



**‘VOICES FROM THE CLASSROOM: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC  
CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES AND  
PERSPECTIVES OF DRAMA AND ARTS EDUCATION IN  
IRISH PRIMARY SCHOOLS’.**

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## Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis represents my own work and has not been submitted, in whole or part, by me or another person, for the purpose of obtaining any other qualification.

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Date: 23/11/23

## **ABSTRACT**

Drama is a recognised subject in the Irish primary school curriculum. Whilst research has been conducted into drama education practices in Irish schools, little is known about teachers' experiences and perceptions of drama education. The rationale for this research is to report on the current position of drama in the Irish primary classroom. This research further aims to report on teachers' attitudes and experiences of drama in their classrooms.

To achieve these aims, a case study with an ethnographic focus was conducted. One-to-one interviews were conducted with 15 Irish primary teachers, located in 15 different schools of a range of sizes, locations, and demographic compositions. Verbatim transcripts of the audio-recorded interviews were analysed in Nvivo 11 software using a comparative procedure.

There are five emergent analytical categories: the importance of drama education in schools, the awareness and interest among teachers, the implementation of drama, the importance of drama on students' learning and the development and impact of teachers' backgrounds and past experiences. These categories are developed into the main themes of the research which are compared and discussed in relation to the significance of drama, being a supporter of drama, making drama happen, and drama for living and learning. Findings associated with these themes are used to develop recommendations for the enhancement of drama education.

Within the context of curricular redevelopment at primary level in Ireland and taking into account the positive changes taking place in the broader arts and education ecosystem as a result of increased systemic focus and investment in creativity initiatives, drama needs to hold a new position in our schools. The predominant outcome of this research in addressing extant difficulties with drama in Irish primary schools is to make the case for a transdisciplinary model for drama in schools - a living model of drama - which values all dramatic engagement, particularly that which leads to rich modes of learning and engagement both within and beyond the curricular structures.

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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

ACI- Arts Council Ireland

AI- Artificial Intelligence

AR- Augmented Reality

APP- Assistant Principal Post (APPI- Assistant Principal 1 & APPII- Assistant Principal 2)

BLAST- Bringing Live Arts to Students and Teachers

CP- Creative Partnership

CPD- Continual Professional Development

DES- Department of Education and Skills

DEIS- Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools

DEAR- Drop Everything and Read

DCD- Drama Curriculum Document

ESCI- Education Support Centres Ireland

ETBs- Local Education and Training Boards

GAA- Gaelic Athletic Association

HID- High Intensity Drama

HIIT- High intensity interval training

INTO- Irish National Teachers' Organisation

LCYPs- Local Creative Youth Partnerships

NCC- National Children's Choir

NCCA- National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

Oide- support service for teachers and school leaders, formed from the integration of four existing support services in 2023.

PCRB- Primary Curriculum Review Body

PCF- Primary Curriculum Framework (2023)

PSC- Primary School Curriculum (1999)

PDST- Professional Development Service for Teachers

QQI- Quality and Qualifications Ireland

SEN- Special Educational Needs

STEM- Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths

STEAM- Science, Technology, Arts, Engineering and Maths

TAP- Teacher Artist Partnership

VR- Virtual Reality

AR- Augmented Reality

# **1 WHY IS IT SO HARD TO TEACH DRAMA?**

## **1.1 ABOUT THE RESEARCHER**

In the words of Freebody and Finneran (2020, pg. 205), 'For drama educators and practitioners, hope is the foundation on which we build our work'. This research emanates from a perspective rooted in hope. Even when the data within this research may appear pessimistic, it culminates with an optimistic outlook for the future.

Drama, as an art form, wields profound influence, particularly in an educational context. It has personally shaped my development and guided my journey as a teacher. During my childhood, the performing arts were my creative outlet and passion, yet I could not foresee how this interest in drama would intersect with my career as a primary school teacher. However, as I ventured into the field of education, it became evident that drama had an equally transformative effect on the children in my classroom. This realisation compelled me to pursue advanced studies in drama at postgraduate and doctoral levels.

As emphasised by Neelands (2004), drama educators and practitioners must move beyond the rhetoric of transformation and focus on harnessing the empowering potential of the arts for children. Ireland's primary education landscape is undergoing a transformative period with the development of the primary curriculum framework and an unprecedented emphasis on arts education. This thesis is infused with the hope that this shifting landscape will usher in positive changes for arts education.

Fundamentally, drama revolves around storytelling, and this thesis chronicles the journey undertaken throughout the research process. This journey is not confined to the professional realm but intertwines with personal experiences. The narrative's beginning differs from its conclusion. I embarked on this research journey as a mainstream primary school teacher in Kildare, Ireland, passionate about drama education. However, as I progressed through my doctoral career, I assumed the role of a Special Education Teacher (SET), which limited my opportunities to teach drama. The outbreak of Covid-19 further disrupted the teaching of

drama, rendering it near-impossible for nearly two years. My identity in this research was often difficult to describe as I started as primary school teacher. I became a mother, I became a project manager on my house build, I became an SET, I became a researcher, I became a third level educator. The journey and the way I saw myself changed as the journey evolved and my new roles developed.

This research project was initiated to uncover how primary school teachers approach drama instruction, identify the challenges they encounter, and advocate for adaptable ways to integrate drama into the curriculum. My journey has involved periods of fluctuating enthusiasm and struggles with identity as a drama advocate, teacher and researcher. Now, as I near the end of my doctoral journey and work in teacher education, I am rediscovering my passion for drama, rekindled after lockdowns and the constraints of school life muted it temporarily. I am writing as one inside the community of drama teaching.

Though my journey deviated from its initial path, this research remains significant. It highlights that special education should not hinder drama instruction; on the contrary, it can be even more beneficial for students with additional learning needs, a point explored in this thesis. I hope to address the 'roadblocks' to teaching drama and offer guidance, especially considering the impending primary curriculum framework in Irish primary education.

Throughout this thesis, the terms 'drama' and 'drama education' are used interchangeably, though they have distinct nuances. Drama encompasses the art form of storytelling through live performances, often before an audience, while drama education is a pedagogical approach utilising drama techniques to achieve educational objectives, typically within an educational context. In this context, 'drama education' encompasses both the art form and its use for learning. As Ireland moves toward a transdisciplinary approach to education, drama and drama education stand poised to seamlessly integrate into the evolving educational landscape.

Being a school teacher researcher in the arts embodies a unique intersection of pedagogy, creativity, and inquiry. As a teacher researcher, one adopts a dual role: firstly, as an educator committed to nurturing the creative and intellectual growth of young learners, and secondly, as a researcher engaged in systematic investigation to enhance educational practices and outcomes within the arts. The concept of the teacher as a researcher is grounded in the belief that teachers, by virtue of their close proximity to the learning process and their intimate understanding of their students' needs and contexts, are well-placed to identify research

questions and undertake investigations that can lead to meaningful improvements in teaching and learning (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993). Anderson (2012) says that drama research is for those who would like to deepen their understanding of drama learning by researching their practice and the learning of their students (pg. 132).

In the context of the arts and drama, being a teacher researcher means engaging deeply with both the content and pedagogical knowledge specific to disciplines such as visual arts, music, and drama. It involves exploring innovative teaching strategies, integrating cultural and historical perspectives relevant to Ireland, and fostering an environment where creativity and expression are valued and nurtured. Research in this area focuses on how artistic practices influence children's social, emotional, and cognitive development, an aspect I explore with the research participants. Research in this area can also investigate how the arts can be used to enhance cross-curricular learning and transdisciplinarity, I consider these concepts in the latter stages of the thesis.

Engaging in research can significantly strengthen a teacher's practice by fostering a mindset of continuous improvement and evidence-based decision-making. It can lead to a deeper understanding of how students learn in the arts, the impact of various teaching approaches, and the ways in which the curriculum can be adapted to meet diverse needs. This reflective and inquisitive stance not only benefits the teacher's own professional development but also contributes to the broader educational community by adding to the body of knowledge on effective arts education practices (Zeichner & Noffke, 2001). This project has changed my way of thinking and enabled me to step back and see how arts education is both productive and where it needs support. Engaging in research in the area I am passionate about and teach in has afforded me the opportunity to have a deeper understanding of the role of arts-based learning. However, the role of a teacher researcher can also present challenges. I struggled on this journey and found the end of story sometimes hard to navigate. Balancing the demands of teaching with the rigors of research can be difficult, particularly given the time and resources required to research, conduct the interviews and analyse the feedback into an effective discussion. There are also tensions between the immediate, practical concerns of teaching and the longer-term, more abstract goals of research, I found it difficult to prioritise my time. Navigating these dual responsibilities required me to focus on my identity as a teacher researcher and an early career researcher which did lead to self-doubt. I was daunted

by the prospect that I had nothing to contribute to the field and the ‘imposter monster’ which Stewart (2023) discusses as a common phenomenon among early career researchers was hard to tame. Doran (2023) agrees that imposter syndrome is a common experience and does not reflect your actual capabilities, valuing the importance of good mentoring and receiving constructive criticism is an integral part of the research process (pg. 473). While being a full-time teacher and acknowledging that research and academic writing is indeed challenging, it has been and will continue to be an opportunity for intellectual development, empowering me as an academic and educational researcher (Stewart, 2023, pg. 471).

Furthermore, the impact of research on practice is not always straightforward. Translating findings into actionable changes in the classroom can be complex. As the Irish education system is in a period of change, the discussion and recommendations in this research may be timely, but may take time to be actionable. Thus, while engaging in research can provide valuable insights and lead to improved teaching and learning outcomes, it requires a supportive environment and a commitment to integrating new knowledge into practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009).

In conclusion, being a teacher researcher in the arts represents a dynamic and impactful role that blends the art of teaching with the science of inquiry. It offers the potential to enrich one's own practice and contribute to the broader field of education. However, realising this potential requires navigating the challenges inherent in balancing the dual roles of teacher and researcher, as well as effectively translating research findings into enhanced educational experiences for students. I found the process of this project challenging as I worked full time while also conducting the research. I struggled with my identity and in understanding what my role was throughout this project. I have decided to call myself a teacher researcher and am embracing this identity and how I evolved to view myself in this way. Throughout this document, I am talking from the perspective of a teacher researcher. I talk from the perspective of ‘I’ and ‘me’. I am assuming you are reading this document as you have an interest in the role of arts in education, if you read ‘we’ in the document, I am talking from the perspective of ‘we’ as educators. The collective ‘we’ means; teachers, school administration and management; and policy changers or makers. My story started as a primary school teacher asking my colleagues to talk openly about drama and arts education, I am finishing it as a third level educator focusing on where drama can go now based on the feedback from my colleagues.

## 1.2 THE STUDY

This thesis is about drama. This thesis is about teachers, teaching drama. This thesis is about teachers, teaching drama in Irish schools. This thesis is about the realities of teaching the drama curriculum and understanding drama pedagogy.

This thesis seeks to provide qualitative discourse and practitioner insight on the nature and challenges, but also the success and joys of teaching drama in Irish primary schools. It does this by seeking to understand the difficulties and possibilities posed by curriculum, pedagogy, teachers, and schools, for the teaching of drama, and from the perspectives of the participants in the research.

As a primary school teacher, as a specialist drama teacher and as an advocate for drama, I have witnessed the challenges and battles faced by drama education in the context of the Irish primary school system. Drama was formally introduced to the classroom with its inclusion in the Irish Primary Curriculum in 1999. Prior to its inclusion it was informally included in the curriculum in an ad hoc fashion. The thesis will later discuss the myriad challenges and headwinds faced by drama in Irish primary schools, and by teachers in these schools. Drama has not overcome these challenges.

This thesis is written from a hopeful and positive perspective, it will also offer solutions to the issues identified by the participants. Baldwin (2012) also hopes ‘that politicians and educational decision makers will see the significance of the connections between drama, imagination and creativity soon for the sake of future generations of children in education and in society’ (Baldwin, 2012, pg. 4). Drama in schools is described as a collective experience, where ‘any notions of the introverted, solitary, creative genius are quickly dispensed with’ (Gallagher, 2007, pg. 1235). I have experienced many of these, both as teacher and student. These experiences are shared by many of the participants, who share their perspectives on the contribution drama education made to their lives. This thesis is situated in my belief that there are many potential future roles for drama in the classroom. Crucial skills and critical thinking

are on offer to students and teachers. This thesis, while investigating many challenges facing drama, ultimately presents a positive and hope-filled outlook.

McDonagh (2014) advises that there have been some positive movement in terms of recent policy, where several influential documents and directives were launched to promote creative learning in schools. However, ‘the majority of research studies on arts education in Irish classrooms focus on music and visual arts, with very few exploring drama’ (pg. 10). The distinct deficit in terms of research on drama in Irish schools makes this study timely.

Irish primary teachers face many challenges, inside and outside the classroom (McCoy, Smyth and Banks, 2012). When teaching drama, challenges emerge which are distinctly related to drama as a subject. There is a perception amongst parents that the subject is superfluous, student apprehension or shyness or a lack of shared resources or lesson ideas amongst teachers. Other common challenges include space to facilitate drama, class sizes and time constraints. These can intensify and become stubborn, permanent blocks to effective teaching. In Ireland, in many schools, large class sizes are the norm, with immense pressure on learning because of the implementation of standardised testing and demand for high academic results. ‘Beyond controlling teaching and learning, tests have served as an accountability tool that ensures value for expenditures of taxpayers’ money’ (Madaus and Russell, 2010, pg. 21). Policy makers have always been aware that stakes tied to a test, force the teacher to adjust instruction to prepare students for tests (Madaus and Russell, 2010), which can result in drama and the arts being overlooked. Very often, drama education can be overlooked. My sense is that the “reputation” of drama is not in good standing, with parents ascribing little value to the subject and schools limiting resources and time. In addition, Ackroyd & Boulton claim many teachers feel anxious about delivering drama lessons: ‘Many teachers are expected to use drama activities with little or no relevant training, often resulting in a lack of both confidence in and understanding of educational drama practice’ (2004, pg. 1). While this analysis is nearly 20 years old, it remains true that there is a lack of confidence and understanding in drama education. Despite its significant contribution to children's learning and development, drama often finds itself marginalised or completely excluded from the curriculum. This is particularly true in the current educational climate, which prioritises academic accountability, leading to a diminished focus on drama and similar creative disciplines (Bresler, 2002; O’Toole & O’Mara; 2007; Wee 2011). In the context of changing curriculum requirements, teachers in many situations, especially primary school teachers, are finding themselves faced with having to teach some

things with which they are less familiar or less confident: 'Given that teacher education experiences all vary across many different third level institutions, it is not surprising that some teachers are a little daunted when faced with a drama curriculum' (Bowell & Heap, 2001, pg. 20).

