Emily Colgan 12740075

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Abstract

Guided Writing as a Framework for Effective Differentiation and Assessment for Learning Strategies

(A Self-Study Research Project)

The process of critical reflection led to me realising a concern in my practice. This concern served as a catalyst for this self-study action research project. Through the process of critical reflection, I identified my core values as care, equity and integrity. I found that often my practice conflicted with these values. I decided that I wanted to improve how I catered for the different needs of the children in my class, particularly during writing lessons. My research question is '*To what extent can I adopt (AfL) strategies in order to effectively differentiate writing lessons*?'. The aims of this self-study action research project were:

1. To find an effective way to differentiate for my class during writing lessons

2. To improve my use of assessment for learning strategies

3. To live out my values of care, integrity and equity in my practice.

I implemented Guided Writing to counteract the disparity between my values and my practice. My vision was to create a learning environment where I could effectively cater for the needs of the children in my class and tailor my teaching to suit their needs. The research took place in my class, in a primary school in a disadvantaged area of Dublin. Qualitative data was collected through unstructured observations, a reflective journal and writing samples. Data was analysed using thematic analysis. As this research involved children, ethical conduct of the research was given significant consideration. Ethical issues addressed informed consent,

anonymity and confidentiality as well as power-relations. The main findings of this self-study action research project were:

1. Guided Writing enabled me to create an environment for differentiated writing instruction.

2. Guided Writing provided me with a way of motivating and engaging children in writing

3. Through the self-study process I am now more critically aware of my professional identity and values

In conclusion, this self-study action research project has empowered me to feel confident in my actions as an educator and has solidified the ideas that language learning is an integrated process, children learn language through interactions and the role of the teacher is to support.

Acknowledgments

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List of Abbreviations

Afl: Assessment for Learning

NCCA: National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

DEIS: Delivering Equality of Opportunities in Schools

INTO: Irish National Teachers Organisation

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

NCCEA: The Northern Irish Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment

OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Focus and Aims of this Study
The aim of this self-study action research project was to establish the extent to which, I, as a teacher could improve my use of AfL strategies in order to cater more effectively for the diverse needs of children in my class during writing lessons. My research question is '*To what extent can I adopt (AfL) strategies in order to effectively differentiate writing lessons?*'.

The Irish Primary School Curriculum (1999) recognises the contribution that writing makes to the holistic development of the child. As reported by the NCCA, a child's experience of writing in school contributes to their cognitive, emotional and imaginative development. Teachers should take advantage of this potential and provide rich learning experiences for children so that they can progress as writers.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will describe my understanding of self-study action research. I offer a rationale for choosing my research focus and go on to discuss the focus and aims of this project. The context and background of the study are described, together with an outline of the specific intervention I chose to implement in order to achieve the aims of the research. The potential contributions this project might make to the teaching of writing in a wider educational context are then proposed. Finally, a summary of the format of the study is provided.

1.2 Self-Study Action Research
It is firstly necessary to define what is meant by action research and then, for the specific purpose of this study, what is meant by self -study action research.

Action research is a process which employs action to accomplish change. It is problem-focused, content specific and future-oriented (Williamson and Prosser, 2002). Action research has a dual objective-firstly, for change to be realised and secondly, to generate knowledge through reflection (McNiff and Whitehead, 2002). The emphasis on reflection here, critical reflection,

leads on to the heart of the matter of self-study action research. The teacher and his or her own practice is the focus. As educators, it is fundamental to the development of professional practice and children's learning that professional practice is evaluated and evolves, given that 'being professional involves constantly monitoring one's practice and questioning oneself' (McDonagh, Roche, Sullivan and Glenn, 2012: 13).

Self-study has been described as the 'single most significant development ever in the field of teacher education research' (Zeichner,1999: 8). Self-study is a collaborative process (Lighthall, 2004). The term self-study may convince the reader that it is an entirely individualistic approach to research. This is not the case. For self-study to be effective it must involve others. The value of involving others becomes 'evident in practice and is well demonstrated when interpretations, conclusions or situations resonate with others who have had the opportunity to analyse the data independently' (Loughran and Northfield,1998 :12). Therefore, I involved critical friends throughout the research process. This idea of collaboration resonates with Brookfield (2017) lenses of critical reflection. These are :1. The Self lens 2. The Student lens 3. The Peer lens and 4. The Literature lens. Brookfield (2017) states that each lens can 'illuminate a different part of our teaching' (Brookfield, 2017:62)

The concern in my practice which I identified through critical reflection has served as a catalyst for this self-study action research project (Mills, 2003). I value child-centred, learner focused teaching and learning, and I feel this is realised in my practice generally. However, this was not necessarily the case when teaching writing lessons, with a possible negative impact on the attitudes, progress and enjoyment of writing amongst the pupils in my class.

1.3 Research Context, Background and Intervention

In this section I will outline the research context, background and the intervention that I implemented as part of this self-study action research project

1.3.1 Research Context

This research project was carried out in an English-medium, co-educational, DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) Band 1 Catholic Primary School. The research project where I was working as a mainstream class teacher there during the time-frame of this project. The Second Class, whom I taught, were participants in this action research project.

1.3.2 Research Background

It was my intention to enhance how I use AfL methods in order to cater more effectively for the different learners in my class during writing lessons. In order to do this, I altered my approach to the teaching of writing (Curriculum Development Council, 2002). I believe that this was relevant to my teaching and the children's learning .I also saw it as an opportunity to engage with the NCCA'S most recent language curriculum document in a meaningful and purposeful way to 'support progression' and 'decide on the next steps in teaching and learning to help children progress' (NCCA, 2014:38). I planned to enhance how I use assessment data, using AfL methods, in order to inform decisions I made regarding planning instruction (Tomlinson and Moon, 2013). My hypothesis was that it would enable me to 'recognise children's individual, inherent abilities and needs and their early experience of language when establishing a starting point for further language development' (NCCA, 2011,6). It is crucial that assessment information is used, and that assessment is linked to teaching (Glaswell and Parr, 2009). I aimed to use AfL methods in order to plan the next steps to enhance the children's learning.

Drawing on a constructivist perspective, that proposes that a child can construct knowledge themselves, with their teacher, guiding them (Brownlee and Berthelsen, 2006), it is my epistemological assumption that children have a much better chance of success when their

needs and individual differences are accounted for (Irish National Teacher's Organisation, 2007). In this view 'every learner matters and matters equally' (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization,2017:12). It was my professional concern that I have not been living true to these values in my current practice. In my reflective journal I noted 'I feel like I'm observing and assessing constantly in my head but not doing anything with these' (Colgan, 2019a). I also noted that 'the thought that I'm not doing anything with these assessments is constantly playing on my mind and makes me feel uneasy that I'm not fulfilling my duty to change planning and instruction in light of my instruction' (Colgan, 2019a). Through conversations with my critical friends I decided to focus on improving my teaching of writing as this is an area where differences prevail within my classroom.

I implemented Guided Writing in my classroom. Guided writing is a small group instructional framework presented to students who have the same needs at a certain point in time (Fountas and Pinnell, 2001).

Ningsih (2016) describes Guided Writing as a framework that allows a teacher to work closely with a small group of students based on a common need. This structure allowed me to work with small groups of children, whilst other groups of children were engaged in independent tasks. In Guided Writing, instruction for each group is targeted to support and challenge each group appropriately.

Guided Reading was already an established practice in my classroom. Guided Reading is a small-group approach to the teaching of reading. Children are grouped according to ability and texts are selected to match their abilities. The research aimed to and it made use of established practice by taking advantage of the similarities between the two frameworks. The following section will outline the potential contribution of this study to the research available to date on

Guided Writing, as well as contributing to the professional development of members of the staff in my school.

1.4 Potential Contribution of this study

DeClouette (2012) claims that inclusive practices benefit the whole school community. By providing a framework where the learning needs of all children are being considered and accounted for in planning, teaching, learning and assessment, my hypotheses is that the Guided Writing structure promotes inclusive practice. The expectation is that this research project will serve to benefit the whole school approach towards teaching and learning. As mentioned previously in this chapter, Guided Reading is an established practice in our school. When I presented my research to members of staff, it was decided that Guided Writing would be implemented in all second classes for the next academic year.

There is relatively little literature and research available on Guided Writing. This is surprising, in light of the fact it is mentioned in many policy documents. I hope that this project will contribute to the resources available on Guided Writing and encourage others to investigate its value and potential impact.

The following section will outline the format of this study, providing an overview of the two cycles of research that were completed.

1.5 Format of the Study

The study comprised of two research cycles. Cycle One began on the 7th January 2019 until Friday 15th February 2019. Guided Writing began on the 28th January 2019. An interim evaluation took place from the 18th February – 24th February. During this time, I reflected on the process. I made some adjustments to how I planned for and taught using a Guided Writing framework, based on these reflections. Cycle Two began on the 25th February 2019 until the 3rd May 2019. The research plan can be found in Appendix 1.

Data was generated using unstructured observations, a reflective journal and samples of children's work. These were then analysed through thematic analysis, generating codes and themes generated the main findings.

1.6 Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of this self-study action research project, aimed at answering the research question '*To what extent can I adopt (AfL) strategies in order to effectively differentiate writing lessons?'.* The focus of the project is on how I can enhance my practice in order to benefit the learning needs of the children in my class.

Chapter Two deals with the pertinent literature in the fields of AfL, differentiation and Guided Writing relevant to this self-study action research project.

Chapter Three describes this the methodological approach and design that I selected to suit the aims of this project. This self-study action research project aims to answer the research question '*To what extent can I adopt (AfL) strategies in order to effectively differentiate writing lessons*?'. In conjunction with the methodological approach and design of this project, this chapter also discusses ethical considerations, the sampling strategy used, data collection and analysis, as well as reliability and validity.

In Chapter Four, I analyse the data that was collected over the research project. In that chapter, I will articulate my findings as a result of this research project (Figure 4.1).

In Chapter Five, I summarise my main finds and present my 'Living Theory' (Whitehead, 1989). I identify the limits of this study and make further recommendations.

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Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This literature review aims to identify and critique literature available to date which explores the different components involved in this research project. The research project aims to answer the research question '*To what extent can I as a teacher enhance how I use Assessment for Learning (AfL) in order to effectively differentiate writing lessons?'*.

Firstly, I explore what is meant by and involved in AfL. I then specifically examine AfL as an effective assessment method in the teaching of writing. I then define what is meant by differentiation and critique available literature on the practice of differentiating instruction for writing. Guided Writing will be investigated as an effective method to provide differentiated writing instruction.

2.2 Assessment: Definition and Purpose
In order to contextualise AfL, it is necessary to define what is meant by assessment in the Irish and other international contexts. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) defines assessment as the 'process of generation, gathering, recording, interpreting, using and reporting evidence of learning' (NCCA website, accessed 4/11/2018). This is similar to what The Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (NCCEA) defines as assessment- 'the systematic collection, interpretation and use of information about learning' (NCCEA website, accessed 4/11/2018) in order to give teachers a clear understanding of a child's progress and learning needs. Thus, the purpose of assessment in education is to provide information about progress in learning. It is an integral part of teaching and learning as it enables teachers to 'understand better how each child is progressing at school and using that information to further the child's learning' (NCCA, 2009:7).

There are different types of assessment and a variety of ways to assess. Assessment can be both summative and formative. Summative assessment generally involves assessing pupils after

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learning has occurred, for example at the end of unit of work or at the end of a school year. Airaisian (2000) describes this kind of assessment as a final judgment on learning. For the purpose of this research project I focus on AfL methods as a form of formative assessment. The principles underpinning this form of assessment resonate with both my ontological and epistemological values.

2.3 Definition and Purpose of Assessment for Learning (AfL)

Some of the literature pertaining to AfL uses the term interchangeably with the term formative assessment. However, Stiggins (2002) argues that they are not identical- 'Assessment for learning is about far more than testing more frequently or providing teachers with evidence so that they can revise instruction, although these steps are part of it. In addition, we now understand that assessment for learning must involve students in the process' (Stiggins, 2002: 761). This distinction between formative assessment and AfL is also maintained by the Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment who state that while formative assessment is often referred to synonymously with AfL, in fact it refers specifically to the collection of approaches and techniques associated with the practice of formative assessment. Swaffield (2011) argues that the most defining feature of AfL is the involvement of students themselves. Berry and Kennedy (2008) propose that assessment for learning (AfL) is assessment that focuses on supporting learning rather than documenting achievement and that the fundamental principle of assessment for learning is a strong link between assessment and learning. These authors suggest that assessment should serve 'as a catalyst for learning' (Berry and Kennedy, 2008:19). It seems that a clear theme emerging from the literature is that AfL enables children to be active agents rather than passive participants in their own learning.

AfL supports one of my core values- that of equity. For example, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2008) suggests that formative assessment methods

may help create 'greater equity of student outcomes' (OECD, 2008:2). However, the OECD acknowledge the need for a fundamental re-thinking of approaches to reaching equitable student outcomes.

Black and William (2001) argue that AfL occurs when assessment information is used in a meaningful way to adapt the teaching to meet the children's needs. This understanding of AfL relates to what Randi and Corno (2005) offer as an explanation of assessment for learning, namely that AfL occurs when informal, ongoing assessments are used to guide instruction.

2.3.1 Theoretical background of AfL

Assessment for learning is a constructivist view of assessment. It aims 'to understand how the learner learns, what the learner can do or cannot do, and makes some deliberations and decisions on how to help the learner learn.' (Berry and Kennedy,2008:10). This echoes what Schuwirth and Van der Vleuten (2011) describe as Assessment for Learning .They describe Assessment for Learning as assessment that is 'inextricably embedded within the educational process, which is maximally information-rich, and which serves to steer and foster the learning of each individual student to the maximum of his/her ability' (Schuwirth and Van der Vleuten, 2001:478).

Authors outline a range of purposes for AfL as a means to enhance the quality of learning and the learning experience. The literature also points to AfL as an integral element of classroom teaching. Black et al., (2003) maintain that the purpose of assessment for learning is promoting students' learning and teaching and that it is embedded in teaching and learning. Crooks (2001) also suggests that assessment for learning takes place concurrently with the teaching and learning process rather than after. Gardner (2006) defends assessment for learning as a type of assessment that impacts positively on the quality of students' learning experiences. Crooks (2001) also states that the primary focus of AfL is the ongoing improvement of learning. The emphasis is on progress and achievement rather than failure and defeat (Stiggins, 2002).

Stiggins (2002) endorses the idea that assessment for learning promotes greater learning and enables children to learn more. This consolidates the point made by Black and Williams (2001) who argue that if teachers use formative assessments as part of their teaching, students can learn at approximately double the rate. Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall and Williams (2003), maintain that assessment for learning has the power to determine learning goals and identify how to reach them.

2.3.2 Key features of AfL

Swaffield (2011) proposes that 'Sharing criteria with learners, developing classroom talk and questioning, giving appropriate feedback, and peer and self-assessment are accepted as being at the heart of assessment for learning' (Swaffield, 2011:380). This echoes what Sadler (1989) thought about the practice of assessment for learning. He presented the idea that two core actions are involved in assessment for learning. Firstly, there needs to be an awareness by the learner of a deficit between a goal and present state. Secondly, an action needs to be taken by the student to reduce that gap and achieve the desired learning. The learning must be done by the student with a teacher acting as a guide or a facilitator.

Leitch, Gardner, Mitchell, Lundy, Clough, Galanouli and Odena (2006) name four processes of assessment for learning-eliciting information, providing feedback, sharing criteria with pupils and promoting peer and self-assessment. The four processes of assessment for learning highlighted. This is similar to the thinking of Black et al., (2003) who describe questioning, feedback, sharing learning intentions and self-assessment as the four actions which can transform formative assessment.

Questioning

Sullivan (2003) emphasises the importance of using questioning as a method of assessment for learning as it allows a teacher to find out what a student knows, where the gaps in understanding

lie and then make decisions to scaffold children's learning between what they already know and their learning goals. Studies indicate that appropriate questioning can result in positive student outcomes (Boyd, 2015). Kirton et al., (2007) state that it is necessary for a teacher to create a non-threatening environment in which students feel safe to answer questions, and in some cases, answer incorrectly.

