on the development of positive learner dispositions. Such development commands educators to be extremely sensitive to the needs, interests and abilities of the children in their care. Whereas this research focuses on the holistic development of the child, including the development of thinking skills, there is also a rationale for the inclusion of philosophy in schools to support academic achievement in terms of higher English and Math scores (Lim, 1994). This study, however was long in duration and implemented with a much older age group. Moreover, reliability is questioned in this study as so many factors, not only philosophy might have attributed to student's academic achievement in a year long period. Primary teachers are very aware of the content of the curriculum for the class group that they teach and are often consumed by summative assessment test scores, but

it is essential to ask the questions; Are the needs, interests and abilities of children honoured in classrooms? Are their voices and questions listened to and responded to? Are their opinions valued? Is the development of their thinking skills, oral language development and interpersonal skills supported in a suitable manner?

Importance of the Voice of the Child in the Classroom

“By voice we refer to that cluster of intentions, hopes, grievances, and expectations that children guard as their own. This voice surfaces only when the adult has learned to ask and get out of the way” (Pufall & Unsworth, p.8).

Intertwined with concepts of democracy and citizenship in the classroom is the pertinence of the voice of the child and the importance of carefully and respectfully listening to children. First of all, The *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC) (2006) has international implications for the importance of listening to children. It supports the view of children as rights’ holders, and argues that the early years is critical for the fulfillment of these rights. According to Thomson (2008), this has spurred on educator’s to discover ways of listening to the child’s voice in the classroom. Fiumara (1990) makes a statement when she declares that “the child begins to speak *because* the adult listens.” (p.118). This statement invokes a number of connotations for educators; the significance of listening to the child in order to support learning, but maybe more importantly the pertinence of listening to a child in order to encourage the development of a sense of dignity, self-worth and self-confidence within themselves. According to Millar & Moran (2007), methodology focusing on the creation of a climate in which individuals are respected and valued, is more likely to help children to develop a sense of self-worth. Moreover , studies such as Kite (1991) and Sasseville (1994) show that

philosophical engagements have a positive effect on improving the self-esteem of children. *Listening* to the students is a central element in both of these studies.

The primary educators' day is safe to say a very busy one with the inclusion of an overcrowded curriculum to be "covered" and the large student numbers to educate. With such demands, one can imagine how days could go by without being able to and/or being unaware of genuinely listen to the children in one's care. Philosophy with children is a springboard from where the educator can show children that they are valued and that their opinions matter. Not only does it show the children, that what they say matters, it has the capacity to bring out their true academic thought capabilities because they have an opportunity fully explore topics and questions of an open-ended nature and are given the time in which to do so in a respectful atmosphere

Philosophy and Citizenship

The practise of philosophy with people both young and old possesses the power to stimulate an active participatory democracy. To nurture an autonomous, responsible and critically reflective learner from an early age and beyond is key for a democracy that has an open and reflective dialogue. Roche (2015) states that "critical thinking is necessary for making sense and meaning of our lives and our world. Without it, we risk being mere receivers and consumers of others knowledge" (p.11). Critical thinking in turn leads to a critical citizenry, people who are not mere receivers and consumers of others knowledge, but who are free thinking and confident participants.

(Fisher, 2006) is a strong promoter of this outlook and explains it through his "habits of intelligent behaviour". He implies that dialogic teaching aimed at improving thinking helps develop such habits which include being curious (asking deep and interesting

questions); collaborative (through engaging with discussion); critical (through giving reasons and evidence); creative (through generating and building on ideas); and caring (through developing an awareness of self and others. He claims that these “habits”, all of which doing philosophy can help develop, form good citizens.

Bohm (1998) too describes dialogue as a hugely important practice and sees it as

“a stream of meaning flowing among and through us and between us. This will make possible a flow of meaning in the whole group, out of which will emerge new understanding. It’s something new, which may or may not have been the starting point at all. It’s something creative. And this shared meaning is the “glue” or “cement” that holds people and societies together”. (p.2)

Furthermore, a number of studies which promote the use of democratic practices in the classroom show that classrooms that are dialogic in nature improve children’s learning (Roche 2011, Mercer, 2000 , Alexander 2010). Thus, focusing on democratic practices which lead to a sense of citizenry can lead to overall learning improvements. Mary Roche is a strong campaigner for the inclusion of democratic dialogue in the classroom and upholds the view that engaging children in dialogic practices improves their critical thinking skills. (Roche, 2011, 2015). Moreover, Alexander (2010) states that “connecting the language of learning with the language of participation” (p.111) is a means to the development of critical literacy.

On a national level, the current president Michael D. Higgins and his wife Sabina are passionate campaigners for the need for everyone in Irish society to engage with philosophy and critical thought in order to be true democratic participants. In his most recent speech on the subject of philosophy on November 20th 2016 at the celebration of World Philosophy Day for Philosophy Ireland, of which his wife Sabina is the current patron, the president declared that “the teaching of philosophy is one of the most powerful tools

we have at our disposal to empower children into acting as free and responsible subjects in an ever more complex, interconnected and uncertain world”. To add to that he stated philosophising with children is “an engaging path to a humanistic and vibrant democratic culture, and a means of encouraging people to dialogue respectfully”(Humphreys, 2016). The president has repeatedly argued that if we cherish democracy we need an active and independent thinking citizenry and that philosophy in schools is the means to that end.

Philosophy and Thinking

“All which the school can or need do for pupils, so far as their minds are concerned ... is to develop their ability to think” (Dewey, 1916, cited in Fisher, 2003, p.5).

According to Fisher (2006), philosophical dialogue develops the kinds of thinking that children might not get used to in other lessons (cited in Roche, 2015, p.107). The development of thinking in young children has now come to the forefront of the education in a ever-changing society which now demands its’ citizens to be independent, resourceful and innovative thinkers. Now there is less a demand for what the Greeks called “*tekne*” the basic skills and techniques which need to be introduced and practised by beginners in any area of learning and more of a requirement for *phronesis*, that is practical wisdom or intelligence, the higher order thinking which enhances skill to the level of expertise (Fisher, 2003, p.18). According to Fisher (2005) the foundation for thinking skills needs to be laid early in life, for open-mindedness begins in the formative years when a child’s identity as a thinking person is being established (p.x). Thus, it is necessary that the nurturing of thinking skills begins in the early years. Moreover, Garside (2014) claims that “it is by thinking together, exposing our thoughts and beliefs to one another, and having these thought and beliefs explored and sometimes challenged that we learn to think better together”(p.178)

Since Lipman began implementing the Philosophy for Children (P4C) programme in the 1970's, in response to an education system that he thought was stifling children's creativity and independent thinking, there has been a myriad of research ever since, quite an amount of which has focused on the development of children's thinking skills when implementing a philosophical community of inquiry in an educational setting. Much research has indeed focussed upon the upper end of the primary school and one may attribute this to a certain view that very young children may not/do not have the capacity to think in an abstract manner and therefore are unable to develop philosophical thinking (White, 1992, Wilson, 1992). Moreover, children in the upper half of the primary school have more language, therefore making it easier to measure the effectiveness of engaging with philosophy.

Nevertheless, there has been some research both national and international to examine the effects of philosophy engagements on thinking skills with children in the early years. In Ireland, Donnelly (2001) carried out some of this research in her very own Junior Infant and Senior Infant class group over a two-year period, using her thinking time approach to philosophising with children, where she studied the children's higher order thinking. The purpose of this study was to investigate the ability of young children to think in the abstract, through defining and analysing some of the elements of higher order or abstract thinking. Some of the higher order thinking skills that she measured were as follows; comparing, offering explanations, clarifying, summarising, making balanced evaluations and judgements as well as making inferences and connections. The results of her study showed that these children were extremely capable of demonstrating their higher order thinking skills with understandably displaying more complex thought processes in Senior Infants. One could strongly claim that the reason for this was that they were given the *opportunity* to enter into dialogue as early as Junior Infants and that

their thought processes as well as language were consistently scaffolded in order to display such good results.

Another study which focused on measuring the development of thinking skills with very young children of five and six years of age is that carried out by (Sare, Luik, & Tulviste, 2016) whereby an intervention group of children participated in a weekly philosophical group discussion over eight months. The result of the study showed that the intervention group performed much better in giving significantly more reasons that included: (1) comparison, (2) analogy, (3) justification, (4) the wording “because of that”, and (5) causal connection than children in the control group if they were asked to reason their opinion in assessments post intervention.

Morris (1992) makes philosophy more accessible for young children through her suggestions on how to teach philosophy through picturebooks. Like Roche (2015), she claims that picturebooks are suitable stimuli for engaging children with philosophy with the inclusion of thought provoking questioning and imaginative dialogue which promote the development of thinking.

The Child and the Other during Philosophy

During philosophy sessions, children are exposed to the ideas and opinions of others, which in turn help to build upon and/or challenge their own wonderings. Dialogue with the other is an essential element of philosophy with children and a myriad of research such as (Alexander, 2010; Mercer 2000; Murphy 2004, Roche 2011) shows that learning grows and knowledge is produced in classrooms that are dialogic communities (Roche, 2015, p,10)

Employing Vygotsky's belief that social mediation is the foundation of knowledge and learning, however, supports the potential instrumental role that the teacher and other children can play in supporting and guiding learning during philosophy engagements. The other (teacher and other children) can indeed be "a mediator, co-player, scaffolder, trainer and advocate" (Kernan, 2007, p. 11). In admitting social mediation with a more knowing other as central to cognitive development, there is significant potential to develop "higher mental functions" through social interactions during philosophy sessions. A more knowing other can either be an adult or a more knowledgeable peer. These higher mental functions may be defined as "being able to classify, order, generalise, compare and so-on" (Smidt, 2009, p.38). The term "scaffolding" undertaken by Bruner is a term used to describe how a meaningful and supportive social interaction with a knowing other promotes cognitive development. In earlier writing and research scaffolding was seen as a "process by which an adult assists a child to carry out a task beyond the child's individual capability" (Waller & Swann, 2009, p.92). The roots of this term are grounded firmly in the work of Vygotsky and his concept of the zone of proximal development. Vygotsky describes this process as "the distance between actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p.86). In other words, a more knowing other such as a parent, sibling, peer or educator interacts with a child to support and extend their current knowledge so as the child can grasp the potential knowledge (ZPD) to reach a higher level of knowing.

Considering the more knowing other as the educator in the classroom, he/she has a primordial role in creating an environment which is dialogic, participative and democratic. Roche (2000, 2007, 2011, 2015) promotes the use of dialogic enquiry,

whereby the educator takes a step back and attempts to be a co-constructor of knowledge rather than an imparter of knowledge. Donnelly (2010) also uphold this democratic community of enquiry which epitomises the social-interactionist theory of Vygotsky. Likewise, the more knowing other in philosophical discussions with children are also their peers. Children absorb the knowledge, language and thinking of others, and in conjunction with such, can construct higher levels of thinking and knowing.

Introducing more sophisticated vocabulary and complex sentence structures whilst engaged in dialogue supports the children's development of vocabulary. Engaging in mutual wonderings with children fosters a sense of enjoyment and helps to develop warm relationships as there is no hierarchy amongst participants. Engaging in joint problem solving during discussions promotes positive interdependence and assertiveness.

With the specialised, supportive and careful guidance of an adult facilitator during philosophy sessions, it is undeniable that children are encouraged to reach their full potential as regards socialisation, cognitive development and language acquisition. Without such support, children would indeed discover and learn organically but the amount of which would be arguable. Noddings (1992) places huge importance of the pedagogical relationship which is carefully examined in this study.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the relevance of engaging children with philosophy in relation to current curricular aims, educational theory and societal values and demands. In the next chapter, the research methodology will be outlined. The methods of data collection and

analysis will be explained, as will the rationale behind these choices. Limitations to the research will be discussed, as will questions of data reliability and validity.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

In general terms, research may be defined as “a process of steps used to collect and analyze information to increase our understanding of a topic or issue” (Creswell, 2012, p.2). Educational research not only has the enormous capacity to add to our knowledge of an innumerable amount of educational issues and developments, it also has huge potential to improve professional practice and inform policy debates (Creswell, 2012). Educational research, therefore possesses the capabilities to constructively inform, spanning from the localised level of the single educator to the societal level of advising educational policy and practice. In essence, educational research has the power to transform both policy and practice.

