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How I can Foster Independence in Primary School Children by Encouraging Choice in Learning

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to look at how I could foster independence in children through encouraging choice in learning. By identifying four ways in which choice can be included in the school day – choice in partner, choice in activity, choice in topic and choice in homework, the children were encouraged to make choices in their own learning in order to develop independence. In both my personal and professional life, I value trust, independence and teamwork and I hoped that through this research study I would also be able to live closer to these values in my professional practice as a primary school teacher.

With the purpose and aims of this study in mind a review of the literature in the area of independence was undertaken. However, it was noted that literature relating to independence in the primary school classroom was sparse, and instead was primarily based on developing independence in the transition from secondary school to university. As a result, the researcher narrowed her focus and began to explore literature that focused on choices in learning and how choice can promote independence. Through the process of reflection, the researcher developed a clear understanding of the relevant material underpinning the study area and identified a gap in the literature around which this research is based.

This study employed a mixed methods approach. With the aims in mind, self-study action research was chosen by the researcher as the most suitable method for this study. Data collection was undertaken using a combination of methodological approaches including a Post-It survey, a pre-intervention discussion circle, four post-intervention questionnaires (one on each area in which choice was offered), naturalistic field observations and journaling.

The sampling strategy used for the study was convenience sampling as the researcher was teaching second-class students at the time, and therefore they were selected as the participants in the study. In total, twenty-one second-class primary school children, aged 7-8 years old, participated in this study. It was planned that two cycles of action research would take place. However, due to Covid 19' and the closure of the school in March 2020, action research cycle two was not completed.

Some interesting insights into fostering independence in the classroom through encouraging choice in learning were highlighted in this study. Findings suggest that facilitating choice in learning positively contributes to the development of independent learning skills among children. Furthermore, encouraging choice in learning can motivate children and encourages fun, flexibility in learning and new experiences in the classroom. However, some areas of concern were also highlighted. These included the short school day and the implementation of choice being organisationally challenging for the teacher, a lack of enjoyment and stress for some children who found making decisions challenging and finally conflict between both peers in the classroom and children and their parents at home when choices are offered.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

1.0 Introduction

This chapter provides an introduction to the dissertation topic and presents the reader with an overview of the research area. The focus and aims of the study will be clarified along with an explanation of the core values of the researcher that underpin this study. The context of the research, which took place with second-class children in a primary school classroom setting, will be examined and the current influences of the Primary School Curriculum and Aistear – the early childhood curriculum framework – will also be presented.

1.1 Focus and Aims of the Study

The aim of this study was to foster independence in children through encouraging choice in learning. Through engagement with the literature and reflection upon my own practice, I identified four ways in which choice can be practically included in the school day – choice in partner, choice in activity, choice in topic and choice in homework. While participating in this study the children were encouraged to make choices in their own learning in order to develop independence and become more self-reliant in their learning. When children are participants in their own learning, this leads to increased independence (Bucknall, 2012).

Action research is centred around values (McNiff, 2016). As a reflective practitioner, it is important to be aware of what drives you in both your personal and professional life, so that you have an awareness of what you are doing and why you are doing it (McNiff, 2016). Through my participation in this course and engagement with relevant literature, I became aware that educational values are based on how I view myself in relation to others (McDonagh et al., 2019). After deep reflection, I found that my core values were trust, independence and teamwork as shown in **Table 1** below.

Table 1: My Core Values

TRUST

INDEPENDENCE

TEAMWORK

Beginning with trust, I believe that this value is rooted in my upbringing in which I was blessed to be brought up in an environment in which the adults in my life were always fair and reliable. I could always trust them to help me make decisions and judgements in my life, whether big two years. The dissonance between the independence shown by senior infant children in terms on their self-help skills (putting on their coats, closing their lunchboxes etc.) was quite alarming in my first senior infant class and this lead me to explore how and why some children are more self-reliant than others from an early age. Finally, my core value of teamwork has been evident in my personal life from an early age. I have played team sports since I was six years old and believe that being part of a team has endless benefits, including social, educational and physical development.

Through reflection and dialogue with my critical friend, I noticed that although I value trust, independence and teamwork, I continued to teach in a way that denied these values. It became evident that I was in fact a "Living Contradiction" (Whitehead, 1989). My values of trust, independence and teamwork were being denied, as I was not living closely to those values in my professional practice. This is evident in an excerpt from my reflective journal in which I discuss the use of a 'pick-me-jar' in the classroom;

"I realised today that by using the 'pick-me-jar' in my classroom, I am not allowing the children to make decisions about who they work with and am taking that choice away from them. I am inhibiting their independence!"

(Teacher Reflective Journal, 22nd January 2020*)*

Through this research study, I aimed to live closer to my values of trust, independence and teamwork by encouraging the children in my class to make choices for themselves instead of me making choices for them.

1.2 Background of the Study

Both the primary school curriculum (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), 1999) and Aistear (NCCA, 2009) highlight the importance of children becoming independent as they progress throughout their educational journey. Aistear, the Irish word for journey, is the early childhood curriculum framework for children from birth to six years of age. It prescribes learning experiences so that all children can grow and develop into competent and confident learners (NCCA, 2009). Both the development of independence and assisting children in making choices are key components of Aistear - the early childhood curriculum framework.

Aistear states the important role the learning environment plays in facilitating the development of independent learning skills and offering children choices in their learning in order to allow children to become independent and learn about the world we live in (NCCA, 2009).

> *"An inviting environment encourages and helps children to explore and to take advantage of opportunities for fun, choice, freedom, adventure and challenge,"* (NCCA, 2009: 12).

Through participating in this study, I hoped to facilitate an environment where independent learning skills could be fostered among the children in my class through arranging the classroom so that the children can express themselves, interact with their peers, make choices, test ideas, create, develop and practice skills (NCCA, 2009).

The partnership between the child and the adult is also key in facilitating independence. The adult helps the child towards independence by providing them with choice in their activities, and by providing opportunities for them to make decisions and take the lead, (NCCA, 2009).

"In partnership with the adult, children will show increasing independence, and be able to make choices and decisions," (NCCA, 2009: 17).

Furthermore, Aistear (NCCA, 2009) highlights the importance of well-being and promoting citizenship and social justice. It aims for children to have positive outlooks on learning and on life and to be confident, happy and healthy (NCCA, 2009). When the adult provides children with choices and invites them to vote or reach consensus, citizenship and social justice are promoted and in turn, independence fostered (NCCA, 2009). Giving children messages of approval also gives them the confidence to voice their views and opinions, to make choices, and to help shape their own learning (NCCA, 2009).

The Irish primary school curriculum was devised by the NCCA in 1999. The curriculum aims to enable children to become lifelong learners through developing positive attitudes to learning and the ability to learn independently," (NCCA, 1999). It states that,

"Children's experiences of school will be such that they will come to value learning and will develop the ability to learn independently," (NCCA, 1999: 65).

Although independence is mentioned in the Primary School Curriculum on several occasions, it does not explicitly tell us how independence could be fostered when compared to Aistear, which was developed ten years later. Is this because of a newer, more forward-thinking outlook on education? On the other hand, maybe the importance of developing independence is rooted in the early years and less important as children develop? Through undertaking this research study, I hoped to live closer to my values of trust, independence and teamwork in my

professional practice by fostering independence in my classroom by encouraging choices in learning.

1.3 Context of the Study

The research took place in a single-sex primary school located in South Dublin. The school is a catholic English-medium all-girls primary school. This school was selected as it is the school I am currently employed in as a class teacher. As I was teaching second-class at the time of the research, the study took place with this class level of children aged 7-8 years old. Independence is valued in the school and before attending junior infants' parents are asked to ensure that their child is, "as independent as possible – physically, emotionally and socially," (booklet for parents of junior infants starting school). Furthermore, throughout the infant education programme, one aim of the school is to, "develop independence," among students (booklet for parents of junior infants starting school). However, a whole-school approach to developing independence is not in place in the school and I noted in my reflective diary that although the school aim to develop independence, practical steps of what this might look like among second-class students are not available;

> *"I spoke to X and we both agreed that independence is valued in the school as the children are encouraged to carry out tasks and jobs around the school such as bringing messages to the office or to other classrooms, organising PE equipment for active yard days etc. However, developing independence at various class levels is not an explicit focus."*
>
> (Teacher Reflective Journal, 24th January 2020)

1.4 Potential Contribution of the Study

The aim of this study was to enhance my ability to foster independence in children by encouraging them to make choices in their learning. It is hoped that by encouraging choices in learning, a foundation for the development of self-reliance in learning and a sense of personal responsibility and personal fulfilment would be achieved for the children. I also hoped that by fostering independence in the children in my class I would be able to live closer to my core values of trust, independence and teamwork in my professional practice. On an organisational

level, I hoped that other teachers in the school who may share some of the same values as me might learn from some of the strategies used in this research study and try them out in their own classrooms. Thus, allowing me to live closer to my core value of teamwork by working together with others to achieve a common goal.

1.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter briefly described independence in the primary school classroom and the importance of fostering independence in order to encourage children to become self-reliant, confident adults in the future. The next chapter will review the literature and research on independence, independent learning in the classroom, and explore how independence can be fostered in the classroom by encouraging choice in learning.

Chapter 2 – A Review of the Literature

2.0 Introduction

This chapter presents a critical review of the literature related to the topic area of this study; how I can nurture and develop independence in children by facilitating choice in their learning. Literature exploring how independence and independent learning can be fostered in children continues to develop and an initial screening exercised identified a small number of research papers dedicated specifically to fostering independence in children in their early years in a school setting. On initial screening of the literature, it was clear that a range of terminology was applied to describe a child who is independent, including independent learners, self-directed learners and self-regulated learners.

A research strategy was developed to ensure an effective, organised and comprehensive search of the pertinent literature. The first step was to generate several key search terms or words from the chosen topic area, from which synonyms were developed and entered into a range of suitable databases. Initial searching of electronic databases including Academic Search Complete, ERIC, JSTOR, and EBSCOhost was undertaken. Available topic-related scholarly book literature was also reviewed. No date parameters were applied to the literature at the outset, although where possible the focus was on literature published within the last 10 years. The search was confined to English language material only. The results from the database searches involved reading the abstracts of papers and excluding papers in which the terms independence and independent learning were not evident.

The results of this review of literature is presented in five main themes; *(a) Independence and Independent Learning, (b) Strategies to Promote Independence, (c) Principles of Independent or Self-Regulated Learning (d) The Independent Learning Environment, (e) Benefits and*

Barriers to Independent Learning, and (f) Benefits and Barriers of Providing Children with Choices.

In this literature review, the meaning of the term independence will be defined. The difference between independence and independent learning will be explored in the context of a primary school classroom. Stages of independence and developing the skills and strategies necessary to become an independent learner will be examined. Following on from this, a practical guide to creating an independent learning environment in the classroom will be presented, focusing on fostering independence through allowing children to make choices in their own learning. Finally, both the benefits and challenges of creating an independent learning environment in the classroom and providing children with choices in their learning will be explored considering relevant, recent literature.

2.1 Independence and Independent Learning

> *"The future is one that is likely to be fluid, borderless and constantly changing. It will demand among other attributes, a positive attitude towards learning and the capacity to work independently" (Curriculum of Planning and Development Division (CPDD), 2004).*

It is evident in current literature that the importance of children developing independence is upheld by society, schools, teachers and parents. In a longitudinal study following 15-year olds into adult life, Rauber (2007) reported on the importance of motivation and self-regulation on both school achievement and later success in life. He stated that in a world that is constantly changing and evolving it is important that independence and self-regulation are developed from an early age (Rauber, 2007). Findings suggested that more time should be allocated to developing independent learning skills in order to sustain a culture of independent learning in the classroom (Rauber, 2007).

Similarly, a large-scale study was conducted by Gill and Halim (2007) to examine the effects of fostering independence on college students. Both teachers and students rated independent learning highly, considered it to be an important part of teaching and learning, and highlighted independent learning as a critical life skill (Rauber, 2007). Findings suggest that students needed opportunities to explore, reflect and challenge themselves intellectually with teachers acting in the role of a facilitator. Therefore, teachers needed to rethink their teaching approaches and methodologies in order to allow their students to be flexible, reflective and self-reliant (Rauber, 2007). Findings also acknowledged that although everyone appreciates the importance of independent learning, it is practically challenging given the nature of students, curriculum demands and educational philosophies (Gill and Halim, 2007).

2.2 Defining Independence

> *"Independent learning does not refer to a situation where learners are left without adult intervention but instead, opportunities and tasks are provided for students to explore and there will be junctures to get guidance and feedback from peers or the teacher"*
> *(Gill & Halim, 2007: 4)*

In the past, independence has been defined as doing things for oneself (Williams, 2003). People often believe that being independent means working alone. However, both Meyer et al. (2008) and Mars (2015) believe that working alone does not automatically develop independent learning skills. Williams (2003) concurs and claims that if a child is isolated in his discovery without adult stimulation, he or she will fail to move beyond Vygotsky and Cole's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Vygotsky and Cole's (1978) theory proposes that, through social interaction, young children develop higher mental functions such as thinking and reasoning. A child's ZPD refers to the distance between what they can achieve on their own as opposed to what they can accomplish with the help of more capable others, such as parents and teachers (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978).

Becoming independent is a developmental process, with many changes happening over time (Mars, 2015). Children should move from a state of dependence in infancy to independence in adulthood with the necessary support and guidance from the adults in their lives (Mars, 2015). Parents and other important educators in a child's life can provide critical support for children in their journey towards independence (Mars, 2015). The long-term goal is for children to be able to make good choices, take responsibility for their actions, and to act sensibly in their personal and professional lives (Mars, 2015). Gill and Halim (2007) highlight the importance of independent learning in ensuring that children become effective individuals who can direct their own growth and development. They should be able to function in a mature way in the world, separate from their parents (Lynn, 2008). Both parents and teachers aim for children to develop into well-adjusted, independent adults (Mars, 2015).