Feedback

Among the themes emerging from the literature in relation to feedback are its' potential to empower students, its' role in enabling goal setting and its' benefits for teachers' practice.

Jones (2005) affirms that AfL is about empowering learners to take action to improve their own learning. Feedback enables this to happen and it should be timely and specific, and should propose ways to improve performance (OECD, 2008). Feedback benefits both the teacher and the learner as the process of providing feedback results in teachers paying closer attention to what students do and do not understand, and are thus better able to adjust teaching strategies to meet identified student needs(OECD, 2008).The benefit for the student is an increased awareness of how he or she learns and is more able to set goals, develop a variety of learning strategies, and control and evaluate their own learning process (OECD, 2008, Sadler, 1989). Hattie and Timperley (2007) affirm that for feedback to be effective there must be a learning context to which feedback is addressed. They propose three questions -: Where am I going? How am I going? and Where to next? By answering these questions learning is enhanced. These conversations can occur as conferences between teacher or student or as more informal discussions. These questions encourage self-assessment, and the pupils are guided towards the development of their own 'learning to learn' skills. Teachers can use 'methods that allowed them to track an individual student's progress toward the learning goals, as judged through established criteria' (OECD, 2008:8). Nicol (2010) believes that feedback should present as a dialogue between teacher and pupils.

Sharing learning criteria with students

The literature suggests that dialogue between teachers and students about learning is beneficial and develops self-assessment skills.

It is crucial for teachers to remember that learning intentions should be about children's learning and not their teaching (Dymoke and Harrison, 2008). Hattie (2009) and Stobart (2008) emphasise the importance of discussing learning intentions, and the related success criteria, with learners. Establishing explicit learning intentions is crucial as 'Without the learning intention, children are merely victims of the teacher's whim' (Clarke, 2001:19). The use of sharing learning intentions with children enables them to develop self-assessment and peer-assessment skills (Clarke (2014).

Peer and self-assessment

Self-assessment and peer-assessment are proposed as valuable skills in the learning process and serve as tools to promote and enhance learning.

Self-assessment 'involves students in thinking about the quality of their own work, rather than relying on their teacher as the sole source of evaluative judgements' (Andrade and Valtcheva, 2009:13). Through the use of self-assessment, the pupils are guided towards the development of their own "learning to learn" skills. Earl (2006) refers to self-assessment as 'assessment as learning'. Self -assessment is a 'a subset of assessment for learning that emphasises using assessment as a process of developing and supporting metacognition for students' (Earl, 2006:7). The purpose of self-assessment is to reinforce learning and encourage monitoring and an awareness around one's own learning. Thus, self-assessment is primarily used for formative purposes, to enhance learning and to encourage the monitoring of one's own learning. Wong (2017) affirms that for self-assessment to be valuable, children need to be taught self-assessment skills.

Black et al., (2003) suggest that peer-assessment complements self-assessment and perhaps should come before self -assessment as the 'prospect of such assessment has been found to improve the motivation of students to work more carefully' (Black et al., 2003:102).

In conclusion, assessment for learning forms an integral part of the learning process as information is shared with the learner and information is made available on the quality of the learning. This is made possible as comparison with aims and objectives is important and looks forwards to the next stage of learning.

The following section will consider assessment for learning in the specific context of writing instruction.

2.4 AfL in Writing
In this section I will outline the role of assessment in writing instruction. I will then examine the use of AfL in assessing writing.

2.4.1 Assessment and Writing Instruction
Beck, Llosa, Black and Anderson (2018) assert that good assessment practice is an important element of effective writing instruction. Overmayer (2009) states that we should not think of assessing writing as a product or final grade because by doing this 'we cannot help our students grow as writers because we are taking out the opportunity to learn through practice.' (Overmayer, 2009: xv). Overmayer propose that in thinking about the power of assessment we can assess writing with integrity. I agree with this statement as it aligns with my core value of integrity.

2.4.2 Assessment for Learning and Writing Instruction
Effective assessors of writing are described as those who 'consistently clarified key learning targets, scaffolded support to meet the needs of each student, and monitored each student's growth' (Overmayer, 2009:3). Parr and Timperley (2010) cited in Beck et al., (2018) believe that when teachers give specific recommendations this then leads to an improvement in

students' writing. Therefore, 'As teachers of writing, we can monitor student progress during all parts of the writing process, even during the initial, idea-gathering stages, by thinking of assessment as something that can inform our instruction' (Overmayer, 2009: 4). Effective assessment 'can empower students and teachers not only to improve but, better yet, to believe in themselves as writers and teachers of writing. And once students believe they are writers and you believe you are a teacher of writing, any barrier, no matter how imposing, begins to crumble' (Overmayer, 2009:7). Mak and Lee (2014) criticise the limited research carried out on assessment for learning and writing instruction. This was also my experience when researching the topic.

The following section will investigate differentiation strategies and focus on differentiated writing instruction.

2.5 Differentiation

In this section I will firstly outline what is meant by differentiation. I will then discuss the rationale behind differentiated writing instruction. Finally, I will discuss methods of differentiation methods in specific regards to writing.

2.5.1 Definition of Differentiation

Differentiation is defined as 'changing the pace, level, or kind of instruction you provide in response to individual learners' needs, styles or interests' (Heacox, 2014, 5). Tomlinson and Imbeau (2010) claim that 'the core of the classroom practice of differentiation is the modification of four curriculum-related elements – content, process, product, and affect – which are based on three categories of student needs and variances – readiness, interest, and learning profile' (Tomlinson and Imbeau, 2010, 15). Roy, Guay and Valois (2013) advise that differentiated instruction has two components, instructional adaptations and academic progress monitoring. Roy et al., (2013) focus only on differences in ability whereas Tomlinson (2003) focuses on abilities, interests, and learning styles in relation to differentiation.

2.5.2 Rationale for Differentiated Instruction

The necessity to provide learning environments that respond to individual differences is a long-established concern (Ainscow, Booth and Dyson,2006). Themes emerging from the literature available on differentiated instruction present differentiated instruction as an equitable practice which enables teachers to create a supportive learning environment.

Walker-Dalhouse and Risko (2015) cited on International Literacy Association Website, accessed 26/11/2018), believe that differentiation provides equitable and effective instruction. The authors state that differentiated instruction 'provides opportunities for building teachers' caring relationships with their students and promotes responsiveness to students' interests and learning trajectories. (Walker-Dalhouse and Risko,2015, cited on International Literacy Association Website, accessed 26/11/2018).

It is the responsibility of educators to adjust their teaching to the different developmental needs and the varying levels of individual learners (Moore, 2014;Tomlinson,Brighton, Hertberg, Callahan, Moon, Brimijoin, Conover and Reynolds, 2003). Corno (2008) argues that we need to employ instructional practices that enable all students to learn and develop their abilities. Heacox (2014) describes the role of the teacher in differentiated instruction as a facilitator and a collaborator. She says that as a facilitator of differentiation you have three key responsibilities. These are 'providing and prescribing differentiated learning opportunities, organizing students for learning and using time flexibly' (Heacox, 2014, 11).

Tomlinson (2004, cited in George 2005) asserts that 'Differentiation provides a variety of ways for all students to feel affirmed, challenged, and successful: flexible grouping, appropriately challenging tasks for individuals, and emphasis on personal growth as one criterion for success' (Tomlinson,2014 cited in George, 2005:188). George (2005) states that 'Differentiating instruction is. . . essential for accomplishing successful learning in the heterogeneous classroom' (George, 2005:191) yet argues that there are few realistic strategies that ensure that

'authentic human learning is served, and where all students are successfully and meaningfully challenged' (George 2005, 192). Differentiating instruction is crucial to 'creating learning environments that effectively accommodate the diversity typical of today's classroom' (Tomlinson, 2000 cited in George, 2005:189)

Salend (2009) states that academic progress monitoring procedures assist decisions concerning how to differentiate instruction to match a sufficient range of learning needs. Hence, there must be harmony between instructional practices and students' capabilities and their competencies and tasks (Randi and Corno,2005). Consequently, progress monitoring procedures are crucial in providing this information.

2.5.3 Differentiated Writing Instruction

Tobin and McInnes (2008) affirm that an organised structure and responsive teaching support differentiated literacy instruction. This captures the essence of Guided Writing. Among the arguments for differentiated writing instruction in the literature, strong arguments are made for contribution effective grouping practices and formative assessment make to differentiated writing instruction.

Greenwood et al., (2003,cited in Tobin and McInnes,2005) state that grouping children in small groups is necessary for optimal writing behaviours Park and Datnow (2017) acknowledge that grouping can be involved in differentiated instruction and that 'Assessment data play a large role in DI in the form of student grouping' (Park and Datnow, 2017:284). Santamaria (2009, cited in Park and Datnow, 2017) explains the relationship between differentiated instruction and grouping. The 'focus is on meeting individualized learning needs through flexible, relevant, and varied student supports including student grouping for instruction (Santamaria,2009 cited in Park and Datnow, 2017:286). The way that teachers group students is not solely determines by 'generalized categories of students as high, middle, and low performing but also on content topics and domains of knowledge or skills' (Park and Datnow,

2017:303). Park and Datnow (2017) indicate that ability grouping and differentiated instruction occur concurrently. Flood and Lapp (2000) believe that grouping practices are often the missing link in effective writing instruction.

Shea (2015) affirms that 'formative assessment, selection of research-tested methodology matched to learner needs, mindful targeted instruction (responsive teaching), guided practice with engaging tasks, and continued assessment ensures that children grow as expected in confidence and competence as writers' (Shea, 2015:114). Edwards and Pula (2008) promote conferencing as a method to differentiate writing instruction. The authors state that 'conferencing could increase student success at writing: It has the power to change the instructor's role in a fundamental way; and it can enhance the instructor-student relationship, in turn increasing student success' (Edwards and Pula, 2008:11).

The following section explores Guided Writing. Guided Writing was chosen as an effective framework to implement assessment for learning strategies in writing lessons whilst also providing differentiated writing instruction for learners.

2.6 Guided Writing
For the purpose of this study, the definition of Guided Writing used, describes guided writing as small group instructional framework presented to students who share similar needs at a particular point in time (Fountas and Pinnell, 2001). Benefits of Guided Writing to both students and teachers are presented throughout the literature.

Guided Writing allows teachers the opportunity to provide in the moment guidance and provides an important context for assessment (Gibson, 2008a). Gibson (2008a) claims that by engaging in Guided Writing, a teacher will naturally engage in reflection and therefore improve a teacher's instructional interaction with students. Guided writing lessons provide opportunities

to observe and teach intensively. Guided writing lessons will help students to bridge the gap between whole-class writing instruction and independent writing.

Englert, Mariage and Dunsmore (2006) emphasise the collaborative nature of writing. There should be a gradual release of responsibility where teachers model and scaffold and then they should encourage pupils to engage in their own writing, solving problems that they face (Englert and Dunsmore, 2002). Guided Writing provides an effective framework to allow for this gradual release of responsibility.

Nelson and Calfee (1998) acknowledge the rhetorical and communicative functions, knowledge and cognitive processes shared by writing and reading. Clay (1998) emphasized the complementary relationship that exists between learning to read and learning to write. Therefore, the decision was made to use Guided Reading books as a stimulus for Guided Writing.

2.6.1 Instructional Procedures for Guided Writing
Gibson (2008b) describes four instructional procedures for Guided Writing: 1. Shared, Brief Experience 2. Discussion of Strategic Behaviour for Writing 3. Students' Time to Write Individually with Immediate Guidance from the Teacher 4. Step 4: Connecting Students' Immediate Writing to an Audience. This can be seen in Figure 2.1.
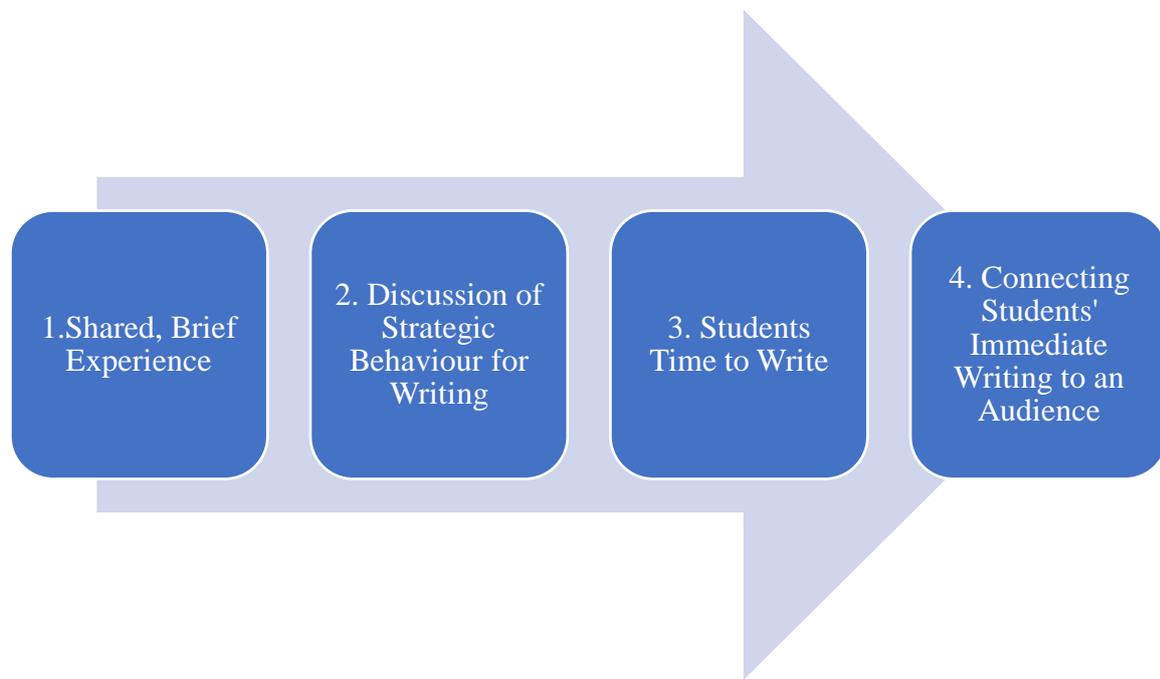
Figure 2.1 Instructional Procedures for Guided Writing adapted from Gibson (2008b)

Shared Brief Experience

Children are introduced to the writing task and be exposed to the language structures needed for the writing task. Instruction should be explicit.

Discussion of Strategic Behaviour for Writing

Strategic behaviour for writing is modelled by the teacher. Teachers need to ensure that there is context for writing tasks.

Students' Time to Write Individually with Immediate Guidance from the Teacher

Students are given time to write and practice what they have learned from the instruction from their teacher. The teacher scaffolds and focus the writer's attentions on how to improve their writing when necessary.

Connecting Students' Immediate Writing to an audience

Providing an immediate audience ensures that the context is revisited and allows learners an opportunity to reflect on their writing.

2.6.2 Assessment for Guided Writing Instruction
Effective instruction requires ongoing assessment practices. Notes made both during and after Guided Writing lessons help teachers plan for future lessons (Gibson, 2008b). Guided Writing is underpinned by AfL principles.

2.7 Conclusion
This literature review discussed AfL and differentiation, and how these practices are realised through the framework of Guided Writing.

Chapter Three presents an outline of this self-study action research project and the methodological approach and design that I chose to suit the aims of this project. The next chapter also discusses ethical considerations, the sampling strategy used, data collection and analysis, as well as reliability and validity.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction
The purpose of this chapter is to present an outline of this self-study action research project and the methodological approach and design that I used to suit the aims of this project. This self-study action research project aims to answer the research question '*To what extent can I adopt (AfL) strategies in order to effectively differentiate writing lessons*?*'.*

 In conjunction with the methodological approach and design of this project, this section also discusses ethical considerations, the sampling strategy used, data collection and analysis, as well as reliability and validity.