As mentioned previously in Chapter 2, educational values have experienced a seismic shift with Vygotsky’s socio-cultural view of education now being the popular lens from how one perceives learning. Likewise, educational research has experienced huge changes on how one views and values research.

Traditional methods which have dominated educational research in previous decades are generally situated within the “normative” paradigm (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000, p.33). Their typical medium and large scale studies have helped to inform educational policy and reform, and continue to be an essential part of educational research today. However, not only does educational research have the power to inform on a broad level, small scale research projects which can be interpretive and critical in nature can also place an emphasis on the social element of research and have the potential to be of huge significance to practitioners in terms of encouraging them to transform their own practice. Action research, which is employed in this study, and explained in further detail below

is an example of how one can implement a small-scale research project in his/her educational setting.

The purpose of this chapter is to identify and describe a suitable research approach (action research), the research methods (audio recordings and reflective diary) and data analysis (transcriptions). The rationale behind these choices is explained. Ethical considerations are identified. The reliability and validity of the data is discussed as well as any limitations associated with using action research as the research approach.

Quantitative & Qualitative Research

The two main categories of research comprise of quantitative research methods and qualitative research methods, both of which play key roles in educational research depending on the type of research project which is being explored.

Quantitative research mainly focus on the examination of numerical, fixed data sources in a rigorous and scientific manner. It is often very useful for synthesising large quantities of numerical data. Such research is “used to identify patterns or trends of behaviour. Experiments and measurement are often used and there is a working premise that research can be value free.” (Mills & Butroyd, 2014, p.6). Some common forms of quantitative data sources include surveys, questionnaires and observations which can be analysed numerically.

Qualitative research methods on the other hand are used to explore the meanings that individuals, groups or societies attach to their sayings, doings and beliefs” (Mills & Butroyd, p.6). According to Creswell (2012), qualitative research is best suited to address a research problem in which you do not know the variables and need to explore. Some characteristics of quantitative data include:

- Analyzing the data for description and themes using text analysis and interpreting the larger meaning of the findings.
- Writing the report using flexible, emerging structures and evaluative criteria, and including the researchers' subjective reflexivity and bias.

(Creswell, 2012, p.16)

Interviews, surveys, questionnaires, reflective diaries, case studies and interpretation of video and audio recordings are all examples of qualitative data sources that can be examined for meaning.

Practitioner Research

The teacher as researcher movement inspired by Stenhouse (1975) highlighted the need for classroom based research to be carried out from within the natural constraints of the classroom.

Whilst the central aim of practitioner based research is the improvement of practice with the hope of fostering learner achievement and enjoyment, a key component of this research is the careful self-reflective enquiry of the researcher (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p.162). For the researcher here, action research is “an enquiry by the self into the self” (McNiff, 2002, p.15). The researcher investigates his/her own practices with a view to altering these in a beneficial way (Denscombe, 2014 p.124).

Action Research

Action research or practitioner based research is “a powerful tool for change at the local level” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000, p.344). It is normally associated with hands

on small scale research projects (Denscombe, 2014) including, in this case practitioner based research in the early years classroom setting. There are various perspectives of this type of research but “what unites different conceptions of action research is the desire for improvement to practice, based on a rigorous evidential trail of data and research” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000 p.344). Four defining characteristics of action research as stated in Denscombe (2014) are:

1. Practical nature: It is aimed at dealing with real world problems and issues.
2. Change: Both as a way of dealing with practical problems and as a means of discovering more about phenomena, change is regarded as an integral part of research.
3. Cyclical process: Research involves a feedback loop in which initial findings generate possibilities for change which are then implemented and evaluated as a prelude to further investigation.
4. Participation: Practitioners are the crucial people in the research process. Their participation is active, not passive.

In simple terms, action research can be defined as research that is carried out in response to a problem or feeling of discontentment with the status quo with aims to improving professional practice, educational outcomes and learner satisfaction. In this research study, the practitioner was initially unhappy with how the curriculum was being delivered in her classroom, particularly in response to how the voice of the child was being valued and listened to.

Research Design

The research approach was of a qualitative nature, in the form of action based research that took place in the infant classrooms of a multidenominational primary school. The researcher worked within the paradigms of critical theory and interpretation, taking the form of critical reflection of one's own practice and societal educational values. In conjunction with this was the interpretation of the language and participation of the children involved in the study.

In this study, action research was used to investigate and encourage the children's full potential with regards to philosophical and abstract thought. The researcher decided that this type of qualitative approach would provide suitable information on the subject under consideration.

The Research Context

The context within which the research took place was the natural and familiar setting of the classroom in a co-educational and multidenominational school in Dublin.

For philosophy sessions, the children are arranged in a circle on the floor so as to encourage positive communicative dispositions where each participant had a clear view of others. This design is intended to be conducive to the community of philosophical enquiry; dialogic in nature. All participants, including the practitioner take turns to speak using a speaking object which is passed around the circle. If a child does not wish to speak, he/she passes the speaking object to the next person.

It is important to mention that the practitioner who embarked on this research is a full-time classroom teacher at the school, whose main responsibility is the daily education and care of children in the classroom. Therefore, it was necessary as much as possible for

the action research to be incorporated into the weekly classroom schedule in a suitable and realistic manner. To cater for this, two philosophy sessions per week were included in the research. Even though they were incorporated into curricular time for Learn Together and Oral Language time for a six-week period, this duration is still a relatively short one in the daily life and development of young children. A longer study over the period of their first year in primary school would be much more indicative of what can really be achieved in thinking time sessions.

Sample

The two Junior Infant class groups took part in the research. All children were between 4 and 5 years of age at the time of the study.

The first group was the pilot group consisting of 26 children. There were 7 EAL children in the class. Another 4 children were noted as having some difficulty with focus and engagement in tasks on a daily basis.

The second group, (the intervention group) consisted of 15 children in total. There were 4 EAL children in the intervention group, one of which has only spoken once or twice in the classroom. In addition, the group also included 2 children who have been noted as having some difficulty with focus and engagement. The intervention group were picked at random and the remaining 13 children in the class also had the opportunity to engage in block of philosophy sessions after the intervention was complete. However, these 13 children were not audio recorded and did not take part in this study. This measure was put into place to ensure that all children in Junior Infants in the school had the opportunity to experience thinking time in the academic year.

The Pilot Study

The pilot study consisted of four philosophy sessions over a three-week period with a neighbouring junior infant class group consisting of approximately 26 children depending on daily absences. Permission was sought from both the principal and parents of the children who took part in the pilot study. Audio recordings were taken of these sessions and notes in the form of a short reflective diary were used to help analyse the progression. The practitioner chose a mixture of natural philosophy topics and response to story. The sessions were as follows:

Session 1 : Rainbows

Session 2: Response to the True Story of the Three Little Pigs Part 1

Session 3: Response to the True Story of the Three Little Pigs Part 2

Session 4: How was the world made?

Even though the children were somewhat familiar to the practitioner, it took more time than anticipated to build a rapport with the children and set the tone for philosophy sessions, implying the importance of teacher-pupil relationship when working with children of such a young age.

As a result of the pilot session, the practitioner made a number of changes to the plan for the intervention group. First of all, the practitioner decided that a smaller group of children would be much more suitable in terms of creating a calm atmosphere that was conducive to dialogue. Therefore, fifteen children from the practitioner's own class group took part in the intervention study. Secondly, the practitioner noted that more reflection and less description was needed in the reflective diary in order to tease out more meaning for analysis. Thirdly, the practitioner noted that it was important to attempt to increase the amount of actual philosophical dialogue during sessions, spending less time on warm

up games and cool down exercises where possible. The practitioner chose to continue to base lessons on topics that were of general interest to the children. A range of topics were added to the thinking tree on display in the classroom for which were then chosen later as topics for specific sessions. As the intervention involved the children in the researcher's own class group, a warm and friendly relationship has already been established by this point in the school year.

Data Collection

“Documentation through notes, photographs, videos and art work is a key element of reflective practice and ongoing research” (O'Connor, 2012, p.140).

The gathering of data undertook the form of a narrative style with the researcher synthesising data sources in order to tell an interwoven story of the investigation. This method of research/assessment of the project honours the modern socio-cultural holistic view of assessment with young children. As thinking time is an open ended, emergent and a complex process which does not have a finite end, it is necessary that the documentation needs to reflect this and be formative in nature. This documentation type approach to looking at very young children's learning is heavily employed in Reggio Emilia schools in Italy where observation, interpretation, and documentation in this approach are woven together, along with the pedagogy of listening, to allow learning to be visible (Rinaldi, 2004). Therefore, a documentation type approach was deemed most suitable for this project.

The data was gathered through transcriptions of audio recordings of sessions and the reflective diary of the researcher. “The use of tape recordings provides a multiplicity of

participants' perspectives within a natural setting. It is thus a complete and accurate account of verbal behaviour" (McKernan, 2000, p,106)

The use of audio recordings as a central means of data collection guaranteed that pupil voice (Mc Intyre et al, 2005) was at the heart of data collection, ensuring that action research was carried out "*with* our learners" (cited in Mills & Butroyd, 2014, p.78) as opposed to on them.

The practitioner's reflective diary in conjunction with the analysis of transcripts provided a rich, multi-layered dimension to the collection of data. The diary consisted of analysis of practice, feelings, attitudes with the intention of coming to a better understanding and improving that practice. It consisted of detail of how each session went, how the children reacted and anything that was successful and unsuccessful. This "reflection-on- action" (Schon,1983) enabled the practitioner to revisit events of philosophy sessions and modify them through deliberate and critical self-assessment.

Data Analysis

Transcription data was analysed using the Constant Comparative Model (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) which was further expanded by Lincoln & Guba (1985). Data was examined from the transcripts through identifying categories of language meaning linked to the critical and abstract thought of philosophical thinking. It is necessary to mention that multiple categories were often identified in any one contribution. However, the researcher deemed it most appropriate to only attribute one category to each utterance made each child; the category which the researcher felt was the most fitting. This helped to ensure that the coding process displayed a sense of balance and fairness. The categories of language used were as follows:

1. **Statement** – The statements of the children form the foundation of thinking time sessions. An aim of this community of inquiry is that children feel comfortable with making statements or contributions of any degree. No matter how brief, children’s statements convey their thoughts and willingness to participate in philosophical discussion.
2. **Giving a reason/Explanation** – Many of children’s statements are followed by reasons and explanations using words such as “because” and “so”. When children give reasons/explanations, they display their ability to organise their thoughts, think logically as well as creatively. Explaining, reasoning and thinking logically are integral elements of philosophical dialogue.
3. **Clarification** – To clarify is to make something clear or easier to understand by giving more details or a simpler explanation. (Cambridge). Philosophy is a process of thought, an endeavour to make sense of something. Clarifying thoughts is a complex process and shows an ability to carefully organise thinking in one’s mind and select the key elements of meaning.
4. **Inference** – An inference is a guess that you make or an opinion that you form based on the information that you have. Inferencing is a key element of philosophical discussion. During the process, the participant attempts to make some logical sense of the information that he/she already possesses. To make an inference also often involves some creative thought about why something is the way it is, what should, would or could happen and what will happen “if” something is a certain way.

5. **Judgement** – A judgement is a decision or opinion about someone or something that you form after thinking carefully. During philosophical dialogue the children voice their judgements based upon their personal beliefs and/or from carefully listening to their peers to form a conclusion about what they believe to be just.

6. **Reflection/Questioning** – To question is to express doubts about the value or truth of something and to reflect is to think carefully, especially about possibilities and opinions. The search for truth is a central element of philosophical dialogue and inquiry. It opens children up to critical thought, creative thinking and gives them the power to feel a sense of confidence in their wondering. In many ways, a question is the essence of what philosophy is all about; a process of searching for wisdom.

7. **Emerging hypothesis** – A hypothesis is an idea or explanation for something that is based on known facts but has not yet been proved. When stating a hypothesis, the speaker conveys a certain amount of certainty about his/her idea and/or opinion. They can make a statement with more confidence based on the information they already have.

8. **Democratic Language** - The use of democratic language including “I agree/I disagree and I agree with/I disagree with” was recorded to examine their participation in a democratic community of inquiry.

Data Reliability & Validity

Validity and Reliability in research are complex concepts to begin to grapple with. In addition, whether the data collection is mainly quantitative or qualitative can modify the way in which one looks upon these terms. In all research cases, “threats to validity and reliability can never be erased completely; rather, the effects of these threats can be attenuated by attention to validity and reliability throughout a piece of research”. (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000, p.105).