2.3 Role of the Teacher

Meyer et al. (2008) stress the important role of the teacher in enabling and supporting independent learning in the classroom. Lockhorst (2010) suggests that the role of the classroom teacher is to encourage the development of the competencies and social skills necessary for students to work independently. Gershon (2014) believes that acting independently is one of the most important skills a student can learn and that children need to be prepared for a world where teachers are not there to provide them with all the answers. Failing to prepare students for this would be doing them a disservice (Gershon, 2014).

Furthermore, Lockhorst (2010) suggests that the role of the classroom teacher is to encourage the development of the competencies and social skills necessary for students to work independently. Both Meyer et al. (2008) and Graham (2003) believe that successful independent learning is dependent on several internal and external factors. Internal factors are based on several skills that students have acquired. They include cognitive skills (memory,

attention and problem-solving abilities), metacognitive skills (an understanding of how learning occurs), and affective skills (feelings and emotions). External factors involve relationships between teachers and students and the facilitation of an 'enabling environment' in which independent learning can flourish. Graham (2003) categorises independence into the domains of physical, social, intellectual, organizational and attitudinal independence. Children may be independent in one domain and not another (Graham, 2003) and therefore need to be taught the skills to develop independence across all five domains. However, results of Graham's (2003) study found that teachers tended to give priority to the facilitation of social, organisational, and physical independence, instead of intellectual independence.

Lockhorst (2010) examined the extent to which learning dialogues between teachers and pupils meet the conditions necessary to foster pupils' independence. Results indicated that teachers, by drawing upon their knowledge of pupils' learning processes, did not help their pupils develop their higher mental functions and therefore did not foster independence. Lockhorst (2010) concluded that teachers lack training or are unable to apply knowledge to enhance the thinking skills of pupils. However, the results obtained in the study did show that ongoing assessment of pupils' learning, co-regulation, and the use of exploratory language can all help to foster pupils' independence.

It is important to explain to the children what it means to be an independent learner in the classroom. The characteristics of someone who is seen to be an independent learner and the behaviours they show that make them independent should be discussed and described (Gershon, 2014). The teacher then acts as a "consultant" or "helper" while pupils work independently (Lockhorst, 2010). The teacher is working in co-operation with the pupils, however he or she are the more experienced participant in the relationship (Lockhorst, 2010).

2.4 Independent Learning versus Dependent Learning

Independent learning is both a goal and a process (Candy, 1991). It occurs when children take responsibility and ownership for their own learning (Mynard & Sorflaten, 2002). The role they play in their own learning experiences becomes more active and participative as independence develops (Gill & Halim, 2007). Therefore, independent learning can be seen as a person acting alone based on his or her own learning and ideas (Pugh, 2014).

Dependent learners find it difficult to take responsibility for their own learning. They rely heavily on the teacher and on being "spoon fed" information (Graham, 2003). Dependent learners often lack confidence and need to be provided with opportunities to develop the skills of becoming an independent learner. Independent learners are usually intrinsically motivated, compared to dependent learners who often require rewards and praise for effort (Mynard & Sorflaten, 2002).

2.5 Independence – A Developmental Process

Becoming independent is said to be a developmental process (Mars, 2015). Throughout the various stages of childhood development, caregivers can provide support for children, enabling them to become more independent. The stage of independence in which a child is at can be deciphered by the age of the child. Mars (2015) classifies children into three distinct groups; infants (0-2 years of age), early childhood (2-6 years of age), and school age children (6+ years of age).

As children move through the early childhood stage numerous opportunities to foster independence emerge as children are keen to do things for themselves (Mars, 2015). One area in which independence can be easily fostered is in the area of "self-care". Children at this age are enthusiastic to dress themselves and help-out with daily tasks wherever possible (Mars, 2015). As the realization occurs that they can do things for themselves, the foundation for

independence is rooted (Mars, 2015). At the early childhood stage children are verbally capable of expressing their thoughts, feelings and needs, and are ready to take greater steps in becoming independent (Conner, 1997).

When children start school, they are faced with many new challenges that require independence, such as making choices and controlling their own behaviours. Making decisions and choices about friends, schoolwork and play are all part of daily life choices of school-aged children (Conner, 1997). These demands continue to grow as they progress through the school. Allowing children to complete tasks on their own and make choices for themselves develops independence (Mars, 2015). Although sometimes time consuming, it is essential for the teacher to take a step back and give children the opportunity to work independently (Mars, 2015).

2.6 Principles of Independent Learning

An independent learner is said to be self-directed and self-reliant and are aware of both their strengths and weaknesses (Mynard & Sorflaten, 2002). The principles of independent learning include *attitudes, beliefs, cognitive strategies, domain knowledge, external supports,* and *flexibility of strategy use* (Wery & Nietfeld, 2010). There are a variety of ways in which teachers can apply the principles of self-regulated learning in the classroom in order to increase independence.

Students' *attitudes* about learning are influenced by how motivated they are (Zimmerman, 1990). The learning and information must be relevant to the pupil and the pupil must demonstrate a willingness and a want to learn. Lakin (2103) agrees that without motivation and an inner drive, learning becomes mundane and meaningless and that students with positive *attitudes* persist longer when faced with problems or difficult tasks. One approach a teacher can take to improve children's *attitudes* to learning is to model a positive or a 'can do' attitude (Wery & Nietfeld, 2010).

Beliefs about a student's ability are closely linked to his or her attitude to learning. Students who have positive beliefs or self-efficacy will put in more effort and persist with difficult tasks. Both Wery & Nietfeld (2010) and Heath (2015) agree that teachers can improve student's self-efficacy by carefully designing tasks to provide just the right amount of both support and challenge to children when necessary. Each child's individual abilities and their developmental stage are important when deciding on how much support should be given and the difficulty of challenges that should be set (Mars, 2015).

Cognitive and behavioural strategies help students accomplish a task, whereas *metacognitive strategies* help students select and reflect upon their strategy use (Wery & Nietfeld, 2010). Many typically developing students initiate strategy use on their own or learn new strategies by observing others (Wery & Nietfeld, 2010). However, teachers can explicitly teach strategies, i.e. decoding word strategies, or model strategic thinking and problem-solving by using the 'think-aloud' approach (Smith, 2006). Through the development of cognitive strategies students in turn become more independent.

Domain, or content, knowledge refers to skills, facts, concepts and vocabulary that are associated with a particular learning task (Wery & Nietfeld, 2010). Often, if students do not have enough domain, or background knowledge and it can inhibit independent learning. Teachers can provide many opportunities for students in their classroom to build upon their domain knowledge using educational videos, hand-on experiences, field trips, and text-based materials (Wery & Nietfeld, 2010). Providing students with opportunities to share and discuss their knowledge with their peers also enhances the knowledge-building process (Wery & Nietfeld, 2010).

Students learn from *external supports* such as social supports and material resources (Zimmerman, 1990). They can seek help from these supports when they encounter a problem. However, some children do not seek help because they are unaware that they need help, do not know how to get help, or seek too much help which leads to the other person doing the work for them (Wery & Nietfeld, 2010). Teachers can support these students by modeling material help-seeking strategies, i.e. looking up an unfamiliar word in a dictionary, and by identifying when peer support should be utilized (Wery & Nietfeld, 2010). For students to be fully independent, teachers need to encourage flexible strategy use and should model the selection of a strategy, the implementation of the strategy, and evaluate its effectiveness after use (Wery & Nietfeld, 2010).

2.7 The Independent Learning Environment

Although the objective of becoming an independent learner is clearly stated in many school policies, statements and aims, how it should, and can be implemented in the classroom setting is not always clear (Lockhorst, 2010). As an adult, our role in fostering independence is to provide love and support, encourage exploration and curiosity, teach skills and allow children to make their own appropriate decisions (Conner, 1997). We must provide a supportive learning environment for children and recognise everyday learning opportunities as they arise (Mars, 2015).

2.8 Creating an Independent Learning Environment in the Classroom

An independent learning environment allows children to direct their own learning, make choices, and make mistakes (Gill & Halim, 2007). To create an independent learning environment, we must firstly adjust the mindset of both teachers and students in the classroom (Gershon, 2014). The classroom environment should be a space where children can engage, explore, learn, express themselves, interact with others, develop ideas, take initiative, and take on responsibility. In an independent learning environment, children should be able to make

decisions for themselves and take risks (Gill & Halim, 2007). Through engagement in a supportive classroom environment that encourages independence, children develop confidence and abilities that shape and influence their lives and futures.

2.8.1 Tools to Develop Independence in the Classroom

There are a range of tools that teachers can use in the classroom in order to develop independence in the classroom and foster lifelong independent learning. Several strategies that can be used in the classroom to foster independence will be discussed in this section. However, the focus in this piece of research is on fostering independence by encouraging children to make choices in their learning.

2.8.2 Clear Guidelines/Instructions

Clearer guidance, clearer tasks and support during tasks are recommended for enhancing independent learning (Hockings et al., 2018). When setting tasks in the classroom, it is important to keep teacher talk to a minimum (Gershon, 2014). Clear instructions should be given, including examples, success criteria, time to complete the task and extension tasks for those students who may complete their work early (Gershon, 2014).

2.8.3 Checklists

Checklists are a great tool for promoting independent learning in the classroom because they provide students with the means to make judgments and assess the work they have done (Gershon, 2014). A research study conducted by Hampshire et al. (2014) looked at the effectiveness of homework checklists as a tool for promoting independence. They found that homework and the use of a homework plan can help students develop organizational skills, promote self-management and effectively enhance problem-solving skills, thus fostering independence by encouraging choice in learning. The role of the parent in facilitating homework was also considered and Hampshire et al. (2014) stated that the primary role of the

parent in the homework routine is to prompt children to begin their homework task, help the children problem-solve, and praise and reinforce the children for staying on task. Overall, the findings of the study revealed that although devising a homework plan is initially time consuming the children acquire the long-term skills needed for self-management and organisation.

2.8.4 Wall Displays and Charts

Wall displays and charts offer an alternative point of reference to help children deal with questions and problems relating to their work (Gershon, 2014). Directing students to wall displays when they have a question will encourage them to search for the answers independently (Gershon, 2014). A study by Thiabult (2015) on the learning purposes of social networking sites found wall displays to be also advantageous for the development of literacy and learning in the classroom, as well as encouraging self-directed learning.

2.8.5 Exploratory Language and Open-Ended Questions

Exploratory language opens pupils thinking to consideration, discussion and critical thinking (Lockhorst, 2010). Open-ended questions are said to promote independent thinking and learning (Gershon, 2014). The use of open-ended questions encourages students to be more independent because they do not assume a single, definite answer. Self-questioning also enhances independence and self-direction as it is an active strategy that promotes understanding (Lockhorst, 2010). Glaubman & Glaubman (1997) carried out a study on the effects of children's questioning at kindergarten level. The results showed that for children to produce lower-level questions, teaching methods make no difference, but when they are requested to produce higher-level questions, children need to be directed and taught questioning skills.

2.8.6 Choice in Learning

Offering choice helps children to develop self-esteem, self-determination, and foster independence (Shorgen et al., 2004). Patall et al. (2010) agree that giving students a choice can increase motivation when a student has clear preferences, appreciates the choices provided, enjoys the act of choosing, and benefits from the outcome of choosing. Lane et al. (2015) add to this further by concluding that choice can also reduce problem behaviour and increase academic engagement time for student.

However, a study conducted by Bicard et al. (2012), which gave students a choice of seating in the classroom on a weekly basis, found that allowing children to choose whom to sit beside in turn led to disruptive behaviour. Therefore, the benefit of offering children a choice negatively affected the outcome measure of tasks set. The outcome of this study recommended that a choice in seating be offered instead for the duration of a specific task (e.g. floor, desk, beanbag, with a partner or alone) or that choice is provided for a specific task or at minimum, each day.

2.8.7 Support and Collaboration

Hockings et al. (2018) believe that the most powerful influence on independent learning is the support, collaboration and advice that can be obtained from other students. Socio-cultural theories of teaching state that development and learning emerge from interactions and co-operation with others (Lockhorst, 2010). Rogoff (1990) agrees and states that the exchange of ideas, joint experiences, joint reflections and discussion all contribute to developments and learning. Whereas, Lynn (2008) regards friendship and peer relations as the most vital component to developing independence. She regards independence as the “separation” from our parents and moving into our own lives (Lynn, 2008). However, Lakin (2010) claims that independent learning is never truly independent. It involves influence, discussion and debate

from others, such as parents, teachers, grandparents and peers. Therefore, he believes it should be termed 'interdependent learning' (Lakin, 2010).

2.9 The Benefits of and Barriers to Independent Learning

It is suggested that independent approaches to teaching and learning have mutual benefits for both students and teachers (Williams, 2003). In this next section the benefits of independent learning for both the student and the teacher will be explored.

2.9.1 Benefits of Independent Learning for the Child

"*Independent learning aims to develop competent, self-motivated, confident and adaptable thinkers who are deeply involved and interested in what they are doing and are keen to take ownership of their learning" (Gill & Halim, 2007: 3)*

For students, independent learning improves academic performance, increases motivation and self-confidence and provides them with a greater awareness of their own abilities (Meyer et al., 2008). Students who are independent learners work to higher standards are more motivated and have higher self-esteem than other students (Meyer et al., 2008).