Presently there are 12 subjects included in the Irish primary curriculum, each with a fixed allocation of time. Unprogrammed, discretionary time is at a premium, and often is used to compensate for unforeseen classroom interruptions. When implementing a curriculum that is crowded there is a real concern about how teachers can ensure that each subject is given due attention. In Ireland, drama is currently a standalone subject and sits within arts education. Arts education includes art, music and drama (NCCA, 1999a). In my experience, arts education is a broad and unclear term. It is my belief at the outset of this research that teachers are unsure what is expected of them when it comes to arts education. As teachers we may have a fear of the arts because we don't feel confident in our own skills in the arts. However, as this thesis is from a hopeful and positive perspective, I note here a claim made by McCabe; 'it is not your skill in the arts that is important, but your enthusiasm' (McCabe, 2007, pg. 1). Students don't care about your skill set, if they see you taking part and engaging in the same way you expect them to. If we as teachers are not required to have an amazing skill set, and we momentarily hypothesise that McCabe is correct; that teachers' skill sets in relation to effective drama education is of secondary importance, then why is it so hard to teach drama in Irish schools?

This research starts with a lot of questions that need examining. I wonder have we been set up poorly to do our jobs. Drama does not have enough status and respect as a subject. The pedagogy is tough. Useable resources are scarce and there seems to be little faith in the current curriculum document. As teachers there is a need to keep things fun and lighthearted to keep students engaged, and this can be draining. The Irish curriculum is currently going through a period of change. Drama will continue to be a component of arts education in the primary curriculum framework (NCCA, 2023). The results from the curriculum review are still being analysed (NCCA, 2019), however, the current working assumption is that drama education will continue to be included. The form which drama takes in the revised curriculum is not clear, but drama will not be a standalone subject in the early years of primary school education, now being referred to as key stage one and key stage two. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) have reported that there will be a move from subjects to a more integrated curriculum for the early years of primary and a subject structure to the curriculum in later years

of primary school (NCCA, 2019, pg. 8). Although drama teaching does present challenges, it is and will continue to be part of the Irish curriculum in Irish schools and therefore demands a pedagogical framework and practices that need improvement and development from curriculum leaders, teachers and schools. This research seeks to inform the conversation of what that should be and how best to engage with it.

### **1.3 DRAMA EDUCATION**

Drama education, in the Irish context, is developing beyond its formative stage into a recognised subject within the curriculum. The formative stage, in the 1970's-2000's, was marked by slow progress and often a fight to justify the existence of drama education. Anderson discusses this phenomenon internationally when describing drama education's need to justify its existence in arts education and highlights the need for arts research; 'drama education is moving slowly but surely from its beginnings in advocacy-based research to developing an evidence base for its effectiveness in the curriculum' (2012, pg. 135). Drama education has become a developed area of teaching and research internationally, originally in the English-speaking world but now also much further afield. Ireland has a small body of research on drama education, but it is growing, with notable works from; Hallissey, (2015); McDonagh (2015); Finneran (2016); Kenny & Morrissey (2016); Finneran & McDonagh (2017); Kenny (2017); McCabe & Flannery (2022) and McCabe (2023) all contributing to the developing conversation surrounding drama education in Ireland. The history of drama education tells of a pendulum swinging story (Bolton, 1984). From the early days of text-centred drama, to speech and drama, to Peter Slade's (1954) play-based approach, to the 'drama in education' work of Dorothy Heathcote and to a multi-dimensional approach of some of today's writers (Ackroyd, Anderson, Bolton, Davis, Dunne, Freebody, Finneran, Gallagher, Heap and Bowell, McCabe, Neelands, O' Toole, Smyth, Toyne and Prendiville, to name a few), drama trends, often borne of political pressures have pushed teachers in contrary directions (Davis, 2010, pg. 45). The evolving and changing direction of drama education is perhaps a contributory factor in teacher confusion or tentativeness when delivering drama education.

The challenges facing arts education, specifically drama education, are multifaceted and are the responsibility of teachers, principal teachers, policy makers, school communities, the Department of Education and Skills and the Schools Inspectorate. These individuals and

organisations need direction and a framework on how to address these issues. Fiske (1999) says there has been a push for arts education and there are now national and international calls for the role and benefits of arts education with young people to be examined. Anderson (2012) and Bamford (2006) highlight new policy, research and advocacy documents that have been published in the last decade on arts education and details UNESCO's international strategies to support arts education. In its 2006 'Road Map for Arts Education', UNESCO nominates the following aims for the future of arts education; 'recognising the arts in the learning process; encouraging behaviours and values which underlie social tolerance and the celebration of diversity; acknowledging that in many societies art traditionally was, and often continues to be, part of everyday life; understanding the challenges to cultural diversity posed by globalisation and the increasing need for imagination, creativity and collaboration as societies become more knowledge based and noting that among the 21st century challenges is an increasing need for creativity and imagination in multicultural societies – which arts education can address efficiently (UNESCO, 2006, pg. 15). These are sizeable aims, and it would seem difficult to realise them all in Ireland when the curriculum is already deemed overloaded, and teachers are under pressure to deliver a high standard of education across all curricular areas. 'Curriculum overload suggests some imbalance or incongruity between our capacity to enact or activate a curriculum which itself is perceived as overloaded. If we imagine the relationship between children and teachers as critical to children's learning, the issue of curriculum overload affects not just teachers but also children, who are subject to it (NCCA, 2010, pg. 7). The visions of UNESCO give a clear direction of what arts education should look like but to achieve those aims, teachers require the training, time, and resources to be invested into it and policy or curriculum documents are needed to give teachers their road map, which usually comes from state bodies or departments of education. More training, time, resources, and curriculum documents would be a welcome addition to not only the Irish classroom but indeed, all classrooms, with a specific focus on not overloading the curriculum.

Teachers seem to believe in drama's importance for children's learning and acknowledge that drama should be taught as part of the curriculum (McCabe, 2007, pg. V). But the reality of implementing it is difficult. It holds challenges for teachers, pedagogy, schools, and the very nature of drama itself. Each of these will be examined separately in this thesis. Central to this discussion is in developing an understanding of how and what our teachers are, as they are ultimately charged with curricular implementation and their educational values clearly govern their classrooms. Teacher's backgrounds play a role in the kind of teachers we are. This

research investigates how our teacher background plays a role in, if, and how, we implement drama education in our classrooms. Teachers' backgrounds are discussed in chapter 2.

Drama education can be a gateway to creativity and imagination; esteemed attributes for our society. Initial teacher education (ITE) should encourage teachers to implement creativity and imagination: 'opening up students to participatory arts experiences from the beginning of their initial teacher education programme presents a model of arts education that is inclusive, active and potentially transformative' (Kenny, Finneran & Mitchell, 2015, pg. 116). Teachers carry with them the entirety of their life experiences and fullness of their education into their classrooms. It is relevant to investigate how those experiences and identities interact with drama education. This thesis explores the complex and uniquely individual ways that Irish primary school teachers experience the teaching of drama in their classrooms, the negatives, and the positives. The challenges that make it so hard to teach drama are presented and discussed in this research. One of the questions that drives this study is: why is teaching drama in Irish schools so hard? There is no swift way to answer that question as it is a multi-faceted problem, but this research seeks to address this question by identifying the issues and looking at solutions.

Like every multi-faceted problem, this issue needs to be understood at as many levels as possible. Does a teacher with a strong personal predisposition to the arts have an advantage in implementing the drama curriculum? Do teachers carry into the classroom their (un)conscious biases? Is it possible to deliver quality / exciting/ innovative drama education in a school that does not place emphasis on, or ostensibly value drama? Can a school with an ethos that is positively disposed to the arts deliver drama education with teaching staff who are unfamiliar or perhaps not particularly passionate about drama? What do the teachers themselves think about drama pedagogy and the drama curriculum? Is the current curriculum fatally flawed? What can we learn from the front-line classroom experience of those tasked with delivering the curriculum? These considerations formed the framework of the research questions and the interview structure.

#### **1.4 THESIS STRUCTURE**

This research follows a traditional linear approach with the research project being guided by a central question (Jones, 2015). When the fundamental question and subsidiary research questions were developed and clarified, I undertook an in-depth and thorough initial study on literature surrounding this subject to date. Rhoades (2011) highlights the importance of a literature review to provide the researcher with a focus on previous research. This work has been ongoing throughout the project and a wide range of texts and previous research are examined in chapter 2; locating the drama in schools, the past and the present. Locating the drama in schools specifically looks at the history of Irish curriculum, the evolution of arts education in Irish schools and the pedagogy of drama. This chapter also looks at the role of teachers' backgrounds, their beliefs and teacher identity in relation to implementing curriculum and pedagogy in schools.

Chapter 3, examining the drama in schools; provides a framework for the teacher-centred case study with an ethnographic focus. The chapter introduces the research methodology approach chosen for the work, defines the sample, details how the interviews were conducted, and how the data was collected and analysed. A comprehensive investigation of ethics and limitations of the study is presented.

Chapter 4 provides an initial report of the raw data and an overview of the results. The following chapters (5-9) are a discussion and a comparative with specific reference to the participants' answers to give conclusions on the research. Then I present patterns from the data, discuss, and compare the emerging themes.

Final chapters of this research present my suggestions and conclusions based on the discoveries of this study. 'Towards a living model of drama', is the title I have given to how arts education is currently evolving (part I, chapter 10) and further recommendations to be considered and implemented (part II, chapter 11). Chapter 12 gives my concluding comments and sentiments on the project.

## **1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The objective of this project is to research the causes and factors which cause the teaching of drama in Irish schools to be difficult. ‘Drama has and continues to struggle in curriculum’ (Finneran & Freebody, 2021, pg. 75). Research in the field points to the fact that the teaching of drama is very complex (O’ Toole, 2002; Bolton, 2010; Anderson, 2012; Finneran & Freebody, 2021,) and this complexity revolves around four areas: teachers, pedagogy, curriculum, and schools. Therefore, the research framework and the research questions focus on these areas. The research seeks to identify if Irish primary school teachers feel confident in teaching drama and to ascertain the reasons why drama education has possibly not been fully embedded in Irish primary schools. These research objectives are addressed through five research questions:

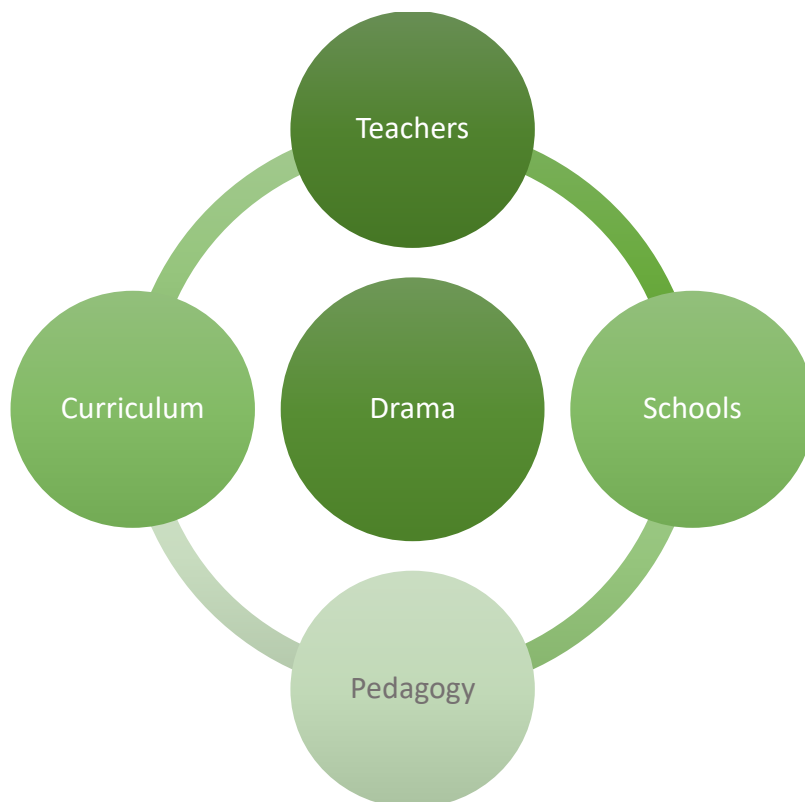
1. How do schools actively or passively encourage or discourage the teaching of drama?
2. How has the 1999 drama curriculum enabled or inhibited the teaching of drama in Irish primary schools?
3. What are the attitudes and opinions of teachers in the study towards drama education and does their personal backgrounds and experiences affect their teaching of drama?
4. What is drama pedagogy in the context of the teachers involved in the study?
5. What happens during drama time in the classrooms of these teachers?