As action research is mainly qualitative in nature, it was necessary the researcher to look upon the terms of validity and reliability in a way that was suitable to the investigative, exploratory and narrative nature of this type of this project.

As regards reliability, Mills & Butroyd (2014) claim that in everyday English it means dependability. In other words, “for research to be reliable it must demonstrate that if it were to be carried out on a similar group of respondents in a similar context (however defined), then similar results would be found” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000, p.117). To address the issue of reliability in this action research project, the researcher provided “a degree of accuracy and comprehensiveness of coverage” (Bogdan & Biklen,1992, p.48), throughout. Beginning with requesting permission from the relevant bodies, to carefully transcribing and diligently coding raw data which was accompanied by the deep reflection of the researcher in the research diary, the researcher attempted to give a thorough description of the project from beginning to end.

In relation to quantitative research, the term validity may be understood as the extent to which “the research results have precisely addressed the research questions” (Somekh & Lewin, 2005, p. 349). However, as action researchers do not make claims to context-free knowledge (Greenwood & Levin, 2000), the exact above understanding of validity to

action research is not a reasonable one. Alternate terms to validity such as trustworthiness (Kincheloe, 1991, cited in Mills & Butroyd, 2014, p.100) and understanding (Wolcott, 1994, cited in Mills & Butroyd 2014, p.100) have been proposed to “capture the essence of validity in a way that applies specifically to qualitative research” (p. 100). Thick description and attention to systematic and deep analysis in action research has the potential to satisfy these requirements.

In terms of external validity in action research – the degree to which results can be generalised to the wider population, cases or situations, this issue is problematic (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, p.136). In this action research project, the researcher viewed generalisability through the lenses of comparibility and transferability (Lincon & Guba,1985). To attend to these concepts, Schofield, 1990 (cited in Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 200 p.137) suggests that it is important to provide a clear, detailed and in depth description so that others can decide the extent to which findings from one piece of research are generalizable to another situation.

Ethical Considerations

This research is conducted in line with the Ethics Guidelines from the Marino Institute of Education. The research was submitted for 'Ethics Approval' and was approved in November 2016.

“An action research is considered ‘ethical’ if research design, interpretation and practical development produced by it have been negotiated with all parties directly concerned with the situation under research” (Altrichter, 1992, p. 48)

Prior to the commencement of the research, the following steps were undertaken to support an ethically sound research project:

1. A letter seeking permission to carry out the research in the school was approved by the board of management.
2. Letters were sent out to parents giving them a synopsis of the project whilst also requesting permission for audio-recordings of their child to be taken and analysed.
3. The children were informed of the “thinking time” project in a child-friendly manner so as to encourage ownership of the research and promote democracy in the classroom.
4. The intervention group of fifteen children were selected at random from the practitioner’s class group. The remaining children also engaged in a six-week block of philosophy sessions after the intervention was completed. This was to ensure that all children in the class where the intervention took place were provided with an equal opportunity to engage in philosophy sessions.

Throughout the research and analysis of data, confidentiality was ensured as much as possible through the following measures:

1. Data from transcriptions and reflective diary was stored in password protected files to reduce the likelihood of outsiders gaining access.
2. The children were given different names on written transcriptions to foster a certain degree of anonymity.
3. All original data from this research will be destroyed after the dissertation has been approved.

Limitations to this Study

As with all research, this study is not without its' limitations. As already mentioned, this action research project on philosophy with young children took place in the natural classroom setting of one multi-denominational school of mainly average socio-economic status. Therefore, it was framed by the experiences of participants in this particular school. The issue of generalizability as explained previously is a limitation of all action research, but it is offset by the real insight and depth of understanding provided. It allows for much detail to be collected.

As the research was run in a setting where the researcher was the classroom teacher of the intervention group, a certain degree of bias was unavoidable, as the researcher had already developed a warm and caring relationship with the children. Nevertheless, this close relationship with the children engaging in the research was an essential element to ensuring that as much data and insight into the project was gathered to create a rich bank of information to examine. The stark contrast between the pilot group and intervention group in terms of participation emphasises the significance of a warm relationship and attachment between a researcher and children of this young age.

Moreover, bias is never completely unavoidable in the vast majority of research projects as the researcher often has a personal affinity for the subject and is passionate about the improvement of the topic at hand. "All researchers have opinions about what they are researching. Their research has been chosen precisely because it is of significance to them" (Griffiths,1998, p.129). In this sense, bias can be viewed as an essential and positive characteristic of research.

In terms of sample size, the amount of children involved in the project was relatively small, with 26 children in the pilot group and only 15 children in the intervention group.

However, the researcher purposely engaged a smaller amount of children in the intervention group in order to allow a richer picture of what children are capable of to be presented. Undoubtedly, young children within a smaller group are given more of an opportunity to speak, wait time is lessened and behavioural management is more manageable.

Concerning the categorisation of language in transcripts, the researcher identified the children's language as being emulative of certain thinking skills. The language coding process relied on the professional judgment of the teacher. While all efforts were made to choose the most suitable language categories for children's contributions, it is necessary to mention that there might have been some variation, if another researcher/s coded the transcripts.

As already briefly mentioned, the limited amount of time within which this research was carried out was another limitation of the project and a much longer project in duration would be more indicative of children's progress and capabilities. Nonetheless, the researcher worked within these time constraints to create an as transparent a project possible. Data was recorded diligently through careful transcriptions and complimented by the inclusion of a reflective diary to deeply reflect on the progress of the project. In addition to this, the language present in the transcriptions was meticulously categorised and coded to extract the most meaning possible out of the children's contributions.

Conclusion

This chapter began with an explanation of this researcher's theoretical stance. It continued to outline the approach the research assumed, how the data was gathered and analysed. A action research study was adopted; data was collected through the use of audio-recordings and transcriptions. Ethical considerations were discussed. Limitations to this approach were discussed. In the next chapter, Research Findings, the main research findings will be presented.

Chapter 4: Research Findings

Introduction

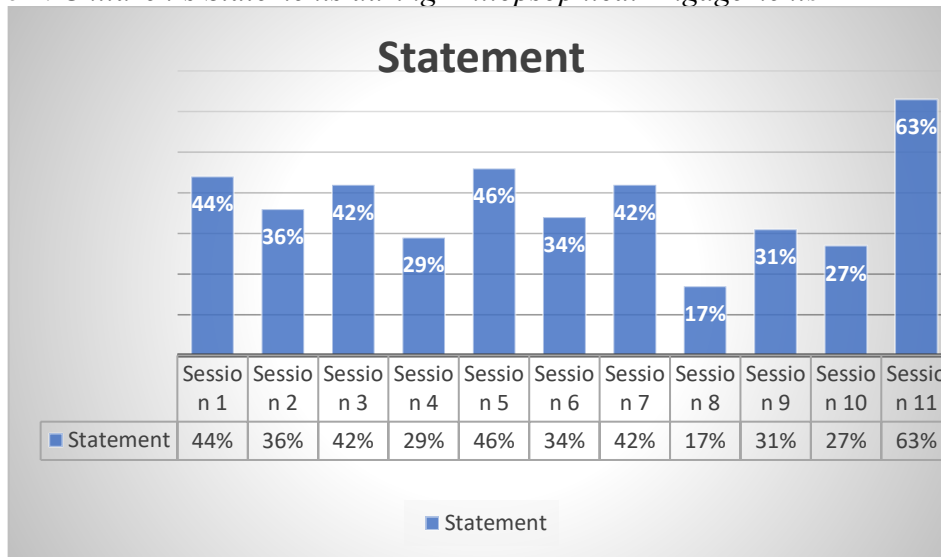
This research took place in a multidenominational school between February-April 2017. 41 children from Junior Infants were involved in the study, 26 of which took part in the pilot study and the remaining 15 in the intervention group. The children participated in a series of thinking time sessions which were further analysed in the reflective diary of the researcher. The purpose of the thinking time sessions was to determine the degree to which children in the early years are capable of displaying elements of philosophical thinking, through the examination of their language contributions. Also, the level of children's participation was also analysed to help build a picture of their involvement in a democratic community of enquiry. The aim of the researcher's reflective diary was to compliment the analysis of audio-transcriptions through providing an in depth analysis of sessions to create a rich multi-layered approach to the research.

This chapter will outline the findings of the research. The tools of analysis will be briefly reviewed and then the findings will be presented. Thus, this chapter provides the foundation to evaluate the research findings and whether they relate to current research, which will be discussed in Chapter Five, The Discussion.

Findings

Statements

Figure 1: *Children's Statements during Philosophical Engagements*



By far the most common of language categories present in the coded transcriptions were statements, comprising of 17% of children's contributions in session 8 to the highest percentage of 46% in session 5, with the approximate average of statements at 40% per session.

Statements were carefully coded through the analysis of children's language use. In fact, everything that the children uttered could be classified as a statement as any contribution that a child makes can be termed as a such, no matter how simple or complex. Nevertheless, in the case of this research study, the researcher graded a language contribution a statement, only if it was the most fitting for a child's contribution. If any of the rest of the language categories were present or more evident in any of the children's utterances, they were instead coded using the other categories and were not deemed "statements".

The portrayal of thought processes can be grouped as the least complex of the study. This, however does not imply the children's use of statements is the least significant in terms

of participation in a democratic community of enquiry or their capability of employing philosophical thought. In fact, children disclosing their statements, matter how brief, conveys their competence in communicating their thoughts and ideas to others and being confident in doing so. It must not be forgotten that the children were very young at the time of the study; 4-5 years of age. Thus, the inclusion of their statements, thoughts and ideas are hugely significant and display the first monumental step in fostering children's emerging philosophical thinking abilities. Moreover, Donnelly (2001) even claims that to speak at all is, to some extent, engaging in a higher-order activity (p.279).

Through the analysis of the children's language, no clear sequential rise or fall in the amount of statements that children used was evident. Instead there were a couple of interesting findings as regards the "type" of session and natural direction that the topic took. For example, the largest percentage of statements present (46%) was session 5 named "Brains vs Computers". As apparent from the reflective diary of the researcher, this session went particularly well with strong involvement from the children.

All children participated in the discussion, albeit two children needed some encouragement. A number of children contributed to the discussion at least twice and even three times willingly showing great interest. (Reflective Diary – Session 5)

In contrast to the large amount of statements in session 5, session 10 ; If fish could fly, comprised of the least amount of statements with only 17%. It was also one of the more challenging sessions for the researcher.

The challenging nature of the session for the children was evident from that start as a number of children passed the speaking object in the first round, with some of them asking "Can I have a little think?" (Reflective Diary – Session 10).

The above two sessions convey contrasting findings in terms of the percentage of children giving statements and their apparent interest in the sessions. Computers and other items such as tablets and computer games are objects that children today are hugely familiar with in their everyday life. Therefore, this gave the session much more momentum and the children drove it themselves.

Gladly, the children seemed to be immediately fascinated by the topic of Brains vs Computers and I did not need to give such a big input to keep the session afloat. They did it themselves. (Reflective Diary – Session 5).

In contrast to the above, the topic of “If fish could fly” was much more abstract in nature and the children struggled with this.

I questioned why the above behaviour was the case today and I wondered was the topic simply too abstract? The lack of participation from a number of children displayed their possible confusion about the topic. (Reflective Diary – Session 10).

On a different note, in session 5, it was reported that a number of children repeated the statements of others. The repetition of statements is positive, particularly in the contributions of EAL children. It shows that they are listening carefully to their peers in the community of enquiry and developing their own language skills.