3.2 Self-Study Action Research
Firstly, I explore the characteristics of self-study action research and distinguish between this and action research. Secondly, I explore the role of critical reflection in self-study action research. Thirdly, I then explore the role of ontological and epistemological values and why these are relevant in self-study action research.

3.2.1 Self-Study as an Enquiry into my own practice
I enrolled in this Master of Education (Research in Practice) course so that I could investigate and improve my teaching through critical reflection. My research question is '*To what extent can I adopt (AfL) strategies in order to effectively differentiate writing lessons*?'. It was my intention to reflect on and critique my current practice. I wanted this process to lead to improved learning experiences for the children in my class**.** Therefore, this project involved an enquiry into my own practice. A significant element of this project is the concept of taking action to improve my practice. Garbett and Ovens (2016) describe self-study as an effective method for inquiry as it is profound and transformative for our practice as educators. Self-study is defined as an 'intentional and systematic inquiry into one's own practice (Dinkleman, 2013:8). Self-study has been heavily influenced by the areas of reflection and reflective practice (Lassonade, Galman and Kosnik, 2009). The idea of teacher as researcher arose from a body of research that established that teachers could scrutinize their teaching by reflecting on their practice and by becoming reflective practitioners (Schön, 1987).

Korthagen (1995) claims that the motive behind self-study as a method of research is that to 'combine the best of both worlds: the world of scientific research on education and the world of practice' (Korthagen, 1995 :100.) Samaras and Freese (2006) affirm that self-study enables teachers to understand their teaching and students' learning. When a practitioner engages in self -study they can express learning about their practice so that it becomes transformative for more than themselves (Loughran, 2005). The goal of self-study can be described as a way to investigate questions or issues that are 'individually important and of broader interest to the teacher education community' (Loughran, 2004:9).

Samaras and Freese (2006) claim that self-study is essential to developing teacher efficacy. When teachers critically reflect on their practice, they aspire to understand their teaching, becoming active participants in their own professional development and growth (Zeichner,

1999). La Boskey (2004) emphasises this idea of teacher identity as it facilitates the reconstruction and continuous development of a teachers' self-image. Samaras et al., (2004) advocate that self-study as effective for self-knowing, forming and reforming a professional identity Samaras and Freese (2006) recognise that teachers often realise a disparity between what they believe and their practice. Jack Whitehead (1989) names this disparity between one's philosophy and practice as a 'living contradiction'.

Dinkleman (2013) also considers the important role of the individual and collaborative groups to problem solve. Barnes (1998) identifies three key characteristics of self-study. These are openness, collaboration and reframing. He also argues that collaboration plays a critical role in self-study and that through collaboration can reframe problems from different perspectives. Berry and Crowe (2006) stress the importance of critical friends as fundamental elements of reliable self-study. Hamilton and Pinnegar (1998) argue that an important feature of having a group of critical friends that collaborate on research is the reframing of experience which Barnes (1998) describes as a crucial element of self-study. Self-study is intrinsically inclusive as it endeavours to find power within practice as it encourages practitioners themselves to be constructors of knowledge (Allender and Allender, 2008).

LaBoskey (2004) describes self-study as 'self-initiated and focused; it is improvement-aimed; it is interactive; it includes multiple, mainly qualitative, methods; and it defines validity as a validation process based in trustworthiness' (LaBoskey, 2004 :817).

3.2.2 Action Research and Self-Study
Action research has been described 'as a vehicle for systematic critical inquiry into one's self' (Feldman,Paugh and Mills, 2004:974). Through engaging in action research, I was enabled to critique my own practice and identify areas that I felt I needed to improve.

Lassonade et al., (2009) argue that action research and self-study are similar as they 'both methodologies, the researcher inquires into problems situated in practice, engages in cycles of research, and systematically collects and analyzes data to improve practice' (Lassonade et al.,2009: 5). LaBoskey (2004) and Samaras and Freese (2006) state that self-study involves more than this. It involves a personal narrative. Action research is concerned more with what a practitioner does whereas the emphasis of self-study is on the identity of the practitioner (Lassonade et al., 2009) as it focuses on both personal and professional improvement. However, action research can be described as a 'useful tool for self-study' (Feldman et al.,2004:970). Action research provides the methods to enact self-study.

3.3.3 Reflective Practice and Critical Reflection
Reflective practice and critical reflection are essential elements of self-study. Reflective practice can be defined as 'a set of abilities and skills, to indicate the taking of a critical stance, an orientation to problem solving or state of mind' (Moon,1999: 63). The term emerged from the work of Schön (1983), who highlighted the gap between formal theory and actual practice in professional realms. Schön advocated reflective practice as a method for reducing this gap and improving practice.

Critical reflection can be described as the link between thinking and doing. When critical reflection is meaningful it can be transformative (Dewey,1944; Schön,1983). It is a skill that can be learned though practice and feedback (Dewey,1933). Critical reflection can be described as the way in which we identify assumptions that influence and dictate our actions. It allows us to uncover the roots of these assumptions and develop alternative ways of acting (Cranton,1996).

Not all reflection is critical (Fook and Askeland, 2006). Critical reflection demands 'moving beyond the acquisition of new knowledge and understanding, into questioning [of] existing assumptions, values, and perspectives' (Cranton, 1996: 76). Brookfield (1988) proposes that

four elements are central to critical reflection: assumption analysis, contextual awareness, imaginative speculation, and reflective scepticism (Brookfield ,1988:325). Brookfield (1995) states that it is the focus on power that makes reflection critical.

Brookfield (2017) outlines that there are four lenses of critical reflection and that each one serves to 'illuminate a different part of our teaching' (Brookfield, 2017:62). The four lenses that he is referring to are 'students' eyes, colleagues' perceptions, theory, and personal experience' (Brookfield 2017:62). Badia (2017) states that combining these lenses with action research results in further improvement, as it allows educators to implement changes to solves identified issues. For reflection to be critical there needs to be possibility for changes (Cranton, 1996).

3.3.4 Role of Critical Reflection in self-study research

For critical reflection to be effective for our practice we should dedicate time to reflect and integrate learning. Self-Study research is 'embedded with deliberate acts of reflection that result in transformation of self, practices, and/or systems' (Phillips and Carr, 2010:7). The goal of teacher research is not to change others, but to reflect in order to achieve a better understanding of yourself and your role, and to make changes based on this understanding (Kraft, 1997 cited in Kraft 2002:177). Mezirow (1991) defends that for learning to be transformative, critical reflection is necessary.

Kraft (2002) stresses the importance of values and assumptions in the critical reflective process. She states that 'through conscious processing and bringing into question our beliefs (i.e., reflection) that we are able to change or transform our practices emerging from these belief '(Kraft, 2002:179).

The following section will examine the concept of developing a living theory (Whitehead, 1989) as a result of a self-study action research project.

3.4 Living Theory

A living theory is defined as 'an explanation produced by an individual for their educational influences in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formation in which they live and work' (Whitehead, 2008:104). A living theory is formed by asking the question 'how do I improve my practice? Whitehead (2009) emphasises the role of values in generating a living theory. Action research is developed further by living theory as it demonstrates how the researchers claim their knowledge has influenced their learning and the learning of others (Clerkin, 2009). Living theory accommodates uniqueness in research as it considers context and values and these values act as core standards of judgement (Whitehead and Mc Niff, 2006). Jove (2011) advocates the living theory method in action research but emphasises the importance of acknowledging 'living contradictions' (Whitehead, 1989). These refer to times when you were not living out your values in practice. She states that 'living contradictions' have to be made clear in action-research in the processes of self-reflection and action research. They have to be explored, since it contributes to learning, embodiment and the production of knowledge '(Jove, 2011:265). Bognar and Zovko (2008) highlight the necessity of values being chosen by the researchers themselves if these values are to be meaningful.

The fundamental components of this project are reflection, taking action and generating new learning (Figure 3.1). Therefore, it is my belief that is necessary to locate my research within the realms of self-study and action research.
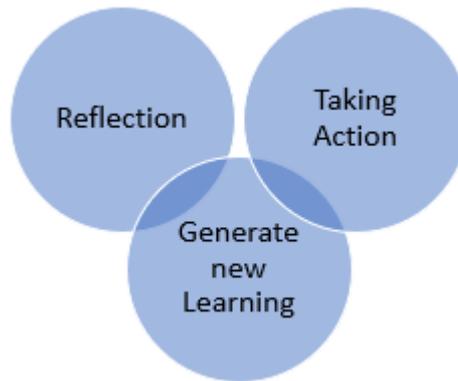
Figure 3.1 Fundamental Components of this Study

3.5 Ontology and Epistemology

The purpose of this section is to illustrate that the research methodology that I used, is aligned with my ontological and epistemological commitments. Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) state that 'who a researcher is, is central for what a researcher does' (Bullough and Pinnegar, 2001:13). Therefore, one of my main concerns about this project is to ensure that the methodology that I conducted the research within was in line with both my ontological and epistemological commitments.

Ontological assumptions can be defined as assumptions that 'concern the very nature or essence of the social phenomena being investigated' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007: 7). As stated, my core values are care, equity and integrity. I feel that this self-study approach encompasses my values and transforms my research into a living theory (Whitehead,1989). Hymer, Whitehead and Huxtable (2008) state that 'The school curriculum embodies our society's beliefs about educational knowledge, the received wisdoms of our generation and cultural expectations'(Hymer et al., 2008:68) and that 'As educators, we want to enable our students to develop skills, understandings and an appreciative recognition of themselves and others which will enable them to contribute to their own well-being and that of our community. We want to help them learn to know themselves as the persons they want to be, confident and competent to develop their talents and offer them as valued, valuable gifts which will contribute

to their living satisfying and productive lives' (Hymer et al., 2008: 69). In order to respond this responsibility, I wished to interrogate my practice as an educator and investigate how and where my values transcended in my practice and more interestingly, where they did not. I believe that 'Educational theory and research has profound implications for the future of humanity because it is based on values which are communicated, through our practice, to our students' (Hymer et al., 2008:69). By committing to this method of research I am opening a space for enquiry about how I interpret the world and interpret my own actions so that I can locate my practice within my 'concern for integrity and vocational commitment' (Hymer et al., 2008:70).

Epistemological assumptions can be described as ' the very bases of knowledge – its nature and forms, how it can be acquired, and how communicated to other human beings' (Cohen et al.,, 2007:7) and it has been stated that 'how aligns oneself in this particular debate profoundly affects how one will go about uncovering knowledge of social behaviour' (Cohen et al.,, 2007:7). As I hold a constructivist view of knowledge and knowledge creation, the idea of creating a story of my own living theory (Whitehead, 1989), validates this methodology for me. As 'self-study research supports theoretical growth, ongoing development, the production of knowledge, and the enhancement of self-confidence' (Lunenberg, Korthagen and Zwart, 2011:1), I believe that from practice comes theory, and that by taking an informed risk I can generate new ways of teaching.

Considering both my ontological and epistemological commitments I was satisfied that engaging in self-study action research was an appropriate method for me to enquire into my own practice.

The following section will discuss the ethical issues that did arise or could have potentially arisen in the course of undertaking this research.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

This section will discuss ethical issues such as informed consent, power dynamics and vulnerability. It will also outline information on research participants and data storage.

Prior to the commencement of this self-study action research project, aimed at answering my research question '*To what extent can I adopt (AfL) strategies in order to effectively differentiate writing lessons?*'. I submitted a proposal and an ethical approval form to the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education, Maynooth University. Ethical Approval was granted via e-mail on Monday 12th November 2018. Ethical conduct was a significant consideration for me, and it is my intention that the following paragraphs will illustrate this commitment.

3.6.1 Ethics

For the purpose of this section it is firstly necessary to explain what is meant by the term ethics. The term 'ethics usually refers to the moral principle and guiding conduct, which are held by a group or even a profession' (Wellington, 2015:540)

Hickey (2018) argues that if the objective of research is to discover or expand knowledge it is critical that the research does not harm participants in any way. Ethics were fundamental to ensure the integrity of the research project. As integrity is one of my core values this is an area that I spent a lot of time considering. It is important to note the sensitive nature of this research as this research is conducted with the children in my care for this academic year 'Sensitivity inheres not only in the educational topic under study, but also, much more significantly, in the social context in which the educational research takes place and on the likely consequences of that research on all parties'(Cohen et al.,2007: 120). As well as consulting the Maynooth University Ethics Policy, Maynooth University Research Integrity Policy and the   British Educational Research Association (BERA) Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2004) I also earnestly consulted the Department of Children and Youth Affairs Guidance for developing ethical research projects involving children (2012).

3.6.2 Free and informed consent
In order to carry out this research, I was aware that free and informed consent was necessary from the children in my care and their parents/guardians. Assent was sought from the children (Sage, 2018). Before I sought assent from the children, I sought informed consent from their parents/guardians. Assent is described as agreement to take part in research activities that may be given orally or in writing. I thoroughly researched this area and I knew that 'the onus is on the researcher to show that he or she has taken the steps necessary to ensure that the person whose consent is being sought has been given the requisite information and has been supported in developing an adequate understanding of the research' (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2012:2). Diener and Crandall (1978) describes four elements of informed consent: competence, voluntarism, full information and comprehension (Figure 3.2). I believe I did my utmost to respect each of these four aspects.
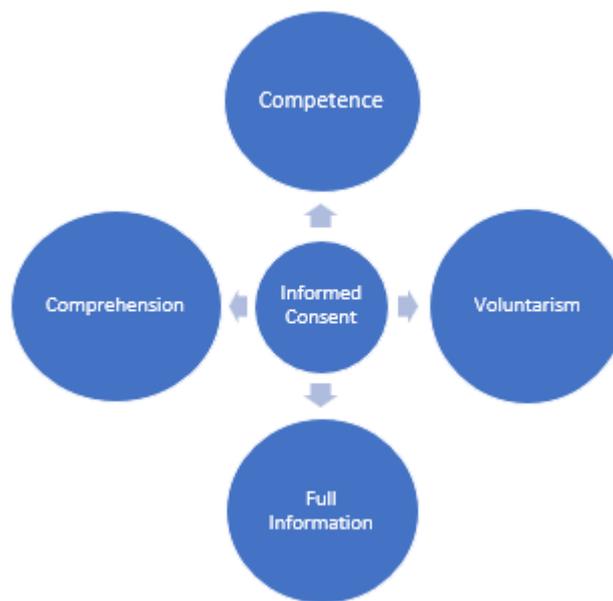
Figure 3.2 Elements of Free and Informed Consent adapted from Diener and Crandall (1978)

Competence

'Competence implies that responsible, mature individuals will make correct decisions if they are given the correct information' (Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2007:52). As this research involves children, consent was also sought from parents and guardians. In November 2018, I held an information session for the children in my class and their parents/guardians to inform them of my proposed research. I explained the purpose of this research project and the aims of the research. I emphasised that as this was a self-study research project, the focus was on me and my learning, and that I was hoping that through this project I could improve how I cater for their children's learning needs.

In January, both the children and their parents/guardians received an appropriate information letter and consent letter (Appendix 2) which was approved by the Maynooth University's Ethics Committee. The children's information letter included 'appropriate use of language, clear layout and larger than usual font' (Burton, Brundrett and Jones, 2011:57). This ensured that it was suitable and accessible to the children.

Voluntarism

Voluntarism means that 'participants freely choose to take part (or not)' (Cohen et al., 2007:52). Involvement in this self-study action research project was voluntary, I did not offer and incentives or rewards for taking part, or there were no penalties if the children and/or their parents/guardians did not wish to take part. The participants were informed in writing of their right to withdraw at any time as 'Researchers must recognize the right of any participant to withdraw from the research for any or no reason, and at any time, and they must inform them of this right' (BERA, 2004: 6). During the information session in November 2018, I explained to both the children and their parents/guardians that participation in this project was voluntary with no rewards or penalties involved. I also informed the children and their parents that they were free to withdraw from the research at any time.

Full information

To the best of my knowledge, all relevant information about the research was shared with the children and their parents/guardians. I supplied my university e-mail address should any of the parents/guardians or children have any additional questions.