## **1.6 THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

To give drama education a context; currently (at the time of this research) primary schools in Ireland (for children aged 4 – 12 years of age) have a curriculum area entitled ‘arts education’. This curricular area contains the subjects; visual arts, drama and music. Whilst visual arts and music featured in the previous curriculum (Govt. of Ireland, 1971), the inclusion of drama as a subject was a significant development when the current curriculum was published in 1999. Arts education is allocated 3 hours of teaching time in the week. Drama can be adapted as a pedagogy or teaching tool and/or integrated into another subject. Finneran (2008), provides a chronology of events which he believes contribute to the achievement of subject status for drama beginning with a report on the arts in education published by the Arts Council (Benson, 1979) which states that drama both as a methodology and as an activity warrants more attention.

Drama did not become a subject until 1999, but the Benson report suggested it should be more recognised, twenty years earlier. During third level teacher education programmes such as the Bachelor of Education (BEd -undergraduate; four years) or Professional Master of Education (PME – postgraduate, two years), teachers participate in modules in arts education, which contain components in drama education to prepare them to teach drama in their classrooms.

Based on this overview of drama, I have identified my conceptual framework of this research. As displayed in figure 1, teachers, schools, curriculum, and pedagogy are the main elements that are discussed throughout this thesis and the core components to make drama happen. They are discussed individually in the next sections to highlight why they are the basis of the conceptual framework for this thesis.



*Figure 1; The Conceptual Framework*

## **1.7 TEACHERS**

Teachers occupy a key role in the successful and effective delivery of drama education. Teachers are the human delivery vehicle for arts education and carry the responsibility of creating a positive and enriching arts education experience for students. There are many outside contributions like collaborating with other teachers, artists, and practitioners, however, the responsibility to plan and organise this type of enhanced arts education falls under the remit of the class teacher. Therefore, teachers' interests and awareness in investing in arts education is relevant here as an element of the conceptual framework. Teachers' experiences, perceptions and feedback are worthy of significant research. Significant value might be found in understanding teachers' perceptions of the curriculum, resources available for implementation and the relative standing of drama within a school environment. Teachers are central to this study, with the focus being placed on their perspectives and attitudes, and their backgrounds in relations to their own arts education experiences.

According to Toye & Prendiville (2006 pg. 8), teaching is as much an art as a science, and, when a teacher is an artist, they can go above and beyond the pre-packaged systems approach that is often born of prescriptive education. Toye and Prendiville are suggesting that a successful delivery of arts education requires teachers to lead beyond the strict confines of the curriculum. Teaching drama may be quite difficult for many Irish primary teachers if they are not artistically inclined. Being artistically inclined is not a prerequisite to applying and undertaking a teacher education programme. Drama as a subject has a complex nature, and there is often difficulty on the teacher's part of understanding their pedagogical role. Toye and Prendiville's understanding of the teacher as an artist requires us to spend time planning lessons that encompass a 'negotiation of meaning' (pg. 8) with our classes. In other words, 'more than merely transferring a body of knowledge, we will be helping children make sense of the world in which they live' (pg. 8). This is an aspiration of what drama teachers can achieve; using drama to teach skills but also as a method for learning. I imagine teacher's identity and backgrounds also plays a role here. For some, their backgrounds will help them be confident drama teachers where they can easily adapt a role that helps children make sense of the world they live in. For others, their backgrounds or lack of experience in the arts might be one of the challenges they have with drama teaching. Looking at teachers' backgrounds and their identities is a central component of this body of research.

My teaching style has been shaped by my prior knowledge and experiences of the arts, which is my background or teacher identity, and echoes the research conducted by Kenny, Finneran,

and Mitchell. ‘Within arts education, prior knowledge and experience of the arts further adds to the multi-faceted development of the emerging teacher identity’ (2015, pg.160). The literature review of this study details how the process of teacher education has changed significantly in recent years. With the introduction of these new measures, teacher identity, is a prominent theme in educating future teachers (Alsup, 2006; Darling-Hammond & Cobb, 1996; Day, Sammons, Stobart, Kington, & Gu, 2007; Deegan, 2008; Haniford, 2010; Korthagen, 2004; Lopes & Pereira, 2012; Rodgers & Scott, 2008; Sugrue, 2004). Teacher identity is shaped by the kind of people we are and the educational experiences and backgrounds we come from. Understanding aspects of teachers’ backgrounds and teachers’ identities regarding values and opinions around the arts and especially drama education is key to this research project.

Teachers’ backgrounds play a role as teachers are one of the elements of the conceptual framework to make drama happen. Our identity and experiences as teachers, defines our teaching style and the impact this has on our students. The impact drama education can make on teacher identity, and more importantly, the impact teacher identity will have on drama education. This study offers a brief overview into research on teacher identity and provides an analysis on the backgrounds of the participants, specifically, whether their background plays a role in their confidence and competence to teach drama. For successful drama education; pedagogy, curriculum and teachers need to all be sympathetic to one another, if not always perfectly aligned.

## **1.8 SCHOOLS**

Schools are also a core element of conceptual framework as their ethos and the importance the school places on arts education will determine the quality of arts education their students receive. When looking at the role schools play, that includes the school management team and the school community.

It is the responsibility of the school management team to oversee the implementation of standards set out by the governing bodies. ‘The Education Act, 1998 requires schools to develop a school plan which would state the school’s objectives regarding access and

participation, and the measures proposed by the school to achieve these objectives' (INTO, 2016, pg. 1). This Act obliges boards of management to regularly review and update the school plan, in consultation with the school's teachers. Through formal school planning, schools develop and review mandatory policies and legislative requirements, creating what can be regarded as the permanent section of their school plan. School planning also enables schools to identify and work on priority areas for development, thus creating the developmental section of their school plan. School self-evaluation (SSE) is a further component of school development planning. It is a mode of working that contributes to both the permanent and developmental sections of the school plan. Through school self-evaluation, schools reflect on and review their day-to-day practices and their policies, with a particular focus on teaching and learning. It provides all schools, including DEIS (Delivering quality of Opportunity in Schools), with an internal process for developing and progressing action planning for improvement. The teachers in this research are asked to comment and share their experiences of whole school planning and the availability/access to said plans. The purpose of this is to identify if arts education is prominent to the planning processes in schools. Is it an area of focus for the permanent or the developmental section of the school plan? Is arts education ever selected as an area of focus for school self-evaluation? Insights from the teachers on practices around planning for arts education in schools helps us to understand the value schools place on arts education.

Oide is a new support service for teachers and school leaders, funded by the Department of Education, formed from the integration of four existing support services and launched on September 1, 2023. These support services are the Centre for School Leadership (CSL), Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT), the National Induction Programme for Teachers (NIPT) and the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST). According to the IPPN (The Irish Primary Principal's Network) and Oide there are currently 7 mandatory school policies that Irish primary schools are required to have in place. They are; Child Protection, Enrolment, Code of Behaviour, Anti-Bullying, Health & Safety, Substance Use and Whistleblower. These are required to understandably efficiently run the school and have a support in place when any of the above issues arise. Where is the policy on education? On arts? Why are these not mandatory? Does this show the Irish Education's system or the Department of Education and Skill's attitude to arts education? Schools are meant to develop a subject specific whole school plan, but this is not the same as school policy. Teachers in this study are also asked to share if

their school has an arts education policy or a drama policy. Again, to ascertain if their school management places value on putting policies in place for arts education.

Then looking at school community, a whole school play or Christmas concerts have traditionally been a popular event in Irish schools. It is a school community event where families are invited in to watch a performance.

‘Ask children of any age what they most clearly recall from their education. Often, even decades later, it is having had a role in a really good play. Memories come tumbling out. If the teacher played her cards right and the play had depth and met the children in the right places, that shared endeavour will have taken deep roots. Their enjoyment in the recall testifies as much (Smyth, 2016, pg. 7).

Drama offers a fantastic setting for many kinds of learning as the above quote mentions. Many people in their adult lives can fondly recall the exhilaration of being on stage and their wonderful childhood memories of being involved in a theatrical production. Smyth (2016) notes that the performance of a play can imprint memory and change lives- a culmination of cross-curricular and widely different types of learning. These moments are valued but it is not the only method of delivering drama education, and realistically the many superb settings for learning that drama offers does rely heavily on the teacher's ability to set up the drama, guide the drama and frame the children's learning in a safe and fun environment. While a performance is indeed memorable, and having a school community event like a show has many advantages for a school, the school plays a role in identifying that this is a fun extra-curricular event, and not the beginning, middle and end of arts education for the student. In many countries, drama is still in the midst of an advocacy phase and is fighting to win a stable, constant, and secure place within the schooling system (Neelands, 2000, pg. 56). The situation is noted to be the same in Ireland: ‘while it can be argued there is generous space for the arts in Irish schools both officially in the curriculum, and typically in the hearts and minds of the teachers, drama has yet to flourish’ (McDonagh, 2014, pg.10). McDonagh suggests that there seem to be a plethora of reasons for this; including teacher confidence, the lack of a drama pedagogical tradition and the perceived vagueness of the subject in Irish schools.

In my own experience, drama at primary school amounted to one performance once a year. At post-primary level, the study of dramatic literature was reading from a textbook and writing

long essays on opinions of the literature. Other than attending stage schools as an afterschool activity, which also focused on a performance in front an audience, this was the experience of ‘drama’ as a child in the Irish school system in the 1990s. While I cannot account for every school in Ireland previously or presently, this seems to be a fairly common experience of drama in Irish schools. Now, drama has developed into a fully accredited subject in its own right, and has made some advances as to how it is used in the classroom today. School management and the school community can use these advances and ensure appropriate planning of drama education is in school plans and policies and adopted into the ethos of the school. The relevance of drama in an Irish school setting is an important part of drama education as it seeks to understand teachers’ struggles with drama in the classroom today.

## **1.9 PEDAGOGY**

Pedagogy refers to the act of teaching. Understanding the manner in which drama is taught in the Irish classrooms is key to understanding the challenges and successes of drama in Irish primary schools. This section will explore how pedagogy is examined in this thesis.

Drama, while not a new concept, and not a new subject to curriculum, it is a new learning approach within contemporary education. Is drama pedagogy the problem? Do teachers understand what pedagogy is? For the purposes of this research, I define pedagogy as the ‘act of teaching’ or an approach to teaching. McCabe (2007) states that for a long time there have been differing opinions about the pedagogy of drama; whether it is preferable to teach in or through the art form. Some believe that you should concentrate on teaching the skills directly associated with the art form which is ‘acting’. Others believe that the arts are a method of learning, for example, teaching maths concept of shape through dance (McCabe 2007, pg. 2). This is an age-old debate; ‘theories of drama and learning have informed drama pedagogy in schools, both in drama as a subject in its own right and as a method of learning more generally across the curriculum’ (Franks, 2019, pg. 9)

Drama pedagogy does not fit easily into one box, and it is difficult to make a generalisation about it. Perhaps this is why teachers find it challenging to teach. It is also a subject and a concept that has evolved over time. In, ‘this second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, drama has

become an adaptable and energising human enterprise that can span and expand the compartmentalised, discipline-based learning approaches that characterise so much of contemporary education' (Anderson & Dunn, 2013, pg. 293).

As this thesis is concerned with the challenges drama teaching presents, this section is an attempt to 'untangle the confused strands of classroom drama' (Bolton, 2007, pg. 45) and try to establish an understanding of drama. Bolton (1971), also asked these questions in search of his own understanding of drama; 'What is drama? When is drama, drama? When does educational drama go to the heart of drama? We should be able to ask this question: What is the nature and function of drama when it operates at its highest level of achievement?' He goes on to answer his own questions;

'It seems to me that possibly an answer to this is, when it is composed of those elements that are common to both children's play and to theatre, when the aims are to help children to learn about those feelings, attitudes and preconceptions that, before drama was experienced, were too implicit for them to be aware of. [...so, they are] helped to face facts and to interpret them without prejudice; so that they develop a range and degree of identification with other people; so that they develop a set of principles, a set of consistent principles, by which they are going to live' (Bolton, 1971, pg.12-13).

While Bolton's explanations are enlightening, they are also boastful as to what the subject could be in an idyllic world. They are not very tangible or an easily implemented concept in an Irish classroom today. The language describes drama as some kind of beautiful journey that students will go, but I am still left wondering what it actually all means and how I bring it into my classroom. Is drama pedagogy to be a combination of teaching skills and a method of learning? Bolton (1990), discusses this issue quite succinctly and finds argument for one or the other absurd. He endorses facilitating the understanding of ideas, feelings, insights and experience through the practice of arts. If you use this pedagogy, then you will be educating both in and through drama. As a drama educator, the 'intention is to work in the art form, using elements of theatre and of other enactive, visual, aural, kinaesthetic and verbal modes, and combine it with an understanding of the theme or content the group aims to explore' (Bolton, 1990, pg. 5). If your only aim in arts education is to teach skills and concepts associated with arts disciplines, then you are overlooking what is meant by the arts and the pedagogy of arts education. Drama education is one of the best platforms to learn how to think outside the box.

But we still need to do a lot of work to rectify the common misconception of what drama really is.

According to Benson (1979) The term ‘drama education’ includes the use of drama both as a method and as a subject. ‘As a method, drama depends on the initiative and imagination of a subject teacher, although obviously some expertise is required. Its use and benefits vary according to age-group. Up to twelve years of age the emphasis is largely on the personal development of the child, using drama as an extension of personal play, developing team work, solving problems etc.’ (Benson, 1979, pg. 56). Using drama as an extension of personal play for students up to the age of twelve is a clear and concise way of using drama in the classroom. In their book the ‘Pedagogy of Play’, Mardell *et al.*, discuss what the pedagogy of play is and the benefits of it on children’s development.