A couple of children repeated the statements of others. This was particularly the case with two children with EAL. (Reflective Diary – Session 5)

Some of the EAL children’s repeated statements and vocabulary included:

Ailish: I think that brains are em so good so I think brains are so powerful. Their body sleep. (Session 5 line 37-38)

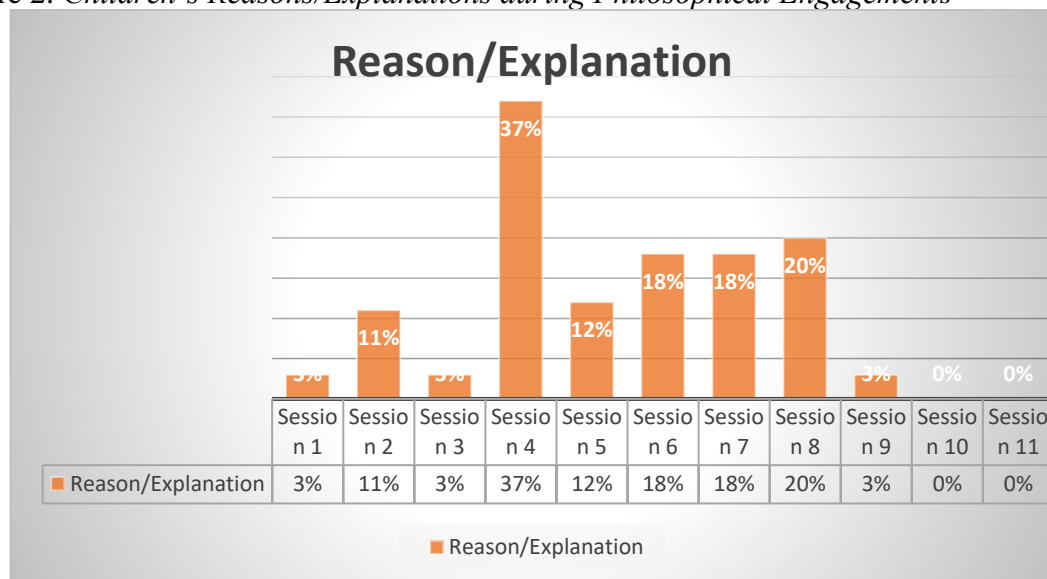
Laura: I think computers are smarter because you can watch videos and you can watch more things (Session 5 line 98-99)

Giving Reason/ Explanation

As already briefly mentioned in the data analysis section of the methodology chapter, language was categorised as Giving Reason/Explanation when children gave reasons to their statements and/or explained them in more detail. This category demonstrates that children are displaying another level of deeper thought and convey logic when they back up their statements with reasons. In simple terms, they are able to make a point and back it up. This is an essential element of philosophical dialogue, regardless of the age and/or language articulation of participants.

The percentage of this category again varied from session to session and showed no real incline as the sessions progressed, varying from 0% of contributions in sessions 10 & 11, to 37% in session 4. These examples alone certainly did not show a sequential increase.

Figure 2: *Children's Reasons/Explanations during Philosophical Engagements*



It is important to mention that more evidence of giving reason/explanation is present in the raw data of the transcriptions than what the above percentages show due to the fact that the researcher attributed only one language category to all of children’s contributions, even though multiple categories of language in any one contribution can be evident.

Some examples of children’s utterances within this category were as follows:

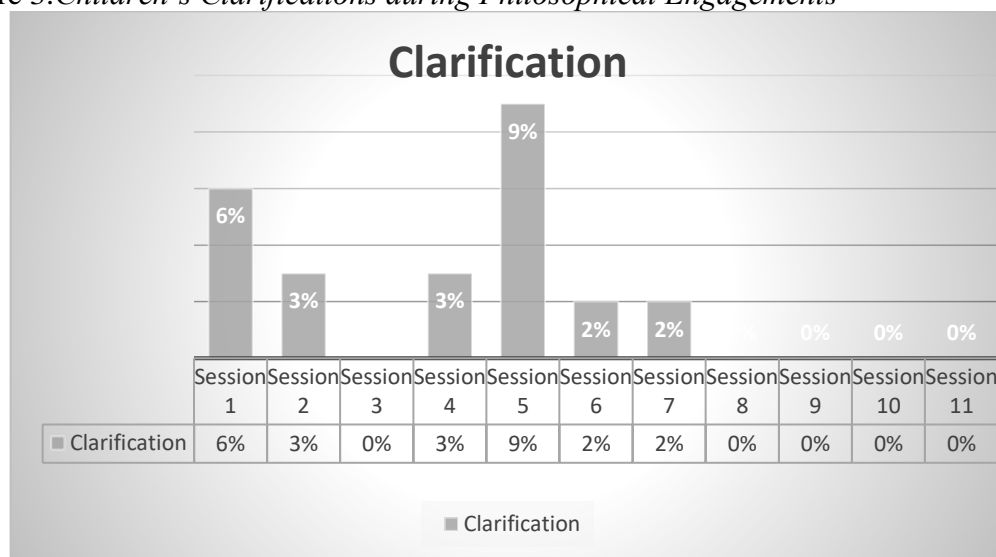
Ailish: I think the big bad wolf needs to say properly because he don’t want to eat the pigs, just get another bowl of sugar and go down to another house to get a cup of sugar. (Session 1 – Line 42)

Ciarán: I think the big bad wolf shouldn’t get out of jail because he ate the three little pigs (Session 2 – Line 100-101)

Hannah: Because I go out in my boots and then I can jump in puddles. (Session 6 – Line 63)

Clarification

Figure 3: Children’s Clarifications during Philosophical Engagements



This category of language data was probably the least evident throughout sessions and showed in fact a decline from session 6 onwards. To clarify something is the action of making a statement or situation less confused and more comprehensible. This is a complex thinking skill and one that requires oneself to synthesis thoughts, choose the main points and communicate these to others in a simpler manner, a task which young children may be able to somewhat able to perform in their minds but may not be able to fully verbalise and put these thoughts into language just yet.

Some of the few examples of evidence of clarification throughout the study are presented below:

***Ciarán:** All he wants is a cup of sugar to make his granny's cake. He didn't mean to blow down the pig's house. (Session 1 – Line 64)*

***Ross:** Rain when it's very heavy like it doesn't actually destroy houses. Like a hurricane can actually lift up a whole house. (Session 6 – Line 84)*

Inference

Lipman (1991) defined his programme of Philosophy for Children as “ philosophy applied to education for the purpose of producing students with improved proficiency in reasoning and judgement” (p.12)

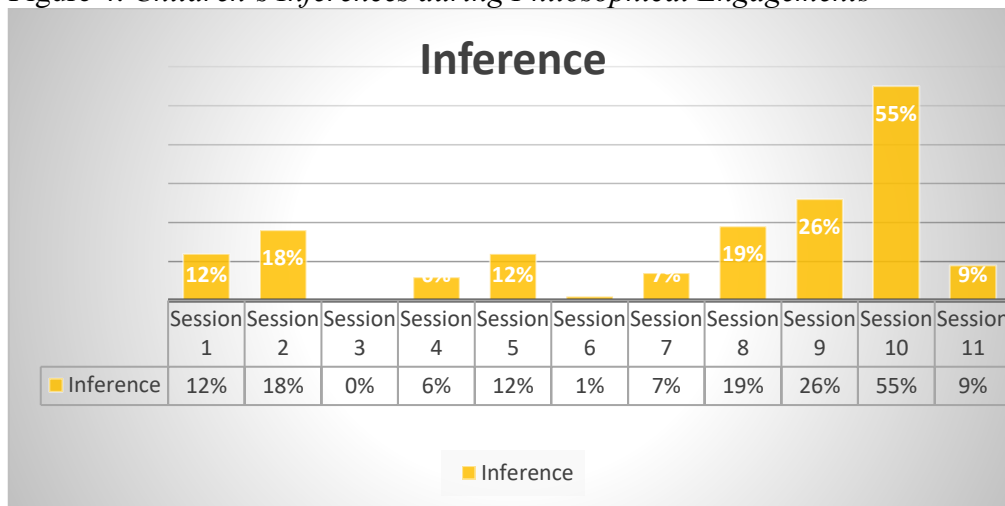
Philosophy with children is a platform from where children develop their reasoning skills.

Included in such skills of reasoning are “drawing inferences and making deductions” (Fisher, R., 2003, p,247), which “require the use of reasoning, argument and explanation” (p.247).

When children make an inference, they make a statement of what might or would happen based on the information they already have. The reasoning may have already occurred in their own mind or they verbalise it explicitly after they draw an inference.

Children’s language throughout the philosophy sessions showed rich data in terms of showing their ability to reason and make inferences. This conveys that the children are engaging in philosophical thought; thinking carefully as opposed to making simple fleeting statements. The results of the data collection also show a general rise in the amount of inferencing that was detected throughout the intervention.

Figure 4: *Children’s Inferences during Philosophical Engagements*



Evidence of children making inferences and engaging in philosophical thought are apparent in the following contributions to discussions:

Darragh: *I think that the three little pig’s mommy should try and get another baby. Then she will have two. Then she if she tried to have another baby, then she will have three then. (Session 2 – Lines 94-96).*

In the above statement, Darragh is making an inference about what “should” happen in response to Mammy Pig having only one son left.

Conor: *If fish could fly, then the sea wouldn’t be lonely cos if fish could fly then it doesn’t mean that sharks and squid and all of the other sea creatures wouldn’t be in the sea. (Session 10 – Lines 36-38)*

Suzi: Em if fish could fly, then they won't really taste the same but when people go fishing they won't be able to catch fish. (Session 10 – Lines 72-73)

The above two utterances from session 10 show that children are making deductions and thinking creatively through the inferences they make. They are making statements about what “might” or “would” happen if fish could fly.

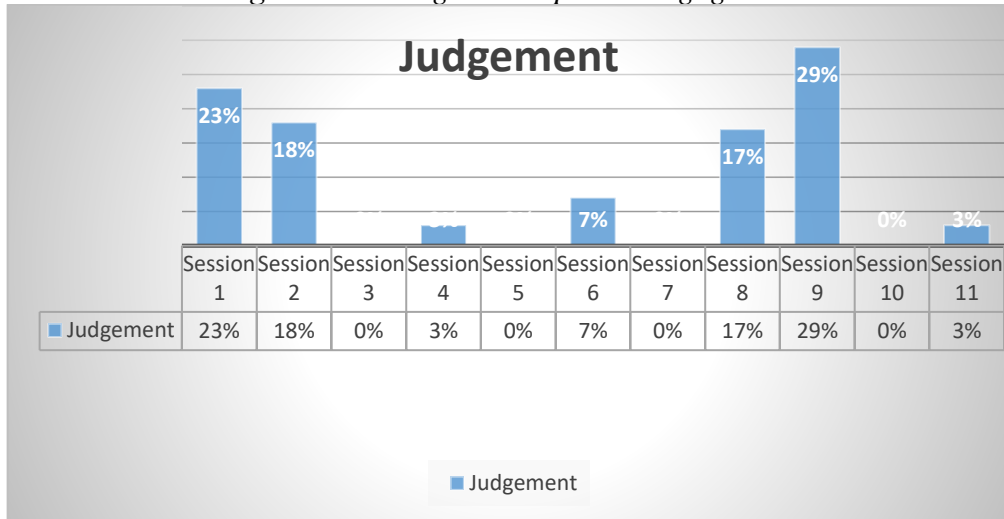
An interesting finding is that there is rich evidence of inferencing in sessions 8, 9 & 10, all of which begin with “if” statements. This conveys that engaging children in sessions of this type fosters their inferencing skills, thus supporting them to think philosophically.

Judgement

Children exercise critical thinking and reasoning skills when making judgements. Judgements are informed by reason or evidence. When children make judgements about the topic at hand in philosophical discussions, they demonstrate their ability to be reflective. Moreover, comparable to drawing inferences, judgements also “require the use of reasoning, argument and explanation”. (Fisher, 1991, p.247). Reflection, reasoning and making decisions based on the information that one has, show that young children indeed possess the potential to engage in philosophical thought when making judgements in their search of logical thought and truth inspired by their sense of wonderment.

Evidence of children making judgments was particularly clear in certain sessions throughout the study, showing that children’s ability to make judgments can be fostered and supported depending on whether the topic/question for philosophy sessions may lend itself to such reasoning.