Comprehension

As mentioned above, I held an information session and an information letter was sent to the children and their parents/guardians so that to the best of my knowledge 'all participants understand the nature of the research project' (Cohen et al.,2007:53).

3.6.3 Differential Power Relations

It is important to note that 'Research historically has been intimately connected with issues of power' (Grover, 2004:89). As I was the teacher in the classroom I was automatically in a position of power. I was very conscious of this. I explained to the children in my class that there was no personal gain for me if they participated in the research and I stressed the voluntary nature of their participation. I explained that the reason I decided to do this research was so that I can learn something new that would help me provide more appropriate writing lessons for them and that even without the research element I might have tried this out in our classroom anyway. I positioned myself as a learner parallel to my students in order to alleviate issues of power.

Grover (2004) states that there is no prescriptive method to give children a voice in social research, therefore alleviating power struggles. However, she affirms that by assuming a child centred approach, children are enabled to be active participants in the research process, and this then enhances their status as individuals with fundamental rights to participation in society. To respond to this, I want to relate back to my teaching philosophy which I discussed in Chapter Two. Child-centredness is one of my core beliefs about teaching and learning. I believe that a mutually respectful environment exists in our classroom and I feel that the children feel free to

voice their opinions. I believe that the atmosphere in our classroom contributed towards alleviating any power struggles.

Biesta (2009) believes that when children are involved in the research process, they are supported to be autonomous and independent in thinking and action. I wanted to afford the children the opportunity to become involved. This resonates with what Grover (2004) talks about when she says it is necessary to regard children as experts on their own experience. Therefore, I asked the children to write about their experience of Guided Writing to explain their thoughts and feelings about the intervention.

By assuming this stance, and by approaching the research in the manner that I did, I believe I did not provoke any power struggles. However, although I endeavoured 'to lessen the power differential between children and adult researchers, the difference will remain' (Cohen et al., 2007:54). I believe it is not possible for me to guarantee that there were no power issues, as stated earlier I was in a position of power already by being the class teacher.

3.6.4 Veracity

Veracity Is concerned with 'the concepts of truth about the research study and the absence of deception. Individuals have the right to be told the truth and not to be deceived about any aspect of the research' (Nursing and Midwife Board, 2015: 8). As mentioned earlier, to the best of my knowledge I shared all relevant information with the participants. In my reflective journal, I recorded my true reflections of events and I did not alter or change any data. All observations were truthful and represented my thoughts and observations in the moment. In my discussions with critical friends I sincerely considered their feedback and was honest about my thoughts and feelings over the course of the research.

3.6.5 Privacy: Anonymity and Confidentiality

In the context of research, privacy has been defined as 'all information relating to a person's physical and mental condition, personal circumstances and social relationships which is not

already in the public domain. It gives to the individual or collectivity the freedom to decide for themselves when and where, in what circumstances and to what extent their personal attitudes, opinions, habits, eccentricities, doubts and fears are to be communicated to or withheld from others.' (Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 1981, cited in Cohen et al., 2007). In the information letters and consent letters, I assured all participants that the name of the school and individuals would not be used as 'Researchers must recognize the participants' entitlement to privacy and must accord them their rights to confidentiality and anonymity, (BERA, 2004:70). I endeavoured to secure anonymity using pseudonyms (Ogden, 2008). I asked the children to create their own pseudonyms which I explained I would use when I was publishing their data. In order to promise confidentiality, I explained to the children and their parents that although I can identify participants from the information given, I will not make the connection known publicly (Cohen et al.,2007). However, at the information meeting I informed the children and their parents/guardians that if a disclosure was made or any child protection issues arose over the course of the research the agreement of confidentiality and anonymity would have to be revoked.

Data was stored in line with recommendations in the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Data Protection Policy in my school. I discussed the subject of data storage at the information meeting in November 2018. During the school day, outside of Guided Writing lessons, data pertaining to this research was stored in a locked press in my classroom. At other times, for example when writing Chapter Four, Data analysis, data was stored in my home and was not shared with any other individuals. I explained that the data collected could be made available to the school principal, my critical friends and my Thesis Supervisor.

The following section discussed research paradigms and a rationale is provided for locating this self-study action research project within the interpretivist research paradigm.

3.7 Research Paradigm

This section outlines what is meant by a research paradigm. This research project is located within the Interpretivist paradigm and the features of this research paradigm are discussed.

3.7.1 Definition of a research paradigm

Guba and Lincoln (1994) define a paradigm as beliefs or a view of the world that influences. research action. A paradigm is a way of describing ontology, epistemology and axiology (Patton,2002). Lincoln and Guba (1985) present four elements in a research paradigm- epistemology, ontology, methodology and axiology. Ontology in research can be described as that which 'examines your underlying belief system as the researcher, about the nature of being and existence' (Kivunji and Kuyini, 2017:27). Scott and Usher (2004) claim that ontology is a fundamental element of a paradigm as it aims to understand the world as it is interpreted. Epistemology is an integral element of a research paradigm as 'it helps you to establish the faith you put in your data. It affects how you will go about uncovering knowledge in the social context that you will investigate' (Kivunji and Kuyini, 2017:27). It 'focuses on the nature of human knowledge and comprehension that you, as the researcher or knower, can possibly acquire so as to be able to extend, broaden and deepen understanding in your field of research.' (Kivunji and Kuyini: 2017:27). Axiology refers to the ethical issues that need to be considered when planning research (Kivunji and Kuyini, 2017:27). Axiology of education is described as 'the question of what education might work for' (Biesta, 2015:13)

The following sections are concerned with the research methodology for this research project. It was necessary to locate my research within a particular research paradigm as my methodologies were 'guided by philosophical beliefs about the nature of reality, knowledge, and values and by the theoretical framework that informs comprehension, interpretation, choice of literature and research practice on a given topic of study' (Chilisa, 2012 :3).

3.7.2 Interpretivist Research Paradigm
Candy (1989) suggests that there are three main research paradigms- Positivist, Interpretivist, and Critical paradigms. However, Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) nominate a fourth paradigm, known as the Pragmatic paradigm. For the purpose of this research I am locating this self-study action research project within the realms of the interpretivist research paradigm.

Research in the interpretivist paradigm aims to understand social phenomena through the 'eyes of the participants rather than the researcher' (Cohen et al., 2007:21). Context is an integral component in this research paradigm. Although this is as self-study project, and I am focused on myself, the students in my class are an integral motivation for conducting this research. (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998) A key feature of the interpretivist paradigm is that reality is socially constructed. There is an emphasis on understanding the subject rather than the perspective of the observer.

My research question '*To what extent can I adopt (AfL) strategies in order to effectively differentiate writing lessons*?'. I have embarked on this self-study journey in order to improve my use of assessment to improve learning experiences for the children in my class and empower them through these learning experiences. In the interpretivist research paradigm, theory does not lead research but rather research informs theory (Kivunji and Kuyini, 2017). Interpretivists collect mostly qualitative data from participants over an extended period (Rehman and Alharthi,2016). This resonates with the research instruments that I employed, which generated qualitative data.

Morgan, (2007) outlines the following characteristics for research conducted within the interpretivist research paradigm.

- The admission that the social world cannot be understood from the standpoint of an individual.

- The belief that realities are multiple and socially constructed.

- The acceptance that there is inevitable interaction between the researcher and his or her research participants

- The acceptance that context is vital for knowledge and knowing.

- The belief that knowledge is created by the findings, can be value laden and the values need to be made explicit.

- The need to understand the individual rather than universal laws.

- The belief that causes and effects are mutually interdependent.

- The belief that contextual factors need to be taken into consideration in any systematic pursuit of understanding.

The purpose of this self-study action research study for me is to firstly empower myself as a teacher by positioning myself as a researcher of my own practice and secondly, to empower my students by designing writing lessons that are specific to their needs. I have highlighted the centrality of my values in this research and the importance of giving the children in my class a voice during this research. I believe that this justifies my research to be within the realms of the interpretivist paradigm.

Guba and Lincoln (1994) describe a set of criteria to determine the trustworthiness of interpretive research. These are: credibility (internal validity), transferability (external validity), dependability (reliability) and confirmability (objectivity) (Guba and Lincoln, 1994:114). These will be discussed in detail later in this chapter. I believe that I was authentic and conscientious in my endeavours for closeness to truth. I described the steps and methods of this study in detail. Therefore, I believe that my self-study action research project possesses aspects of the quality criteria described by Guba and Lincoln (1994).

The following section outlines the three research instruments I decided to use in order to generate data for this self-study action research project.

3.8 Research Instruments

In this section qualitative date is discussed. I then outline unstructured observations, reflective journaling and writing samples as these were the research instruments I used during this research project.

3.8.1 Qualitative Data

For the purpose of this research project I define and justify the three research instruments that used. I decided to use three qualitative method approaches in order to answer my research question *'To what extent can I adopt (AfL) strategies in order to effectively differentiate writing lessons?'*.

Bogdan and Biklen (2006) affirm that qualitative research places an emphasis on the importance of meaning and process in order to better understand humanity. This conforms with locating this project within the interpretivist research paradigm. Richardson (1992) identifies 'the subject matter of qualitative research was the lived experience of the researcher' (Richardson, 1992:125) and that those undertaking qualitative research possess 'a set of norms and values regarding what should be studied and how it should be studied and communicated' (Richardson, 1992: 125). What is described here, resonates with me as a research method that embodies what self-study action research is about. I reviewed and researched a variety of research instruments such as interviews, audio recordings, journals and observations. As a result of this review, I decided that I would implore the use of unstructured observations, journaling and writing samples (Figure 3.3). I consider these methods of data collection as the most suitable methods for eliciting relevant data which addressed my research question as the qualitative researcher 'aims to catch the dynamic nature of events, to see intentionality, to seek trends and patterns over time' (Cohen et al.,2007:397).
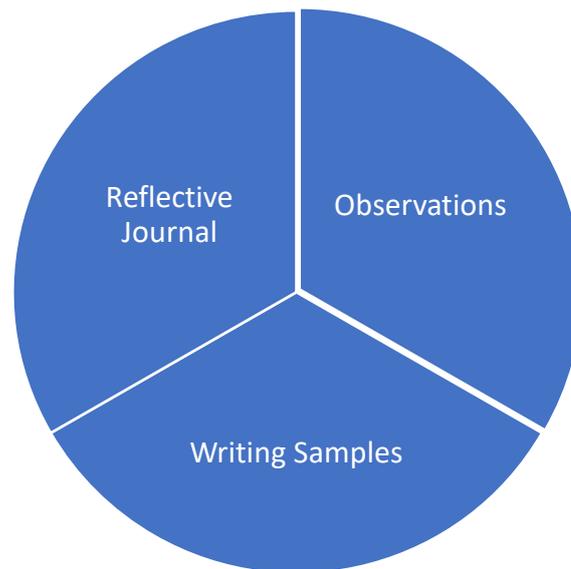
Figure 3.3 Qualitative Data Collection Methods

3.8.2 Unstructured Observations

Observation can be described as 'The Natural Tool of the educational profession' (Burton et al., 2011: 96). Taking advantage of the innate nature of observation, meant that for me, data collection was manageable and consistent as it was expanding the scope of a practice that was already well established in my practice. It is an effective research tool as it enables the researcher to immerse themselves in the research environment (Burton et al., 2011). I was recording in the moment, describing what I thought there and then, without time for analysing and hypothesising.

Observation is an effective method as it can 'provide evidence as to what is happening ' (Campbell, MacNamara and Gilroy,2004:94) and that '94).I believe that the freedom of unstructured observations enabled me to look at the bigger picture and record what I was experiencing rather than losing out on information because it didn't fit into a particular box.

The unstructured observations served a dual role over the course of the research. Firstly, to inform planning for writing lessons over the course of this study. Secondly, they sometimes

served as a stimulus for reflections in my reflective journal. I recorded observation notes during

Guided Writing sessions. I recorded these observations on the same page where I planned

lessons. Below is an image showing a Guided Writing lesson plan and observation record.

Image 3.1 Guided Writing Lesson Plan

In my opinion, the use of unstructured observations brought a sense of authenticity that other

research instruments would not, as it was a true representation of what was happening. The act

of recording observations is one I am familiar with. I did not feel burdened with the task of

collecting the data for the purpose of this research project. Therefore, I think the credibility of

these observations is elevated.

3.8.3 Reflective Journaling

Reflective practice was an integral part of this research project. Dewey (1933) describes

reflective practice as an intentional and continuous way to think about our actions. By engaging

in reflective practice, as a teacher, it enables us to find ways to improve our practice (Thompson

and Pascal, 2012). Over the course of this research I recorded my reflections in a reflective

journal, which was recommended by lecturers.

Moon (1999) and Holly and McLoughlin (1989) support two main systems to ensure reflection is meaningful and proactive. Firstly, writing as a form as reflection and secondly, engaging in dialogue with colleagues and other professionals. Holly and McLoughlin (1989) state that time must be given to ensure that reflection is worthwhile. Finding this time and choosing what to reflect on was sometimes a challenge, and knowing if it was meaningful enough, or relevant enough was a difficulty I encountered. This is in agreement with what Shockley et al., (2008) found in their research. They reported that many teachers feel that they have limited opportunities for reflection on their practice as a result of the demands of teaching (Shockley, et al., 2008)

The context in which reflection occurs has been described as having a significant influence on learning and reflection (Boud and Walker, 1998). I think that it is imperative to once again state that I work in a disadvantaged area. Howard (2003) defends that teachers who work in disadvantaged areas will experience 'immeasurable benefits' when they engage in the critically reflective process.

As mentioned above, engaging with a reflective journal is a method by which to undertake reflective practice. A reflective journal refers to 'a teacher's or a student teacher's written response to teaching event' (Richards and Lockhart, 1994:7) Casanave (2013) regards a journal entry as reflective when it (1)engages the writer's feelings, emotions, interests, or curiosities; (2) connect writer with something (e.g., with another aspect of the self, with another idea, with another person, with experiences and subject matter); and (3) helps the writer develop the awareness needed to understand the self, an experience, an idea, or an event in expanded ways' (Casanave, 2013: 8).

Reflective journals are effective because they can aid 'teachers identify important insights about their teaching and how to improve their classroom practices' (Zulfikar and

Mujiburrahman, 2018:2). Reflective journals are useful as they can produce pertinent data (Zulfikar and Mujiburrahman, 2018). Bolton (2001) states that for journal writing to be proactive, perspective dialogue is essential. Once I began my intervention, and was talking more with my critical friends, writing in my reflective journal became easier and the entries were meaningful. Reflective journals have been proven to be effective and have affected teachers in their classroom practices, their perceptions around interactions between students and teachers and their methodologies (Zulfikar and Mujiburrahman, 2018).

Writing a reflective journal has been a vehicle for me to uncover aspects of identity on both a personal and professional level. I adopted Moon (2004) framework for critical reflection. This framework suited me because it is not prescriptive. Moon (2004) explains different levels of reflective writing and I find that I can naturally locate my writing within these. Moon (2004) model is about noticing, making sense, making meaning, working with meaning leading to transformative learning (Figure 3. 4).

Figure 3. 4 Framework for Critical Reflection adapted from Moon (2004)

The transformative learning has been three-fold. Firstly, keeping a reflective journal has allowed me to record my reflections and this has enabled me to take informed actions (Brookfield,1995). These actions are based on assumptions that I have conscientiously and

critically explored. Secondly, it has enabled me to minimise self-laceration (Brookfield,1995) and not to blame myself entirely when students are not learning and acknowledging that some of the causes can be social or political. Thirdly, I think that keeping a reflective journal has grounded me emotionally and has served as a space for me to reconnect with my beliefs about teaching and believe in myself as a teacher (Brookfield, 1995).

3.8.4 Writing Samples

Using children's writing samples makes research 'practical, meaningful and relevant' (Baumfield et al., 2013:13). Mackenzie, Scull and Munzie (2013) propose that analysing children's writing samples has the potential to assist classroom teachers recognise changes in students' writing, help teachers to provide feedback to students, and can also support teaching decisions.