‘When people play, they are engaged, relaxed, and challenged—states of mind highly conducive to learning. Through play, children and adults try out ideas, test theories, experiment with symbol systems, better understand social relations, take risks, and reimagine the world. As they lead their play, players develop agency. Exploring the unknown, they cultivate their imaginations and learn to deal with uncertainty. Joyfully playing with others, they develop empathy. While not all learning has to be playful, nor does every moment of play involve significant learning, a close look at play and playfulness reveals numerous emotional, social, and cognitive features that powerfully aid learning. These features help make learning feel fun and enjoyable, and proceed in engaging and exploratory ways’ (Mardell *et al.*, 2023, pg. 19).

Mardell *et al.*, state that through play, children try out ideas, experiment and take risks. Children learn through their early experiences of dramatic play. As a more structured kind of improvisational role-playing, drama-based pedagogy generates and cultivates many cognitive skills. Andy Kempe suggests that drama’s purpose is to ‘galvanise perception and imagination to inform, enlighten, and enrich, applying approaches where emotion and empathy support learners to understand, the effects of events on people’ (Kempe, 2013, pg. 200). This is also an unencumbered description of drama; we do use drama to explore events so we can enlighten and inform children.

Davis (2010), advises that drama practitioners should stick to four main aims when designing a drama education framework. It should place emphasis on content; promote drama for personal growth; see drama principally as a means of social development and hold teaching

about the dramatic art form as a priority (pg. 45). A compelling drama teacher will attempt to move forward on all these aims simultaneously; however, the last aim; teaching the dramatic art form, has caused confusion. What is the dramatic art form and what is its connection to drama education? Gavin Bolton's (2010) *Essential Writings* highlights that curriculum documents from the British Department of Education have ignored dimensions of the dramatic art form from previous writings and did not mention focus and tension, which create the deliberate manipulation of time and space and therefore create constraints where drama can take place: 'these critical formal dimensions are given little space in recent literature, almost as though those now writing about drama theory do not really understand the basic nature of drama' (Davis, 2010, pg. 46). In Davis' writings on Gavin Bolton's work (2010), they define the dramatic art form into four subcategories; learning how to act; academic learning about drama, learning theatre crafts and learning the basic elements of drama (pg. 46). These aims and subthemes present a strong foundation to attempt to define drama education and how it has evolved into what it is today.

Drama education is the opposite of traditional, rote learning styles of education where the student is expected to sit quietly in the class and listen to the teacher talk. It is an active, self-exploratory, independent journey of learning that has parameters set by the facilitator but the student can be in control of their learning. This description of drama is called process drama and is currently one of the most common approaches to drama in Irish schools (O' Neill, 1995). It can be used to explore new academic content or to explore oneself. This approach may adapt as we move towards a new curriculum in art with a more integrated arts-based approach (NCCA 2020, 2023, 2024b). In summation, drama education can be defined as; an interactive, exploratory method of learning where students are tasked with being in charge of their own learning through performance, where the meaning of the performance is for the benefit of their own learning (Toye and Prendiville, 2006). Drama education can also be used as a teaching tool to enhance any lesson or can be the basis of the lesson, the beauty of drama education is that it can be utilised for any curricular area and helps students to draw meaning from new or old content or knowledge. Playful movement and kinaesthetic learning lie at the core of drama. Drama illuminates and deepens other subject areas when brought into the heart of schools (Smyth, 2016). Drama education is multi-faceted; hence, the difficulty in defining it, and subsequently, understanding how to teach it.

To give a very clear definition of what I understand drama pedagogy to be in my own practice and within the context of this research, I am going to echo the words of Frances Prendiville and Nigel Toye. This description comes from a teaching resource, *Drama and Traditional Story for the Earlier Years*, which the writers have designed for use in the classroom. It states: ‘What is drama? An active, fictional approach to learning where teacher and pupils use role and other techniques of the art from to examine key elements of a story. The fictional exploration focuses learning, with reflection in and out of role as a vital ingredient of that learning process’ (Toye & Prendiville, 2006, pg. 248). This quote defines drama in a way that strongly resonates with my own belief and understanding of drama. It also encompasses my earlier description of drama pedagogy; where drama is a method of learning but also teaches skills, this can be done through story. The active, fictional approach is using drama as a method of learning. Throughout this document, when I refer to drama, I am talking about drama as an *active, fictional approach to learning that examines key elements of whatever the lesson content maybe through story*.

## **1.10 CURRICULUM**

Curriculum is a set of learning guidelines. Presently there is one strand or aim on the Irish primary school drama curriculum, which is, ‘drama to explore feelings, knowledge, and ideas, leading to understanding’ (NCCA, 1999c, pg. 8). Until the introduction of the 1999 curriculum, drama did not have a role in an official capacity in the Irish schools. ‘The mere fact that the curriculum exists is clearly an indication of some commitment to drama’ (Finneran, 2008, pg. 191). The drama curriculum was introduced as it was thought to be beneficial in some way to education in Ireland. Policy makers have committed to the inclusion of drama in the curriculum and therefore must have deemed it to have weight and value to add. O’Toole and Stinson (2009) draw upon the ideas of Richard Courtney (1980), to remind us that curriculum should not only be understood as a noun, but as a verb as well. According to Anderson and Dunn (2013), the curriculum is a process that teachers and students engage in together (pg. 299). The current Irish drama curriculum document (DCD) is possibly a stumbling block for Irish teachers when it comes to teaching drama. The curriculum itself, and how it is understood by teachers is examined in this study. This research seeks teachers’ opinions on the document, its usability and relevance in today’s classroom. The space between the written curriculum and the

implemented classroom lesson is lacking. Material is needed to guide teachers in interpreting the curriculum.

Drama provides a space within the curriculum for young people to imagine and actively engage with human experiences from the past, present, and future. It is a place for exploring and re-making old stories, for creating and projecting into fictional worlds where the rules can be changed, and new possibilities appear (Sinclair, Jeannette, and O'Toole, 2009, pg. 66).

This a broad definition of drama, drama is a broad subject. It covers a wide range of issues in school. I can see why teachers may find it difficult to teach or even understand drama, with descriptions such as this. How do teachers interpret this statement: 'where the rules change and new possibilities appear' and how do you apply this to a classroom?

Australian curriculum documents define drama in terms of; 'expressing and communicating understandings about human issues and experience; interacting in a range of roles, relationships, situations; investigating feelings, actions and consequence contexts; developing confidence and awareness. These aims are addressed through such activities as; the enactment of real and imagined events; collaboration in the preparation and presentation of drama performance; and the manipulation of an understanding of forms, styles, and purpose of drama' (Sinclair, Jeannette, and O'Toole, 2009, pg. 66). Drama needs to be recognised for what it does best, which is to negotiate meanings through engagement with imagined realities' (Toye & Prendiville, 2007, pg. 81). Drama has the potential to ignite the student's imagination, generate deep understanding, challenge beliefs and attitudes, cultivate higher-order thinking, broaden understandings, stimulate emotional capabilities and build cognitive abilities (Fleming *et al.*, 2004, Bolton 2007, O'Toole & Dunn, 2009). Drama is about human experience and human understanding. It is cognitive, holistic and experiential. It allows students to explore, experiment, discover, create and perform (O'Toole and Dunn, 2002) and can also enhance the teaching of most subjects (Buchman, 2015) as students can engage with the content through imagined realities or create an era in time through the fictional lens.

Academia has traditionally focused on mathematics, sciences and the study of language as being the pivotal points of education. However, in this new era of social media and constant communication with people in all corners of the world; a well-rounded education that includes communication skills, public speaking, free speech, and the ability to express oneself through

a variety of different mediums, are necessary skills for life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Traditional academia should not be replaced but there is a place in education for core curriculum subjects that incorporate a strong arts education.

‘During the last three decades, research findings into the value of arts education remain positive and consistent. Study after study has shown that when the arts are given space in the curriculum, there are immediate benefits to students, schools and the wider community. There is persuasive evidence that the inclusion of arts in education motivates and engages students in learning, stimulates curiosity and fosters creativity, facilitates collaboration, and promotes significant and relevant skills’ (Anderson and Dunn, 2013, xix).

This statement from Michael Anderson and Julie Dunn highlights that research in the arts is moving forward; it does have value and is being recognised for its merits. The role of arts education within the curriculum and the primary curriculum framework are investigated further in chapter 2, locating the drama in schools, the past and the present and in chapter 10, towards a living model of drama.

## **1.11 CONCLUSION**

The rationale behind this project is introduced in this chapter; the research questions and components of drama education that underpin the conversation around the challenges of teaching drama are outlined. The next chapter, locating the drama in schools; is a comprehensive literature review on the history of arts and drama education, its evolution, drama for learning and the teaching of drama, teachers’ backgrounds and the challenges teaching drama presents. Again, I want to reiterate that this is a hopeful thesis about the potential drama has. Therefore, I think it appropriate to highlight in the early stages of the thesis that drama can have an impact on our identities and abilities while in the classroom, but more importantly on our lives, after the classroom. This excerpt from *Masterclass in Drama Education* sums it up eloquently;

‘While it is true that some of our young people will use these skills on the stage and go onto theatrical careers, most will not. All of our students will need, however, to continue learning from others who differ from themselves and almost all of them will need to understand how to work in teams. This interpersonal understanding is an essential part of our modern democratic world, and it is one of the reasons drama has historically, and still, today, has a strong case for being part of the mandatory curriculum. If our communities and their governments are serious about creating democratic, pluralist societies that not only tolerate but understand and engage with difference, drama would be at the centre of the curriculum’ (Anderson, 2012, pg. 77).

To conclude, social and collaborative learning skills students learn in drama will apply to many of their endeavours in life- and not just activities related to performance. Drama lends itself to many things within the classroom. Investigating why teachers find it hard to use drama in the classroom and identify solutions to this problem, is a worthwhile enquiry.

## **2 LOCATING DRAMA IN SCHOOLS IN THE PAST AND THE PRESENT**

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

The foundation of any literature review lies in a fundamental question that guides the exploration of a specific research area. In this context, my guiding question is centred around the perspectives and experiences of Irish primary school teachers concerning drama education. Understanding how these educators perceive and engage with drama education is crucial, as it forms the basis for an in-depth narrative that illuminates the current landscape of drama education in Irish schools. This overarching question also produces several subsidiary inquiries that will be addressed throughout the literature review.

Anderson (2012) suggests that a literature review should not only provide support for the research question but also highlight the gaps in existing literature that the research question aims to bridge. By embarking on this literature review, I aim to familiarise myself with prior research on the subject, discern previous findings, and ultimately draw comparisons with the outcomes of this study. As Bell (2010) states, the primary objective of a literature review is to offer the reader a comprehensive understanding of the existing knowledge and major questions within the subject area (pg. 104). In line with this description, this chapter is designed to fulfil precisely that purpose, furnishing readers with a comprehensive overview of the current state of knowledge and addressing the principal questions in the realm of drama education as perceived by Irish primary school teachers.

Research in the field of drama is crucial for the advancement of knowledge, to allow scholars to explore diverse aspects of drama, from its history to pedagogy. John O'Toole (2006) underscores the importance of research in generating new knowledge and understanding the current state of drama education, particularly in Irish primary schools. Qualitative drama research, as advocated by Anderson (2010), emphasises the quality of the learning experience. Turner-King and Kitchen (2022) highlight the need for a more interdisciplinary approach within the field, suggesting a shift toward transdisciplinary education. Anderson also calls for a transition from advocacy to a research-rich culture, acknowledging the newfound recognition

of drama's importance in the curriculum. This research realm is evolving, with its future promising a dynamic blend of inquiry and practice.

To offer a comprehensive understanding of what drama is, it is imperative to demystify the essence of drama. This chapter aims to shed light on what drama education is and how it can be effectively harnessed as a pedagogical tool. Drama inherently lends itself to practical application, with an array of resources available to educators, encompassing games, activities, and lesson ideas, some of which are catalogued in the subsequent literature timeline of this chapter (appendix 7). However, it is worth noting that while these resources provide valuable lesson plans, they may sometimes lack a sense of purpose, as observed by Fleming (2011). For a drama educator, there is a need to contemplate the "why" behind teaching drama. What is its purpose, and what do students stand to gain from their participation in dramatic activities? The amalgamation of the theoretical underpinnings and practical activities forms the cornerstone of effective drama education. Frequently, drama is treated as a peripheral subject within a busy school week, perhaps relegated to a late Friday afternoon slot, where students are tasked with impromptu improvisations or group dramas for presentation. In a curriculum bound by time constraints, teachers often find themselves pressured to orchestrate meaningful drama lessons. Yet, relegating drama to an afterthought, without grounding it in theoretical foundations or promoting its rationale, does not provide students with a comprehensive and well-rounded drama education. As Fleming (2011) aptly notes, "if practice without theory is in danger of being reductive, theory without practice can easily become vacuous and irrelevant" (p. 2). Students need to grasp the "why" to derive meaning and understanding from their lessons. Learning is most effective when it can be linked to prior knowledge or to aspects of the students' lives.

In an evolving educational landscape where schools are increasingly recognising their role in addressing personal and social issues, the significance of instilling values and attitudes has begun to shape education and curricula worldwide, as Ragnarsdóttir and Björnsson (2020) report. Drama emerges as a potent vehicle for exploring the evolving values and attitudes of today's students. Ragnarsdóttir and Björnsson contend that drama can empower children to become not only healthy and creative individuals but also active participants in a democratic society.

The following chapter delves deeper into the conceptual framework underpinning this research. It places emphasis on the pivotal components that collectively shape the landscape of drama education. These components include teachers, schools, curriculum, and pedagogy, all of which hold significant roles within the context of arts education, specifically drama education, and are influenced by teachers' backgrounds. It explores the historical evolution of drama education, delves into the role it plays within the broader educational spectrum, and illuminates the myriad benefits it offers. Additionally, it engages in a discussion regarding the impact of teachers' backgrounds on the effectiveness and success of the subject. Notably, as drama holds a recognised place within the curriculum of primary schools in Ireland during the time of this research, this chapter underscores the significance of drama education within these institutions and illuminates why the present research remains pertinent.