2.9.2 Benefits of Independent Learning for the Teacher

"Good teaching is that which ultimately makes the teacher redundant; the good teacher enables the learner to become independent" (Pan, 2007)

For teachers, having independent learners in the classroom enables them to organise a wide range of activities and shift their focus from organisation and behaviour to teaching and learning (Meyer et al., 2008). It allows teachers to work with small groups within a class on specific areas while the rest of the class works independently. The teacher takes on the role of a facilitator and this often requires the teacher to supervise lessons instead of teaching them. The learning is somewhat transferred from the teacher to the child. Independent learning values individual efforts and allows for a variety of learning styles to be catered for in the classroom

(Kolb, 1984). Barbieru (2016: 107) discusses the role of the 'traditional' teacher as, "*the keeper of all information and all control*". Her study on the role of the educator in a Montessori classroom challenges this 'traditional' role and looks instead at the role of the teacher as a passive role. Independent learning requires a shift in culture for the teachers and we must also be cognizant that becoming an independent learner is something that develops over time (Lakin, 2013).

2.9.3 Barriers to Independent Learning

There are many obstacles that inhibit independent learning taking place in a classroom. Firstly, many students possess a fear of failure and therefore must be taught that failure is not always negative (Gershon, 2014). They must begin to see failure as an opportunity to learn and not something to fear. To overcome this obstacle, it is important that teachers always praise persistence and hard work (Gershon, 2014).

Teacher talk is another obstacle to independent learning. It is important to minimize teacher talk in the classroom in order to allow for independent learning to take place (Gershon, 2014). It is recommended that no more than five minutes should be spent by a teacher setting or explaining a task in a classroom that aims to facilitate independent learning. Candy (1991) agrees with this and states that the challenge lies in the ability of the teacher to provide the correct amount of guidance without providing too much direction.

2.10 Measuring Independent Learning in the Classroom

A study administered by Perry and Winne (2006) explored the difficulties in measuring self-regulated, or independent, learning. Results obtained stated that measuring independent learning in young children was particularly difficult. In order to promote and measure independent learning in the classroom, Graham (2003) conducted a study to decipher the characteristics of the more-independent and less-independent children. Children were categorised as "hiders", "seekers" or "props". Hiders were the children who were seen to keep

a low profile in the class, seekers were those children who often look for attention or help, and props were the children who were able to manage themselves. Results of this mixed-methods study found that although it may not be possible to make children entirely independent, it is possible to teach them strategies that might increase their independence. Graham (2003) also found that higher teacher expectations regarding the independence of children in his or her class were also crucial. If children are not 'spoon-fed' the standard of work may decrease initially, but the long-term standard of work will increase as children will have the knowledge and skills to achieve without relying on others (Graham, 2003).

2.11 Benefits of and Barriers to Providing Children with Choices in their Learning

Choice in the classroom is heavily debated and there is a lack of conclusive evidence as to whether providing children with choice is beneficial to the students (Platt, 2018).

2.12 Benefits of Providing Children with Choices in their Learning

Choices in the classroom provide students with an alternative activity, which differentiates between students but prevents the need to divide them by ability (Dyson, 2001). It could be suggested that the best strategy for creating choice is by offering two or three variations of an activity which students have the choice of doing within the lesson. Gershon (2015) believes that by providing a variety of options or choices within a lesson ensure that we can stretch and challenge the thinking of all pupils and thus all students are provided with an opportunity to learn in a way that suits them.

Platt (2018) conducted a study to determine if providing children with choice in the classroom is linked to their motivation and performance. This study also aimed to determine if choices in the classroom could work successfully as a form of differentiation. Results of the study found that facilitating choice in the classroom can be beneficial, but it is also very dependent on the individual class. Students tend to work more effectively when given a choice in their learning activity; however, choice is also strongly linked to motivation. Furthermore, providing children

with a choice in their learning as a form of differentiation allowed for greater opportunities for independent learning in comparison to pupil grouping.

2.14 Barriers to Providing Children with Choices in their Learning

Drew (2019) conducted a study on the problems associated with giving children choices in the classroom. He stated that although giving children choices has a role in empowering children to become critical and productive citizens, children are often landed with the responsibility of exercising their choice "wisely" in order to find themselves in a position in which they can enjoy everyday classroom privileges. Drew (2019) highlights a relationship between the notions of choice and power relations between teacher and student, which he suggests should be further researched.

Although Gershon (2014) believes there are benefits to providing children with choices in the classroom, he also admits that it is clearly not practical to personalise every activity to every student. This would be a huge workload on any teacher and there is simply not the time (Gershon, 2014).

2.15 Conclusion

In conclusion, this literature review has provided an insight into the literature pertaining to fostering independence in children. The results of this review of literature is presented in five main themes; *(a) Independence and Independent Learning, (b) Strategies to promote Independence, (c) Principles of Independent or Self-Regulated Learning, (d) The Independent Learning Environment, (e) Benefits of and Obstacles to Independent Learning, and (f) Benefits of and Barriers of Providing Children with Choices.*

2.16 Chapter Summary

Firstly, literature that describes independence and differentiates independent learners and dependent learners was identified and explored. This research suggests that independence can be seen as a person acting alone based on his own learning and ideas (Pugh, 2014). However,

Independent learning is both a process and a goal (Candy, 1990) that ultimately ensures that children become effective individuals who can direct their own growth and development (Gill & Halim, 2007).

In the second theme, research suggests that independent learning is a developmental process (Heath, 2015). Children can and should be supported by caregivers, such as parents and teachers, throughout their stages of development, enabling them to become more independent.

The third theme presented the principles of self-regulated learning; *attitudes, beliefs, cognitive strategies, domain knowledge, external supports,* and *flexibility of strategy use* (Wery & Nietfeld, 2010), and suggested ways in which teachers can implement these principles or strategies in the classroom in order to foster independence.

In the fourth theme, a learning environment for fostering independence was explored. Research suggested that we should provide a supportive learning environment for children and recognise everyday learning opportunities as they arise (Mars, 2015). The role of the teacher in this environment is as a facilitator and to encourage the development of the competencies and social skills necessary for students to work independently (Lockhorst, 2010). Tools to promote independent learning in the classroom put forward in the research included the use of clear directions when setting tasks, open-ended questions and self-questioning, checklists, wall displays and technology, motivation and choice, and finally support, collaboration and advice from peers.

The fifth theme discussed the benefits of independent learning and the barriers to promoting independent learning in the classroom. Research suggested that the benefits of independent learning greatly outweighed the small number of barriers to its implementation. Ultimately, independent learning values individual efforts and allows for a variety of learning styles to be catered for in the classroom, which benefits both students and teachers (Kolb, 1984).

The sixth and final theme discussed both the benefits of providing children with choices in their learning and the barriers to doing so in the classroom. Offering choice helps all students develop both self-esteem, self-determination, and feelings of control and independence (Shorgen et al., 2004). However, giving children choices in the classroom can also prove to be problematic and can lead to power relations between teachers and students (Drew, 2019). Although choice and decision-making has been studied with students of various ages and disabilities in controlled settings, less enquiry has been conducted examining instructional choice in typical classroom contexts (Skerbetz & Kostewicz, 2013) and this is an area suggested for future research.

Through this literature review, I have identified some areas where further research would be valuable. Research into fostering independence among college and university students is prevalent but there is an absence of literature on fostering independence in the early years. A large proportion of literature reflects on fostering independence in college students for them to make the transition to university with ease. Fostering independence in the classroom in early childhood is known to have benefits for both the children and the teachers. The tools that can be used are diverse.

The next chapter describes the chosen methodological approach and methods selected to meet the aim and objectives of this study, which is to foster independence in primary school children through facilitating choice in their learning.

Chapter 3 – Research Methodology of the Study

3.0 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the study and the methodological approach and design selected to meet the aim of this study – to foster independence in second-class primary school children by encouraging choice in learning. It is suggested that, "Research is any type of enquiry that generates knowledge and may include a variety of activities," (Hek & Moule, 2006: 9). I aim to increase each child's own level of independence and provide them with the guidance and necessary tools and skills in order to develop as lifelong, independent learners. I also hope to live closer to my core values of trust, independence and teamwork in my professional practice by fostering independence in my classroom by encouraging choice in learning.

3.1 Ontology and Epistemology

Research is concerned with understanding the world and this is informed by how we view our world, what we take understanding to be, and what we see as the purposes of understanding (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). The three lenses of research which we use to examine the practice of our research are, (1) scientific and positivistic methodologies, (2) naturalistic and interpretive methodologies, and (3) methodologies from critical theory (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018).

The two concepts of social reality are ontological assumptions and epistemological assumptions (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). Ontological assumptions are concerned with the nature of the world and the human being in social contexts (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). Whereas, epistemological assumptions are related to knowledge - how it is formed, how it is acquired, and how it can be communicated to others (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). Ontological assumptions give rise to epistemological assumptions and these, in turn, give rise to methodological considerations (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995: 21).

3.2 Research Methodology

Having established the purpose and aims of research, it is important to select a research methodology that will enable the full exploration of all areas relating to the research. As the purpose of this study is to bring about change and enhance my own practice, self-study action research was selected as the research methodology.

3.2.1 Action Research

Action research is an approach to research which attempts to bring about change as a result of reflection on practice (Hek & Moule, 2006). The scope of action research is vast, and it may be used in any setting where a problem involving people, tasks or procedures needs to be solved or where some change is needed to achieve a more desirable outcome (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). For the purpose of this study the researcher has highlighted fostering independence as one area in which change is needed in order to achieve a more desirable outcome and live more closely to her values of trust, independence and teamwork.

Holloway (2010) attends that action research is a methodology intended for exploration, intervention, examination and change. It utilises action to bring about change and is problem focused, content specific and future orientation (Holloway, 2010). Action research is a method of learning from experience and reflecting upon the learning that has taken place (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011).

3.2.2 Action Research Cycle

McNiff and Whitehead's (2011) cycle of action research involves five keys stages, (1) identifying an area of investigation, (2) imagining a solution, (3) implementing the solution, (4) evaluating the solution, and (5) changing practice in light of the evaluation. These five stages, as outlined by McNiff and Whitehead (2011), can be seen in Table 2 below;

Table 2: The Five Key Stage of Action Research (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011)

Stage 1	Identifying an area of investigation
Stage 2	Imagining a solution
Stage 3	Implementing a solution
Stage 4	Evaluating the solution
Stage 5	Changing practice in light of the evaluation

In this action research study, the researcher identified the area of investigation as how independence can be fostered in second-class children. The action undertaken to bring about change was the implementation of choice in learning to foster independent learning skills. Choice was encouraged in four areas; choice of partner, choice of activity, choice of task and choice of homework.

Collaboration between the researcher and participants was important in identifying the specifics of the problem and collecting data using a suitable methodology, in order to bring about a change in practice. The advantage of action research over other more traditional approaches to research is that it has the potential to generate genuine and sustained improvements in organisations (Aveyard, 2013).

3.2.3 Self-Study Action Research

Self-study action research involves undertaking research in one's own educational practice (Loughran, 2010). It is grounded in the desire to enhance one's own professional practice and is driven by values. In self-study action research the focus is on the self in relation to others and to one's own professional practice (Loughran, 2010). It involves examining one's own practice to determine if change is required in order to benefit you or your students. Through deep reflection, I examined my own practice in relation to my values. I value trust, independence and teamwork and see these values being lived out every day in my professional

practice when I am decisive, use problem-solving skills, and collaborate with others, such as my critical friend or other teaching colleagues, when encountered with difficult tasks.

The purpose of this piece of research was to enhance my own professional practice by fostering independence in my second-class children by encouraging them to make choices in their learning, allowing me to live more closely to my own values. My values of trust, independence and teamwork are being denied when I do too much for the children in my classroom, i.e. select partners or groups for them, tell them what to do for homework, choose topics of investigation or activities for them etc. I aim to encourage choice in learning in order to foster independence among the children in my class and encourage them to become lifelong, independent learners.

3.3 Mixed Methods Research

Action research can employ both qualitative and quantitative research techniques (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011). The research paradigm selected for the purpose of this study was mixed methods research. Mixed methods research brings together quantitative and qualitative research approaches (Newby, 2010). Triangulation can be defined as the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). As I was looking at a small scale, detailed study it was hoped that triangulation of data would be achieved through the use of a mixed methods approach and that a greater insight into the legitimacy of the interpretation of data would be attained.

3.4 Sample

"The quality of a piece of research not only stands or falls by the appropriateness of the methodology and instrumentation but also by the suitability of the sampling strategy that has been adopted," (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018: 92).

Sampling is the technique used to select a portion or part of the population (Hek & Moule, 2006). The basic principle of sampling is that accurate findings can be acquired without the

need to collect data from an entire population (Denscombe, 2010). A number of sampling strategies were considered by the researcher, but convenience sampling was selected for the purpose of this study. Convenience sampling involves choosing the sample from those who the researcher has easy access to (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018).

The research site for this study was an English-medium, all-girls primary school located in South Dublin. I selected this school as it is the school I am currently employed in, making it a suitable choice as I am familiar with the setting of the school and the class in which data was obtained. Due to the nature of this study, I chose a distinct group of participants; second-class children. Participation in the research study was open to all children in my class, a total population of twenty-three students.

A letter was sent out to the parents of all the children in the class, inviting their child to participate in the study. This letter included an *Information Sheet on the Research Study* (Appendix C), informing the parents of the rationale and aims of the study, a *Parental Consent Form* (Appendix B) and a plain language sample *Child Assent Form* (Appendix D). A final sample of twenty-one participants took part in the research study. One child did not return the consent forms, and another declined to participate in the study.