Figure 5: *Children’s Judgements during Philosophical Engagements*



For example, in sessions 1 & 2, the children were faced with the moral dilemma of deciding whether the big bad wolf was in fact innocent after hearing his side of the story. Young children have a particular affinity for making moral judgements as they are intrigued and constantly bombarded by what is right or wrong. Examples of judgments they made in these sessions are as follows

Ian: *I think the big bad wolf shouldn’t get out of jail because he shouldn’t have eaten the two pigs. He shouldn’t because that’s why the mother pig will get sad. That’s what she will actually do. (Session 2 – Lines 97-99)*

Brid: *I think the Mam should say to go over to see the wolf in jail and tell him even if they died, he shouldn’t have eaten them. He should have let their mammy look after them and her might send her little pigs to the church. (Session 2 – Lines 106-108)*

Conor : *I think the big bad wolf just done it by accident and I think the three little pigs should go to jail because they are the ones who actually should be in jail because they are the ones that just wanted to be mean to the big bad wolf. (Session 1 – Lines 164-167)*

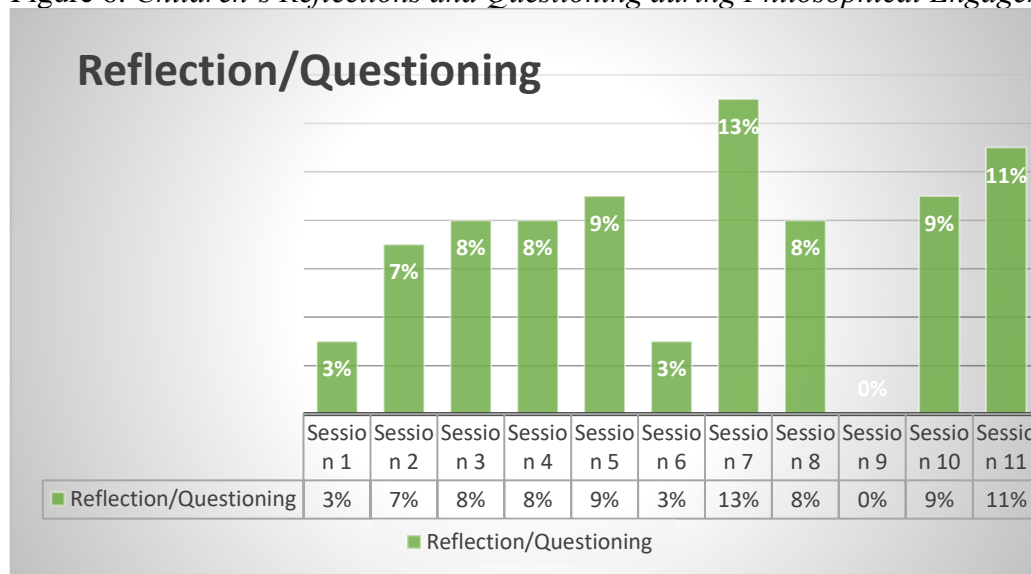
In addition, session 9 titled “If we had no school” lend itself lend itself to children making various judgements about whether we should have school or not.

Callum: *Yeah. Em if we had no school that would be bad because we won’t learn or we wont have any friends and we wont have much fun and in school you have puppet shows and some people don’t have any sand so that’s why we need to go to school. (Session 9 – Lines 153-156).*

In the above contribution, Callum is giving his judgment about what is important for him at this young age.

Reflection/Questioning

Figure 6: *Children’s Reflections and Questioning during Philosophical Engagements*



“The first key to wisdom is constant questioning By doubting we are led to enquiry, and by enquiry we discern the truth.” (Peter Abelard, cited in Fisher, R., 2005, p.53)

In essence. “philosophy is foremost a process of enquiry.....It begins in wonder and the child’s natural curiosity about the world” (Fisher, 2003, p.20).

When young children reflect upon something or ask a question, they demonstrate that they are engaged in the “process” of thinking and enquiry. Essentially they are searching for wisdom and any reflection they make or question they ask is opened up to the community of enquirers around them.

Ian: *I think I don’t know how the sky is really like. The stars are in the sky but in outer space. The moon is in outer space. The earth is in outer space. All the other planets are in outer space like donuts because I know every single planet but not all of them. (Session 7 – Lines 62-65)*

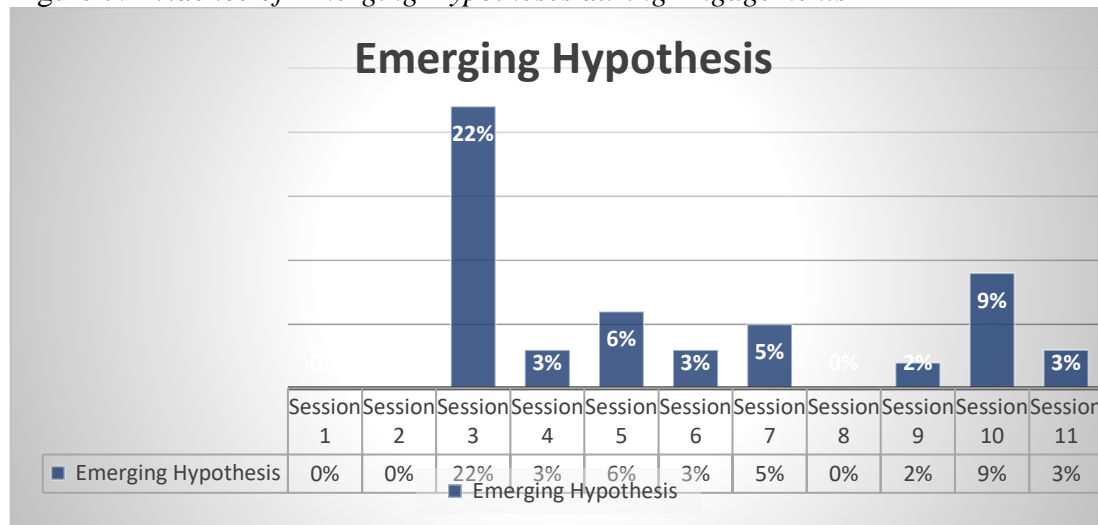
Brid: *I think when it’s night time I think where does the sky go if it’s night time and when the night comes out? (Session 7 – Lines 149-150)*

Ciarán: *I know how the babies came. I don’t know how the first dinosaurs came. (Session 3 – Lines 84-85)*

Conor: *I think that the world was made of nature and of rocks but I don’t know how the rocks were made and I think that the nature and the rocks made God. (Session 3 – Lines 101-102)*

Emerging Hypothesis

Figure 7: Evidence of Emerging Hypotheses during Engagements



Hypothesising involves “suggesting a theory, explanation, possible consequence etc” (Fisher, 2003, p.265). It may be explained as an educated guess that is based upon prior knowledge and/or evidence, which awards the statement a certain legitimacy and sound foundation.

When children state hypotheses in a community of enquiry during philosophy sessions, it shows that they are engaging in philosophical thinking as theorising on the basis of prior knowledge and reason is a key element of philosophy itself.

Even though children in the early years age group are still at a formative stage in their thinking, “they can come up with thoughtful and plausible hypotheses from an early age, given sufficient stimulus from adults” (Fisher, 2005, p.77).

The results of the study show that young children are capable of such thinking and language, albeit evident in generally small amounts throughout. Nevertheless, this is even more of a motivation to foster further their potential to develop these competences at such a young age. Below are some of the example of hypotheses from the study:

Ross: *I don't know where the world came from but I know how it was made. Like the earth is made of nature and even people are nature and Donald Trump is nature. Grass is nature. Anything that is alive is nature. (Session 3 – Lines 20-22).*

Suzi: *Well the first people on earth were.... Well my Mammy has a necklace and they're in the necklace and it's in an apple because they took a bite of an apple one day. (Session 3 – Lines 110-112)*

Conor: *It's very complicated but I think every single animal can talk to each other and how they like bark and all that stuff. I think every single animal can talk to each other. (Session 5 – Lines 137-139)*

Hannah: *If we had no rain, our skin would change. We would have brown skin. We would have brown skin if there was no rain. (Session 6 – Lines 50-52)*

Ciarán: *Do you know what I think the sky gets its' colour from? The clouds. The clouds is white, the sky is white but maybe the clouds are just covered in the darkness. (Session 7 – Lines 178-180)*

Oisín: *If fish could fly, then they would be able to breathe out of water and underwater and they would not really have two fins. (Session 10 – Lines 31-32)*

Democratic Language

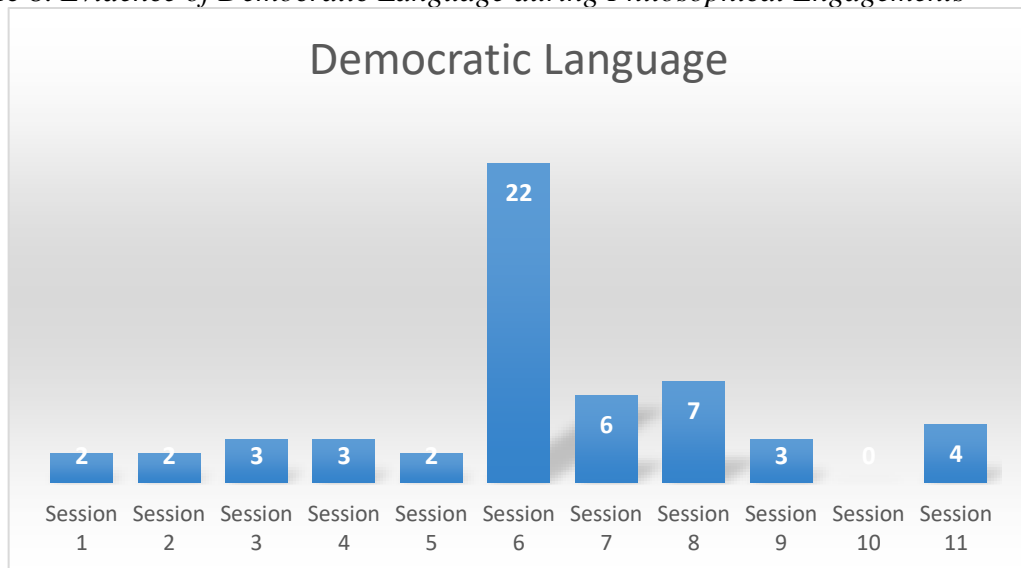
Whereas the previous categories of language show that children are capable of engaging in philosophical thought, this category is more representative of the potential of the young child to participate in a democratic community of enquiry, an important aspect of philosophical discussion within a group.

During this study, the language of “I agree with...../I disagree with.....” was carefully modelled by the facilitator throughout and revised at the beginning of each session to

further encourage its usage amongst the children. Such language is representative of one of the ways to achieve “shared enquiry; to encourage children to talk and listen to each other” (Fisher, 2003, p.183).

The following table shows the amount of these utterances throughout the intervention.

Figure 8: *Evidence of Democratic Language during Philosophical Engagements*



In the deeper analysis of the reflective diaries a careful distinction is made between children simply repeating the language “I agree/I disagree” and using the structure “I agree with because /I disagree with because”.

Early in the intervention in session 3, the researcher noted that even children of this young age simply becoming accustomed to the language structure is an important step in creating a community of careful listeners in the future.

On one hand, I am pleased with this progression that the children are beginning to use language modelled by me even if it is “copied” immediately after. I feel that this is an important step in beginning to develop their critical thinking skills and equipping them with the language in the future to express their thoughts in a democratic and reflective manner. (Reflective Diary – Session 3)

In session 6, the researcher noted that a number of children used the more complexed structure of “I agree with” which displays another level of listening to others.

Today was also amongst one of the first times where children used the structure “I agree with _____ “

*... the use of such simple democratic language today has given them the tools and sparked encouragement to listen to the opinions of others and respond with their points of view.
(Reflective Diary – Session 6)*

Participation

The two charts below give a summary of the number of utterances that each child made during philosophy sessions. Apart from Beth, who made no contributions throughout the intervention, the vast majority of children showed good levels of participation throughout the study and even some improvements, particularly EAL children such as Ailish and Laura. To add to that, a number of children who conveyed a shy disposition at the beginning of the study including Emma and Hannah showed a general improvement in their levels of participation as the intervention progressed. Emma made no contributions in session 1 but this gradually improved. Hannah also made no contributions in session 2 but gained more confidence throughout. It is necessary to mention that any other absences of contributions, other than the ones already mentioned, were attributed to the children being absent during those sessions.