## **2.2 THE ARTS IN IRISH EDUCATION**

### **2.2.1 CURRICULAR PROVISION**

Before delving into the literature of drama education, it is necessary to provide an overview of Irish curriculum and how it has evolved to its current position. Before 1971, the arts were largely neglected as a part of primary education in Ireland, which was focused on providing a basic, universal curriculum consisting primarily of reading, writing, and maths (Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO) 2009, pg. 29). The *Curaclam Nua na Bunscoile* of 1971 reoriented the curriculum towards a more child-centered approach, partly through its inclusion of programmes in music, visual arts, physical education and dance (Sugrue 1997). However, a 1979 report by the Arts Council Ireland indicated that in practice, arts education was still largely neglected in Irish primary schools, with teachers tending to perceive the arts more as a means of passing the time than of developing students' potential (Benson, 1979, pg. 20).

A further revision of the curriculum in 1999 was intended to build on the child-centered principles of the 1971 initiative while further promoting the holistic development of the child (NCCA, 1999a, pg. 7). Significant for the present research was the prioritisation in the 1999 curriculum of the arts as means of promoting holistic education and lifelong learning. Detailed

and standardised curricula were created for visual arts and music (with dance being implemented through the physical education curriculum), and general guidelines were provided for drama education also. Drama education in fact had the status of a last-minute add-on, appended to the 1999 curriculum provision ‘very late in the process’ (Sugrue, 2004a, pg. 197). Sugrue reports that the late addition of drama to the revised curriculum is surprising given the fact that a report from the Primary Curriculum Review Body (PCRB), advised that drama become ‘a pedagogic resource and focus for integrating various aspects of the curriculum’ (DES, 1990, pg. 69). SPHE (Social, Personal, Health Education) also became a newly recognised subject in the 1999 curriculum and the SPHE document has a detailed section outlining the merits of drama as pedagogical practice. In line with the PCRB’s advice, the revised curriculum intended to award drama a space as a teaching tool and to recognise its virtues. It just appears that time ran out and the research, recommendations and ideas were never successfully executed: ‘it appears that drama became a subject rather than a pedagogical principle at a very late stage in the process, too late to revise other subject documents to reflect its new status’ (Sugrue, 2004a, pg. 197). This statement from Sugrue mirrors the previous comment in the introduction of this chapter, about drama being thrown into children’s learning, late in the week on a Friday afternoon. The drama curriculum was thrown in, late in the day for the revised curriculum and perhaps not presented or rolled out as effectively as it could have been.

There are relevant structural variances between how the 1971 and the 1999 curriculum was developed. The 1971 curriculum document was produced by a group of primary school inspectors. The lack of involvement from primary school teachers is criticised (McDonagh, 1969). The inspectors had the responsibility of developing curricula, while teachers had the responsibility of implementing it (Sugrue, 2004a). This was the case until the Curriculum and the Examinations Board were founded, the precursor to what we now call the NCCA (The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment). The NCCA was founded under the Education Act of Ireland in 1998: ‘the council is accountable to the Minister for Education and is responsible for ensuring good governance and performs this task by setting strategic goals and actions and taking strategic decisions on all key areas of work’ (NCCA, 2022).

The NCCA revised the curriculum in 1999, in a process which included teacher involvement and feedback. The OECD (1991) report that the founding of the NCCA is the most important innovation in recent years as it provided the means whereby a national approach to curriculum

could be employed. The NCCA is still the main body to review and produce curriculum and policy in Ireland today. The new curriculum framework (2020) and recently published primary curriculum framework (2023) are currently under review and will be the newest revision to Ireland's curriculum since 1999. It is still in draft form at the completion of this research. The 1971 Irish curriculum recognised drama as a teaching tool, but the 1999 Irish curriculum thought it could be more and acknowledged it as subject. Where and how drama will place in the primary curriculum framework is not yet clear, but it will be fully incorporated as a component of arts education, according to the draft document (NCCA, 2020 & 2023). The European Commission (2009) report indicates that in Ireland the arts are integrated in the early years but organised into separate subjects in later schooling, where they are optional. The new curriculum document suggests that going forward, we will also have subject groupings. According to the Department of Education and Skills, the framework introduces key competencies for children's learning, setting out the main features and components for the full redevelopment of the primary school curriculum, detailing curriculum areas and subjects; and suggested time allocations. It introduces and expands aspects of learning including STEM Education, modern foreign languages and a broader arts education (Gov.ie, 2023) The framework will guide the development of the specifications for each of the curriculum areas that will be introduced in the coming years. The primary curriculum framework is discussed further in chapter 10.

The NCCA has been a pivotal leading body in terms of Ireland's educational provision over the last twenty years. The research, reports, policies and curriculum documents that it has produced are easily accessible and readily available on their website. It is a huge network and much needed resource to Irish education. As we are focusing on drama education here, it is relevant to look at what policy is available from the NCCA and other governing bodies for arts and drama, and to investigate what advances have been made in these areas since 1999. In the appendices, (appendix 6), is a comprehensive timeline of publications by Irish Educational bodies like the NCCA and NEPS (National Educational Psychological Service). The purpose of the timeline, while showing the significant contribution made to curriculum and policy in a wide range of areas, is intended to highlight the lack of progress for drama education. The figure contains only one significant document for drama in over 20 years and this document was created for every subject, so drama was not being identified as an area of priority. The NCCA has also published reports and research documents, (they are not all listed), as this timeline contains mainly publications, and a lot of reports or research did not directly relate to

the focus of this research. The only document relevant for primary school teachers to enhance or upskill their drama teaching is *Drama Guidelines for Teachers of Students with Mild Additional Learning Needs*, published in 2018 (highlighted in pink in appendix 6). The document outlines the rationale for producing a planning document on using drama with students who have mild additional learning needs, how the school should plan, how to organise the classroom, approaches and methodologies and exemplars with lesson resources and ideas for a range of class levels. This is an essential document for teachers as our classrooms grow ever more diverse and is discussed further in section 2.4 on how drama can support learning, but it is substandard that this the only advancement made in terms of curriculum and policy in over twenty years.

### 2.3 THE CHANGING CONTEXT OF ARTS IN IRISH EDUCATION

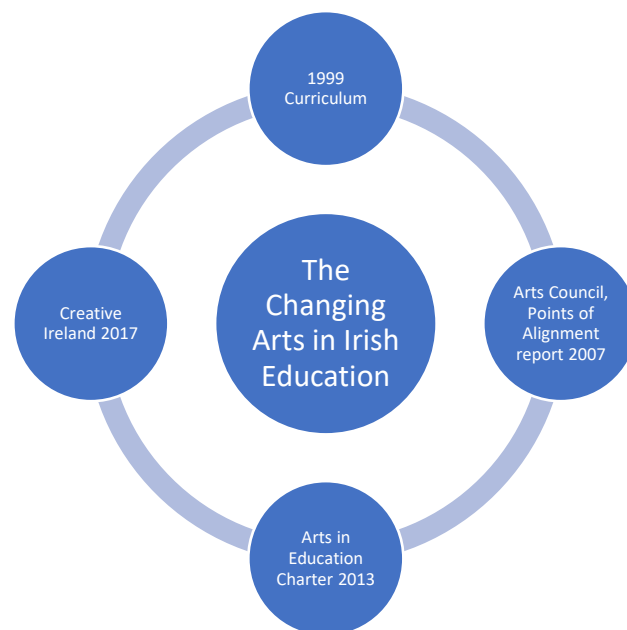


Figure 2; *The Changing Arts in Irish Education*

The landscape around drama and arts education has changed over the last number of decades, changes which are due to the national 1999 curriculum, the Arts Council ‘Points of Alignment’ 2007, the establishment of the Arts in Education Charter in 2013, and the establishment of Creative Ireland in 2017, as seen in figure 2. These are the big factors that have reformed the role of arts education. Primary arts education in Ireland was implemented to contribute to the

overall aims of the 1999 curriculum, which are: ‘to enable the child to live a full life as a child, and to realise his or her potential as a unique individual; to enable the child to develop as a social being through living and cooperating with others and so contribute to the good of society; and to prepare the child for further education and lifelong learning (NCCA, 1999a, pg. 7). Specifically, arts education is intended to stimulate students to think creatively and to promote their adaptability. Emphasis on the creative process is intended to ensure the child’s work is personal and of the high quality that work tends to achieve when the creator feels a personal investment in it. Arts education is described as ‘life-enhancing’ because it is expected to encourage and increase students’ self-esteem, willingness to take risks, tolerance for diversity, and spontaneity (NCCA, 1999a, pg. 7).

When discussing arts education, it is necessary to incorporate the term arts in education as it is a vehicle to embed the arts into other curricular areas.

‘The very term “arts *in* education” as opposed to “arts education” (referring to general, mainstream or curriculum arts in schools) draws one into a potential binary between the arts and education worlds. One is “in” the space of the “other”. Issues relating to power, control, responsibility and role invariably surface. Like any meeting point, however, it also opens up significant opportunities for dialogue, creativity, imagining and, of course, tension. Thus, the “in” between space of the two worlds becomes a rich site for discussion, debate and possibility’ (Kenny, 2017, pg. 254).

According to the Arts Council (2008), arts in education it is broadly defined as arts interventions in formal education contexts in Irish schools. The Arts in Education Website ([artsineducation.ie](http://artsineducation.ie)) have a detailed overview of what is happening at primary level in Ireland currently. There is wide body of initiatives like; Finding our Way (Dance), ABC of the Three Museums (Visual Art), The Ark (cultural centre in Dublin for children to explore music, theatre and literature), Fighting Words (writing skills from Creative Ireland), the Association of Teachers’/Education Centres in Ireland, Poetry Ireland, The Design and Crafts Council of Ireland, multiple teacher artist partnerships (TAPs) around the country and Music Generation, to give a few examples, doing commendable work in the field of arts in education in Irish primary schools. Given this list of current arts in education projects, it is evident that there has been an increased effort to increase arts-based education and, despite the effects of Covid-19, we are seeing the return of initiatives and guest teachers to our classrooms, largely funded by

the Arts Council Ireland. The increased effort and emergence of development in arts education is largely in part to *The Arts in Education Charter* (2013). “The Charter laid down a significant marker for change in being a joint venture of the then Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (DAHG) and the Department of Education and Skills” (Kenny, 2017). The *Benson Report* (Benson & Ó Tuama, 1979) called for the collaboration between the two departments, with the *Artist-Schools Guidelines* (ACI, 2006) and *Points of Alignment* (ACI, 2008) echoing the sentiments of the Benson Report in recent years. Education Partnership is an aim outlined by the Arts in Education Charter document and an area of focus. The Arts in Education Charter (2013) ‘aims to promote and develop arts education and the arts in education amongst children and young people through an integrated and collaborative approach across government departments, education agencies and arts organisations’ (Kenny, Finneran & Mitchel, 2015, pg.159). The above listed arts in education initiatives currently employed across the education sector of Ireland are examples of the Charter coming to life, momentum has been building to establish and grow collaboration between business, philanthropic, government sectors and the arts in our education system.

The primary curriculum framework includes arts education, with drama still a core element, and some new additions. Long (2015) reports that it is positive to see arts education continue to be recognised as curriculum, especially the inclusion of drama, as this is not the case in all European primary curriculum. However, the proposed reduction in time for arts, despite the fact that it is potentially to be expanded to include dance, film and digital media, as well as the original subjects of art, music and drama, does not show a meaningful commitment to wellbeing and the arts (McCabe & Flannery, 2022). This reduction for the arts reflects an ongoing concern across the primary education sector and accordingly, for pre-service teacher partnerships and higher education institutions generally (Caldwell *et al.*, 2021; Aróstegui, 2016). The primary curriculum framework identifies wellbeing as one of its key competencies and reflects that arts education plays a vital role here. McCabe and Flannery recommend that wellbeing should be embedded in teacher education. The report on *Teachers in Europe Careers, Development and Well-being* recommends to improve the wellbeing of European teachers throughout their teacher education (European Commission, 2021). Based on the findings of that report and their own research, McCabe and Flannery, go as far as to state the arts should be core elements of teacher education programmes. ‘Yet, continually arts education work is largely fragmented, short-term, under-resourced, sporadic, poorly funded and lacking in rigorous research documentation’ (Kenny, 2017, pg. 254). How can we make progress

towards arts-based activities to target wellbeing if our allotted time is being cut in the curriculum? While there is commendable work being implemented in schools across the country, it is fragmented, under-resourced and lacking research. It is undeniable that progress has been made over the life-time of the 1999 curriculum. Some of this success can be accredited to the arts in education initiatives born from; the Charter, the Arts Council and Creative Ireland.

The Arts Council Ireland is a government agency responsible for funding and developing the arts in Ireland. ‘When the Arts Council was established in 1951, its role focussed on the promotion of the fine arts and no emphasis was placed on its potential links with formal or non-formal education provision. Over recent decades, the Arts Council has developed a much more multi-faceted role’ (Arts Council, 2007, pg. 41). They provide support and grants to artists, organisations, and projects across various art forms, including visual arts, literature, theatre, music, dance, and film. The Arts Council regularly publishes reports, strategies, and policies related to the arts in Ireland. These documents may cover topics such as funding priorities, arts development plans, cultural strategies, and initiatives aimed at promoting artistic excellence, accessibility, and cultural participation. ‘Over recent years, some new agencies have been established and initiatives undertaken which have greatly enriched the arts landscape in Ireland. The establishment of a coherent and cohesive policy on the arts in education at this time would greatly improve the co-ordination of policy, promote greater alignment of operation by involved stakeholders, and allow for greater added value to education through enlightened implementation strategies’ (Arts Council, 2007, pg. 37).