The final participants in this study included twenty-one children, the classroom teacher/researcher and a learning support teacher who acted as a critical friend. The critical friend was also selected using convenience sampling as she was a learning support teacher working within the researcher's classroom setting. The critical friend was invited to participate in the study and was given an *Information Sheet on the Research Study* (Appendix C) and a *Critical Friend Consent Form* (Appendix E).

3.5 Data Collection

Data collection is an integral part of any form of research. In this research study data triangulation was deployed using a discussion circle, a Post-It survey, post-intervention questionnaires, naturalistic field observations and a teacher reflective journal. The research intervention took place between January and March 2020. Data collection was carried out on the research site, which was second-class in an all-girls primary school located in South Dublin. It was intended that two cycles of action research would occur. However, due to Covid 19' and the closure of all schools at a national level, cycle two was not completed.

Prior to the intervention, I conducted a discussion circle with the students in order to decipher their knowledge of what it meant to be an independent learner in the classroom. As part of this discussion circle, I carried out a Post-It survey with the children. Following on from this, the interventions implemented focused on fostering independence in the children by encouraging choice in learning. I formulated a *Research Schedule* (Appendix L) which detailed the areas in which choice would be offered to the children on a weekly basis. In week two, the children were offered a choice in partner. In week three, the children were offered a choice in activity. In week four, the children were offered a choice in topic. In week five, the children were offered a choice in homework. At the end of each week, the children participated in a post-intervention questionnaire. The purpose of these questionnaires (Appendix F, Appendix G, Appendix H and Appendix I) was to get the children's thoughts and opinions on having a choice in their own learning and if they thought they were more independent when offered a choice in their learning.

Throughout the intervention, both my critical friend and I conducted naturalistic field-observations during the occasions when choice was being offered. I also kept a reflective diary in which I reflected upon the interventions put in place and whether I thought I was living more closely to my values of trust, independence and teamwork in my practice.

3.6 Data Collection Instruments

All the methods of data collection, including interviews, questionnaires and observations, were reviewed and through this process the decision to use a discussion circle, Post-It Survey, questionnaires, naturalistic field observations and a reflective diary was made. I considered these methods of data generation as the most suitable methods of eliciting information, which would address the research question – how can I foster independence in children by encouraging choice in learning?

3.6.1 Discussion Circle

Discussion circles are a form of group interview with the emphasis on the interaction within the group who discuss a topic given by the researcher (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). In this study, I conducted a discussion circle with the children prior to implementing the intervention. The purpose of the discussion circle was to gather some baseline information on the children's interpretation of what it meant to be an independent learner in the classroom. The use of a discussion circle enabled the children to challenge each other and participate in a discussion in an environment which was natural to them (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018).

3.6.2 Survey

A survey gathers data at a particular point in time and intends to describe the nature of the existing conditions (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). During the pre-intervention discussion circle, I conducted a Post-It Survey with the children. The survey allowed me to gain an overall picture of how independent the children believed they were in the classroom at the time (pre-intervention). The children were asked to decide if they thought they were independent in the classroom *always*, *sometimes* or *never*. The children wrote the word *always*, *sometimes* or *never* on the Post-It supplied to them by the teacher and the teacher collected the Post-Its when complete (Appendix K).

3.6.3 Questionnaires

Self-completion questionnaires were selected as another method of data collection for this study. A post-intervention questionnaire was completed by the children by hand at the end of each intervention in which choice in learning was encouraged. **Table 3** below shows the titles of the questionnaires completed by the children at the end of each intervention.

Table 3: Post-Intervention Questionnaires

Week 2	Choice of Partner	Appendix F
Week 3	Choice of Activity	Appendix G
Week 4	Choice of Topic	Appendix H
Week 5	Choice of Homework	Appendix I

The questionnaires contained four distinct questions, three of which were open or unstructured questions, and one question which was a closed or structured question. Open or unstructured questions have no response framework imposed on them by the researcher and allow the participants to answer the question in their own words using the space provided. They are valuable as they give a sense of the respondent's own voice and opinion (Newby, 2010). Whereas, closed or structured questions are constructed so that participants' responses fall into categories that are predetermined by the researcher. Structured questions are effective in obtaining a larger data set and data can be gathered about gender, age, or to rate something on a scale (Newby, 2010). For the purpose of this study the closed question took the form or a yes/no answer.

3.6.4 Naturalistic Field Observations

Field research involves observing people and events in their natural setting (Newby, 2010). As I was both the researcher and class teacher and was present in the classroom, I had the opportunity to conduct field observations and informally observe the children in their natural

classroom setting. The advantage of field observations is that the information is more valid because the children are not aware that they are being observed. It is important that there are no conditions or variables that are not usually present which could influence or disrupt what is being observed (Newby, 2010).

Observations can be both structured and unstructured. Structured observations are highly organised, and the researcher will know in advance what he or she is looking for and may have observational categories worked out in advance (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). Unstructured observations are not pre planned and the researcher goes into the situation and observes what is taking place before deciding what is significant information for the research (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). For the purpose of this piece of research it was decided that unstructured field observations would be used in order to allow for the collection of data that emerged naturally in the classroom. Observations were carried out on the twenty-one children who were identified in the sampling process. Each week, new patterns in the children's actions and interactions were identified. I took notes for general observation daily. The data was then organised and compared using Braun and Clarke's (2006) 6 Phases of Thematic Analysis.

Observations are a popular choice of research methodology as they give the researchers the opportunity to gather 'live' data from 'live' situations (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018: 305). Using observations enables the researcher to move beyond perception-based data, such as opinions and interviews, and gain more in-depth, personal knowledge (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). However, literature suggests that there are a number of ethical issues associated with the use of observations as a research method. Conducting observations requires the researcher to act in an open way adopting a clear role as either a participant observer or a non-participant observer (Hek & Moule, 2006).

In this study, as I was also the class teacher, I acted as a participative observer. Acting as a participant observer involves being part of the situation under observation. The researcher must maintain a clinical role whilst recording data, which can prove to be problematic (Hek & Moule, 2006). Whereas, a non-participative observer may use an observation schedule, or record events on video for later analysis, the participant observer encounters the difficulty of trying to memorise observations or find some simple way of recording field notes whilst participating in the task at hand (Hek & Moule, 2006). Being involved in the culture of the classroom daily and having previously formed relationships with the children in the class may also affect the researcher's objective interpretation of the situation. Because observational methods rely on the researchers own perceptions and interpretations of events, they are therefore open to individual bias (Hek & Moule, 2006).

3.6.5 Journaling

Educational practitioners can experience uncertainties in their work and Schon (1995) believes that through reflection a practitioner can make sense of these uncertainties. Throughout the course of this action research study, I used journaling to track my learning and changes in my thinking. Keeping a reflective journal allows you to learn more about your work and focuses your attention on both your values and the area of work which are of interest to you (McDonagh et al., 2019). I always kept a journal by my side, enabling me to record events during the day, as well as momentary thoughts, reactions and reflections both in and on action. Schon (1983) describes reflection-in-action as reflections that occur in your mind as you respond to events in your practice. Whereas, reflection-on-action occurs when you get an opportunity to reflect upon and revisit previous thoughts in a calmer and more restful frame of mind after the event has occurred (Schon, 1983).

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are of the upmost importance across all stages of the research process where the, 'dignity, rights, safety and wellbeing of participants' is paramount,' (Moule and Goodman, 2009: 45). As this study involved human beings, and children in particular, careful consideration of the procedures used to protect their rights were adopted. I undertook a period of reflection considering the ethical and bias issues relating to the proposed study. As the children were vulnerable, due to their age and level of comprehension, consent to participate in the study was sought from their parents or guardians. A letter was sent home fully informing parents or guardians about the rationale and aim of this research study (Appendix B). Consent, in written form, was also requested from the following parties; the school principal and board of management (Appendix A), the parents or guardians (Appendix B), the critical friend (Appendix E) and assent from the children (Appendix D).

3.7.1 Confidentiality

Confidentiality of information, identity and of data was promised. Only information that was relevant to the study was used and if I had wished to use any information that was in anyway sensitive, further permission would have been sought. The real names of the participants and the name of the school and members of staff were not used. Instead, initials were used to identify individuals in any data collected or analysed. However, when writing up the findings of this study initials were not used, and anonymity of participants was achieved. The participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point.

3.7.2 Reliability

Reliability refers to the extent to which an instrument or technique shows consistency of measurement (Hek & Moule, 2006). Findings are said to be reliable if the research can be easily replicated by other researchers using the same methodology and design approach of the study. A valid and reliable data collection instrument will measure what it is expected to measure and

be consistent in measuring what it is designed to measure (Hek & Moule, 2006). However, errors in measurement do occur and therefore data collection can at times be inconsistent. Any inconsistencies of measurement should always be noted and acknowledged by the researcher.

3.7.3 Bias

I am conscious I am the class teacher in the classroom in which the research was carried out. I am aware of the possible conflicts that could create bias and influence the results. However, my position as an insider has also supported my research in many ways. Being present in the classroom all day provided me with sufficient time to observe and listen to the children, and to understand their feelings and experiences at school. Moreover, I was able to interact with my critical friend on an ongoing basis, providing us both with the opportunity to ask for clarification on the research and identify any issues raised by respondents.

3.7.4 Validity

Validity refers to the extent to which an instrument or technique measures what is intended to measure (Hek & Moule, 2006). In this research study convenience sampling was selected, a variety of research tools were considered, and analysis of collected data was carried out by organising, categorising and coding collected data in order to make comparisons. Through this validity the researcher was true to the aim and purpose of the study, which was to foster independence in second-class children by encouraging them to make choices in their learning in order to bring about change in practice. This piece of research was also submitted to a validation group for judgement by relevant others. Validation groups are set up in order to help researchers examine their claims critically against their evidence (Lomax, 1983). The validation group gave critical feedback in order to give merit to the work and offered critical feedback in order to move my thinking forward.

3.7.5 Representativeness

Representativeness can be described as the extent that one can believe the findings of a study to be an accurate representation of the situation researched. Various methods of achieving representativeness can be found in the literature, including prolonged engagement of the issue under study, persistent observation, triangulation, member checking and peer debriefing. During the course of this study regular contact was maintained with the participants in the study. I engaged with the children on a daily basis and weekly meetings were arranged with the critical friend. The critical friend was also present in the classroom on at least one occasion every day for a period of 30 minutes or longer.

3.8 Data Analysis

Data analysis is the processing, summarising and interpretation of raw data into meaningful information (Hek & Moule, 2006). It refers to the ability to think and reflect critically on what has been achieved due to the implemented action (Mukherji & Albon, 2010). It involves looking back at the objective of the study and reflecting upon whether the stated objective or aim was achieved.

3.8.1 Qualitative Data Analysis

As this was a mixed method study, I began the data analysis process by organising the qualitative data collected in the discussion circle, questionnaires, naturalistic field observations and teacher reflective journal. The first consideration was whether the transcribed data would be analysed by hand or using computer software programme such as NVivo. I decided that coding by hand would allow for greater visualization of the data.

As there is no standard method of data analysis used in action research, it was decided to use Braun and Clarke's (2006) 6-Phase Framework of Thematic Analysis and apply it in a systematic manner to describe and explain the process of analysis within the context of this

action research study. Thematic analysis is the process of identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). These patterns or themes are then used to address the research question or say something interesting about an issue. Thematic analysis is a very flexible method of data analysis as it is not tied to an epistemological or theoretical perspective and therefore a suitable method of analysis given the diversity of work in learning and teaching (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Good thematic analysis does much more than simply summarise the data, it interprets and makes sense of the data presented (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017).

Braun and Clarke (2006) distinguish between two levels of themes; semantic and latent. Semantic themes refer to explicit or surface meaning of data and the analyst is not looking beyond what the participant has said or what has been written (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Moving beyond this, latent themes go further than what has been said and the analyst starts to identify or examine the underlying ideas, assumptions, conceptualisations and ideologies that shape or inform the semantic content of the data.

Table 4: Braun and Clarke's (2006) 6 Phases of Thematic Analysis

Step 1: Become familiar with the data	Step 4: Review themes
Step 2: Generate initial codes	Step 5: Define themes
Step 3: Search for themes	Step 6: Write-up

The process of analyzing the collected data was initially a daunting task, as shown below in an excerpt the teacher reflective diary;

"When I initially sat down to begin analyzing my data, I was a little overwhelmed. Where should I begin? What is the best way to organize all this information and try to make some sense of it?"

(Teacher reflective diary, 19th March 2020)

3.8.3 Step 1: Become Familiar with the Data

I was interested in the students' own accounts of their experiences and their points of view and this in turn determined the questions put forward in the questionnaires. The first step was to read and re-read the transcripts until I became very familiar with the entire body of data collected. The reflective journal was also used to make notes and jot down early impressions of this data. As soon as possible, information gathered from the children's questionnaires was transcribed verbatim into a Microsoft Word Document.

3.8.4 Step 2: Generate Initial Codes

Each questionnaire was individually coded. This process involved breaking down the data obtained into discrete parts, identifying patterns in the raw data, and applying a conceptual label to single events that are related to a phenomenon. Braun and Clarke (2006) distinguish between a top-down or theoretical thematic analysis, that is led by the research question(s), and a bottom-up or analyst's focus driven thematic analysis that is driven more by the data itself. Given that I was concerned with addressing the specific research question, *theoretical thematic analysis* was used. Each section of data that was relevant or that captured something interesting about the research questions was coded. Every piece of text was not coded.

Open coding was used, instead of pre-set codes, as codes were developed and modified as I worked through the coding process. I also had some initial ideas about codes, i.e. friendship, conflict, time management. Each questionnaire transcript was coded separately. I coded every segment of data that seemed to be relevant to or specifically address the research question. After coding all the transcripts, the codes were compared and some of them modified before moving on to the analysis of subsequent data collected. When working through this process some new codes were generated and other existing codes were modified. The process of coding was done by hand, working through hardcopies of transcripts with pens and highlighters.