The following section explains, in detail, the structure of Guided Writing and how it was implemented into my classroom.

3. 9 Pedagogical Intervention

My aim was to improve how I use assessment to cater more effectively for the diverse learning needs of the children in my class. My research question was *'To what extent can I adopt (AfL) strategies in order to effectively differentiate writing lessons?'*.

I chose to focus on writing lessons, as in my class, I felt that this was an area I had neglected also an area where the vast differences in learning needs and abilities were most apparent.

Writing is a foundational literacy skill, critical to children's general literacy skills (Cutler and Graham, 2008). As a result of my research, much of the literature focused on the relationship between reading and writing (Calkins, 1994; Shanahan and Lomax, 1986). Elbow (2004) argues that writing is a skill that is critical to reading attainment.

Guided Reading is currently an established practice in my classroom. As a result of this I decided to use the 'Engage Literacy Programme' which is currently in use in our school as a stimulus for writing lessons. I saw an opportunity to optimise resources that were already in use. The children were grouped into four ability groups.
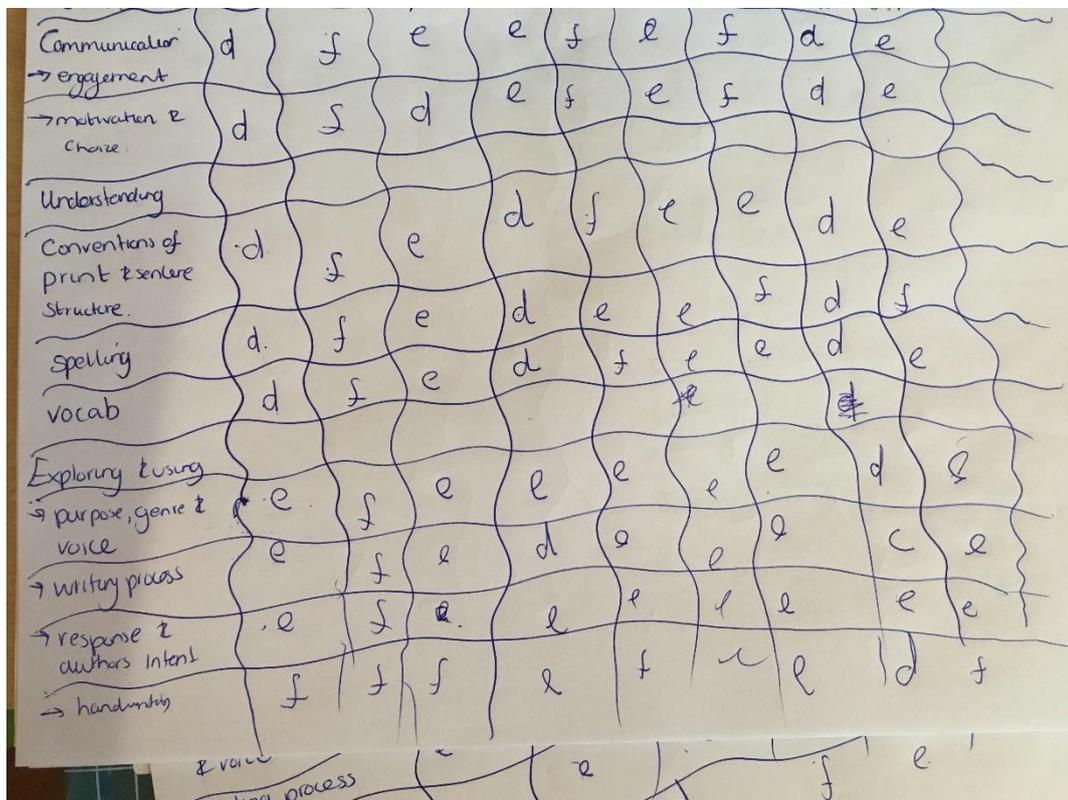
Image 3.2 Initial Assessment of Writing

The image above depicts how I assessed the initial piece of writing the children completed in January. The writing samples were assessed using The New Primary Language Curriculum Progression Milestones for Writing. I grouped the children using this assessment data. The groups were identical to their guided reading groups which had been assessed using running records. Clay (1998) emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between learning to read and learning to write. My critical friends also assessed the writing samples independently and agreed with the groupings of children.

These groups were colour coded: Blue, Yellow, Red and Green. Guided Writing took place four times a week for approximately forty minutes. I began Guided Writing with my class on the 21st January 2019 and Guided Writing continued until 3rd May 2019.

As mentioned above, the Guided Writing Groups and Guided Reading groups were the same. If a group had guided reading with me on a particular day, they would then have guided writing with me, using the book they had read as a stimulus for writing. The same book/piece of writing was used throughout the week. During the interim evaluation, it was noted that the set-up of Guided Writing stations was time consuming. I then introduced a visual timetable which aided the children in knowing what activity they were doing.

Image 3.3 Visual Timetable

I read and wrote with two groups each day, meaning that each group had two writing sessions with me per week. When children were not writing with me, they were engaged in independent activities. I planned for Guided Writing lesson and Guided Reading lessons simultaneously. Information gathered during one session was used to inform planning for subsequent sessions. Resources from the Engage Literacy Programme (Image 3.4) informed my planning.

Image 3.4 Resources from Engage Literacy Programme

3.10 Sample

For the purpose of this research project I engaged in convenience sampling (Cohen et al., 2007).

The participants were the children in my class whom I taught, and colleagues whom I work

with. The sample size is sixteen children. Eighteen consent forms were sent home. Two forms

were discounted because they were not returned.

3. 11 Data Collection and Analysis

As outlined earlier in this chapter, I used three qualitative data collection methods. The

following paragraphs summarise the data collection process and the analysis of data gathered.

3.11.1 Data Collection
Writing samples

The children completed a piece of free writing on Monday 14th January. The children were

given thirty minutes to complete this piece of free writing. These were then assessed by me,

using the New Primary Language Curriculum Milestones as an assessment tool. I used this

assessment information to divide the class into four ability groups. The writing samples and

grouping were reviewed by my critical friends, who agreed with the group allocations.

Journaling

I initially tried to engage with my reflective journal daily. As mentioned earlier, I struggled

with recording entries in my reflective journal.   I spent so much time wondering what I should

write, worrying about how it sounded, just generally feeling like I had to write something.

Finlay (2008) describes this as one of the main pedagogical concerns of critical reflection, the 'extent to which forcing students to reflect may prove counterproductive' (Finlay, 2008:13). I was desperate to write so that I would have data. I genuinely appreciate the value of reflective journals and of the data that they generate. However, at the initial stages of this research project I was not regularly writing in my journal as I knew that the data wouldn't be authentic and genuine. At the beginning of this project I didn't feel that I was equipped with the skills of critical reflection. This echoes what Shockley et al., (2008) found in their study- teachers reported that they were unfamiliar with the 'how to' of being a reflective practitioner. The obligatory nature of keeping a reflective journal was initially a restriction. It has been stated that 'conditions under which journal writing takes place can have a powerful influence on what is produced and the extent to which writers can engage in critical reflection (Boud 2001:17). When I felt like I had something to write about I wrote in my journal. There were times when I was aware, I hadn't been engaging with my reflective journal and in order to stimulate writing I simply typed 'Reflective Questions for Teachers' into my search engine and used these as inspiration.

On a fortnightly basis, along with my other curriculum planning, I generally reviewed these reflections, and this led to further insights and new perspectives (Moon,1999;Holly and McLoughin,1989). During the interim evaluation, I spent some time looking for re-occurring patterns and themes that were emerging from my reflections I used these to further enhance the next cycle.

Observations

Observation notes were recorded during Guided Writing lessons. Each group worked with me twice a week. Once again, when I was planning on a fortnightly basis, I reviewed observation notes to inform my planning for subsequent sessions. Sometimes, observations served as a stimulus for reflections.

3.11.2 Data Analysis

Data analysis in qualitative research involves 'organizing, accounting for and explaining the data' (Cohen et al., 2007: 461). Analysing qualitative data can be complex because it requires two very different skills. Analysing qualitative data requires you 'be systematic and meticulous on the one hand and yet on the other creative '(Strauss and Corbin, 1998 cited in Campbell et al., 2004:130). As stated earlier in this chapter, I have located this self-study research project within the realms of the interpretivist paradigm. Data gathered and analysed in this paradigm is generally associated with grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). However, I instead chose, to analyse the data I collected using thematic analysis.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis can be defined as a 'method for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning ('themes') within qualitative data' (Braun and Clarke, 2006:297). Braun and Clarke state that that thematic analysis should be viewed as a foundational method for qualitative analysis as it affords important skills that are beneficial for other forms of qualitative analysis. Thematic analysis is valuable for encapsulating important characteristics of a large data set, because in order to handle the data the researcher must have a well-structured approach, which then leads to a coherent report of data findings (King, 2004). Nowell et al., (2004) appraise the flexible nature of thematic analysis. However, Holloway and Todres (2003), believe that this flexibility can lead to discrepancies and an absence of consisting when determining themes from the research data. Holloway and Todres (2003) acknowledge that if the research makes their epistemological position clear then the accuracy and consistency of thematic analysis can be improved.

A theme is described as something that 'captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the

data set' (Braun and Clarke, 2006:10). If a piece of data captures something relevant in relation to the research question, for me in my analysis of the data, it became a theme.

Thematic analysis involves 'a constant moving back and forward between the entire data set, the coded extracts of data that you are analysing, and the analysis of the data that you are producing' (Braun and Clarke, 2006:15).

Nowell et al., (2017) present a linear adaptation of Braun and Clarke (2006) approach for thematic analysis. I have represented this approach in Figure 3. 5. They emphasise the reflective nature of thematic analysis although it is presented in linear form.

Phase 1 • Familiarising yourself with your data

Phase 2 • Generating Initial Codes

Phase 3 • Searching for Themes

Phase 4 • Reviewing Themes

Phase 5 • Defining and Naming Themes

Phase 6 • Producing the Report
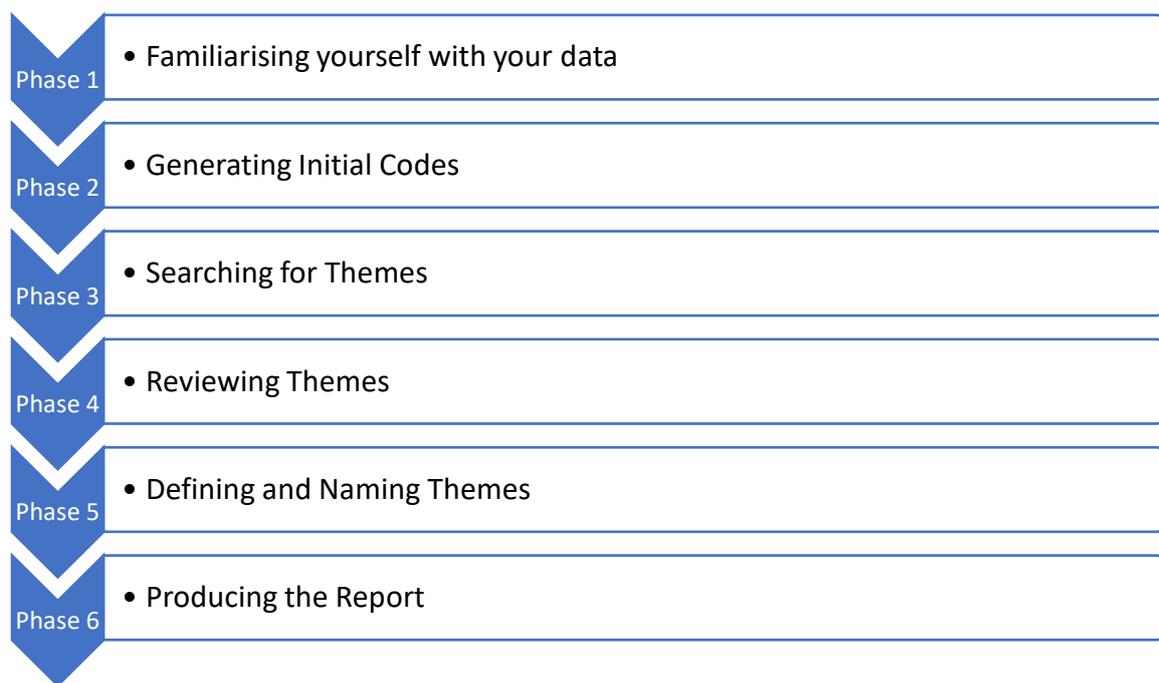
Figure 3. 5 Approach for Thematic Analysis adapted from Nowell et al., (2017)

3.12 Reliability and Validity

In this section I will define what is meant by reliability and validity. I will then detail how I ensured reliability and validity during this research project.

Reliability refers to 'the consistency of the scores/results when a data collection tool…is administered on different occasions' (Lankshear and Knobel, 2010:161). Validity refers to 'the

meaningfulness of the results. It is concerned with a judgement regarding how well a data collection tool measures what it claims to measure' (Lankshear and Knobel, 2010). In order to ensure reliability and validity I engaged in triangulation. Triangulation is described as a multi-method approach to social research (Cohen et al.,2007). Campbell et al., (2004) describe four types of triangulation; methodological, investigator, theory and data. I fulfilled these in the following ways.

Methodological

I collected data from more than one source e.g. reflective journal, observation notes, and samples of work.

Investigator

I documented my observations during lessons and reflected on these in my reflective journal. I sought opinions from my critical friends.

Theory

I researched differing theories about what I am observing and consider them against my own observations.

Data

I collected data from different people, such as my critical friends and the children themselves. I also collected data at different times for example sometimes I wrote in my reflective journal in the evenings or on the weekends.

3.12.1 Critical friends

I invited three colleagues to become my critical friends. I chose the school principal, the Home School and Community Liaison Officer and the Literacy Post Holder as I feel that all three of these people can positively contribute to this research project as 'the cross-checking and the fathering of differing perceptions about research is an essential way of ensuring reliability and authenticity' (Campbell et al.,2004:85).

3.13 Conclusion

This chapter presented an outline of this self-study action research project and the methodological approach and design that I used to suit the aims of this project. This section also discussed ethical considerations, the sampling strategy used, data collection and analysis, as well as reliability and validity.

In Chapter Four, I analyse the data that was collected over the course of this self-study action research project. I articulate my findings as a result of this self-study action research project.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Discussion

4. 1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse the data that was collected over the course of this research project. In this chapter, I articulate my findings as a result of this research project (Figure 4.1). I discuss my critical reflections throughout the process and provide an evaluation of my research in terms of the living out of my values in my practice. I describe the main findings from the research and critically analyse these findings whilst making use of relevant literature. Data was derived from my reflective journal, observations and lesson notes and samples of children's work. My critical friends also supplied notes that they took over the course of the project. The main findings are outlined in Figure 4.1 below.

Finding 1
- Guided Writing, enabled me to create an environment for differentiated writing instruction.

Finding 2
- Guided Writing provided me with a way of motivating and engaging children in writing.