One report titled ‘Points of Alignment: The Report of the Special Committee on the Arts and Education’ is a significant document published by the Arts Council Ireland in 2007. It focuses on the relationship between the arts and education and explores ways to enhance and integrate arts education into the Irish education system. The report is the result of a special committee established by the Arts Council to investigate the state of arts education in Ireland and provide recommendations for its improvement. The committee examine various aspects, including curriculum development, teacher training, resources, and partnerships between schools and arts organisations. ‘Points of Alignment’ emphasises the benefits of arts education for students’ cognitive, creative, and personal development. It highlights the importance of fostering creativity, imagination, and critical thinking skills through engagement with the arts. The report also recognises the role of the arts in promoting cultural awareness, diversity, and social inclusion. The report recognises that ‘one of the great deficiencies (for arts education) has been

the lack of a coherent vision or cohesive national plan’ (Arts Council, 2007, pg. 45). This report offers recommendations, which, in effect, was the start of a cohesive national plan. The report identified that a National Arts-in-Education Development Unit, Local Partnerships, The Arts Council, The Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism were all to play a role in the plan.

Some of the key recommendations and points addressed in the report include:

1. Integrating arts education into the curriculum
2. Teacher training and professional development
3. Partnerships and collaboration with outside agencies
4. Access and inclusion for all students. ‘Points of Alignment’ underscores the importance of providing equal opportunities for all students to engage in arts education, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds or with special educational needs.
5. Funding and resources

The Arts Council used the findings and recommendations from the Points of Alignment report to inform its strategies and initiatives relating to arts education. The document plays a significant role in shaping policies and discussions on the integration of arts education in Ireland. Some of the initiatives established, as a result of report, and that are currently offered across Ireland are discussed in Chapter 10, Towards a Living Model of Drama. Irish society has moved into the new century, there are many social changes and contextual factors which indicate that a much more inspiring future for the arts education is possible than was the experience in the past.

Creative Ireland is another fundamental pillar of the changing context of arts education in Ireland and one that is doing phenomenal work in terms of school, community and youth programmes in the last five years. Creative Ireland is an Irish government initiative that aims to place creativity at the centre of public policy and promote Ireland as a centre for cultural and creative excellence. It was established in 2017 with the vision of nurturing creativity and fostering collaboration across various sectors to enhance well-being, cultural expression, and economic growth. ‘Creative Ireland was born out of *Ireland 2016*, the hugely successful state initiative to mark the hundredth anniversary of the Easter Rising (an historic event of the Irish Rebellion). The programme draws inspiration from the extraordinary public response to the

Centenary and the thousands of largely culture-based events exploring issues of identity, community, culture, heritage and citizenship’ (Creative Ireland, 2023).

Through partnerships with various government departments, cultural organisations, local authorities, local education and training boards, community groups and local youth groups, Creative Ireland encourages collaboration, innovation, and the celebration of Ireland's rich cultural heritage while nurturing contemporary artistic expression. Some of Creative Ireland's initiatives were mentioned earlier in this section and are discussed further in chapter 10.

There is a feeling that this is only the beginning and the hope that revised curriculums, initiatives from Creative Ireland and national arts-based projects and further research will move our educational provision further towards the benefits of arts. This study did not start with a focus on arts education. However, the landscape has evolved throughout the lifetime of this research and it is now relevant to discuss drama as a component of arts education. As previously mentioned, going forward, drama will be an integrated pedagogy in the arts curriculum alongside visual art, music and dance in the Revised Curriculum Framework. Therefore, the current standing of arts education is significant to this research. The role of arts education is discussed further in chapters 9 and 10, as part of the research recommendations and moving towards a living model of drama.

## **2.4 DRAMA EDUCATION**

### **2.4.1 DEFINING DRAMA EDUCATION**

Drama education is often perceived as process, pedagogy or product, or a combination of all three (NCCA, 2022, pg. 10). Drama education is multifaceted and can be used in a multitude of ways. Throughout this thesis, drama is discussed as a pedagogy, a process, like process drama and a product that is both an art-form and an integrated teaching tool. Drama education has mutated over several years through a series of changes to become a subject in the teaching curriculum in some countries, including Ireland. It has been adopted in various approaches

depending on the educational curriculum of specific countries. This section attempts to define drama education.

I stated at the beginning that I believe that a fundamental part of drama is making, developing and telling stories. In drama, stories serve as the framework within which characters interact, conflicts arise, and emotions are expressed. Drama uses stories to explore the complexities of human life and emotions, providing a platform for entertainment, reflection, and understanding. By integrating aspects of storytelling into drama education, students can develop their creativity, critical thinking skills, problem solving skills and empathy. Kayılı and Arı (2016) state that the presence of drama and stories can support conceptual development and are effective in the improvement of children's problem-solving skills. Pekdoğan (2016) concluded that storytelling and drama promoted young children's social skills. The advantages of drama and storytelling include 'promoting creative thinking, developing critical thinking, enhancing listening skills, improving the recognition of others and empathetic skills, developing collaboration with the group and respect for peers and supporting positive perspective towards oneself' (Kayılı, G. & Erdal, Z., 2021, pg. 53). Stories allows them to explore different narratives, characters, and emotions, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation for the art of drama.

Ultimately, drama harnesses the power of stories to entertain, educate, challenge, and inspire. Bruner (1991) argues that stories play a central role in human development and contribute to the creation of cultural traditions, tools and norms, and allow the individual to create meaning and relevance in experiences. Storytelling and drama share a number of features which make them natural to integrate during lessons. Both build on children's innate capacity for fantasy and imaginative play, and even very young children can differentiate between the conventions of a story or drama and real life. Through stories and drama, children develop understanding of themselves and the world around them. 'Stories are readily linked to reading and conversations, which creates the possibility of visualising content, structure and narrative as communicative tools' (Walan & Enochsson, 2019, pg. 822). Philip Taylor (2000) in his book, *The Drama Classroom: Action, Reflection, Transformation*, explores the role of drama in education and highlights the centrality of stories in drama pedagogy. It discusses how stories can be used as a starting point for dramatic activities, emphasising the connection between narrative and the development of creative and critical thinking skills. Norfolk *et al.*, (2006), demonstrates how storytelling and drama can enhance learning outcomes and foster creativity

and imagination. In Kathleen Gallagher's (2000) academic work exploring the role of drama education in the lives of girls, she discusses how drama allows girls to explore and construct their identities through storytelling and performance. The book emphasises the empowering potential of storytelling in drama education. Drama is a pedagogy, it is an art-form, it is role-play, all these elements are essentially based on stories.

According to the NCCA, (2022) Drama involves the combination of the emotional, physical, intellectual and imaginative capabilities of the students involved in a collaborative, creative activity. Drama is a performing art and an outlet for self-expression, which is advantageous in learning as it helps stimulate creativity and problem-solving. It is a useful learning tool because it involves the learner physically, socially, and emotionally (Blatner, 1995, pg. 93). This means that the learner is fully engaged. Davis (2014) argues that dramatic art can challenge the learner's perceptions of themselves and their broader environment. It also provides the learner with a set of emotions and thoughts that they may not have means to express. A student can draw on the understandings of personal challenges from the problems faced by characters in literature, on screen, or in their personal lives. Drama can also provide a teacher with an alternative for assessing his or her students (Gary, 2011, pg. 113). Observing students during drama is a useful assessment tool for teachers as drama activities can be a rich source of assessment data that goes beyond traditional testing methods. It allows teachers to evaluate a wide range of skills and attributes while providing a more engaging and authentic assessment experience for students. 'Drama is potentially powerful within the school curriculum because it can be an art form, a medium for learning (a pedagogy), and a social-cultural experience (dramatic play)- sometimes the teacher chooses to focus on one of the approaches, sometimes all are incorporated into the same lesson or unit of work' (Sinclair, Jeanneret and O' Toole, 2009, pg. 68). The statement from Sinclair *et al.*, (2009) highlights the multifaceted nature of drama within the school curriculum. Drama's versatility within the school curriculum makes it a powerful tool that can cater to diverse learning objectives, engage students on multiple levels, and foster creativity, empathy, and a deeper understanding of the world.

Drama can also be a teaching tool that helps learners to participate, demonstrate and observe things in a controlled and non-threatening environment. It also helps them to get in touch with their creativity and develop confidence in expressing their ideas (Gary, 2011, pg. 47). 'Fundamentally, drama is a creative, social activity which allows for the exploration of concepts, issues and problems central to the human condition' (Neelands *et al.*, 1997, pg. 23).

Neelands *et al.*, say that within the drama framework, students can collectively work in imaginary, fictional, ‘as if’ situations. The reactions and behaviours of the students involved is based on feelings. They refer to this experience as ‘felt understanding’ which is the basis of integrated knowledge (pg. 23). This drama framework allows students to bring their real-world knowledge, into the fictional lens, where in a safe environment, they can explore, reflect upon, make sense of and give meaning to the imagined experience. The aim is that ultimately these ‘felt understandings’ transfer back into the real world and real contexts where they can apply this new knowledge and understanding into their everyday lives. Drama is not, in this understanding, a product making activity of theatre, it is a holistic process that gives students an opportunity to explore real life situations, in role, in a fictional setting or imaginary context, almost like a virtual reality. Dorothy Heathcote believes that;

‘If there is a way of making the world simpler and more understandable to children, why not use it? Dramatising makes it possible to isolate an event or to compare one event with another, to look at events that have happened to other people in other places and times perhaps, or to look at one’s own experience after the event, within the safety of knowing that just at this that moment, it is not really happening’ (Heathcote, 1984. Pg. 90).

This teaches students to read the situation under consideration, to observe the behaviour of others; harness existing, relevant information from previous, lived experiences; and, assimilate the existing information into the fictional situation to make new understandings. Essentially, drama education has the power to ‘derive from the innate human ability to role play’ (Neelands *et al.*, 2007, pg. 23), and to build a story and develop tension within that role play and story, thereby providing the potential for a significant broadening of experiences. Woolland (1993), suggests that drama is essentially an art form and he mirrors Neelands *et al.*’s., sentiments on what drama education is. ‘It (drama) is concerned with how individuals relate to the world they live in; how individuals interact with each other and with society in a wider sense’ (Woolland, 1993, pg. 9). When trying to define what drama is, we have to look at what it is, how it works and what it does. Woolland (1993), asks if the building blocks to music are; pitch, melody, harmony, tempo, rhythm and texture, then what are the raw materials of drama? He claims they are role and character, narrative and language.

### *Role and Character*

- Acting as if you were someone else or
- As if you were yourself in another situation

### *Narrative*

- Ordering a sequence of events or images in such a way that their order creates meaning. This is not necessarily the same as storytelling and plotting, which are examples of the ways in which narrative can be used.

### *Language*

- Verbal
- Non-Verbal (body language, facial expression, the use of space, drama conventions like mime or freeze frames).

(Woolland, 1993, pg. 8)

These building blocks, as in music, are an accurate way to introduce the concept of what drama is, how we use it and how it works. Role and character, narrative and language are all elements of story and storytelling. Drama is fundamentally about stories. How drama is used and how it works is discussed further in section 2.5, Drama and Learning. The next section focuses on the evolution of drama education.

#### **2.4.2 HISTORY OF DRAMA EDUCATION**

Drama has a long history and can be linked as far back as the writings of Plato and Aristotle. But the origin of drama as an active learning method in schools can be traced from the beginning of the last century (Hefferon, 2000, pg. 4). Psychologists like Erikson, Piaget, and Vygotsky (Berk, 2003, pg. 20) all believe a child's social development benefitted greatly from make-believe or fantasy play. Drama education has become more structured and guided as a way of learning about themselves and life. Bolton (1978, pg. 8), stated that dramatic play is a

metaphor for children's lives. Leading drama practitioners such as Booth (1985), Heathcote (1985), Neelands (1994 & 1998), O'Neill (1995), Bolton (1999) Bowell & Heap (2001) and Anderson (2012) have offered theories and practices explaining how drama can explore learning in the classroom.

Heathcote is one of the pioneers of drama in education and played a crucial role in developing the ethos of drama education today. Heathcote (1985) challenges the norm that teacher knows everything and the learner is a *tabula rasa*. Moreover, the renowned educationist challenged the existing practices such as the use of lesson plans; lesson plans did not encourage personal exploration of the learners. Instead, learners are forced to absorb what the instructors distribute. She broke new ground in drama education, which was centred on uncovering what the learner already knows. Dorothy Heathcote developed what could be viewed as an unorthodox yet empowering approach to educational drama. Her writings have inspired the work of teachers globally and also this research. In the 1960s, along with Gavin Bolton, another leading drama practitioner, they developed their theory 'Mantle of the Expert' based on the philosophy that we should empower students to be the 'expert.' 'Being treated as experts empowers pupils to explore issues across the curriculum actively, assume responsible roles, solve problems and make decisions in guiding the process and its outcomes' (Farmer, 2014). This method has developed as a useful teaching tool within the curriculum.

It was O' Neill (1995), who followed much of Dorothy Heathcote's (1985) work and who introduced the term 'process drama.' This is a genre of drama education where the participant and the facilitator participate in co-construction of a dramatic world. Cecily O' Neill (1995) describes the genre as a thematic exploration. She argues that process drama rejects the predetermination of outcome and encourages discovery in the process. It does not culminate to a specific performance. All the participants in the genre including the teacher take specific roles, and they become part of story creation (Piazzoli, 2012).

O'Neill (1995) argues that process drama brings students and the teacher together to create a dramatic world. For instance, in the dramatic world, the two work to explore problems and issues. Sometimes, the work may begin as simple issues, but the teacher can layer more complexity as he or she wishes to attain the pedagogical outcome. The learners can think beyond their point of view by taking different roles in the dramatisation (Doyle, 1993, pg. 9). Let's take a fourth-class group (in Ireland these students would typically be 9 and 10 years of

age), as an example, participating in a process drama lesson to put it into context of how there can be many layers to the children's learning in a drama lesson. Imagine the topic being discussed is that of cutting down trees in the forests. The students may take the roles of tree surgeons, environmentalists or the community living in or near the forest. Playing different roles enables them to recast themselves and consider life from different perspectives. This enables them to explore multiple dimensions on the topic. Generally, process drama helps one to wear the shoes of another character and maintain his or her personal identity at the same time.