3.8.5 Step 3: Search for Themes

As previously defined, a theme is a pattern that captures something significant or interesting about that data or research question (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Braun and Clarke (2006) state that there are no hard and fast rules about what is considered a theme but instead characterized by its significance in relation to the research question. I examined the codes and it was evident that some fitted clearly together into a theme, i.e. conflict. These were collated into an initial theme called friendship. At the end of this step the codes had been organised into broader themes that related to or said something about the research question. The themes were predominately descriptive and described patterns in the data relevant to the research question. The workings of the coding process and some examples of the preliminary themes identified can be found in Appendix I and Appendix J, along with the codes that were associated with them. Most codes were associated with one theme; however, some are associated with more than one.

3.8.6 Step 4: Review Themes

After identifying preliminary themes, these themes were reviewed, modified and developed. Data obtained relevant to each theme was gathered and I considered whether the data really did support the theme. Following on from this, I had to consider whether the preliminary themes work in the context of the entire data set. Looking across the entire data set, it was evident that some themes were reoccurring, and others presented themselves in one aspect of the data set only, i.e. the theme of friendship was reoccurring whereas the theme of intelligence only occurred in question 1 of the questionnaire. It was evident that across the data set some themes overlapped and therefore a decision was made to collapse some themes into one. When reviewing the themes, it also become apparent that some themes would be better placed as subthemes. Other themes also emerged as data across the entire data set was analysed.

3.8.7 Step 5: Define Themes

Finally, set themes and subthemes were identified. The overarching themes of *Decision Making*, *Support and Collaboration* and *Motivation* were identified. These themes were rooted in other subthemes, which can be seen in the final thematic map in **Table 5** below.

Table 5: Themes and Sub-Themes from Research Data

Theme	Sub-theme
Decision Making	○ Risk-taking ○ Mistakes ○ Time Management
Support and Collaboration	○ Role of Teacher ○ Role of Parent ○ Role of Peers ○ Conflict
Motivation	○ Fun ○ Flexibility ○ New Experiences

3.9 Quantitative Data Analysis

In this mixed methods study, both qualitative and quantitative data was collected. Quantitative data was gathered from the pre-intervention Post-It Survey and from question four of the post-intervention children's questionnaires (Appendix F, Appendix G, Appendix H, Appendix I). Quantitative descriptive statistics was used to analyze this data. The data was input into Excel and pie charts and bar graphs were generated to represent the collected data.

3.10 Limitations of the Study

Researchers using action research must anticipate the difficulties that may occur and seek to address them prior to commencing the task (Williams and Bow, 2002). Unless there is organisational wide commitment to development through learning about practices, action research can be problematic resulting in much self-reflection and little change (Williamson & Bow, 2002). I foresaw some difficulties, including obtaining the required number of

participants for this study, the small scale of the study and the short timescale over which data would be collected.

3.11 Conclusion

In this chapter, the theoretical underpinnings of self-study action research were explored. This helped to shape the decisions that were made in the course of this study and influenced the approach to research which was adopted for this study. The research methodology employed and reasons for selection have been outlined. The instruments utilised to collect the data and data analysis techniques incorporated are also described. The procedure and sampling for the study is identified and ethical considerations and limitations of the study discussed. In the next chapter, the researcher will present the findings and analysis of outcomes of this action research study.

Chapter 4 -Findings and Discussion of Data

4.0 Introduction

Somewhere in all the data is the answer to the research question and new insights into the field of investigation (Mukherji & Albon, 2010). In this chapter, data collected from the pre-intervention discussion circle and Post-It Survey is analysed, as well as data obtained from post-intervention children's questionnaires (cycle one only), naturalistic field observations and a teacher reflective journal. Due to Covid 19, cycle two of this action research project was not completed and therefore post-intervention results from children's questionnaires from cycle two are not available. However, data collected from naturalistic field observations and journaling at the initial stages of cycle two have been included.

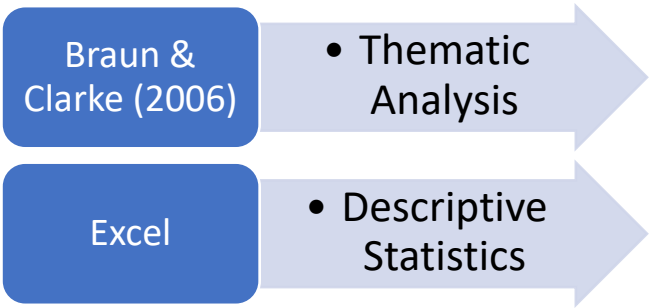
This chapter presents the findings and a discussion of a research study which sought to establish if I could foster independence in second-class children through encouraging choice in learning. The purpose of the study was to develop an independent learning environment in the classroom, allowing me to live closer to my values of trust, independence and teamwork and allowing the children to become more independent learners. In total twenty-one participants (children in second-class) took part in this study and completed post-intervention questionnaires based on the four areas in which choice was facilitated; choice of partner, choice of activity, choice of topic, choice of homework.

Firstly, quantitative data obtained from the pre-intervention Post-It Survey will be analysed and qualitative data collected from the pre-intervention discussion circle will be presented. Following on from this, a qualitative descriptive account of the findings from this study and the relevance of these findings in relation to current literature will be critically examined. This account will also include the analysis of participant quantitative descriptive statistics gathered

in question of the post-intervention children's questionnaires (Appendix F, Appendix G, Appendix H, Appendix I).

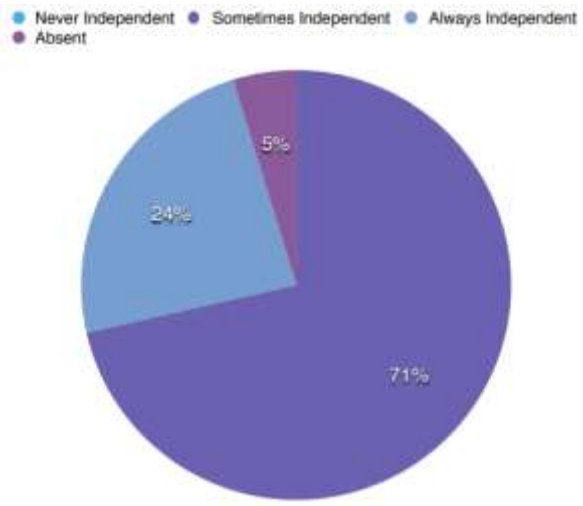
The post-intervention questionnaires children's (questions 1-3), teacher field observation notes, and teacher reflective journal were analysed using the 6 Phase Process of Thematic Data Analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The Post-It Survey and post-intervention children's questionnaires (question 4) were analysed using Excel in order to develop descriptive statistics. The data analysis tools can be seen in Table 6 below.

Table 6: Data Analysis Tools



4.1 Pre-Intervention Post-It Survey

A pre-intervention Post-It Survey was utilized in order to determine how independent the children thought they were in the classroom prior to the intervention. The survey was undertaken as part of a discussion circle with the children in the classroom prior to the implementation of the intervention on providing choice in learning. The children were asked if they thought they were independent in the classroom *always*, *sometimes* or *never* and had to record their response by hand on a Post-It. The results of the survey can be seen in the pie chart below.



It is clear from the data gathered in the pre-intervention Post-It Survey that most children believed they were *sometimes independent* in the classroom (71%), a small number of children believed that they were *always independent* in the classroom (24%) and no children thought they were *never independent* in the classroom (0%). Five percent of children (2 children) were absent on the day the survey took place so there was a 95% response rate (19 surveys). However, qualitative data gathered pre-intervention using a class discussion circle revealed that many children did not fully understand the meaning of the term *independence* or what it meant to be independent in the classroom;

"Independent means doing stuff alone without help"

"Independent is minding your own business"

"Independent means not talking at all"

"Independent is not looking at other people's work"

(Responses from pre-intervention discussion circle when children were asked "what does it mean to be independent in the classroom?")

4.2 Qualitative Analysis – Findings and Discussion

The thematic analysis process as described by Braun and Clarke (2006), elicited three core themes from the qualitative data set. Within theme one: 'Decision-Making' – *Risk Taking, Mistakes* and *Time Management* are explored. Within theme two: 'Support and Collaboration' – *Role of the Teacher, Role of the Parent, Role of Peers* and *Conflict* are described. Within

theme three: 'Motivation' – *Fun*, *Flexibility* and *New Experiences* are analysed. The subsequent subthemes pertinent to each theme are presented in **Table 7** below.

Table 7: Themes and Sub-Themes

Theme	Sub-theme
Decision Making	○ Risk-taking ○ Mistakes ○ Time Management
Support and Collaboration	○ Role of Teacher ○ Role of Parent ○ Role of Peers ○ Conflict
Motivation	○ Fun ○ Flexibility ○ New Experiences

4.3 Theme One: Decision-Making

Through participating in this intervention to foster independence by encouraging choice in learning, the children were given the opportunity to become active agents in their own learning. Perhaps the strongest theme to emerge from that data collected through questionnaires, naturalistic field observations, and the use of a teacher reflective diary, was the difficulty many children had with decision-making. The term decision-making or deciding was used on several occasions by the children in the post-intervention questionnaires in response to the question 'When I choose who to work with/activity A or B/ topic A or B/ what to do for my homework, I am more independent because…'

*"I **decide** myself on what homework I want to do".*
*"I need my mums help to **decide** what to do".*

Difficulties in decision-making are prominent in existing literature. Graham (2003) labels those who have difficulty making decisions and doing things on their own as 'dependent' learners. He suggests that dependent learners lack confidence and should be provided with the opportunities to develop the skills of becoming an independent learner over time. This is concurrent with the findings of this study as I noted in her reflective diary that;

"After talking with X (critical friend), we are confident that with more practice and opportunities to make choices in the class child X will become better at decision-making".
(Teacher reflective diary, 29th January 2020)

Within this theme the findings are further reported in three sub-themes: *Risk-Taking, Mistakes,* and *Time Management*. The following sections will describe the difficulties encountered by students in making decisions and how my critical friend and I came up with a range of solutions to ameliorate these difficulties through reflection in and on practice (Schon, 1983). However, it is important to be aware that although the children expressed difficulties in making decisions, quantitative data gathered from question four of the post-intervention children's questionnaires (Appendix F, Appendix G, Appendix H, Appendix I) indicated that most children liked have a choice in their own learning.

4.3.1 Risk-Taking

Throughout the interventions when choice was facilitated in learning (choice of partner, choice of activity, choice of topic, choice of homework), the children were encouraged to take risks and make choices independently. It was clear that some children thrived when give the opportunity to make decisions about their own learning, whereas others found this task extremely challenging. Some children expressed pride in being able to take a risk and seeing if it paid off;

"Sometimes I risk doing hardly any homework some nights!"

(Response from post-intervention children's questionnaire: 'When I choose what to do for my homework, I am more independent because…)

Others took risks by choosing to work with children in their class who they not typically choose to work with;

"I take risks by choosing to work with someone I don't usually work with".

(Response from post-intervention children's questionnaire: 'When I choose who to work with, I am more independent because…)

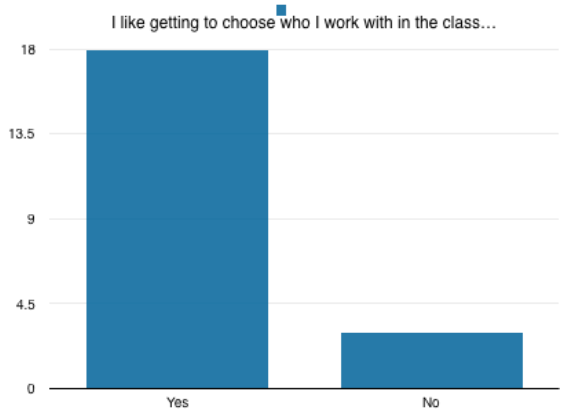
It was noted in the naturalistic field observations that as the intervention progressed some children became more comfortable taking risks and working with children who they would not typically choose to work with;

"Child X is relishing in making decisions for herself and is growing in confidence as the days go on"

"Child X is becoming better at taking risks and working with another child that is not child Y"

(Naturalistic Teacher Field Observations, 31st January 2020)

Furthermore, when asked if they liked having a choice in partner (question 4, post-intervention children's questionnaire – Appendix F), 18 children said yes, and 3 children said no;



When the children took risks in order to make choices in their learning my core values of trust and teamwork are evident as the children began to trust and work with others in the class in order to make choices and develop independence.

4.3.2 Mistakes

When making decisions on their own, the children acknowledged that they made some mistakes along the way. However, they were aware of their mistakes and were beginning to learn from their mistakes as the intervention progressed. Several participants expressed that they made a mistake when given a choice of the volume of homework they had to complete every evening;

"*I try to do too much homework in one night".*

"I leave all my homework until the last day and then I feel panicked".

(Responses from post-intervention children's questionnaire: 'When I choose what to do for my homework, I find it difficult because…)

Drew (2018) believes that some children struggle with making decisions because they feel responsible for the decisions they make and are afraid to make a 'bad' decision or a mistake. My core value of trust which underpins this study is evident here as the children are displaying difficulty with trusting their own decision-making skills. The findings of this study are in line with Drew (2018), however the notion of time playing a role in decision making was also evident in this study, which is discussed next.

4.3.3 Time Management

As this research study was primarily school based, time was of vital importance as the school day is busy. Through providing the children with a choice in their learning in order to foster independence, many children reported that they 'wasted time' trying to make decisions;

"I take ages trying to figure out what to do".