Figure 9: Children's Participation Graph 1

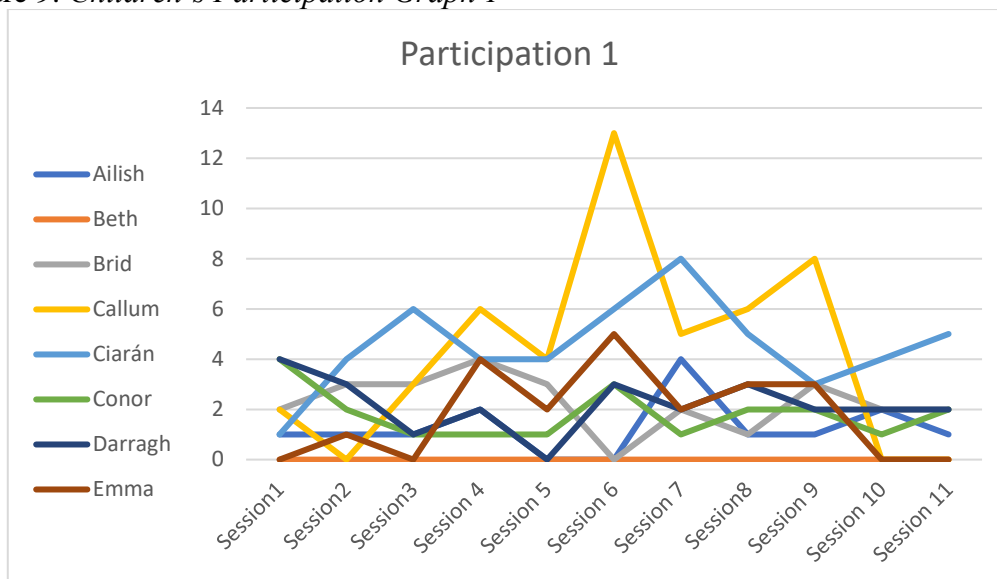
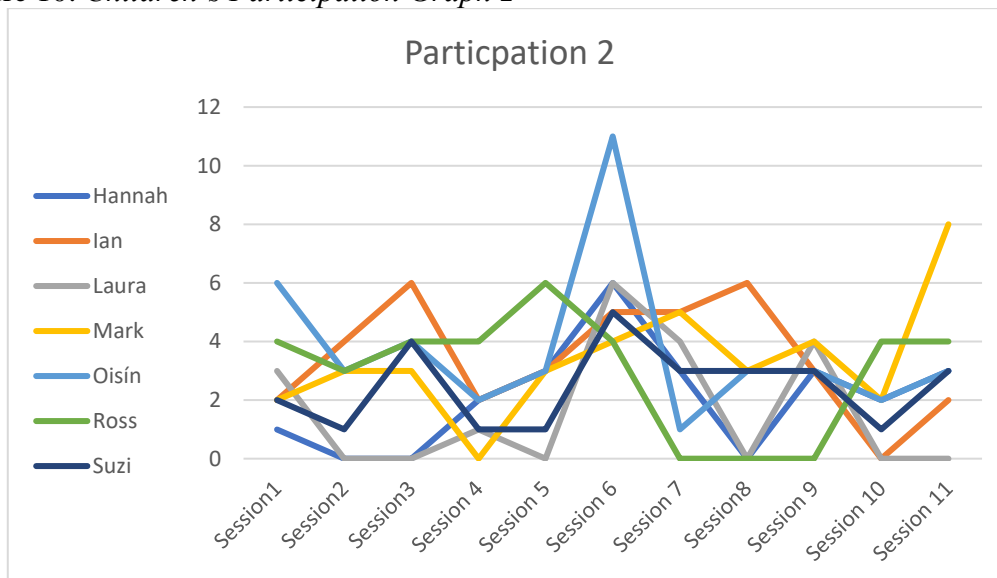


Figure 10: Children's Participation Graph 2



Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to place the findings of this thesis within the broader research context. This chapter will be structured by addressing each thesis research question. The questions to be answered are as follows:

1. Does the practice of philosophy demonstrate that the child in the early years context is capable of philosophical thought?
2. Does the practice of Philosophy with Children foster the young child to successfully participate in a democratic community of enquiry?
3. Does the facilitator support the children in an appropriate manner in order for the intervention to be successful?

-Philosophical thought and Young Children

“Philosophy comes naturally to the young and needs to be viewed as something they can legitimately pursue, so we should foster their interest”. (Wartenberg, 2009, p.5)

This study was undertaken with the appreciation that young children are powerful entities in their own development and learning (DES, 1999). Matthew’s (1980) view of the child not as an ignorant being, but as a rational agent who already has the capacity to reason philosophically is strongly upheld throughout, where the emphasis is placed upon teasing out the potential of the young child.

“All which the school can or need do for pupils, so far as their minds are concerned ... is to develop their ability to think.” (John Dewey, cited in Fisher, 2003, p.5)

Also underpinning this research is a belief that philosophy and thought are inextricably bound together and that respecting and fostering the thinking skills of young children further encourages them to think philosophically. It is also true to say that philosophy itself “has as its subject matter thinking and the improvement of thinking”. (Fisher, 2003, p.2)

Through examination of the children’s language, young children demonstrate that they are engaging in philosophical thinking throughout the study. Their ability to reason, to be reflective, to think critically and creatively is displayed through the language categories presented in the previous chapter.

Undoubtedly, if this study was carried out with older children, their language ability and thought processes would be of a higher order. The younger the child, the more likely that they are unable to verbalise some of their thoughts succinctly (Haynes, 2011). However, the goal of this study was to honour the utterances and potential of the *young child* in particular. While some of the language categories were not present in huge amounts, their presence still shows that the children are capable beings and that their capacities for philosophical thought need to be encouraged and fostered by educators.

The research demonstrated that the presence of certain language categories in sessions might be attributed to the topic under discussion. Therefore, if an educator wished to facilitate the development of some targeted thinking skills, he/she could employ suitable topics to do so. For example, the researcher noted that children made an abundance of judgements in sessions 1 & 2 based on the book; *The true story of the three little pigs*. These sessions encouraged children to reflect upon and reason their moral decisions. In addition to this, the examination of children’s language showed that evidence of children

drawing inferences was rich in sessions 8, 9, & 10, all of which began with “if statements”.

It was also noted at time throughout the intervention, some stand-alone topics such as session 7 titled “The Sky” and session 11 “Dreams” gave rise to difficulties in terms of interest in and momentum of the sessions, possibly because of their more abstract nature and the fact no arguments arose.

“today’s session did not yield to as much opinionated answers”

“It was even more abstract I suppose in nature and I am not too sure whether to keep it open and abstract or initiate a session where children can “take sides” again.”
(Reflective Diary – Session 7)

The following excerpts from session 11 further demonstrate the researcher’s reflections upon an apparent avoidance of participation and display an awareness on the researcher’s part about how one should interact with the children

“The first round of the circle was slow to start and number of children passed the tip; Beth, Ian, Darragh, Hannah.....”

“I feel that I sometimes need to give children that extra time to think during sessions and that during the first circle round, children can feel very much on the spot and freeze when it comes to their turn” (Reflective Diary – Session 11).

In addition to the above, it was also documented that involvement and interest-were high in topics where children had some conflicting opinions or where there were two sides to an argument. Moreover, such topics gave rise to utterances that were rich in reasoning and giving explanations as children explained why they think the way they do. Sessions 5 & 6, named “Brains vs Computers” and “Rain” respectively are examples of where a

certain degree of the category of giving reason/explanation is present. Both of these sessions also showed a high level of participation and interest.

A Democratic Community of Enquiry

“Philosophy is foremost a process of enquiry. It is a creative process rather than an imposed body of knowledge”.(Fisher, 2003, p.20). At the centre of a community of enquiry is “the search for better understanding and justified beliefs through collaborative reasoning and dialogue”.(Haynes & Murriss, 2011, p.4). Echoing the work of Socrates, dialogue in the form of a community of enquiry with class peers and the facilitator formed the basis of philosophy sessions during this research. The results of this study show that young children are more than capable of participating in a classroom dialogue through the medium of philosophical discussion. Nevertheless, in order for the research project to function with young children and for them to participate in a community of enquiry, a number of key components emerged throughout the study to help achieve this.

Relationships

Firstly, when working with children of such a young age of 4 & 5, the researcher documented the importance of the presence of a warm and familiar relationship with the children. “The advantage of primary school teaching is that a teacher and a class share a whole school year together ...and through dialogue and negotiation deep levels of trust and understanding can be built” (Donnelly, 1998, p.80) As already mentioned in the previous chapter, there was a stark contrast between the pilot group of children and the intervention group in terms of behaviour, participation and respectful listening.

“I find that when the children engage in philosophy, there is quite an immediate sense of composure. This is in comparison to the large pilot group , with whom I had to attempt to develop a relationship and suitable expectations for the sessions in such a short period of time. I am finding the fact that I have already built a strong relationship with the children in the intervention group since September means that everybody knows where they stand. This further cements the importance of having a close relationship if carrying out action research with very young children.” (Reflective Diary – Session 9)

Trust and Equality

Secondly, the researcher endeavoured to create an atmosphere of open trust and equality during discussions. In order to inspire this, all members of the group, including the facilitator sat in a circular configuration on cushions on the ground in a quiet room in the school. This allowed all members to sit in a comfortable position where everyone could see each other. Apart from a small number of interactions when children impulsively shouted out statements when they were excited, the children generally had no issue with this formation. Despite their young age, the children showed that they were capable of self-regulating their behaviour concerning their ability to wait their turn to speak and exhibit body language conducive to a respectful community of enquiry for periods of time averaging 20 minutes in duration. Creating an inviting and relaxed physical space is a key prerequisite for inquiry with young children.

Listening in a Community of Enquiry

Thirdly, the children showed their ability to participate in a democratic community through their engagement in the discussion, particularly concerning listening to and building upon peers' contributions and ideas. "Thinking takes place in a social context, is influenced and moulded by our culture and our environment. Learning to think is not achieved in isolation from others. The thinking child is a social child" (Fisher, 2005, p.3). Below are some examples of how children showed that they were carefully listening and building upon each other's ideas.

***Conor:** It's very complicated but I think every single animal can talk to each other and how they like bark and all that stuff. I think every single animal can talk to each other.*

***Suzi:** I think animals can talk to each other if they are only the same. (Session4- Lines 137-140)*

***Callum:** I think the first people was Jesus and I don't know what the rest is.*

***Brid:** I think Jesus was made from the king and queen a long time ago and when they died holy god was just making other people. Even a small baby and then they just grewed up and they came out of people. (Session 3- lines 106-109)*

"What the child does in cooperation with others, he will learn to do alone" (Vygotsky, cited in Fisher, 2005, p.108). Dewey further supported the view "that communal inquiry was always superior to individual inquiry because it leads to knowledge that integrates diverse perspectives and that has been tested in a wider field of experience" (Bleazby, 2012, p.101). In addition to building upon contributions, children's use of democratic language which was discussed in the previous chapter further supported them to engage in what Donnelly (1998) calls "an alert and aware listening" which is more conscious in nature and conducive to democratic dialogue.

Overall, the children in the study conveyed that they were more than capable of engaging in a democratic community of enquiry regarding their behaviour, concentration, listening and contributions. Furthermore, Neil Mercer's (2000) research also maintains that philosophical enquiry provides an ideal context that can nurture listening skills, paying attention and self-expression.

Role of the Facilitator

Whilst most of the analysis focused on the children's input throughout the study, the researcher's participation was equally significant throughout the process in nurturing an environment that upholds the spirit of genuine inquiry and dialogue. As philosophical dialogue is an emergent process, the success of a session was always unpredictable and depended on various factors. "It is very dependent on the particular group of people present, the atmosphere of the classroom on a particular day, the energy levels of the community, and their interest in a particular topic or question."(Donnelly, 1998, p.78).

Variations in researcher participation were evident throughout the process and a strong correlation between the children's interest or lack of in sessions and the facilitator's involvement was apparent, with facilitator input being more abundant in sessions where interest and motivation on the children's part appeared to be somewhat absent. This was problematic in the sense that, the emphasis was on creating a discussion that was child led, whereas in fact some sessions were more teacher-led in an attempt to keep the momentum going and salvage the session. These tensions were evident in session 4 where the researcher reflected upon the true importance of the research for the children.

“I think I felt a sense of pressure to ensure that sufficient data was collected in the session but afterwards I reflected upon how this contradicts my values of thinking time in the first place.” (Reflective Diary – Session 4)

Throughout the study, a goal of the researcher was to foster an environment where children speak because they wish to speak and not because they feel obliged to do so. This worked well, again when interest was high. However, tensions arose when reflecting on sessions where a number of children passed the speaking object in an attempt not to speak. This was evident in session 3, when the researcher expressed her disappointment at how she handled the situation;

I realised I had put on my “teacher face” expressing my disappointment for them not speaking. In hindsight, I feel this was a bad move and contradicts my hope of creating a community of enquiry where the children feel comfortable. (Reflective Diary – Session 3).