Process drama has gained recognition as a valid approach in the field of languages. One of the first steps towards integrating process drama into additional language teaching took place in 1998 (Piazzoli, 2012, pg. 4). This was again under the pioneering work of Cecily O' Neill. She conducted research that described process drama as a liberating approach, which is full of communicative principles of language teaching. Since then, the genre has been applied widely to facilitate language teaching, and it has shown promising results. Due to its good results, there is a rise for the desire to fund specialised teacher training programmes. The programmes could help in assimilating this new approach to education (Gary, 2011, pg. 30). However, various critics have emerged on the efficiency of the approach. Fels and McGivern (2002) assert that not all dramatic approaches are useful to language learners. Some language teachers argue that process drama is challenging, especially when implementing it in a classroom. Despite the criticism, drama has evolved into a teaching tool, whether it is using Heathcote's historic 'Mantle of the Expert' or O' Neill's 'Process Drama', there is a gateway where drama can become a medium for individual and societal change (McGovern, 2017).

Finlay (1911) and Caldwell (1917) are pioneers in writing on drama education and the fight for the cause has continued through many books produced on the topic over the last 100 years. In the appendices (appendix 7), you will see a timeline of some of these works. While it is a comprehensive list on texts published on the subject of drama education, it naturally does not contain them all. This timeline only includes books I reviewed and thought relevant to the topic. The texts included give a detailed insight into what is being researched and published and the history of global praxis in drama education. You will note from the timeline, that during the mid-90's, publications in this field increased considerably and continued to expand, just as drama was being developed and introduced as a curricular subject in Ireland. Books colour coded in blue are primarily publications from the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

Books colour coded in green are primarily publications from the United Kingdom and Ireland. You will note from the timeline that Ireland is only really beginning to enter the field in terms of literature production with a handful of publications to date.

### 2.4.3 HISTORY OF DRAMA EDUCATION IN IRELAND

Drama in Ireland has a rich history, influenced by both Irish cultural traditions and broader educational trends. Drama has been a part of Irish culture for centuries, with a tradition of storytelling, oral performance, and folk customs. As previously mentioned, *Curaclam Nua na Bunscoile* was introduced in 1971, which was the first time drama was introduced into the curriculum. The arts in education report in Ireland conducted in 1979 reported the following;

‘Drama is not a specific part of the curriculum. As a method it has very valuable possibilities for many subjects. At present it forms a small part of teacher training. Its use, however, is not widespread in Irish schools and its possibilities, particularly as a method of teaching in a child-centred curriculum have not been generally recognised’ (Benson, 1979, pg. 32).

Little detail was provided on drama, in fact, it was presented more as a pedagogical tool than a subject (McDonagh, 2012, pg. 70). However, the curriculum did recognise drama as an intellectual activity rather than just ‘entertainment’ and introduced its association with play, make-believe and creative play-making (Finneran, 2008, pg. 40). Drama became a subject in its own right nearly thirty years later. The published drama curriculum document was made available to teachers in 1999, and limited in-service training took place over the subsequent years.

The 1999 Primary Curriculum saw drama as central to the experience of the arts in primary schooling (NCCA, 2022). Arts education is divided into three core areas: drama, music and visual art, which each containing three interactive activities: looking at, responding to, and the making of the art form (NCCA, 1999b). The DES drama curriculum aims to ‘explore themes and issues, create a safe context in which to do so, and provide opportunities to reflect on the

insights gained in the process' (NCCA, 1999b, pg. 3) which reflects Cecily O' Neill's 'process' view of drama. Cregan (2019), says the reality of the 1999 drama curriculum is as more of a 'pedagogical' view of drama, with the use of specific drama techniques such as role playing, teacher-in-role and hot-seating rather than the 'product' view of drama, which is traditionally a school production or Christmas performance. The future of drama is set to continue in Irish schools as drama will remain a component of the primary curriculum framework (NCCA, 2023). Simultaneously to all this, a new second level subject for post-primary school called, Drama, Theatre and Film Studies is currently being designed which is the first time a drama subject will appear at second level as a state examination in Ireland. Drama education is also an integral part of initial teacher education (ITE) programs in Ireland. Aspiring teachers undertake modules in creative arts to prepare them to teach arts education when their ITE is complete. While we are still very much in a development stage of all this new curriculum and policy, it is promising to the future of the subject, and to the recognition of value the subject offers.

#### 2.4.4 THE CURRENT STATE OF DRAMA EDUCATION IN IRELAND

Despite the projected benefits of drama, full adoption of drama into the curriculum in Ireland has witnessed endless disputes over the recent years (Finneran, 2016). The disputes are much witnessed in the primary and post-primary levels. Many educators accept the fact that drama is a powerful pedagogical tool. However, its frequent application in the cross-curricular context has been the source of misunderstanding among educators (Sara, 2015). It makes it difficult to define what drama education means in a classroom context precisely. The primary curriculum framework for primary schools and the new post-primary subject, drama, film and theatre studies, won't be implemented until the academic year of 2024/2025 at the earliest.

Arts education is currently allocated three hours of teaching time a week (teachers often break this down into one hour for visual arts, music and drama) according to the Irish curriculum; however, drama receives less time than this (McCoy, Smyth, and Banks, 2012, pg. 50). The *Arts in Education Charter* (2013), along with the other arts education reformation initiatives mentioned in figure 2, in section 2.3, indorses a surge towards promoting and investing in arts education and arts in education. Teacher confidence to teach drama can also be a challenge. In

the realm of arts and drama education within Ireland, the pivotal role of teacher expertise and enthusiasm as fundamental drivers of quality arts instruction has been underscored by numerous scholars (Bamford, 2012; Oreck, 2004). However, a prevailing challenge within the generalist teaching community is the pervasive lack of confidence and proficiency in arts disciplines, a concern echoed by McDonald *et al.* (2019) and Andrews (2016). According to McDonald *et al.* (2019), Teacher Artist partnership (TAP) type projects enable teachers to build confidence by learning with an artist and found that teachers are enabled to accomplish more and at higher levels than when working alone. McDonald *et al.* (2019); Hall and Thomson (2016); Wolf (2008) and Kind *et al.*, (2007) discuss the relationships of teacher-artist partnerships in their research. In general, primary school teachers lack arts education skill and knowledge, which impacts on their confidence to teach the arts, according to international research (McDonald et al. 2019; Andrews 2016; Snook and Buck 2014; Bamford 2012; Kind *et al.* 2007). Continual professional development (CPD) programmes are one of the ways in which to address teacher confidence and expertise. In recent years, governments and arts organisations have looked to TAP type projects as a means to enhance arts education for students and as a means of teacher CPD and upskilling.

Addressing this gap, the adoption of school-artist collaborations emerges as a strategic response, with the efficacy of such partnerships extensively documented across various studies (Morrissey and Kenny, 2023; Fahy and Kenny, 2023). For these collaborative ventures to effectively enhance educational outcomes, several critical factors must be considered. Firstly, the professional readiness of artists to engage within educational settings is imperative (Laycock, 2008). Additionally, the longevity of these partnerships plays a significant role in their success (Kenny, 2020; Bamford, 2012), alongside the necessity for ample time allocation for the cultivation of relationships, shared vision articulation, and the strategic planning and implementation of collaborative goals (Fahy and Kenny, 2023; Kenny and Morrissey, 2021). Moreover, the principle of reciprocal learning, where both educators and artists mutually benefit from shared knowledge and experiences, is fundamental (Wolf, 2008).

The management of these collaborations also demands careful attention, with Snook and Buck (2014) advocating for purposeful oversight to maximize benefits. The introduction of a third-party facilitator, proficient in both arts and education, can serve as a catalyst in navigating potential hierarchal dynamics between artists and educators, thus fostering a more egalitarian and productive collaborative environment (Morrissey and Kenny, 2023; Sinclair *et al.*, 2015).

The engagement of educators in the process of art-making is not only pivotal for their personal creative development but also serves as a model for fostering creativity and risk-taking among students (Andrews, 2012; Oreck, 2004). This aligns with Greene's (1995) perspective on the transformative potential of art in facilitating imaginative and exploratory thought processes.

In conjunction with the revision of the arts curriculum, combined with these new arts initiatives which are discussed further in chapter, the potential of drama education is optimistic. In the next section, I outline examples of where drama presents itself in the Irish primary curriculum, like the instructional method of process drama, the Aistear programme and play-based learning.

#### **2.4.5 DRAMA IN THE IRISH PRIMARY CURRICULUM- PROCESS DRAMA, AISTEAR, CO-CREATING AND PLAY-BASED LEARNING**

The drama curriculum contains activities, which explore learner's feelings, knowledge and ideas. At the primary level, the emphasis is on using drama as a tool for investigating feelings, ideas, and examining the relationship between people in the real or imagined world (NCCA, 1999b). The teacher is expected to harness learner's capacity for make-believe. After harnessing the capacity, the teacher extends it into other areas of knowledge. Therefore, at this level, the emphasis is on creating drama rather than performing. The participants create fiction to help in learning.

Drama, according to *Bowell and Heap (2001)*, is 'living through' drama or experiential drama and this type of drama is not for an audience, but for the benefit of the participants, themselves. 'In the context of the primary school, educational drama is not to be confused with what may be termed performance drama' (NCCA, 1999b, pg. 2). According to the DES' Teacher Guidelines, drama is envisaged as a creative process. It should develop children's knowledge in every aspect of their personality in regards to their spirituality, morality, emotions, intellectual abilities and physical being. The guidelines promote drama education as a means of exploring 'in a unique way conflicts, issues, concerns and preoccupations that are important to the understanding of real life' (NCCA, 1999b, pg. 2). Drama is an effective medium to deliver a message or life lesson because 'by putting children in the position where they have to examine the moral implications of actions and how all actions have consequences (including

taking no action at all) we have an opportunity to develop their emotional intelligence. All this is done within the safety of fiction, where the consequences for making the ‘wrong’ decision can be looked at without the consequences of real life’ (Toye and Prendiville, 2000, pg. 1).

Within drama education, the tool of Cecily O’Neill’s process drama is usually used where students are in a role as a make-believe character. In role, they try to solve a problem by looking at what is the right/wrong thing to do in the circumstances they are exploring. This type of drama is a genre of performance where the internal audience is essential to the meaning of the drama, the internal audience being the students themselves. ‘In the genre of process drama, the participants, together with the teacher, constitute the theatrical ensemble and engage in drama to make the meaning *for themselves*’ (Bowell and Heap, 2001, pg. 7). Bolton (2007), describes process drama as ‘classroom drama,’ it is rooted in education and remote from stages, acting skills or learning lines. Process drama is about devising an alternative context from traditional classroom settings within which children may learn and explore in. Bolton says the teacher sets the ‘frame’ where the drama is to take place and ‘invites the children to take over the responsibility for creating their own drama within the parameters of that frame’ (Toye and Prendiville, 2007, pg. ix). Julie Dunn, focuses her research on participatory forms of drama and has advocated process drama for learning. She explains that there are myths surrounding the use of process drama in the classroom including; the notion that it can only be used in primary school classrooms, it doesn’t help students understand drama, it cannot be taught nor assessed, and that it is not artistic. Rather, Dunn argues that process drama can be used by all ages in the classroom. It can be utilised in writing and aids in development; it can assess students’ dramatic responses and reflections, using tools like checklists. She advocates that process drama certainly is theatrical, with its strength depending on the educator’s skills and artistry (Dunn, 2017).

During process drama, the teacher is often in role with their students, which is similar to co-creating. Co-creating drama consists of teachers’ coming together with students in a collective creative enterprise. ‘When we look at the concept of co-creating drama and how it may appear in the classroom, it can be characterised by features such as teacher and students collaborating and sharing power, artistic action and the act of creating something new’ (McDonagh, 2014, pg. 8). The ‘co’ in co-creating drama refers to the partnership between teacher and students, in which teachers operate as co-participants and co-artists, instead of through the leader-follower dynamic more typical of other subjects (O’Neill, 2006). In co-creating drama, the teacher does

not always have to be the leader, but facilitates their students' learning in a controlled, safe environment while using an alternative pedagogy. To succeed in co-creating drama, teachers need a willingness to play, take risks, experiment and be a partner with their learners (Craft, 1997). According to McDonagh (2014), the 'creating' aspect of co-creating can be considered the artistic action, and refers to the artistic enterprise of making drama. Fundamental to this conception is the teacher's sharing of the creative impulse with the students, whereby the students become involved in the act of imagining, and teachers are engaged in creative acts with their students to create something new and of value to the group (Taylor and Warner, 2006).

Another development that comes under the branch of drama education and process drama is *Aistear*. *Aistear* is a framework for early childhood education in Ireland. Developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), *Aistear* provides guidelines and support for those working with children from birth to six years old, including educators, parents, and other caregivers. It aims to promote the holistic development and learning of young children through engaging, play-based experiences. It describes learning and development through the four interconnected themes of:

- Well-being
- Identity and Belonging
- Communicating
- Exploring and Thinking

Within these themes there are four sets of guidelines that focus on pedagogy and how the adult can support children's learning and development which are:

- building partnerships between parents and practitioners
- learning and developing through interactions
- learning and developing through play
- supporting learning and development through assessment

(NCCA, 2009, pg. 5)

Aistear is designed to complement the primary school curriculum in Ireland, allowing for continuity and progression in children's learning as they transition from early childhood settings to primary education. It promotes a holistic and inclusive approach to early childhood education, recognising the unique needs, interests, and abilities of each child. Aistear is based on learning through play.