(Response from post-intervention children's questionnaire: 'When I choose what to do for my homework, I find it difficult because…)

"Sometimes I'm not quick enough to find a partner".

(Response from post-intervention children's questionnaire: 'When I choose who to work with, I find it difficult because…)

Both the children and the researcher noted challenges with decision-making, particularly when a limited amount of time was given to make a set decision. The naturalistic field observations noted that;

"Some children are able to make decisions about who to work with quickly and others are having difficulty" (27th January 2020)

"A lot of the children are finding it hard to decide which topic to choose, they want to see what others are doing before they make up their minds" (11th February 2020)

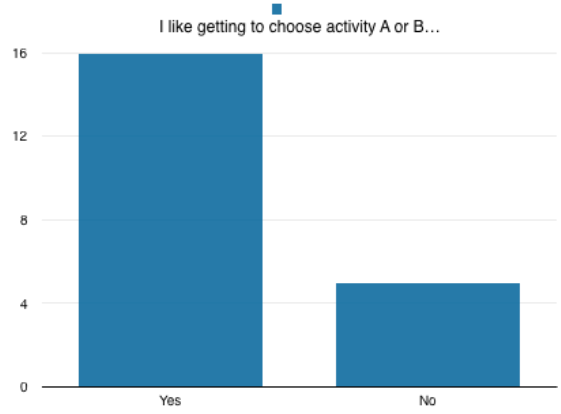
"Many of the children couldn't decide which activity to do because they wanted to do both" (3rd February 20202)

I also noted in my reflective journal that;

"Giving the children a choice of activity is adding at least five minutes to the lesson every day!"

(Teacher reflective journal, 6th February 2020)

Although, giving the children a choice in activity was leading to time management difficulties for me as the teacher, when the children were asked if they liked having a choice in activity (question 4, post-intervention questionnaire – Appendix G), 16 children responded yes and five children responded no;



Reflecting upon the difficulty encountered with time management and in consultation with my critical friend, I offered a solution to the challenge presented;

"The children are struggling to choose a partner within the allocated time. X (critical friend) suggested that putting a timer on the interactive whiteboard so they can visually see the clock might help"

(Teacher reflective journal, 30th January 2020)

A visual timer on the interactive whiteboard was used in cycle two when the children were given a choice of partner, however, post-intervention questionnaire responses from cycle two were not collected due to Covid 19'. I did, however, note in my reflective diary that;

"The timer on the whiteboard is working! The children are making decisions more quickly when they can see how much time they have to make that decision".

(Teacher reflective journal, 3rd March 2020)

Frustration on my part can be seen when time is wasted when choices in learning are encouraged. However, Mars (2015) states that although time-consuming, it is essential for the teacher to take a step back and give the children the opportunity to develop independent learning skills.

Furthermore, giving the children a choice in their learning in order to foster independence often led to the children having less time to complete the activity and a reduction in the quality of the work produced. Some children reported that it took them a long time to decide what activity to do, thus leaving them with less time to complete the set task;

"I waste a lot of time trying to decide what would be the most fun to do and barely finish my work".

(Response from post-intervention children's questionnaire: 'When I choose activity A or B, I find it difficult because…)

Others said that because they spent a long time deciding, the quality of their work suffered;

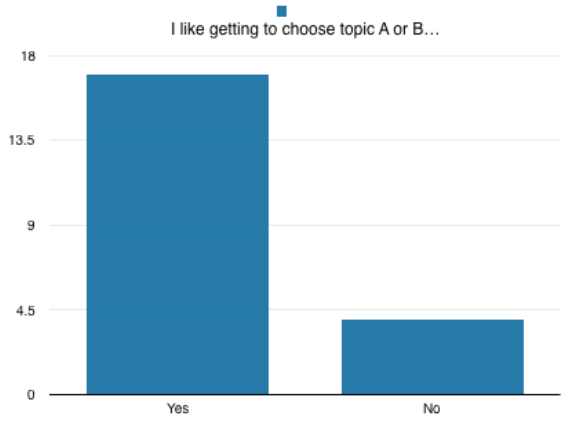
"I spent ages picking which topic to do so I had to rush my writing".

(Response from post-intervention children's questionnaire: 'When I choose topic A or B, I find it difficult because…)

I noted in my naturalistic field observations that;

"Child x is rushing their work because they spent too long deciding what topic to do and can see that others around her are much further ahead. The quality of her work appears to be poor" (11th February 20202)

Although, the analysis of qualitative data suggests that the quality of work was reduced when a choice of topic was provided, choice of topic was the most popular area in which the children liked having a choice. When asked if they liked having a choice in topic, 17 children answered yes and 5 children responded no (question 4, post-intervention children's questionnaire – Appendix H);



Subsequently, it was found that when the children were given a choice in their learning some children experienced difficulties managing the amount or quantity of work set by the teacher. This was particularly evident when the children were given a choice in their homework. The children had to decide how much homework they completed every evening, and this led to some children deciding to do too much or not enough on an evening.

"Some days I do too many things and other days I do hardly any".

(Response from post-intervention children's questionnaire: 'When I choose what to do for my homework, I find it difficult because…)

Some of the children noted that planning ahead and being organised made the decision-making process easier. Although initially making a homework plan was time consuming, less time was spent every evening by the children deciding what to do and therefore less time was wasted;

"I plan and decide on Monday what work I am going to do for the week"

"I draw out a plan of what things I will do on what days"

(Responses from post-intervention children's questionnaire: 'When I choose what to do for my homework, I helps me because…)

This finding aligns with a study by Hampshire et al. (2014) who found that although devising a homework plan is initially time consuming, children acquire the long-term skills needed for self-management and organisation, thus becoming more independent in their learning.

4.4 Theme Two: Support and Collaboration

Throughout the course of this research study, including reviewing the literature, the process of data collected and reflection, the important role of support and collaboration in fostering independence by encouraging choice in learning has emerged strongly. This second theme describes the role of support and collaboration in making choices in learning, thus fostering independence, which emerged in this study. Within this theme the findings are reported in four sub- themes: *Role of the Teacher, Role of the Parent, Role of Peer Support* and *Conflict*.

4.4.1 Role of the Teacher

Literature reviewed suggested that the role of the classroom teacher was to encourage the development of the competencies and social skills necessary for students to work independently (Lockhorst, 2010). Data collected from field observations and the teacher reflective journal concurred with the literature and indicated that role of the teacher was to support and encourage the children in making choices. I noted in my naturalistic field observations that;

"Some children are having difficulty initiating conversation with other children to ask them to be their partner and I had to encourage them to do so" (27th January 2020)

"Child X is reliant on her best friend to be her partner and I had to encourage her to choose somebody different today" (28th January 2020)

The importance of modelling help-seeking strategies in order to support students in becoming independent is acknowledged by Wery and Nietfeld (2010). In my reflective journal, I recorded an entry in which I mentioned the need to model how to ask another child in the class to be your partner as I was observing that some children were experiencing difficulties initiating conversation with their peers;

"I think it will be important for me to model how a child can begin a conversation with another child asking to be their partner as there are a number of children who are struggling with this and don't seem to have the confidence to approach others in the class".

(Teacher Reflective Journal, 30th January 2020)

4.4.2 Role of the Parent

The role of the parent in developing independence by encouraging choice in learning was particularly evident when children were given a choice in their homework. Literature suggested that parents can provide crucial support for children in their journey towards independence (Mars, 2015) and that failing to prepare them for this would be doing them a disservice (Gershon, 2014). Data collected from post-intervention questionnaires indicated that some children were supported and advised by their parents when making choices about homework;

"I can ask mum or dad if they think I have done enough work each day"

(Response from post-intervention children's questionnaire: 'When I choose what to do for my homework, I am more independent because…)

My core value of trust, which underpins this study, is evident here as the child trusts their parent to support and guide them in making choices in their learning and in turn fostering independence.

4.4.3 Role of Peer Support

Peer support played a key role in the development of independent learning skills in the classroom. Some children expressed that they liked helping others, whereas others relied on asking their peers for help. The children wanted to help their peers by advising them on how they might do certain tasks within the classroom or by choosing to work with certain children in their class because they thought they might need some help with a task.;

"I can give advice to my friends about which things they can do on which days".

(Response from post-intervention children's questionnaire: 'When I choose what to do for my homework, I helps me because…)

"I can choose to work with someone who I can help with their work"

(Response from post-intervention children's questionnaire: 'When I choose who to work with, I am more independent because…)

When presented with a choice of who to work with some child based their decision on who in the class might be able to help them with a given task;

"I can work with someone who might be able to help me".

"I can choose a partner who I think could help me".

(Responses from post-intervention children's questionnaire: 'When I choose who to work with, it helps me because…')

When given a choice in homework quantity and task selection some children relied on their peers to help them decide. They asked for suggestions and guidance from others in order to justify their own choice;

"I can ask my friend how many homework things she did".

(Response from post-intervention children's questionnaire: 'When I choose what to do for my homework, I am more independent because…')

When analyzing the collected data, it was evident that friendship played a pivotal role in the choices that the children made. At times they chose to help their friends, or they decided to ask their friends for help. This finding aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development theory which states that through social interactions, children can develop higher social functions such as thinking and reasoning. Children can accomplish more with the help of more capable others, such as their peers, teachers and parents (Vygotsky, 1978). However, conflict between friends and children in the class also occurred, which will be discussed in the next section.

4.4.4 Conflict

A key finding to emerge from this piece of research, which aimed to foster independence in children by encouraging choices in learning, was that giving children choices in their learning can lead to conflict. When the children were given a choice of who to work in the classroom, conflict arose between peers;

"I don't always want to work with the same person, but they always want to work with me".
"Someone else is always with the person I want to be with".
"I don't want to work with some people, and they want to work with me".

(Responses from post-intervention children's questionnaire: 'When I choose who to work with, I find it difficult because…')

However, some children dealt with this conflict in a responsible manner as was recorded in the naturalistic teacher field observations, showing a level of maturity;

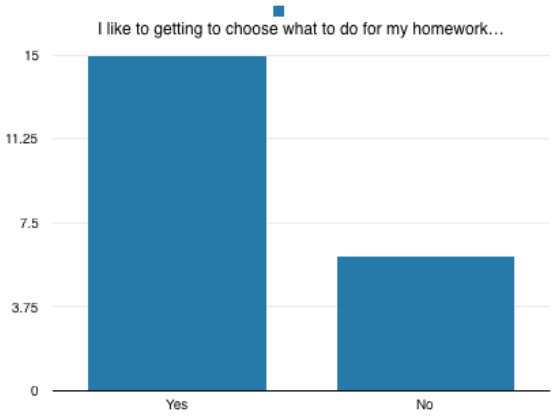
"Child A told child B that she was working with child C today and would work with child B the next time" (4th March 2020).

Conflict also presented itself in the home environment when the children were given a choice of homework (quantity and task). Findings suggest that conflict between the children and their parents occurred when choices in learning were encouraged;

"I argue with my mum because she tries to tell me what to pick".
"I always want to do the same activities, but my dad says I should pick different ones".

(Responses from post-intervention children's questionnaire: 'When I choose what to do for my homework, I find it difficult because…)

These findings in the qualitative data set align with findings in the quantitative data set, as choice in homework was the least popular area in which children liked having a choice and this may be due to conflict with parents at home. When asked if they liked having a choice in homework, 15 children said yes and 6 children said no (question 3, post-intervention questionnaire – Appendix I);



These findings are concurrent with Bicard et al. (2012) who suggested that giving children a choice leads to disruptive and undesired behaviour. Therefore, the benefit of offering children a choice negatively impacts the outcome of the task. However, the findings do not align with Lane et al. (2015), who asserts that choice can reduce problem behaviour and increase academic engagement. This finding also indicates that some parents themselves are not fostering

independent learners and thinkers in their own children at home by making choices for their children. This is an area worthy of further study.

4.5 Theme Three: Motivation

Facilitating choice in children's learning can draw on pupils' innate drive to learn and increase their motivation to engage with activities in the classroom (Pan, 2007). When given a choice in topic, activity or homework, pupils get a say in what they produce, and this can encourage pupils to follow their interests and engage in authentic inquiry. Another strong theme to emerge from the analyzing the collected data was that the children enjoyed making choices in their own learning and as a result the children's motivation to engage in a variety of classroom activities and learning was notably increased. Throughout this intervention, which aimed to foster independence in children through facilitating choice in their learning, it was evident that the children enjoyed having the flexibility in their own learning, reveled in the new experiences, and had fun. I noted in my naturalistic field observations that;

"The children appear excited and happy when told that they could pick who they would work with this week" (27th January 2020).
"The class were thrilled to be doing something different for their homework. The idea of having a choice in what they did and when they did it really excited them" (23rd March 2020)

4.5 1 Fun

When the children were presented with a choice of homework, some children reported that they found it enjoyable and fun;

"I can do something different every night which is fun!"
"I can do fun things some days"

(Responses from post-intervention children's questionnaire: 'When I choose what to do for my homework, I helps me because…)

4.5.2 Flexibility

Analysis of collected data also revealed that the children enjoyed having flexibility in their learning. They liked being able to choose what homework to do on each night. Having flexibility and choice in their homework allowed them to plan-ahead and decipher which days

they did more homework on in accordance with after-school activities and parents work schedules;

"I can do the difficult things first".
"I can do more things on the days my mum is home from work and can help me".

(Responses from post-intervention children's questionnaire: 'When I choose what to do for my homework, I helps me because…')

4.5.3 New Experiences

Having a choice in their learning was a new experience for the children who participated in this study. Prior to the implementation of the intervention, I noted in my reflective diary that I was not living closely to my core values of trust, independence and teamwork as I was making most of the decisions and choices for the children in my class;

"Today we learned about being a living contradiction. I realized that I am in fact a living contradiction and although I value independence, I do not facilitate enough choice in my own classroom and make a lot of decisions for the children which is inhibiting the development of their independence".