During these occurrences, the researcher was torn between whether the children should further be encouraged to speak in order to give a contribution that they are capable of or should the children be simply allowed to pass the speaking object as originally planned.

As the intervention progressed, the researcher developed an evolved perception of how a facilitator could support, encourage and scaffold children in a nurturing manner. The following reflections display how the researcher became more comfortable with gently encouraging the children in a way which gave them confidence.

I first of all hoped that the children would feed more off each other but I am beginning to believe that they do need facilitator prompts and supports because they are only 4-5 years of age (Session 1)

I find it almost impossible not to intervene in at times in philosophy sessions with such young children and I think I am beginning to come to the conclusion that they may need this constructive intervention. (Session 5)

In previous philosophy sessions, she either chose to pass the tip or she needed encouragement and gently probing in order to speak. I think that this may have paid off or else she has just become comfortable with sessions as she was the first person to want to start off the discussion today. It was great to see. (Session 7)

Taking everything into consideration, this action research study enabled the research to critically reflect upon one's own practise with the aim of improvement of such practise for the benefit of the children. Information from the transcriptions in conjunction with the analysis of research diaries created a multi-layered platform for examination and creation of what McNiff (1993) terms an I-theory of knowledge. Throughout, the awareness of one's involvement as the facilitator of sessions proved to be a persistent tension.

I constantly feel puzzled about how much of a facilitator I can be whilst scaffolding the children in an appropriate way so as they feel empowered and not "managed" and "spoken to" by a teacher. (Session 5)

Nevertheless, at the centre of this tension was the desire for the potential of the children to be realised and acknowledged. While the data presented the children's capabilities in terms of philosophical thought and participation in a community of enquiry, it marked the unpredictability of carrying out research with young children as well as the sheer significance of educators to critically reflect upon their own teaching.

There is always a surprising and unpredictable aspect in there lurking just when you think you have got everything right. (Session 10)

Conclusion

This chapter presented a discussion of the research findings, taking into account the main research questions of this thesis. Chapter 6: The Conclusion will conclude the study. The main research questions will be evaluated and future recommendations will be outlined.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Introduction

The previous chapter discussed and interpreted the research findings in more detail. The purpose of this chapter is to succinctly review the main points of this research with a brief summary of the literature and rationale. The chapter will conclude with a brief discussion of implications for future research.

Summary of the Literature

The Literature Review of this thesis provided a discussion of the theoretical underpinnings of the current education system, incorporating the modern socio-cultural perception of the young child. It also provided the reader with a brief history of philosophy as a subject and defined the new understanding of philosophy as philosophy that is “practised”, with an emphasis on the process, as opposed to the end product.

The rationale for the inclusion of Philosophy with Children in the early years context was presented through the how it can

1. Act as a pedagogy to support the principles, themes and goals of Aistear (2009) and the New Primary Language Curriculum (2016).
2. Value the voice of the young child.
3. Encourage in young children a sense of citizenship.
4. Act as a methodology to support the improvement of thinking in the early years.

In relation to literature which specifically examined the process of engaging students in philosophical enquiry and focused on the development of thinking and cognitive development, a number of studies showed that philosophy can help to improve the child’s

thinking and academic achievement; Donnelly (2001), Roche (2000,2007) Murrells (1992).

Furthermore, there is rich evidence to support that a classroom environment which is dialogic in nature supports the child's learning (Roche 2011, Mercer, 2000 , Alexander 2010).

As well as the above others such as Noddings (1992) and Chaskin & Rauner (1995) point out the importance of caring relationships in the effort to create an atmosphere which honours the voices of all, fosters dialogue in a community of enquiry and fosters the development of a critical and caring citizenry.

Thesis Findings

At the outset, this action research project sought to examine 3 fundamental questions:

Does the practice of philosophy demonstrate that the child in the early years context is capable of philosophical thought?

Like the arts, philosophy has a special ability to enable the intelligent imagination.(Bleazby, 2012, p.104)) The findings and discussion of this study show that this particular group of children in Junior Infants displayed elements of higher order thought through the language contributions that they made in sessions. A number of children demonstrated their ability to reason effectively, to make educated judgements, and to reflect upon issues and topics through thinking critically and creatively. However, the richness of language and thought demonstrated was shown to be dependant upon the interest of the children as "motivation is essential for critical engagement"(Haynes & Murrells, 2011, p.5)

The researcher remarked on how the children responded better in sessions which more naturally opened themselves up to judgements, differences of opinion and two sides of a story. Conversely, it was also remarked on that some stand alone topics such as “The Sky” and “Dreams” were possibly too abstract in nature for the children to engage at the same level.

Such topics displayed the least amount of interest and there was a certain sense of “not knowing where to go”. It was when the children were most engrossed in the topics and spoke because they *wanted* to that they produced language that was more natural and sophisticated.

Ironically, early years educators are placed in an overcrowded and demanding education system which is stifled by a curriculum. Teachers are already obliged to teach 12 subjects, incorporate a curriculum framework; *Aistear (2009,)* but still need to hold dear the full potential of the child and the development of higher order thinking and problem solving skills (DES, 1999).

It is understandable that early years educators might reject new pedagogies such as philosophy which develop children’s thinking skills when they are already legally required and under pressure to respond to other initiatives such as the national strategy *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning in Life: The National Strategy to Improve Numeracy and Literacy among Children and Young People 2011-2020*. Even in an education system where there is a supposed move towards the development of thinking skills, increasing the level of reporting of assessment tests to the DES (DES, 2011a) is a requirement of the above *NLNS* strategy.

Unfortunately, a similar demand for the development of thinking skills is certainly not as evident. If there was such a significance placed upon thinking skills from government and educational bodies, philosophy with children as a pedagogy is a relatively easy and

inexpensive means to develop thinking skills. Expensive resources are not needed, and technology is not used as at the centre of philosophy is dialogue. The most important element of the programme is a committed educator that truly values the young child and responds to the needs and interests of the children in his/her care.

Does the practice of Philosophy with Children foster the young child to successfully participate in a democratic community of enquiry?

Language empowers children to develop their thinking, expression, reflection, critique and empathy, and it supports the development of self-efficacy, identity and full participation in society(NCCA, 2009, p.18). The findings of this study show that in the correct atmosphere with appropriate support, even children in Junior Infants can enter into dialogue in a community of enquiry. Their ability to listen, regulate body language, use democratic language and build upon each other's ideas was evident throughout the study and discussed in the research findings. Their levels of participation in sessions conveyed that young children are more than able to participate in dialogue in a respectful environment. Furthermore , the early years could be argued as an even more suitable time to begin dialogue as the children of this age are often less inhibited than older children who are much too used to an atmosphere where school is typically a place where children learn to listen to the teacher but not to each other (Fisher, 2005, p.137).

Today. I did feel that we were having a conversation, a dialogue, the atmosphere was relaxed and I felt that children who were unwillingly to speak in previous sessions like Emma were more confident to do so today. (Reflective Diary - Session 6).

Young children's ability to participate in dialogue is more pertinent that ever in diverse society which requires democracy and a critical, caring citizenry. According to Raitz (1992) philosophy for children is an effective programme for teaching democratic community values. Democracy involves the belief that mutual understanding across

differences of opinion and diversity of interest can only be achieved through genuine dialogue and discussion (Fisher, 2005, p.81).

Philosophy with Children gives the child in the early years context the opportunity to begin his/her journey to becoming full participative citizens. The school system in Ireland is a much different one to what it was 50 years ago and current debates on school patronage commands a citizenry that is caring, critical and reflective. Noddings (1992) argues throughout her work that authentic human liberation and social justice can be achieved by caring people in caring communities (Bergman, 2004, p.151). Young children more than often emulate a strong sense of care and acceptance before they are indoctrinated by societal values. Thus, it is important to engage them in dialogue at a young age where they measure issues against their own interests and values, they make up their own minds, they take action as a function of their own wills – that is, if the more powerful class, the adults, allow them to do so (Pufall & Unsworth, 2004, p.8).

Does the facilitator support the children in an appropriate manner in order for the intervention to be successful?

According to Carr (2011), whether children's learning is supported or inhibited will depend on the strong influence of the views held by educators. The results of the study show that the researcher possessed a strong awareness of how to support the young child through the provision of a caring relationship and creating a comfortable atmosphere for dialogue based upon trust and equality. However, the researcher pointed out the reality of the challenging nature of fully conforming to the above values throughout the intervention. The unpredictable nature of carrying out research with young children was highlighted, especially regarding the short time frame of the study. At times, it was evident that the researcher felt a certain amount of pressure for the study to generate

results and this unknowingly affected some interactions with the children, However, upon reflection of the data, the researcher was able to examine her practice and change it for the better, a key component of engaging in an action research cycle.

I find these values difficult to adhere to at times. I feel that children in the early years have huge potential. The difficulty rests sometimes in being able to display this potential in a specific and controlled time frame, a huge test for early years researchers. (Reflective Diary - Session 4).

Upon final reflection of the role of the educator, from a social-cultural lens, the “effective pedagogue” (Dunphy, 2008, p.59) plays a central role in providing a suitable and supportive environment for philosophy sessions. On the surface, this might seem like an easy task; put children into a circular formation and let them speak about what they want. In reality, this is much more difficult to achieve. Firstly, the pedagogical relationship must be grounded in reciprocal care (Noddings, 1992). Secondly, the educator must attempt to know the children very well in order for them to develop interventions that consider a child’s ZPD (Siraj-Blatchford, Sylva, Muttock, Gilden, and Bell, 2002) and “students need to be scaffolded to develop the capacity for imagining possibilities and creating ideas that have the potential to be realised” (Bleazby, 2012, p.107).

The point must be raised however, that it may be more or less impossible to define the ZPD of each child as development takes into account so many factors some of which are innate and others which will never be seen, heard or understood. In addition to this , it may be even very unrealistic for an educator in an early childhood setting to be able to foster the cognitive development of each and every child to his/her full potential reflecting this Vygotskian socio-cultural idea due to a lack of educators and too many children in settings. Taking these tensions into account, one must be realistic about what

one can achieve to help support pupils during philosophy sessions. Above all, being a “reflective practitioner” (Schon, 1991) proved to be the most eye-opening aspect of this research in an attempt to fully realise children’s thinking skills and support them on their journey to becoming critical and caring citizens capable of engaging in democratic enquiry.

Recommendations

In light of the research findings and the conclusions presented, the following recommendations are suggested:

- As already mentioned, a much longer study would be very beneficial in attempting to realise the full potential of philosophy as a methodology.
- In addition, a comparative study between two Senior Infant class groups, one being very familiar with philosophy as methodology in Junior Infants would be of great interest to see if any significant differences in the language use would arise.
- A revision of language categories and the inclusion of some new categories for analysis would be helpful to identify other explicit thinking and language skills. Categories such as imagining, comparing and contrasting, divergent thinking and evaluating (Fisher, 2003, p.188) would provide for a richer analysis of language.
- That philosophy as a methodology, or even as a subject in its’ own right is fully recognised in the early years context as a means for the development of children’s language, thinking and participation with others. There has never been

more of a rationale for the inclusion of philosophy in the primary school curriculum, with it now being validated as subject at secondary level.

- Children of all ages should be given the opportunity to be part of dialogic and democratic community in their classrooms in order to develop in them a sense of caring citizenship and democracy. The results of this study demonstrate that a dialogic community can even be fostered in the early years context.

In conclusion, the words of some of the Junior Infant children are left to reflect upon which epitomise the nature and value of practising philosophy with children.

Oisín: Did you know that the more you speak with people, then you'll learn more things from them? You find out a lot by listening, (Session 1)

Darragh: Other people's thoughts are different. (Session 7)

Callum: It's so hard to think. That's why it's called thinking time. (Session 4)

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Appendices

Appendix 1 : Consent letter to Board of Management

Dear _____,

I am currently completing Year 2 of a Masters in Education Studies (Early Childhood Education) at the Marino Institute of Education [MIE] and I am writing to you to seek permission to carry out my research in _____. For my research thesis, I will be investigating how the practice of philosophy with young children can nurture and acknowledge a young child's natural ability to wonder, to question and to think in an abstract manner.