Finding 3
- Through the self-study process I am now more critically aware of my professional identity and values.
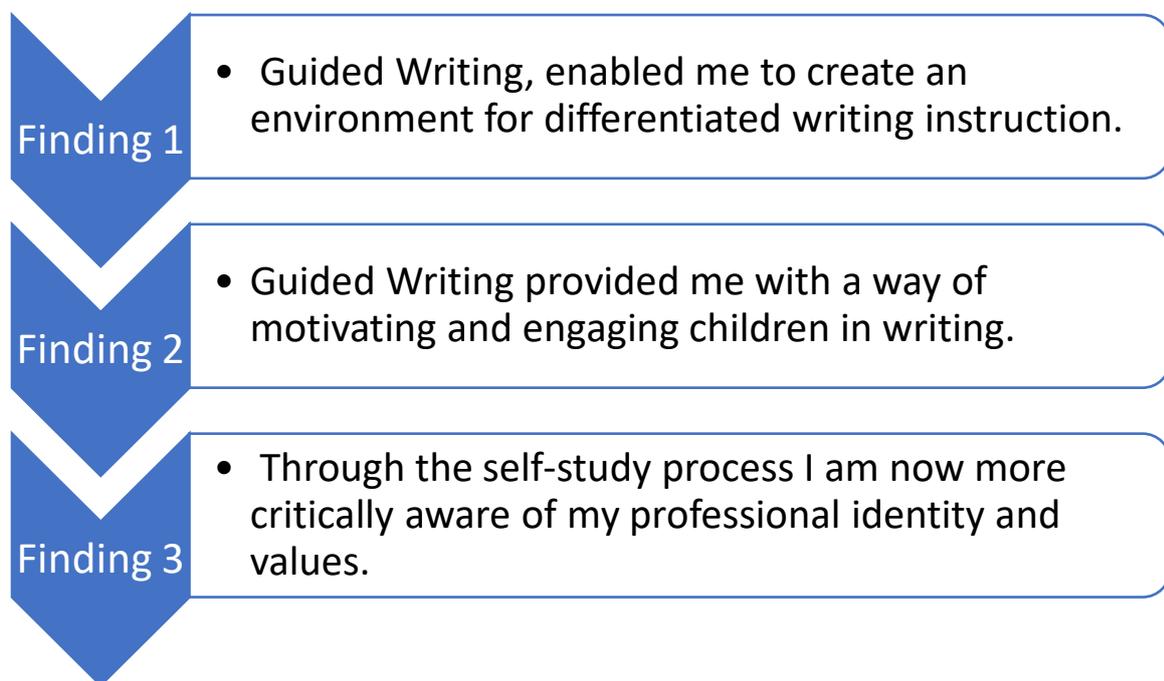
Figure 4. 1 Main Findings

The next section outlines how I used thematic analysis to analyse the data collected and subsequently, the three main findings will be discussed.

4.2 Data Analysis

As mentioned in Chapter Three, I used a linear approach to thematic analysis informed by

Nowell et al., (2017) which describes six phases in the analysis process (Figure 4.2).
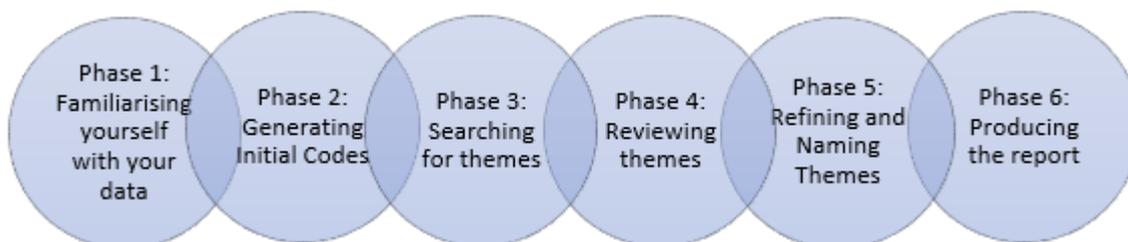
Figure 4.2 Stages of Data Analysis

Phase 1: Familiarising yourself with your data

I read through my reflective journal thoroughly to look for meanings and patterns. I found this

process difficult as it was very personal. I repeatedly read over the entries and over time,

discovered emerging patterns. I also read through my observation notes and found this was

easier than the study of my reflective journal as it wasn't as personal. However, because there

wasn't as much content (the notes were written in short-hand) the patterns emerged at a much

slower pace. When reading the children's writing samples, I was quickly able to identify

patterns and I had a sense of codes and themes that would emerge, even at this early stage of

data analysis. Although I had been consulting my data over the course of the project, it wasn't

until May 2019 that I did this for the intended purpose of thematic analysis.

Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes

Once I familiarised with the data set, I reread the data and began to code it. Codes 'identify a

feature of the data that appears interesting to the analyst' (Braun and Clarke, 2006:18). I coded

the data manually with highlighters or when I identified a code, I wrote it down. The codes

identified at this early stage can be seen in Figure 4.3.

Reflective Journal

Expectations ,No time ,Powerless ,Frustrated, Policy, choice,pressure, Confidence

Different ways , Self-deprication, Listening, Vulnerability

Child centred, Needs, Care ,Integrity ,Equity ,Support ,Differentiate, Independent

Codes

Observation Notes

Motivated,Enjoyment, support, independent, differentiate,needs

Writing Samples

Fun, time, self-awareness, small group, pride, teacher support, enjoyment

Figure 4.3 Initial Codes

Phase 3: Searching for themes

In order to search for themes, I studied the codes and grouped similar codes together. These then became potential themes. For example, figure 4.4. illustrates the codes that led to the theme 'Learning Environment'.

Figure 4.4 Codes that led to the theme 'Learning Environment'.

Through this process I identified six potential themes (Figure 4.5).
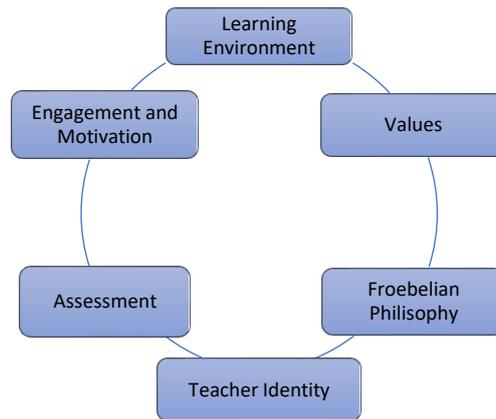
Figure 4.5 Six Potential Themes at Phase 3 of Thematic Analysis

Phase 4: Reviewing themes

I reviewed each of the themes and the related codes. I read over all the coded pieces of data for each theme. Some themes did not have enough data to support them and others were too similar to each other. I then considered the validity of the themes in relation to the entire data set.

Phase 5: Refining and Naming Themes

I once again revised the collected data extracts for each theme and organised them in a way that made sense. At this stage I felt that the themes were ready to be analysed in a detailed manner. Once done, I selected three main themes (Figure 4.6) that in my view reflected the story of the data and my experience of this self-study action research project. I feel that the themes that I selected accurately tell the story of the data.
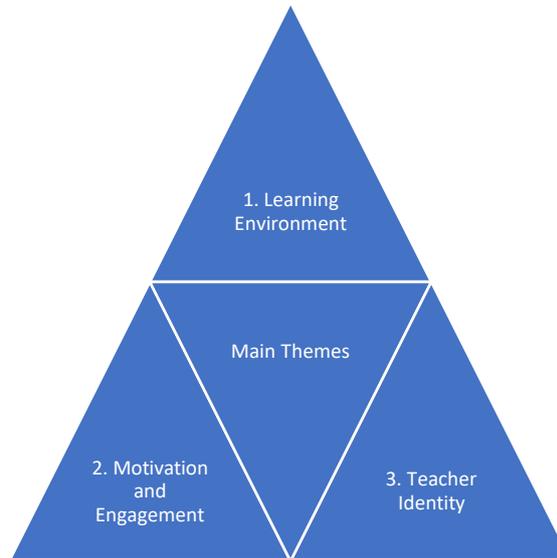
Figure 4.6 Main Themes Emerging from Thematic Analysis of Data

Phase 6: Producing the report

At this stage I wanted illustrate the story of my data and provide findings in relation to my research question '*To what extent can I adopt (AfL) strategies in order to effectively differentiate writing lessons*?'. Identifying three main themes from the data enabled me to articulate my findings.

4.3 Main Findings

This section will discuss, in detail, the three main research findings (Figure 4.7). I will discuss each finding making use of relevant literature.
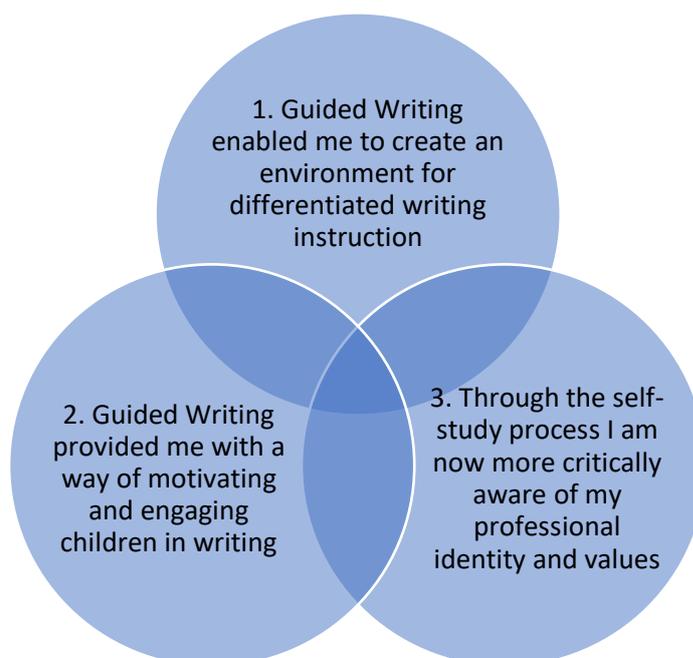
Figure 4.7 Main Findings

4.3.1. Main Finding 1: Guided Writing enabled me to create an environment for differentiated writing instruction

My original research question was '*To what extent can I as a teacher enhance how I use Assessment for Learning (AfL) in order to effectively differentiate writing lessons?'*. Therefore, one of the main aims of the research was to find a practical and effective way to effectively differentiate for the diverse needs of the students in my class. Having reflected on this journey and examined the data I believe that this aim was achieved through this research. My core values of care, equity and integrity have also been realised through this finding. The key components of creating an effective learning environment that emerged through the research can are:

- Children are grouped according to ability

- Lessons have a clear structure

- Instruction is informed by observations

The following paragraphs outline the components of an effective learning environment, from my experience.

Children are grouped according to ability

Slavin (1987) identifies within-class ability grouping as an important factor in raising the performance of children in mixed-ability classrooms. The purpose of within-class ability groups is to improve achievement and reduce the gap between students of different ability levels, which is done through differentiation of instruction (Lleras and Rangel, 2009). Much of the research acknowledges the benefit of this style of grouping in areas of socio-economic disadvantage (Lleras and Rangel, 2009).

I initially assessed a piece of the children's' writing and grouped the children into four ability groups. I found that this was a suitable structure for me as a teacher and the children as learners because, as with fewer students, they were engaged and I was able to adapt content and materials (Tiesto, 2003). Puzio and Colby (2010) are supporters of this way of grouping children, arguing that it provides for the diverse needs of students and that it has the potential to raise the achievement levels on a whole class level. In my experience, this thinking applied to all four groups. As each group was receiving instruction based on their needs, they were making measurable progress each week and were building on skills and techniques in a meaningful way. It particularly enabled me to challenge more able children 'It's been a great opportunity to challenge the children that, for the most part, find writing tasks easy. It's teaching them new skills such as perseverance. I think it's also giving them an insight into how it might feel for others to find something hard and to struggle. It's helping to create a new atmosphere in the classroom' (Colgan, 2019a).

 Nomi (2009) argues against within-class ability grouping and warns against its use as it may negatively impact achievement particularly for children in the lower ability groups. My study

does not support this view. As lessons and instruction were specifically targeted to meet the needs to the group, the children were able to access the content and able to achieve. This differs greatly from my experience of whole class writing instruction where some children consistently struggled and rarely achieved success. On the 2nd May 2019 I reflected on a writing lesson 'I cannot believe how much progress this group have made. When I was working with them today and saw that they were implementing skills into their writing that we have been working on I just realised how amazing it was to have been able to work with this group on the simple things that were huge barriers for them to make progress in their writing' (Colgan, 2019a). My critical friend observed this lesson, and, in her observation, she wrote 'the group are achieving and writing something meaningful, it's exactly where they are at' (Colgan, 2019c). This observation helped to confirm that using this style of grouping enables me to live out my core value of equity in my practice. Equity remains as one of my core values, and so it was something I was conscious of throughout my research. Reflecting on Nomi's (2009) work, suggesting that ability grouping impacts negatively for children in the lower ability groups I wrote 'What I read yesterday has been on my mind and is making me rethink my whole goal which is to be more equitable. I talked with one of my critical friends on the literacy at committee and talked through my idea. From talking I realised that my intentions were good. My critical friend emphasises that this is something that I will be trying to see how it works and that I can feel like I am acting with integrity as I am making an informed decision to try this structure out because the way I am teaching writing at the moment isn't working for me or the children' (Colgan, 2019a,).

Ella, one of my students, wrote 'I feel like a good writer and I like working in small groups'. In my reflective journal I wrote 'I definitely think that in this context for my class having the children in small groups…is really increasing confidence levels…I'm seeing a huge change in how they engage' (Colgan, 2019).

These observations are borne out when I look at other writing the children are doing, separate to Guided Writing. Providing targeted support based on ability 'is helping how they structure their work and think about it as a process rather than a product' (Colgan, 2019a).

Writing Lessons have a clear structure

Graves (1994) advocates the important of a classroom environment that supports writing. Structure is an essential element of the environment so that there is a sensible order in writing lessons (Zemelman, Daniels and Hydee, 2012). Guided Writing is a structured approach to teaching writing Gibson (2008a). The structure of Guided Writing was effective as it allowed me to spend uninterrupted time with groups of writers whilst other groups were engaged in independent activities. Shea (2015) states that differentiation requires teachers to find time to work with small groups and individuals. The overall structure of Guided Writing provided dedicated time for every student to work with me, whereas the way I was teaching before, I struggled to find time to attend to all of the children in the class, focusing more on the less able students 'It's just so solidifying for me that the guided writing is a good set up for addressing the needs of everyone and also giving everyone time to actually talk to me and talk to each other about their work as well' (Colgan,2019a). Each Guided Writing lesson also followed a familiar format and contributed positively to the lesson overall. On the 28th March 2019, one student commented during a guided writing lesson 'I like the way we get to talk about the stuff before we do it' (Colgan, 2019b).

Time emerged as a concern in the research. Establishing Guiding Writing in my classroom was more time consuming than I had anticipated. However, I felt that it was 'definitely worth slowing it down at the beginning to make sure the structure is working so that the work that is done in guided writing is beneficial'(Colgan, 2019a).The value of investing time at the start by establishing a clear structure is highlighted by Shea (2015) who states that expected behaviours

must be clearly established and reviewed regularly so that the other groups can engage in independent work.

A Teaching and Learning International Survey Report published in 2009 by the OECD reported that 'one teacher in four in most countries loses at least 30% of lesson time to disruptive student behaviour or administrative tasks, and some teachers lose more than half' (OECD, 2009:5). I found that spending time establishing routines and expectations for Guided Writing meant that time was not lost managing disruptive behaviour, in contrast with Nomi (2009) who found that using an in-class ability grouping structure meant that the learning environment can be disruptive as a result of less teacher supervision for the independent groups.

Instruction is informed by observations

Observation notes served as a crucial AfL tool over the course of this research project. Observations notes were used to inform planning and record progress. Initially, when I assessed a piece of the children's' writing, I used the writing progression milestones from the New Primary Language Curriculum (NCCA, 2014).I chose not to use this structure for my observation notes as I thought that they would be too prescriptive. As stated previously, I recorded unstructured observations throughout the study. Through the use of observation notes, the lessons had an organic nature and allowed me to provide the writer with 'in-the-moment information that he needs to master the step he's on or move forward' (Shea, 2015:114). This accords with key features of AfL. Firstly, there needs to be an awareness by the learner of a deficit between a goal and present state. Secondly, an action needs to be taken by the student to reduce that gap and achieve the desired learning (Sadler, 1989).

Observation notes informed lesson planning. On the 31/1/2019 in my lesson notes with a group of writers I commented 'input on capital letters needed' (Colgan, 2019b). The next lesson with this group on the 7/2/2019 included a mini-lesson on capital letters.