(Teacher reflective journal, September 2018)

Data collected suggests that most children enjoyed the *new experience* of having a choice in their learning. The children also identified that having a choice allowed them to experience working with new people in their class who they would not typically work with;

"I can work with someone who I have never worked with before".
"I can choose to work with someone new".

(Responses from post-intervention children's questionnaire: 'When I choose who to work with, I helps me because…)

As mentioned previously, the most popular area in which the children liked having a choice was in choice of topic (question 4, post-intervention children's questionnaire – Appendix H). This may be due to motivation and the children's want for new experiences. These findings are concurrent with those of Lakin (2103), Rauber (2007) and Patall et al. (2010) who all agree

that giving students a choice in their learning can increase motivation and give children a positive attitude and inner drive.

4.6 Summary of Key Findings

I sought to foster independence in second-class children by facilitating choice in learning. The data presented in this chapter included a range of both qualitative and quantitative data sets. The children in this study experienced some challenges when presented with choice in their learning in order to foster independence, most significantly with the decision-making process. Here children reported time-management difficulties as well as being reluctant to make a 'bad' decision or a mistake.

However, the benefits of support and collaboration when making choices in learning were also evident. The children relied on support from their teacher, parents and peers in order to make choices and develop independent learning skills. Here the concept of conflict and its impact on the social interactions between the children and subsequent others also arose. It was also found that some parents were unintentionally inhibiting their child's development of independence in the home environment by making choices for them.

The value of choice in learning as a motivator - encouraging fun, flexibility and new learning experiences also emerged in feedback from the children and observations from the researcher. Although, initially a daunting process, having choice in their own learning allowed for the children in this study to become active agents in their own learning experiences, developing as independent learners throughout the process.

4.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented both the benefits and challenges of providing children with choices in their learning in order to foster independence. Notable concepts to emerge from the data were addressed and discussed, identifying the significance of the findings relating to the aims and objective of the study. These findings were also examined in line with current literature

and practice. Within the first theme ‘Decision-Making’ children described both the barriers and benefits of the decision-making process. Under theme two ‘Support and Collaboration’ the important role played by teachers, parents and peers in fostering independence were specified and conflicts within these relationships were identified. Finally, within theme 3 ‘Motivation’ the children and I expressed how offering children a choice in their learning can encourage fun, flexibility and new experiences for the child. In the next chapter, the concluding comments of the research study will be presented and recommendations for practice enhancement and future research in this area will be outlined.

Chapter 5 - Conclusions and Recommendations

5.0 Introduction

Throughout the process of action research, I have developed a reasoned justification for my work. This process of evidence-gathering and critical reflection had helped me to create a developed, tested and critically examined rationale in my area of professional practice. Self-study action research has allowed me to realise my personal values within the practice of my own professional practice. Action research provided an exciting and appropriate method for me as the researcher and as a teacher, to carry out research within my own working environment. This has led to my further development as a professional and subsequently to development within my school organisation.

In this chapter the limitations of this action research study will be outlined and a number of important recommendations will be made. Finally, I will reflect on the process of undertaking this action research study and the impact of the findings of the study on me as a teacher and on my professional practice.

5.1 Limitations of the Study

In order to add credibility to any study, the need to lay out clearly the limitations that apply to it are necessary. Dempsey and Dempsey (2002) attend that all studies are limited in some way and where possible the limitations of the study should be outlined at the proposal stage. It is important to include the limitations of the study as it shows that the researcher is aware of the limitations and that these limitations were not ignored in the development of the interpretation (Polit and Hungler, 1999).

- As with most self-study action-research, the study involved a small sample size. The researcher collected a relatively small amount of in-depth data rather than a larger

amount of surface data in order to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena being researched.

- The researcher acknowledges that the role of the researcher in this study may have influenced the data, both in its collection and interpretation. However, the researcher was aware of this and considered its influence throughout the course of this study. The researcher was conscious of bias and power relations between teacher and students and every effort was made to remove it from the study.
- Regarding the context of this study, other schools and classes may be at different stages of developing independence and as a result, the findings may not be applicable to other contexts.
- The evaluation stage of action research was limited in this study due to school closure.

5.3 Summary and Final Reflection

This study sought to foster independence in children by encouraging choice in learning. The purpose of the research was to instil independent learning skills in the children and to allow me to live closer to my values of trust, independence and teamwork in my professional practice. Both the primary school curriculum (NCCA, 1999) and Aistear (NCCA, 2009) stress the importance of children becoming independent and self-reliant as they progress throughout their educational journey. It is hoped that in partnership with their teacher or parent a child will show increasing independence and begin to make choices for themselves (NCCA, 2009).

I employed a self-study action-research methodology to conduct this research, as the aim of the study was to bring about change in my practice. Ethical issues formed an important cohort in this study as humans, and in particular children, were involved. The research sample included twenty-one second-class girls, aged 7-8 years old, their class teacher and a critical friend. Following on from the process of data collection and data analysis three themes emerged from this study. The first theme ‘Decision-Making’ children described both the barriers and

benefits of the decision-making process. Under theme two ‘Support and Collaboration’ the important role played by teachers, parents and peers in fostering independence were specified and conflicts within these relationships were identified. Finally, within theme 3 ‘Motivation’ the children and I expressed how offering children a choice in their learning can encourage fun, flexibility and new experiences for the child. As a result of this action research study I plan to implement two main changes in my practice, impacting on the learning taking place in my classroom. Firstly, I hope to create an independent learning environment in the classroom where children can rely on resources in the classroom and on displays on the classroom walls to develop independent learning skills. Secondly, I hope to provide the children with more choice in their learning both in the classroom and at home, in order to further develop independence. I plan to present the findings of my study to my colleagues in order to encourage the development of independent learning practices on a whole school level.

5.4 Recommendations

Whilst the importance of fostering independence in the classroom is present in the curriculum (NCCA, 1999), its application through a range of directed interventions needs to be promoted.

- Whilst the school intervention sought to foster independence through encouraging choice in learning, the findings indicated that some parents were unintentionally inhibiting their child’s development of independence. Therefore, including parents and the facilitating choice in the home environment is recommended.
- It is recommended that a whole school approach to fostering independence is required.
- Further large scale, longitudinal research in this area is recommended, to include children of mixed gender and a variety of ages in the primary school.

5.4 Concluding Comments

This study explored how independence can be fostered in children by encouraging choice in learning. Significantly, what drives action research is our need to know in order to bring about the desired change (McNiff, 2016), which applies to this research. Participation in this study has been a journey of mixed emotions for me, full of highs and lows. The highs included seeing the excitement on the faces of the children in my class when I informed them that they would have a choice in their homework, and the low being when the study had to be concluded before the initial date due to school closures. Through recording in a reflective journal, I have throughout the course of this study, developed a much deeper understanding of the learning needs of my second-class students and of my own work practices. I have embraced the findings of this study, and hope that the impact of this research will occur well-beyond the completion date of the study, not only for me, but also for the students involved in the study and for the whole school organisation.

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List of Appendices

Appendix A - Principal/Board of Management (BOM) Consent Form

January 2020

Dear Principal and members of the BOM,

I am currently undertaking a Master of Education (Research in Practice) at Maynooth University. As part of my study we must complete a research project. My research project will investigate how I can foster independence in children by allowing them to make choices in their own learning. I aim to improve the level of independence of the children in my class and share any insights I develop with my professional colleagues. All activities implemented which are said to foster independence will take place during the school day and will coincide with routine curricular activities. I would be extremely grateful if you would give me consent to implement this study with my 2nd class. If any further information on the research project is required, please feel free to contact me.

By signing below, you have agreed to allow the study to take place in the school.

_____ (principal signature)

_____ (member of BOM signature)

Le meas,

L. Corcoran (class teacher)

laura.corcoran@froebelstudent.ie

Appendix B - Parental Consent Form

January 2020

Dear parent/guardian,

I am currently undertaking a Master of Education (Research in Practice) at Maynooth University. As part of our course we must complete a research project. My research project is on the topic of independence and will investigate how I can foster independence in children by allowing them to make choices in their own learning. I am asking for your consent to allow your daughter to take part in this study.

Throughout the school day the children will be given choices in four areas; choosing who to work with, choosing task A or B, choosing topic A or B, and having a choice in their homework. All activities implemented will take place during the school day/regular homework and will coincide with routine curricular activities. The data will be collected using discussion circles and questionnaires with the children and teacher observations and journaling.

All information will be confidential, and information will be destroyed in a stated timeframe in accordance with the University guidelines. The correct guidelines will be complied with when carrying out this research. The research will not be carried out until approval is granted by the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education. You or your child's name will not appear in the study and will remain confidential. You have the right to withdraw your child from this study at any time without giving a reason. I would be extremely grateful if you would give consent for your child to participate in this study.

By signing below, you have agreed to allow _____ (child's name) to participate in this study.

_____ (parent/guardians' signature)

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any further questions.

L. Corcoran (class teacher)

laura.corcoran@froebelstudent.ie

Appendix C - Information Sheet on Research Study

BOM, Principal, Parents and Critical Friend

Who is this information sheet for?
This information sheet is for the Board of Management, principal, critical friend and parents of children in 2nd class.

What is this study about?
This study is on the topic of independence and will investigate how I (the class teacher) can foster independence in children by allowing them to make choices in their own learning. For ten weeks during the school term the children will be given choices in four areas; choosing who to work with, choosing activity A or B, choosing topic A or B, and having a choice in their homework. All activities implemented will take place during the school day/regular homework and will coincide with routine curricular activities. Information from the study will be collected using questionnaires and discussion circles with the children and teacher observations and journaling.

What are the aims of the study?

- to foster independence in 2nd class children by providing choices in their learning
- to develop the teachers understanding of young children's learning and development
- to promote child centred rather than teacher centred learning in the classroom

What sorts of methods will be used?
Questionnaires, discussion circles, observations, daily teacher journal.

Who else will be involved?
The study will be carried out by Laura Corcoran, a student on the Master of Education (Research in Practice) in the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education. The completed thesis will be submitted for assessment to the module coordinator and will be examined by the students' research supervisor within the department and the external examiner for the programme.

What are you being asked to do?
You are being asked for your consent to permit the class teacher to undertake this study on children in 2nd class in your school/your child. In all cases the data that is collected will be treated with the utmost confidentiality and the analysis will be reported anonymously. The data captured will only be used for the purpose of the research study as part of the Master of Education (Research in Practice) in the Froebel Department, Maynooth University and will be destroyed after 10 years in accordance with university with policy.

Contact details:
Student: Laura Corcoran **E:** laura.corcoran@froebelstudent.ie

Research Supervisor: Marie McLoughlin **E:** marie.mcloughlin@nuim.ie

Appendix D - Child Assent Form

Child's name ……

I am trying to find out how to make you more independent so that you can do things on your own and make choices by yourself. I would like to find out more about this. To do this I would like to watch you and listen to you when you are in school and to write down some notes about you.

Would you be ok with that? Pick a box **Yes** **No**

I have asked your Mum or Dad to talk to you about this. If you have any questions, I would be happy to answer them. If you are happy with that could you sign the form that I have sent home?

If you change your mind after we start, that's ok too.

Appendix E - Critical Friend Consent Form

Dear Colleague,

I am currently undertaking a Master of Education (Research in Practice) at Maynooth University. As part of my study we must complete a research project. My research project will investigate how I can foster independence in children by allowing them to make choices in their own learning. I aim to improve the level of independence of the children in my class and share any insights I develop with my professional colleagues. All activities implemented which are said to foster independence will take place during the school day and will coincide with routine curricular activities. I would be extremely grateful if you would assist me in fostering independence when you in are in my classroom and help me to collect observational data on the children. If any further information on the research project is required, please feel free to contact me.

By signing below, you have agreed to participate in this study.

_____ (critical friend signature)

Le meas,

L. Corcoran (class teacher)

laura.corcoran@froebelstudent.ie

Appendix F - Post-Intervention Questionnaire: Choice of Partner

Working with a Partner

You were given a choice of who to work with in class for some activities this week. Please answer the following four questions. One sentence for the first three questions is all that is needed.

* Required

1. When I choose who to work with it helps me because ... *

2. When I choose who to work with I find it difficult because... *

3. When I choose who to work with I am more independent because... *

4. I like getting to choose who I work with in class *

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

Appendix G - Post-Intervention Questionnaire: Choice of Activity

Activity A or B

You were given a choice about doing activity A or activity B this week. Please answer the following four questions. One sentence for the first three questions is all that is needed.

* Required

1. When I choose activity A or B it helps me because... *

2. When I choose activity A or B I find it difficult because... *

3. When I choose activity A or B I am more independent because... *

4. I like getting to choose whether to do topic A or B *

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

Appendix H - Post-Intervention Questionnaire: Choice of Topic

Homework Bingo

This week we used a homework bingo chart for our homework. You had to choose what homework you did every evening. Please answer the following four questions. One sentence for the first three questions is all that is needed.