As opposed to the children learning about ancient philosophers and reading philosophical texts, the content and questions for the philosophy sessions will come from the children themselves. This content that the children suggest may be in response to a previous story/letter being read where there may have been a certain moral dilemma for example. The significance here is that it is the children who choose the topic, not the teacher. The reason behind this is not only to give them ownership of their own learning, it is also so that they have real shared interest in what they are speaking about and most importantly of all, that their voices as children are being listened to, respected and valued in the classroom which is a very busy place.

This process will be integrated into Learn Together curricular time well as English Oral Language curricular time. I aim to begin a 2-3 week pilot very soon with another infant group before I begin a 6 week intervention with my own class. The aims and objectives of the curriculum will be met.

To analyse the children's learning which takes place during these sessions, it will be necessary to take audio recordings of these sessions. All children will remain anonymous throughout the process, whereby they will be given different names on any written/typed documents and if mentioned in my research paper. Data collected will be used for examination purposes only. College regulations require that data is stored for 13 months after examination. After this time, all recordings and samples will be destroyed.

If you have any questions or seek clarification please do not hesitate to contact me using the email address _____

Thanking you very much for your support.

Appendix 2: Consent Letter for Pilot Inquiry

Dear Parents/Guardians,

I am currently completing Year 2 of a Masters in Education Studies (Early Childhood Education) at the Marino Institute of Education [MIE]. For my research thesis, I will be investigating how the practice of philosophy with young children can nurture and acknowledge a young child's natural ability to wonder, to question and to think in an abstract manner.

I am hoping to complete a 2-3-week pilot intervention with your child's class in the coming weeks. This will entail engaging the children in two thirty-minute philosophy sessions per week during this period. The process will be integrated into Learn Together curricular time well as English Oral Language curricular time. The aims and objectives of the curriculum will be met.

To analyse the children's learning which takes place during these sessions, it will be necessary to take audio recordings of these sessions. All children will remain anonymous throughout the process, whereby they will be given different names on any written/typed documents and if mentioned in my research paper. Data collected will be used for examination purposes only. College regulations require that data is stored for 13 months after examination. After this time, all recordings and samples will be destroyed.

Child's name (please print): _____

Please tick, if the below applies and return to your child's homework folder before Monday, 6th February.

- I consent to audio recordings of my child being taken.**

Parent / guardian signature _____ **Date:** _____

If you have any questions or seek clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thanking you very much for your support. It is hugely appreciated. Hopefully, it will be a very worthwhile research project.

Kind regards,

Appendix 3: Consent letter for Intervention Group

Dear Parents/Guardians,

I am currently completing Year 2 of a Masters in Education Studies (Early Childhood Education) at the Marino Institute of Education [MIE]. For my research thesis, I will be investigating how the practice of philosophy with young children can nurture and acknowledge a young child's natural ability to wonder, to question and to think in an abstract manner.

I am hoping to begin the project after the mid-term break. This will entail engaging the children in approximately twelve half hour philosophy sessions. The process will be integrated into Learn Together curricular time well as English Oral Language curricular time. The aims and objectives of the curriculum will be met.

To analyse the children's learning which takes place during these sessions, it will be necessary to take audio recordings of these sessions. All children will remain anonymous throughout the process, whereby they will be given different names on any written/typed documents and if mentioned in my research paper. Data collected will be used for examination purposes only. College regulations require that data is stored for 13 months after examination. After this time, all recordings and samples will be destroyed.

Child's name (please print): _____

Please tick, if the below applies and return to your child's homework folder before Monday, 6th February.

I consent to audio recordings of my child being taken.

Parent / guardian signature _____ **Date:**

If you have any questions or seek clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you very much for your support. Hopefully it will be an enjoyable and very worthwhile project for all involved.

Kind regards,

Appendix 4 : Schedule of Sessions for Intervention Group

Session 1 : The True Story of the Three Little Pigs - Part 1

Session 2: The True Story of the Three Little Pigs – Part 2

Session 3: How was the world made ?

Session 4: Are animals and humans the same ?

Session 5: Brains vs Computers

Session 6: Rain

Session 7: The Sky

Session 8 : If we had no tv

Session 9 : If we had no school

Session 10 : If fish could fly

Session 11 : Dreams

Appendix 5: Extract from Transcripts

Session 2 : The Three Little Pigs Part 2

Oisín: I think that the wolf can get out of jail only unless he's not going to eat more pigs that have skin on because it might look a little bit like their heads are stuck into the ground. So I think that you just got to send him a message that the should stop eating pigs that look like they are sticking out of the ground, have skin on so that no more pigs will get hurt when they look a little bit alive.

Ian: Did you know the mother pig still has one more pig because that pig built a brick house. Well I don't know why. He shouldn't get out of jail I don't know why. He shouldn't eat the two little pigs. I knew it would make the mother pig sad

Ciarán: Em I think the pig needed to stay in the house before they saw the big bad wolf I think. Maybe they didn't. Maybe they did.

Conor: I agree with Oisín

Ailish: I think the big bad wolf needs to say sorry to Mommy Pig. He ate the two little pigs.

Emma: He's being like bold. They should have kicked him in the bum.

Ciarán: I agree. I do agree with Emily because she said he should kick them in the bum.

Bríd: I think he should say sorry cos the pigs was quite mean and the wolves eated the two pigs but the one pig left has to say sorry to him cos that's his only neighbour and maybe the big bad wolf should say he has to not eat the pigs ever again and he has to say sorry to the pigs Mam

Ross: I think the mommy pig should just watch the pig all day long to see if it's dead and then the big bad wolf eats it.

T: But I am wondering should the big bad wolf really get out of jail or not. I don't know.

Darragh: I think the big bad wolf should do his three sneezes before he goes and gets a cup of sugar.

Mark: I think the big bad wolf should never go out of jail because then he will just sneeze the two houses.

T: I agree with what you're saying that the big bad wolf should do his sneezes and the pigs need to say sorry but this has already happened. The pigs are already dead. The mommy has no babies

Ian: Well she still has one

T: And I think the big bad wolf should stay in jail forever because he ate the little pigs and I feel very sorry for the poor mammy.

Darragh: I think that the three little pigs mommy should try and get another baby. Then she will have two. Then she if she tried to have another baby, then she will have three then.

Ian: I think the big bad wolf shouldn't get out of jail because he shouldn't have eaten the two pigs. He shouldn't because that's why the mother pig will get sad. That's what she will actually do.

Ciarán: I think the big bad wolf shouldn't get out of jail because he ate the three little pigs but I don't know why the three little pigs thought they were dead. You shouldn't eat the little pigs if they were dead. You should just leave them alone.

T: I think I agree with Ciarán that he should have left them alone even if they were dead, he should have let the mommy look after them.

Brid: I think the Mam should say to go over to see the wolf in jail and tell him even if they died, he shouldn't have eaten them. He should have let their mammy look after them and her might send her little pigs to the church.

Suzi: I think they should both go in jail unless they both say sorry.

T: I wonder what do you think is worse girls and boys. I wonder is it worse that the little pigs were mean to the wolf or do you think it's worse that the wolf ate the pigs.

Ross: I actually think it's worse that the little pigs were rude.

T: Why? ... You think it's worse that the little pigs were rude.

Mark: I think eh the big bad wolf should ... I think the three little pigs should say sorry to the big bad wolf and then the big bad wolf have to say sorry to the three little pigs and the mommy pig.

T: I agree with you that you think they should all say sorry but I still think it's a very serious thing that he ate the pigs. I don't know if saying sorry is good enough. I don't know. Anybody else hands up want to say something? Do you think sorry is going to fix everything?

Oisín: No, a word couldn't actually fix it so thought I have one idea here that just came up. It was maybe the wolf might have to stay in jail though if he doesn't keep on eating pigs that have their bums in the air, that have skin on. I think if he stops eating it then he should maybe get out of jail.

Brid: I think the wolf should stay in jail or if he never go near the pigs cos the mammy or the daddy might be crying for ages and the mam and dad shoulded looked after, should've telled the big bad wold before he goed to eat them.

Appendix 6: Extract from Reflective Diary

Reflective Diary Session 6 – 24/3/17

Today, the children appeared to settle in to the session quite quickly without the inclusion of warm up games due to time constraints and class cover. They now appear to be very accustomed to the routine of our thinking time sessions and it did not even take them a minute to form a circle where they were sitting appropriately. I feel that this behaviour is helped by the expectations that are set out at the beginning of every session by the facilitator with careful reminders such as quiet mouths and bodies as well as reminding children that when someone has the speaking object in their hand they have the power to speak, whilst the other children have the power to listen carefully. As well as this the reminders to use language such as I agree and I disagree seems to be working well as I feel the children have come to a turning point with this. Today, many of the children were shouting out “ I agree” and “I disagree”. Whilst this may have been “against” the expectation that only children who have the speaking object can speak, I really felt it was a positive step in their dialogue with others. It displayed a new sense of careful listening, a sense that children were not just simply sitting there waiting for their turn to speak and disregarding what others have to say; a sense that they were really listening to the others’ points of view. It is claimed that children of this age group are generally quite egocentric in nature and I do feel that this is often quite evident during daily classroom discussions. However, the use of such simple democratic language today has given them the tools and sparked encouragement to listen to the opinions of others and respond with their points of view. Today was also amongst one of the first times where children used the structure “I agree with _____ “ such as

Oisín who stated “I agree with Suzi”,

Darragh who stated “I agree with Oisín”,

Suzi who stated “I agree with Ross”

Callum who stated “I agree with Oisín”

Oisín who stated again “ I kind of agree with T”

Suzi also used “I disagree with T”

The above is by far the most of this language that was used to date in sessions. However, a large number of children also shouted out the language as mentioned above.

Today, I was observing the session in particular to see if there was evidence of critical thinking or put more simply evidence of real individual thinking. I have noticed that quite a few children who hear what they think is a “good point” also repeat the same point and give the same reasons as the previous child. While I think this is good in the sense that it shows that they are taking on board the opinions of others, I wonder sometimes are they just repeating the same thing because they did not have anything to say in the first place. Even so , this can be a a step for particular children like Laura, Beth and Ailish whose second language is English and who joined Junior Infants with very little English. Ailish and Beth were absent today but it was nevertheless very pleasing to hear Laura speaking confidently using good sentence structure whilst repeating some of the phrases of previous children. On the other hand, it is nearly impossible to know what children are really thinking without hearing it in their speech. Whether they had the same opinions as the child who possessed the same utterances before hand or they have complex thoughts in their head which they cannot verbalise, it is impossible to know.

Many children agreed with the hypothesis first introduced by Callum “If we have no rain, the plants won’ grow or the trees. So we need rain to plant the seeds”. This was a strong

argument for a lot of them. However other children came up with different arguments or statements such as :

- Hannah: If we had no rain, our skin would change. We would have brown skin. We would have brown skin if there was no rain.
- Callum: Some people think that the rain is bad but I think the rain is good because it makes rivers. If we don't have any rivers, we can't drink water so we need rain to make water.
- Ross: I would not like to live in Australia because Australia it has desert in it. I would not like to live in the desert.
- Suzi: Well if we didn't have rain, the whole wide world would be a desert and nobody will be able to drink
- Laura: Some people don't have something to eat and they don't eat water clean and they don't eat water from the sand.
- Ciarán : I think there's a special machine under the pipes that make it clean so you can drink it.
- Mark: I think eh rain is really bad because there's lots of storms at the clouds and can make it lash and lash and then the thunderstorms can scare you.
- Ross: Rain is actually bad and good. People don't like the rain but plants like the rain. Like rain is good at a lot of things.

Above are examples of how children are now starting to feel comfortable with voicing their opinions. Of course it is hoped that they will continue to do so without fear or embarrassment. Today. I did feel that we were having a conversation, a dialogue, the atmosphere was relaxed and I felt that children who were unwillingly to speak in previous sessions like Emma were more confident to do so today. However it is still important to note that Emma, Laura and Mark still needed encouragement with a little bit of extra

questioning in order to tease out their language . As mentioned before in previous sessions, this is something which I find challenging. Should I completely leave it up to them to speak or should I question them? Like session 5 , I felt that it was a much more positive way of encouraging language today, as opposed to session 4 where I showed my disappointment to them for not speaking. This is something which I ideally do not want to repeat.

The children are currently really enjoying the natural philosophy topics at the moment so I want to continue with similar topics for the next few sessions.