Another key feature of AfL is that the emphasis is on progress and achievement rather than failure and defeat (Stiggins, 2001). I found it helpful to record what was going well, as well as what needed more attention. This echoes with what Shea (2011) states about the use of notes to capture learning milestones that may have otherwise been forgotten. This was a new way of thinking for me, as I tended to always look at what needed work rather than what was going well. Before I implemented Guided Writing in my class, I wrote about a conversation I had with one of my critical friends 'I realised that I can be tough on myself and very problem focused. I think that I am struggling and finding this whole experience a negative one and am not realising the good. J commented on the what a supportive learning environment was present and how I appear to make each child feel listened to in group situations and am patient with their different levels of ability etc. It did make me think' (Colgan, 2018a).

4.3.2 Main Finding 2: Guided Writing provided me with a way of motivating and engaging children in writing

As mentioned previously, this finding was an unexpected outcome in this self-study action research project. Identifying a way to motivate and engage children in writing was not one of the aims of this research project. However, in my opinion, it became a dominating theme arising from the data. This finding arose from thematic analysis of my data set. Figure 4.8 illustrates the codes that were gathered from my reflective journal, observation notes and children's writing samples which then led to this finding.

Figure 4.8 Codes leading to Main Finding 2

Firstly, as this was an unexpected finding, I believe that at this point it is necessary to define what it meant by motivation and engagement. It has been noted that the terms motivation and engagement are often used interchangeably in literature and that the distinctions between the two have not been established definitively (Reschly and Christenson,2012). Fredericks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004) have asserted that engagement is a 'meta' construct. They argue that engagement is a meta construct that involves behavioural, emotional and cognitive dimensions of motivation. In my observation notes I noted 'all of the group are focused and on task and are showing enthusiasm' (Colgan, 2019b). These dimensions are crucial for successful learning and therefore are key to success in literacy. Motivation is the most important pointer to high achievement in writing (Alexander, 2010).

I believe that the structure of Guided Writing is effective in fostering motivation and engagement in writing. The following figure (Figure 4.9) illustrates the fundamentals for fostering motivation and engagement in literacy (PDST, 2019). Guided Writing encompassed,

most of these, and I conclude that these components contributed to children being motivated and engaged in writing.
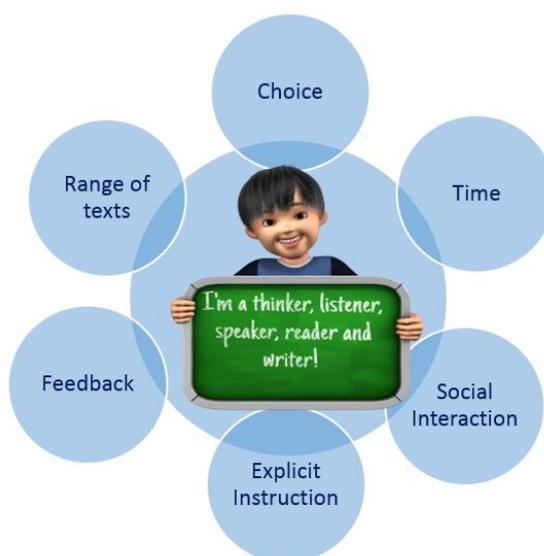

Figure 4.9 Fundamentals for Fostering Motivation and Engagement in Literacy (PDST, 2019)

Time

It has been claimed that 'In typical classrooms it is not unusual to find that children read and write for as little as 10% of the day (30 minutes of reading and writing activity in a 300- minute - five-hour - school day)' (Allington, 2002:2). As mentioned previously, Guided Writing took place four times a week for approximately forty-fifty minutes. The time was dedicated to writing. The children were focused during this time. Rosie wrote 'We had Guided Writing efry Monday Tuesday Wednesday and Thursday. I love writing whit teethere'. Although each Guided Writing session included a mini lesson, the children were given time to write themselves. This was important as 'Extensive practice provides the opportunity for students to consolidate the skills and strategies teachers often work so hard to develop' (Allington, 2002:2). Mohammed wrote 'when I whited more it was Helpful'. Calkins (1987) emphasises the importance of giving children time to actually engage in the act of writing. In order 'to

accelerate students' development as writers, a school must set aside protected time for writing' (Calkins and Ehrenworth, 2016:10). Children need to be given the time to apply skills that they have learned into their own writing. Amanda wrote 'Sometimes we get more time. Sometimes we get less time'. Time spent with me arose as a very important factor. Nathan write 'Got more time with teacher. I like cos it is fun'. Rebecca said, 'I liked working with teacher'. Andrew wrote 'I like writeing whit teacher'. In my reflective journal I wrote 'It's been a great way to build relationships with the children that maybe don't get a chance to talk to me about their work or just to chat' (Colgan, 2019a).

Social Interaction
Writing, like oral language, is innately social (Vygotsky, 1978). In a study conducted by Hurst, Wallace and Nixon (2013) they found that social interaction improved the learning of their students by increasing their knowledge of literacy and teaching and their problem-solving skills and critical thinking skills. People learn from interactions with other people and collective understanding is actualised from interactions amongst people. The structure of Guided Writing allowed for plenty of opportunities for social interactions amongst the children and me. The children had to opportunity to talk about their writing before writing, during writing and after writing. The interactions between the group members impacted positively on their engagement in writing lessons. This concurs with what Mercer and Howe (2012) believe. They believe that when teachers use interactional strategies often, students' participation in lessons and their educational outcomes are likely to improve. Amanda wrote 'I love Guided writing because we get to do rilly fun stuf.' This resonates with one of the key messages from the New Primary Language Curriculum (NCCA, 2014) that 'Children learn language through interactions' (NCCA,2014:20). In my reflective journal I wrote 'I'm seeing a huge change in how they engage. Especially those who normally don't like writing are much more engaged and seem to be really enjoying writing' (Colgan, 2019a).

Feedback

Hattie and Clarke (2018) describe feedback as the information that connects the gap between what is understood and what is intended to be understood. Feedback is a core element of assessment for learning and was a dominant feature in Guided Writing lessons. The children received constructive feedback that was specific to their needs and enabled them to identify areas that were going well for them and areas that they needed to improve. Feedback was not only given on finished products but also during the writing process. Reeves (2008), emphasises that the finest feedback is given frequently, adjacent to actual writing time and it should then be followed by opportunities to practice and implement this feedback. Rebecca wrote 'I liked getting ideas to be a better writer and reader'.

The nature of feedback is important. Feedback should be positively framed, should be delivered in a caring manner, should link achievement with effort, and should focus on factors the student can control (Julien, 2018). Amanda wrote 'I liked getting ideas to be a better writer'.

In my reflective journal I wrote 'They are writing for themselves, taking ownership and responsibility for their work' (Colgan, 2019a). Jurik, GrÖschner, and Seidel (2014) found that teachers use of positive feedback intrinsically motivated students. My critical friend observed a lesson on the 21st March and wrote 'the children are listening to advice and are talking about previous feedback even on a new piece of writing' (Colgan,2019c).

Explicit Instruction

Effective writing instruction involves 'explicit strategy instruction' (Calkins and Ehrenworth, 2016:9-10). Irvin, Meltzer and Dukes (2007:49) state that 'Increasing students' competence through explicit literacy instruction within the context of a supportive learning environment will increase student engagement and improve student achievement'. Explicit instruction was an integral part of Guided Writing and the instruction was specific to the needs of the group. My critical friend wrote 'you're able to target their needs and focus on what each group needs

without holding others back or going too quickly, they're able to write and want to write because it's at their level' (Colgan, 2019c).

Range of Texts
During Guided Writing, the children wrote across a variety of genres. Fountas et al., (2018) acknowledge the importance of using a wide variety of fiction and non-fiction texts. One of the aims of the New Primary Language Curriculum is to 'encourage children to engage personally with and think critically about a broad range of spoken, gesticulated, written and multimodal texts' (NCCA, 2014: 27). Ella wrote 'I like Guided writing because I like writing about story and we get to do different things'.

4.3.3. Main Finding 3: Through the self-study process I am now more critically aware of my professional identity and values
One of the aims of this self-study research project was to live out my values of care, equity and integrity in my practice. Through the process of critical reflection, I feel better equipped to identify these values in my practice and I feel that I have come to know my professional identity. In my reflective journal I wrote 'I can see where I'm at a lot clearer now, I don't fell as under pressure or as overwhelmed by schools and planning, I feel a lot more confident and can see when I'm being child-centred' (Colgan, 2019a).Palmer (1998) affirms that knowing yourself is as essential to teaching as your students or the theory of what you teach. I feel that insight that this wisdom is invaluable to me as a professional. The identity of the practitioner is paramount in self-study practices and is focused on both personal and professional levels (Lassonade et al., 2009). The distinction between the personal and professional identities is something that I have struggled with, however I do now feel better able to see myself as having a professional identity whereas before I felt all consumed by personal identity. Before I used to take everything very personally when it came to the children's learning and general events in the school day. In my reflective journal I wrote 'when certain things happen and things aren't going well I take it so personally' (Colgan, 2019a). This process has enabled me to minimise self-laceration (Brookfield,1995). I have developed a much more positive view of myself as a

teacher, looking at positives as well as things that need to be improved 'I would think that I'm very responsive and adaptable. I'll change my approach or change a task to suit the needs of a group of children' (Colgan, 2019a). Again, on the 11th February 2019, I wrote 'It is going really well. The kids are all really excited about it and are so enthusiastic about it'.

Instead, I have a much more practical, problem-solving approach to teaching and learning. For example, after the difficult day I wrote about above I applied a problem solving approach 'I ..just closed the door of my classroom and just thought of the things that were going well and made a to do list, revised my timetable etc. I think it helped me regain my control, so I wasn't feeling so overwhelmed'. (Colgan, 2019a).I am more emotionally grounded and my belief in my agency as a teacher has been reinstated (Brookfield, 1995).

The following paragraphs outline how my values of care, equity and integrity have been realised in my practice as well as the re-connection with Froebelian pedagogy.

Care

The theme of care was one that came out very strongly in my reflective journal. At one stage throughout the year I was feeling like I cared too much and this was having a negative impact. In my reflective journal I wrote 'It keeps bringing up the conflict I have with care-where to put my energy-do I care too much about their care needs resulting in a disservice to their academic needs? Or are they all the one? It's frustrating because it is often the case that I feel the care needs are blocking their ability to learn' (Colgan, 2019a). This was echoed by one of my critical friends after she observed a guided writing lesson 'you need to let go and stop caring, even just for ten minutes, I can see your brain is going ninety, you'll miss out on the great stuff that's going on' (Colgan, 2019c).I now feel that I have reconceptualised my understanding of care and it now stands to enhance my practice. In my reflective journal I wrote 'When I care, I know it's a natural reaction to something. I am beginning to use that feeling I get when I care as a

warning to stop. When I stop and think about what I am caring about, I take time to break it down and figure out what I can do to care for the situation or the person. In work I feel like my emotional response to situations is more in check' (Colgan, 2019a).

Equity

I was certain when I was naming my values that I wanted to name equity and not equality. The distinction for me was extremely important. I don't believe in treating every student equally, rather I believe in supporting children in different ways to give them equal access to learning. However effective I believe that Guided Writing was in achieving equitable practice within my classroom, there are so many other external factors, systemic barriers that cause inequity in education. My critical friend wrote 'I'm so amazed at how you are reaching all of them, but I'm so frustrated thinking how much time and effort and organisation has to go into it, it should be this difficult' (Colgan, 2019c). I became hyper aware of being equitable in my dealings with children, however I feel it is extremely difficult to claim that I am equitable in my dealings with children, as the reality is, as one teacher, I don't have the capacity to guarantee this.

Integrity

Nillsen (2005) states 'In striving for integrity in teaching, the teacher may need to completely re-examine how to think about the material that he or she teaches' (Nillsen, 2005:91). I believe that this quote encapsulates my reconceptualization of integrity. I consciously reflected on my teaching and identified areas I needed to improve. As well as doing this I interrogated my own beliefs, I examined my own experiences and assumed an active role in improving my practice. I have stated that I intend to continue the critically reflective process as a form of professional development. I feel that I have only begun this learning journey. It has been said that 'the most important requirement is for the teacher to develop a sense of integrity in learning and knowledge as a lifetime project' (Nillsen, 2005:93).

Froebelian Pedagogy

As mentioned in Chapter Three, my beliefs about teaching were heavily influenced by the principles of Friedrich Froebel. However, I feel that I did lose that sense of me as a teacher, I was following the lead of others, and going against my own views and beliefs. In a critical reflection task, completed as part of this course I wrote 'It is the more 'micro' issues that affect me and they have brought around a certain level of despondency. In some ways, over the past few months I think I tried to relinquish any feelings of ownership I had over all of this- a kind of ignorance is bliss attitude. I asked myself how can I be expected to change things when I'm bound by all of these policies and 'ways of doing things'? I would have to rock the boat completely or committing to a massive workload to change and implement new ideas.' (Colgan, 2018a). When I reread that now, I barely recognise myself in that piece. I no longer feel that way. A lot of the same issues still exist but my approach to them is different. Taking the time to reflect and think about what I value, or how I believe things should be done, has left me feeling empowered to go back to my child-centred pedagogy, re-introduce methods into me teaching. I think I have now realised that I can adapt things to suit me, I don't always have to be the one to adapt. My critical friend wrote 'your have more energy now and seem a lot more confident in yourself and the decisions you are making for your children' (Colgan, 2019c).

4.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, this research project resulted in three main findings. Firstly, Guided Writing enabled me to create an environment for differentiated writing instruction. Secondly, Guided Writing provided me with a way of motivating and engaging children in writing. Thirdly, through the self-study process I am now more critically aware of my professional identity and values. I have generated a 'Living Theory (Whitehead, 1989) that Guided Writing an Effective Framework for Differentiation and Assessment for Learning Strategies. Lassonade et al., (2009) state that self-study focuses on both personal and professional improvement. As my

findings demonstrate both personal and professional developments, in my opinion this research project is authentic example of self-study action research.

Chapter Five will present a ssummary of the main findings and the results will be contextualised. I will once again present my 'Living Theory' as a result of this self-study action research project and make recommendations based on my experience and findings.

Chapter 5 Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a summary of the main findings of this research. In this chapter, I intend to contextualise the results and present my 'Living Theory' (Whitehead, 1989). I will also outline the limitations of this self-study action research project. I will provide details of recommendations emanating from this study and share how I intend to share my research.

5. 2 Summary of Main Findings

This research project was intended to explore, how I, as a teacher could improve my own practice and simultaneously enhance the learning of the children in my class. This study set out to examine if implementing Guided Writing in my classroom would enable me to utilise assessment for learning strategies in order to provide differentiated writing lessons to the children in my classroom. Figure 5.1 illustrates the main findings of this research.
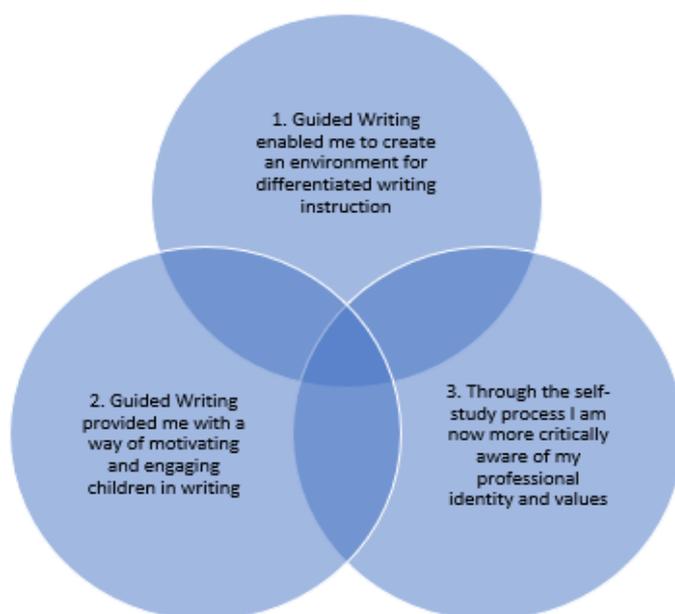

Figure 5. 1 Main Findings

I have generated a 'Living Theory' (Whitehead, 1989) that Guided Writing an Effective Framework for Differentiation and Assessment for Learning Strategies.