* Required

1. When I choose what to do for my homework it helps me because... *

2. When I choose what to do for my homework I find it difficult because... *

3. When I choose what to do for my homework I am more independent because... *

4. I like getting to choose what to do for my homework *

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

Appendix I - Preliminary Themes Identified: Choice of Partner

When I choose who to work with, it helps me because...		
Theme: Friendship **Codes** I can choose to work with my friend I can work with my bestie I can see how my friends figure things out I can work with my friend	**Theme:** New Experience **Codes** I can choose to work with someone who I don't usually work with I can work with someone who I have never worked with before I can work with someone who I haven't worked with before and help them* I can work with someone new I can work with a different person that I don't usually work with I can choose to work with someone new I can pick someone who I never worked with before	**Theme:** Intelligence **Codes** I can pick someone who is really clever I can pick someone who is a genius I can pick someone who I think will know the answers I can choose a partner who I think could help me* I can choose someone who is really smart I can pick someone clever I can choose someone to work with who might be able to help me
Theme: Conflict **Codes** I don't have to work with people who are hard to work with I don't have to work with someone that I don't like working with	**Theme:** Help **Codes** I can choose to work with someone who might be able to help me* I can work with someone I haven't worked with before and help them* I can choose a partner who I think could help me* I can choose to work with someone who I could help with their work	**Theme:** Miscellaneous **Codes** I can see how other people do things

When I choose who to work with, I find it difficult because…		
Theme: Speed and Time **Codes** Sometimes I'm not quick enough to find a partner	**Theme:** Conflict **Codes**	**Theme:** Making Decisions **Codes** I can never decide who I want to work with

I usually just pick the first person I see We don't get much time to decide who to work with I get panicked when I have to find a partner People always pick their partners so fast I panic and pick the first person I see	I don't always want to work with the same person, but they want to work with me I don't want to work with some people because they always take over Someone else is always with the person I want to be with My best friend always wants to be with me and sometimes I want to be with other people* Sometimes the person I want to work with chooses someone else The person I want to be with wants to be with another person I don't want to work with some people, and they want to work with me I prefer to work with my friends, but sometimes other people want to work with me* Sometimes I have to go with someone who I never agree with	I can never choose which of my best friends I want to go with
Theme: Repetition **Codes** I always end up with the same person I always go with the same person	**Theme:** Left Out **Codes** I am always left with no partner because there is nobody left	**Theme:** Friendship **Codes** My best friend always wants to be with me and sometimes I want to be with other people* I prefer to work with my friends, but sometimes other people want to work with me* I can never choose which of my best friends I want to go with*

When I choose who to work with, I am more independent because…		
Theme: Decision Making **Codes** I make choices on my own I get to decide who to work with	**Theme:** Taking the Lead **Codes** I get to take the lead when I choose who I work with	**Theme:** Taking Risks **Codes** I take risks by choosing to work with someone I don't usually work

I get to choose who in my class I want to be a partner with I can make my own decisions I can make my own choice instead of the teacher choosing for me		with and am not sure if I work well with
Theme: Trying Again **Codes** If I ask someone to be my partner and they already have a partner I have to try again and find someone else	**Theme:** Asking Questions **Codes** I have to ask my friend if they will work with me	

Appendix J - Preliminary Themes Identified: Choice of Homework

When I choose what to do for my homework it helps me because…		
Theme: Balance **Codes** I can do less on nights where I have other activities I can choose to do things that take longer on days that I have more time I can do loads on one night and a little on another night I can do less on days when I have after school activities I can do more on days when I'm not so tired I can choose when I want to do more and when I want to do less I can do as little or as much as I like every night I don't have to do loads of homework on busy days	**Theme:** Order/Preference **Codes** I can do the things I want to first I can choose to do the things I am in the mood to do I don't have to learn my spellings every night I can choose to do the things I like and leave out the things I don't I can do all my homework in one night if I want I can decide which days I do which things	**Theme:** Written Work **Codes** I don't have to do sentences every night I can have no writing homework some nights I can choose not to do sentences every night I don't have to do sentences every night
Theme: Difficulty/Flexibility **Codes** I can do the difficult things first I can do the difficult things on the days when my mum is at home to help mw	**Theme:** Fun **Codes** I can do fun things some days I can do something different every night which is fun	**Theme:** **Codes**

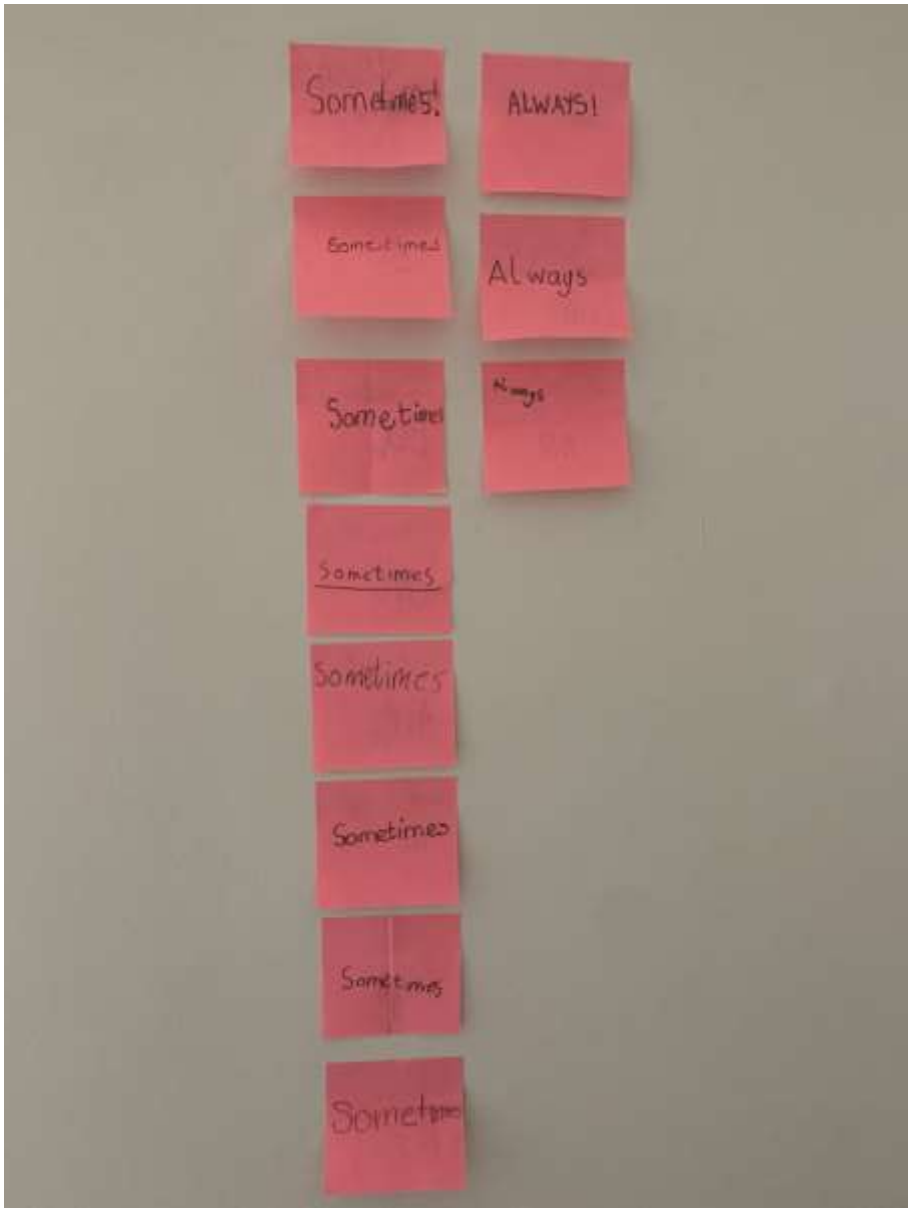
When I choose what to do for my homework, I find it difficult because…		
Theme: Time Wasting **Codes** I take ages trying to figure out what to do Sometimes I get carried away and end up doing my homework for ages I spend loads of time deciding what to do and then I rush doing it	**Theme:** Choice/Help **Codes** I find it hard to decide which ones I want to do I need my mums help to decide what to do I can never decide how many things I want to do I want to do all the things on the list	**Theme:** Timing/Quantity **Codes** I spend ages on my homework some nights I leave lots of work until the last day and then I feel panicked Some days I spend way too long doing my homework

I spend ages deciding what things I want to do It takes time to decide which things to do It takes a lot of time to pick which things to do	I want to do everything I'm so bad at making decisions	Some days I do too many things and some days I do hardly any
Theme: Conflict **Codes** I always want to do the same things, but my dad says I should pick different ones I get into a fight with my mum because she tries to tell me what to do My mum tells me I haven't done enough work some nights I don't want to do some things on the list but I know I should probably practice them	**Theme:** Quality of Work **Codes** Sometimes I forget to do enough things	**Theme:** **Codes**

When I choose what to do for my homework, I am more independent because…		
Theme: Taking the lead **Codes** I am taking the lead by making choices myself I decide myself on what homework I want to do I decide that I don't need to practice my spellings every night	**Theme:** Asking for help/Help **Codes** Sometimes I ask my friends what they did, and I try out doing the same as them I tell my friends the things I did and why it was good in case they want to copy me I ask my friend how many homework things she did I can ask my mum or dad if the think I have done enough work each day I can give advice to my friends on which things they should do on which days	**Theme:** Taking Time **Codes** I take my time to think about what things I would like to do for homework each night I take my time when I'm deciding what homework to do I take a lot of time to think about what homework I would like to do each day I think about the days which I am busy and have afterschool activities

Theme: Have a go/Try again **Codes**	**Theme:** Mistakes **Codes**	**Theme:** Planning Ahead **Codes**
I have a go at doing some activities and then I see if I want to do more after I finish If I don't like something, I picked I can try again and pick something else	Sometimes I make a mistake and I try to do too much homework in one night Sometimes I make a mistake by leaving my work until the last day	I plan and decide on Monday what homework I am going to do on the other days I make a plan of what things I will do every day I draw out a plan of what things I will do on what day I can make a homework plan for the week with my mum
Theme: Taking risks **Codes**		
Sometimes I risk doing hardly any homework some nights		

Appendix K – Image of Post-It Survey Responses



Appendix L - Action Research Schedule

Action Research Schedule

Week Number	Teaching Intervention	Data Collection Tool(s)	Completed Work
Pre-Intervention Data Collection			
Week 1 – January 20th	**Circle time discussion:** - what is independence/dependence? - what can someone who is independent do in a classroom? **Creating a wall chart:** - words to describe independent learners - words to describe dependent learners	**Discussion circle:** - what is independence/dependence? - what can someone who is independent do in a classroom? **Baseline survey:** - I am independent… all the time/some of the time/never **Teacher reflective diary**	**Complete**
Action Research Cycle 1			
Week 2 – January 27th	- Choice of who to work with (during Post-box challenge)	**Questionnaire:** - When I choose who to work with, it helps me because… - When I choose who to work with, I find it difficult because… - When I choose who to work with, I am more independent because … (prompt) - I like getting to choose who I work with… yes/no **Naturalistic teacher observations** **Teacher reflective diary**	**Complete**
Week 3 – February 3rd	- Choice of activity A or B (during phonics lessons)	**Questionnaire:** - When I choose activity A or B, it helps me because… - When I choose activity A or B, I find it difficult because… - When I choose activity A or B, I am more	**Complete**

		independent because… (prompt) - I like getting to choose whether to do activity A or B… yes/no **Naturalistic teacher observations** **Teacher reflective diary**	
Week 4 – February 10th	- Choice of topic A or B (biodiversity)	**Questionnaire:** - When I choose topic A or B, it helps me because… - When I choose topic A or B, I find it difficult because… - When I choose topic A or B, I am more independent because… (prompt) - I like getting to choose whether to do topic A or B… yes/no **Naturalistic teacher observations** **Teacher reflective diary**	**Complete**
February Mid-Term			
Week 5 – February 24th	- Choice of homework (homework bingo chart)	**Questionnaire:** - When I choose what to do for my homework, it helps me because - When I choose what to do for my homework, I find it difficult because… - When I choose what to do for my homework, I am more independent because… (prompt) - I like getting to choose what to do for my homework… yes/no **Naturalistic teacher observations** **Teacher reflective diary**	**Complete**
Action Research Cycle 2			
Week 6 – March 2nd	- Choice of who to work with	**Questionnaire:**	**Observations and teacher**

	(during PE dance lessons)	- When I choose who to work with, it helps me because… - When I choose who to work with, I find it difficult because… - When I choose who to work with, I am more independent because … (prompt) - I like getting to choose who I work with… yes/no **Naturalistic teacher observations** **Teacher reflective diary**	**reflective diary complete**
Week 7 – March 9th	- Choice of activity A or B (during mental maths)	**Questionnaire:** - When I choose activity A or B, it helps me because… - When I choose activity A or B, I find it difficult because… - When I choose activity A or B, I am more independent because… (prompt) - I like getting to choose whether to do activity A or B… yes/no **Naturalistic teacher observations** **Teacher reflective diary**	**Observations and teacher reflective diary complete**
Week 8 – March 16th	- Choice of topic A or B	**Questionnaire:** - When I choose topic A or B, it helps me because… - When I choose topic A or B, I find it difficult because… - When I choose topic A or B, I am more independent because… (prompt) - I like getting to choose whether to do topic A or B… yes/no **Naturalistic teacher observations** **Teacher reflective diary**	**Incomplete**

Week 9 – March 23rd	- Choice of homework	**Questionnaire:** - When I choose what to do for my homework, it helps me because - When I choose what to do for my homework, I find it difficult because… - When I choose what to do for my homework, I am more independent because… (prompt) - I like getting to choose what to do for my homework… yes/no **Naturalistic teacher observations** **Teacher reflective diary**	**Incomplete**
Week 10 – March 30th	**Circle time discussion:** - How have we become more independent? **Literacy/Art activity:** - creating an independent character, i.e. "Independent Izzy" or "Dependent Dan"	**Discussion circle:** - How have we become more independent? **End line survey:** - I am independent… all the time/some of the time/never - I make choices in my learning all the time/some of the time/never **Teacher reflective diary**	**Incomplete**
Data Analysis			