5.3 Reflection on Findings
5.3.1 Guided Writing enabled me to create an environment for differentiated writing instruction.

As discussed, I found that Guided Writing allowed me to differentiate writing lessons effectively. As one of the aims of this research project was to find an effective way to differentiate for my class during writing lessons, this research project was successful in achieving this. As I reflect on the whole process, the way I have felt at the beginning of this process is a distant memory. I was struggling to cater for the needs of the children in my class during writing lessons and felt helpless and overwhelmed. Now, having focused on this need for improvement, and more importantly taken action, I no longer feel that differentiation is a struggle for writing lessons. The structure of Guided Writing suits me as a teacher, I respond well to structure and am clearer in my planning and delivery of instruction when I have a clear structure. AfL played an important role in providing the information needed to differentiate instruction, and that the observations that were recorded were authentic and purposeful. Upon reflection, I came to realise that I did not utilise other AfL tools, and that in the future I would like to explore the area of AfL further and refine my use of AfL strategies, perhaps focusing more on specific aspects of writing when I was assessing e.g. letter formation, syntax etc. It wasn't until I was consciously and mindfully reviewing the data that this emerged, and I think that if I had engaged in the meta reflective process at an earlier date I would have been able to refine my use of formative assessment. It came to my attention that throughout the research cycle the groupings of children did not change. I realise that this oversight also confirms what I spoke about earlier in terms of being more refined in my assessment.

5.3.2 Main Finding 2: Guided Writing provided me with a way of motivating and engaging children in writing

As mentioned previously, this was an unexpected finding but, in my opinion, a dominant one. I believe that Guided Writing motivated and engaged children in writing because the fundamentals for motivation and engagement were present. As well as time, social interaction,

explicit instruction, feedback and a range of texts, Guided Writing embodies the factors for

motivation as outlined by Julien (2018). Julien (2018) affirms that if a learning environment

'is nurturing and safe (physically and emotionally), the expectation of success (scaffolded to

challenge but not overwhelm, many examples of writing, adults talking about their own

writing) are , and activities with value (novelty, purpose, interest) are presented to children ,

the children will be motivated to write (Julien, 2018:665). The learning environment

contributed to their motivation and engagement.   When I think back on my relationship with

my class and how it has evolved over the academic year, I realise that in general the class are

far less reliant on me as a teacher and have really evolved and taken ownership of their own

learning, not just in writing lessons, but overall. This was also noted by one of my critical

friends 'the independent groups know exactly what they are doing and look motivated and

engaged in their other activities. They appear to be working all the time and aren't looking to

their teacher and attend to their tasks' (Colgan, 2019c).

5.3.3 Main Finding 3: Through the self-study process I am now more critically aware of my professional identity and values

I believe that I understand my practice at a deeper level. I've had time to think about it. Taking

this time, to look at the bigger picture has been beneficial. Although, I have struggled with the

reflective process at times, its impact has been positive overall. I've taken informed actions

(Brookfield,1995) and these actions are based on assumptions that I have conscientiously and

critically explored.

This echoes what Glenn, McDonagh, Sullivan, Roche and Morgan (2012) found in their

professional development research project with teachers. Many teachers reported that the found

the process empowering. I am certain that in the future, the heightened awareness of my values

will enhance my practice. I intend to continue the critically reflective process, as a form of

professional development, as the potential concerns that arise will be of personal significance for me and I therefore have more of a vested interest in taking action.

5.4 Recommendations
5.4.1 Need for More Research in Guided Writing Practices
This highlights that there is a need for more research on the teaching of writing. Recent research has implied that newly qualified teachers would benefit from more professional development for writing instruction than is currently available in many teacher preparation programs (Zoch, Myers, Lambert, Vetter and Fairbanks, 2016). Developing teachers' skill development in teaching writing is important and will benefit all students as students in each classroom have a variety of learning needs. As mentioned, I found that there was little literature and research available on Guided Writing although it is mentioned in many policy documents. I hope that this project will contribute to the knowledge available on Guided Writing.

5.4.2 Guided Writing should be seen as an Effective Framework for Writing Instruction
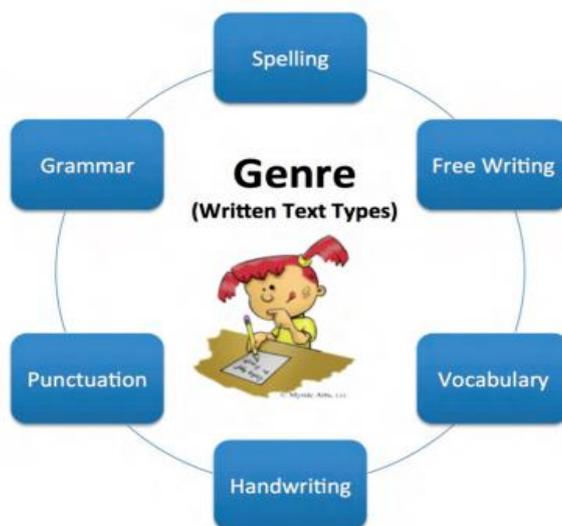

Figure 5.2 Components of Writing (PDST, 2014)

The diagram above illustrates the different components of writing. Each component contributes to writing as part of the language learning process. In order to plan effectively for writing, it is essential that all components are considered. I advocate that Guided Writing should be considered by classroom teachers as a framework for writing instruction as it provides 'a

consistent experience of writing, editing and redrafting that involves the child in writing on a wide range of topics, in a variety of genres and for different audiences.' (NCCA, 1999:3). The Primary School Curriculum states that 'If the child is to become an effective writer and attain autonomous control of factors such as grammar, punctuation and spelling the school needs to develop an approach to writing that involves a consistent use of drafting, editing and redrafting' (NCCA, 1999b, 14). Guided Writing is a structured approach to the teaching of writing, that is flexible and adaptable. In my opinion, Guided Writing provides for the process of each child's journey as a writer and enables the 'gradual development of the child's ability to write through the actual process of writing' (NCCA, 1999b:14).

5.4.3 Teachers Should be Encouraged to Engage in Self-Study Research
The INTO (2010) states that 'Since professional learning is central to school improvement, for schools to improve, it is necessary for teachers, individually and collectively, to develop in a professional sense on an ongoing basis' (INTO, 2010:31). I believe that schools should encourage and provide provision for members of staff to engage in self-study projects as a form of professional development for schools to grow as learning communities. I believe that the centrality of values in this form of research would significantly enhance the professional dialogue in schools and therefore benefit the whole school community.

5.4.4 Explicit Teaching of Critical Reflection Skills
I call for the explicit teaching of critical reflection skills. This is consistent with Poom-Valickis and Mathews (2013) who call for increased engagement in peers and mentors in guiding and modelling reflections. The Teaching Council of Ireland (2017: 28) outlines that upon completion of initial teacher education the graduate will 'review the effectiveness of his/her own practice through continuous reflection on that practice'. I do not feel that there is enough support in initial teacher education to ensure that graduates will be reflective practitioners. I don't feel that I was equipped with the skills of critical reflection before I began the process.

5.5 Implications for Practice

This research project has implications for me, for the students in my class and for the greater educational context. As a result of this self-study action research project, I feel am more confident and empowered in my practice. I have established my 'Living Theory' (Whitehead, 1989) whereby I live out my values of care, equity and integrity in my practice. I believe that Guided Writing, encompasses my child-centred pedagogy and incorporates these values. I have generated a 'Living Theory' (Whitehead, 1989) that Guided Writing is an Effective Framework for Differentiation and Assessment for Learning Strategies. On a personal level, I intend to continue the practice of critical reflection and engage in more projects aimed at enhancing my practice.

For the students in my class, they have received differentiated instruction based on their needs and have become engaged and motivated writers. I hope that this experience leaves them with a love of writing and the confidence to write across a variety of genres.

For the school that I teach in, other teachers have been exposed to Guided Writing as an effective framework for differentiated writing instruction. Guided Writing makes use of current good practice and therefore should not be an extra burden or pressure on staff.It has been decided that all Second Classes will engage in Guided Writing for the academic year 2019/2020.

For the wider educational context, I hope that this research contributes to the literature available on Guided Writing. I intent to share this research on The Teacher's Research Exchange (T-Rex) platform and on Research Gate. I hope that from reading this research, other teachers feel empowered to engage in self-study action research and take ownership of their own learning and practice, in order to enhance the teaching and learning of children. I believe that critical reflection skills should be formally embedded into all initial teacher training courses and professional development courses.

In the future, I would like to further explore the areas of motivation and engagement in writing. In my teaching, for this academic year, I would like to implement Guided Writing in another class level and compare and contrast my experiences.

5.6 Limitations of this Research
This study reports on a small-scale study in one specific context, with just two research cycles. Further research might examine student writing development over a greater period and in a variety of different contexts. A study over a longer period might reveal more valuable detail and better unveil change among students at deeper levels.

5.7 Conclusion
In conclusion, I believe that this self-study action research project was successful in achieving the aims of the research. The research aims were

1. To find an effective way to differentiate for my class during writing lessons

2. To improve my use of assessment for learning strategies

3. To live out my values of care, integrity and equity in my practice.

Through a reflective journal, observation notes and writing samples, valuable data was generated which led to the following findings.

1. Guided Writing enabled me to create an environment for differentiated writing instruction

2. Guided Writing provided me with a way of motivating and engaging children in writing

3. Through the self-study process I am now more critically aware of my professional identity and values

This self-study process has led to my 'Living Theory' (Whitehead, 1989), that Guided Writing is an Effective Framework for Differentiation and Assessment for Learning Strategies.

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Appendices
Appendix 1 Research Plan

Date	Action
Week beginning January 7th	- The research question and intervention was explained to the children again. - Information letters and consent forms were sent home to parents/guardians and children. - Meeting took place with critical friends to discuss intervention-naming the term Guided Writing was decided on.
Week beginning January 14th	- I researched the elements of Guided Writing. - Free Writing sample was retrieved from the children. - I assessed each writing sample using the New Primary Language Curriculum Writing Progression Continuum - Critical friend 2 reviewed writing samples and we assigned children to groups. - Decision was made to use Guided Reading books as a stimulus for Guided Writing lessons as the groups corresponded.
Week beginning January 21st	- I met with my principal to explain details of the intervention. A short synopsis of this was given to my principal to present to the Board of Management if necessary. - I created and printed templates for lesson plans. - I finalised details of research project with critical friends and it was decided to simplify the lesson plan format. - I modelled activities at independent stations for children .
Week beginning January 28th	- I started the intervention-four writing sessions per week, two groups working with teacher each day . - My critical friend 1 was present at all lessons and we then met to discuss and reflect on the first week. We decided that more time was needed for the sessions.
Week beginning February 4th	I continued with Guided Writing lessons in my class.

	• I increased the time of the sessions and this was successful, lessons were not rushed and children had sufficient independent writing time.
Week beginning 11th February	• Guided Writing continued as usual. • I met with all three critical friends to discuss the first three weeks of the intervention. Some suggestions were made.
	•

Interim Evaluation

Week beginning 18th February (midterm)	• Interim evaluation of cycle 1 <table><tr><td>Strengths</td><td>Needs to be improved</td></tr><tr><td>• Children are engaged in independent stations and know what they are doing.</td><td>• Setting up of stations is time consuming. • Children are spending a lot of time selecting materials and rather than writing. • Mini-lesson teaching resources- difficult to see.</td></tr></table>
Week beginning 25th February – March 2019	• A visual timetable was introduced to aid with set up of stations . • A flipchart was used for mini-lessons. • A countdown timer was used for 'selecting materials' time. *important note, during this time Guided Writing was disrupted often for other commitments concerning preparation for the sacraments.
April 2019	• Final meetings with all Critical Friends
May 2019	• Comparative Writing sample collected ' Guided Writing' children were asked to share their opinion on their experience of Guided Writing'

	- Final Guided Writing session 3rd May 2019 - Data analysis -thematic analysis - Public presentation of research
June-August 2019	Writing of thesis

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Appendix 2 Information and Consent Letters

	Maynooth University Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education
	Roinn Froebel Don Bhun- agus Luath- Oideachas Ollscoil Mhá Nuad.

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s),

I am a student on the Master of Education programme at Maynooth University. As part of my degree I am doing a research project. The focus of my research is on assessment and how I can improve my use of assessment in order to cater more effectively for the children's learning needs during writing lessons.

In order to do this, I intend to carry out research in the classroom by changing the way I organise writing lessons. Children will be grouped according to their learning needs and each group will have specific learning targets.

The focus of the research is on how I can improve my practice and I would like to invite the children to be part of the research with me.

The data will be collected using observations and notes from lessons, a daily teacher journal and some audio recordings of children. The children will be asked their opinions and thoughts on writing and what they like/dislike/learn in writing lessons.

The child's name and the name of the school will not be included in the thesis that I will write at the end of the research. Your child will be allowed withdraw from the research process at any stage.

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 as part of the Master of Education in the Froebel Department, Maynooth University and will be destroyed in accordance with University guidelines.

The research will not be carried out until approval is granted by the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education. The thesis will be submitted for assessment to the module leader Dr Bernadette Wrynn and will be examined by the Department staff. The external examiners will also access the final thesis.

I would like to invite you and your child to give permission for him/her to take part in this project.

If you have any queries on any part of this research project, feel free to contact me by email at emily.colgan.2013@mumail.ie

Yours faithfully,

Emily Colgan
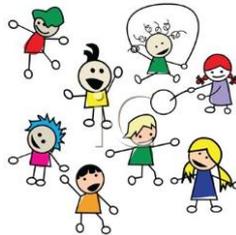
Child's name …………………….

I am trying to find out how I can improve the way I teach writing in our class .

I would like to work with you in a small group and write down some notes about the work we are doing. I might ask you your opinions about the work we are doing and record these . I also might use some samples of your work to see if I have improved the way I teach you during writing lessons. I have asked your Mum or Dad or Guardian 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.

From, Ms. Colgan

Emily Colgan 12740075

**Maynooth University Froebel Department of
Primary and Early Childhood Education**

**Roinn Froebel Don Bhun- agus Luath- Oideachas
Ollscoil Mhá Nuad**

PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

I have read the information provided in the attached letter and all of my questions have been answered. I voluntarily agree to the participation of my child in this study. I am aware that I will receive a copy of this consent form for confirmation of agreement.

Parent / Guardian Signature_____

Parent / Guardian Signature_____

Date: _____

Name of Child _____

Child's signature: _____

Date: _____

Emily Colgan 12740075

Maynooth University Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education

Roinn Froebel Don Bhun- agus Luath- Oideachas Ollscoil Mhá Nuad.

Dear Critical Friend,

I am a student on the Master of Education programme at Maynooth University. As part of my degree I am doing a research project. The focus of my research is on assessment and how I can improve my use of assessment in order to cater more effectively for the children's learning needs during writing lessons.

In order to do this, I intend to carry out research in the classroom by changing the way I organise writing lessons. Children will be grouped according to their learning needs and each group will have specific learning targets.

The focus of the research is on how I can improve my practice and I would like you to be one of my critical friends.

I would like to include your observations and reflections as well as notes from our conversations in my data archive.

Your name and the name of the school will not be included in the thesis that I will write at the end of the research. You are free to withdraw from the research process at any stage.

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 as part of the Master of Education in the Froebel Department, Maynooth University and will be destroyed in accordance with University guidelines.

The research will not be carried out until approval is granted by the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education. The thesis will be submitted for assessment to the module leader Dr Bernadette Wrynn and will be examined by the Department staff. The external examiners will also access the final thesis.

I would like to invite you to give your permission to take part in this project.

If you have any queries on any part of this research project, feel free to contact me by email at emily.colgan.2013@mumail.ie

Yours faithfully,

Emily Colgan

Emily Colgan 12740075

CRITICAL FRIEND CONSENT FORM

I have read the information provided in the attached letter and all of my questions
have been answered. I voluntarily agree to participate in this research as a critical
friend.I am aware that I will receive a copy of this consent form for my information.

Name_____

Signature_____

Date: _____

Emily Colgan 12740075