‘Pretend, dramatic, make-believe, role, and fantasy play involve children using their imaginations. It includes pretending with objects, actions and situations. As children grow, their imaginations and their play become increasingly complex. Children use their developing language to move from thinking in the concrete to thinking in the abstract. They make up stories and scenarios. Children act out real events and they also take part in fantasy play about things that are not real, such as fairies or super heroes. Children try out roles, occupations and experiences in their pretend play’ (NCCA, 2009, pg. 54).

Aistear is similar to process drama as the children learn through playing out different scenarios. Learning through play can include many aspects of drama such as; role-play, pretend play, fantasy play, make-believe, puppets and storytelling. Mardell *et al.*, (2023), claim that playful learning entails straying from a straight line between classroom activities and learning goals and that deep, significant learning does not always unfold in a linear fashion. When I think of this description, I remember ‘learning’ in school consisting of going systematically from chapter to chapter in my text books. Play based learning removes that monotony or archaic way of learning. ‘There should be room to pursue questions that arise, explore occasional rabbit holes, and learn in more than one way. Playful learning situates curricular goals, content, and experiences with a larger purpose of helping learners understand, explore, and shape their world’ (Mardell *et al.*, 2023, pg. 19). Aistear can be described as playing with a purpose. This kind play offers windows into children’s interests and strengths, helps students form relationships, and provides needed breaks from teacher-guided activities and text book learning.

There is a growing body of literature that supports a play-based approach to learning (Wood, 2013; Hunter & Walsh, 2014; Mardell *et al.*, 2023) and a growing body of research on the effectiveness of Aistear. For example, Gray and Ryan (2016) report that ‘despite the prevailing political endorsement of a play-based approach to learning in early years classrooms, play is afforded peripheral status in early years classrooms in Ireland’ (Gray & Ryan, 2016, pg. 201).

In their research on Aistear and the curriculum for the early years, Gray and Ryan (2016), claim that teachers lack familiarity with Aistear, have concerns about their ability to teach curricular subjects through the medium of play and lack the training necessary to implement a play-based approach to learning (pg. 199). They also identified that large pupil numbers and restricted physical space as barriers to a play-based approach to learning. This is consistent with the feedback from participants in this research in relation to confidence to teach drama and physical space. Research in the UK reports the disappearance of imaginative play from early years due to increased pressure on schools to meet performance targets (Whitebread and Coltman, 2015). Similar to Grant (2013), who documents that the teachers in Ireland are concerned with driving up standards and meeting targets.

This section focuses on learning through drama with approaches such as; process drama, Aister, co-creating and play based learning. Most of these approaches are concerned with the process and the learning students gain from the process. The aesthetic education that drama provides is also part of the learning. The next section focuses on the aesthetics of drama and theatre.

#### **2.4.6 THE AESTHETICS OF DRAMA AND THEATRE**

‘The history of drama revolves around two main tensions that to some extents are still debated today. They surround the polarization of drama process and product and approach that value aesthetic discipline above play and exploration’ (Anderson, 2012, pg. 27). I have discussed learning through drama so far, which focuses on the process. You will read in chapters 4-8 that the participants also offer insights into learning through drama in their classrooms. Students learn through the art form but they also learn about the art form. In the introduction of this study, I stated that drama is about story telling. Drama is the art form used to tell stories. Our bodies, voices, movements and gestures are used to narrate the story. This is the aesthetics of drama, it involves both process and product. This section delves into the elements that constitute the aesthetics of drama and theatre, and how these can be effectively integrated into the primary curriculum without overwhelming it. The aesthetics of drama and theatre encompass a broad range of elements including, but not limited to, the use of space, body, voice, movement, timing, tension, mood, and the interplay of light and sound. These elements contribute to the overall sensory experience and the conveyance of meaning, emotion, and narrative in theatrical performances.

In relation to the current Irish curriculum, there is a dearth of reference to the aesthetics of drama, it tends to focus more on drama as a vehicle for learning. One of the broad aims of the current arts curriculum is ‘to provide for aesthetic experiences and to develop aesthetic awareness in the visual arts, in music, in drama, in dance and in literature’ (NCCA, 1999c, pg. 4), but it does not explore how this should be achieved in detail. The Australian curriculum says ‘aesthetics describes the fusion of our thoughts, senses and emotions with the diversity of our personal, social and imagined experience which comprises our response to artworks’ (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2010, pg. 26). Anderson (2012) identifies what is under-recognised here; ‘our responses to art works might be the creation of them ourselves, so our ability to control aesthetics relies on the responses; in short, you need to know about drama (including its processes, forms etc) to make and perform drama’ (pg. 54). Both the Irish and the Australian curriculum seem to focus on the visuals of drama and the arts and do not elaborate on the notion that aesthetics comes from the students performing too. Aesthetics incorporates looking and responding which is a prominent strand across the Irish curriculum. The focus should also highlight that aesthetics comes from performing and creating.

Integrating the aesthetics of drama and theatre into the primary school curriculum represents a nuanced yet vital component of holistic artistic development. This exploration draws upon the foundational theories of Peter Abbs, David Hornbrook, Helen Nicholson, and insights from Michael Anderson, to illustrate the critical role aesthetic education plays in drama and its implications for primary education.

Peter Abbs (2003) advocates for the integral role of aesthetic experiences in education, emphasising their relevance in cultivating perceptual sensitivity and imaginative insight. These are deemed essential for personal development and cultural literacy. He says that aesthetic powers are innate but can only be further explored and developed into great art forms through the aesthetic and imaginative faculties (pg. 57). Within the primary education context, weaving the aesthetics of drama and theatre into the curriculum can significantly enrich students' learning experiences by fostering a deeper engagement with narrative, character, and the symbolic use of space and movement.

‘In educational terms this requires a creative induction of the child into the living tradition of the art-form. It is not just a question of teaching Shakespeare, Beethoven,

Martha Graham, Kurosawa; but more a question of animating the procession of works, genres, techniques, biographies, movements which make up the symbolic continuum I call the aesthetic field. It is a more dynamic concept than tradition and denotes that vital interactive system of allusion, reference and structure in which all art work is necessarily constituted. In the aesthetic field nothing stays still; all is perpetual oscillation and the child's essential creative work should be placed effectively within it' (Abbs, 2003, pg. 57).

Abbs' emphasis on the transformative power of aesthetic education aligns with the need for a curriculum that supports not just the process of learning through drama but also the growth of aesthetic understanding and appreciation.

Echoing this sentiment of the aesthetic field, Hornbrook (1998), critiques drama education in schools and argues for a disciplined approach to drama, one that transcends mere role-play or improvisation to embrace drama as a form of artistic expression that challenges students to engage both creatively and critically.

'Sadly, the relationship between classroom drama and the theatre world outside has never been as close as it should have been. Concentration in the early days upon the therapeutic benefits of drama for the participants diverted attention away from the idea of drama as communication to audiences. With the promotion of drama as a learning method in the 1970s the gap between school and theatre became more pronounced, and by the 1980s it had become customary in drama-in-education circles to speak of 'drama' and 'theatre' as two quite distinct categories of activity' (Hornbrook, 1991, pg. 2).

This critique of the utilitarian view of arts education, which often values the arts primarily for their contributions to other academic areas, reinforces the argument for integrating the aesthetic and craft elements of theatre into the primary curriculum. According to Hornbrook, theatre is a place where the arts regularly celebrate their commonality, with musicians, writers, dancers and designers where they can collaborate on productions which consistently challenge the barriers which have grown up between the arts in Western culture. He recognises that 'dance-theatre, music-theatre and performance-art are all categories which

break down the compartmentalization of the arts and by doing so enrich and diversify our experience' (Hornbrook, 1991, pg. 7). Such an approach ensures that students perceive drama not just as an educational tool, but as an art form with its own intrinsic value and aesthetic principles. Nicholson maintains that Hornbrook 'challenged the orthodoxies of drama-in-education, arguing that its roots in progressive education and its emphases on spontaneous improvisation militated against young people learning theatre as an art form' (2009, pg. 38). While I do not agree with all of Hornbrook's emphasis on theatre being central to the learning, his argument for theatre and aesthetics playing a role in the learning is accurate. Drama education, akin to disciplines such as music or visual arts, fundamentally engages with the art form's aesthetics without being identical to theatre itself. The methodologies or strategies employed are distinct and appropriately so, as noted by Anderson (2012, p. 12), yet they can coexist harmoniously and enhance one another. There exists a tradition where the aesthetics and substance of theatrical innovation find their way into educational environments. According to Nicholson, a connection exists between successful theatre and successful education, theatre that seeks to engage young people to look to the future, articulates a vision of social change and educational aspirations (2009, pg. 12).

Nicholson (2005) extends the dialogue to consider how drama education serves as a conduit for exploring complex themes such as identity, culture, and social issues. This approach not only contributes to a deeper understanding of theatre's aesthetics but also highlights the participatory and collaborative nature of drama, which can foster empathy, cultural awareness, and a critical appreciation for diverse narratives and perspectives. The art form enables putting ideas, narratives and perspectives on stage. Nicholson's work illustrates how aesthetic experiences in drama education can transcend performance skills to encompass a profound appreciation for the art form's ability to convey meaning and evoke emotion.

Anderson (2010) further emphasises the importance of understanding the aesthetic elements of theatre in crafting meaningful and impactful theatrical experiences. Anderson advocates for a curriculum that is enriched by an appreciation of the aesthetic elements. 'We are aesthetic educators and as such we engage with the aesthetics of our art form to help the young people we teach connect with the art form, to understand it, and ultimately we hope the world around them more' (pg. 54). Anderson acknowledges that there is merit in rules and principles within the art form to guide the learning and identifies the dual concepts of aesthetic control and aesthetic understanding. Aesthetic control describes the choices within

the drama. The way actors, playwrights, directors, designers etc. choose how to control the art form is part of the learning. For example, an actor or a student can choose how to portray a character through their voice, pitch, tone, gestures, body language etc. Anderson explains that aesthetic control interacts with aesthetic understanding. Aesthetic understanding is understood through an embodied experience. 'The drama classroom allows students to engage with dramatic process and product from the inside, to tinker with it, to tune it and to refine the art form' (2012, pg. 62). While Anderson admits this concept can be a challenge for drama teachers, when the processes of aesthetic control and aesthetic understanding are intertwined, it provides optimum conditions for critical engagement and the opportunity to emerge students in drama learning (pg. 63).

Eisner (2002) posits that the arts, including drama, endow students with distinctive forms of understanding and cognitive experiences that diverge significantly from those imparted by traditional academic subjects. Through aesthetic engagement in drama, students are afforded opportunities to develop their imaginative capacities and interpretive skills, which are indispensable for both personal and academic growth. This perspective underscores the necessity of integrating aesthetic experiences in drama to cultivate a well-rounded educational experience.

In addition, O'Toole and Dunn (2002) provide insights into the pedagogical frameworks of drama education, emphasising the significance of incorporating aesthetic elements such as tension, focus, timing, and contrast into the learning experience. They argue that a systematic approach to embedding these aesthetic elements into drama education can substantially augment its educational value, thereby enriching the learning experience for students. Drama, Film and Theatre studies is a new subject on the Irish post primary curriculum. 'The subject provides students with opportunities for divergent and even radical thinking, to explore aesthetic experiences, to solve problems and to challenge conventions and orthodoxies' (NCCA, 2024a, pg. 2). The subject looks at the learning of aesthetics and to review the aesthetics of film and productions. It also allows for practical activities that allow students to experiment with theatrical elements, such as space, timing, lighting, and sound, the aesthetic principles of theatre, enabling students to appreciate the intricacies of theatrical production. Such interactions can provide insights into the various roles and crafts involved in theatre, from scriptwriting and directing to set design and costume making, thereby broadening students' understanding of the aesthetics of theatre production and film

production. Discussions and reflections on professional theatre/film productions can further enhance students' aesthetic sensibilities, encouraging them to articulate their perceptions and understand the impact of aesthetic control and aesthetic understanding that Anderson discusses. The draft specification for arts education for primary schools in Ireland identifies aesthetic appreciation as one of its aims. Aesthetic appreciation is described as; 'the ability to experience, create, express, and value the beauty of the world around them and within the arts' (NCCA, 2024b, pg. 6). New curricula in Ireland at both primary and post primary are placing more of a focus on the aesthetics of the arts.

Further on the thesis, I discuss more aesthetically focused types of drama and performance like mime and improvisation (chapter 11) and arts in education initiatives which also have an aesthetic focus like teacher artist partnerships (TAPs). The inclusion of these dramas techniques and TAPs, represents further embracing the aesthetics of the arts within the curriculum. However, to foster a more profound aesthetic understanding, it is essential to extend this engagement by systematically exploring the craft and artistry involved in creating and appreciating theatrical works. This does not necessitate an overemphasis that might detract from the broader educational objectives of the primary curriculum but rather a thoughtful integration that enriches students' learning experiences.

In conclusion, addressing the aesthetics of drama and the arts alongside learning through the arts has a place in my discussion. As Hornbrook, Abbs, Nicholson and Anderson highlight; students' needs to learn and understand both, as both have value in education. By providing students with exposure to a variety of theatrical forms, encouraging critical discussions of performances, and creating opportunities for students to craft and reflect upon their dramatic works, educators can harness the full educational potential of aesthetics in drama. Such an approach not only enhances the artistic skills of students but also supports the broader educational objective of nurturing individuals who are capable of critical thought, empathy, and creative expression. The deliberate inclusion of aesthetic experiences in drama education thus represents a crucial pedagogical strategy for developing aesthetic awareness and appreciation from an early age, contributing to the holistic development of students.

The next section leads us into a discussion on drama and learning across the curriculum.

## **2.5 DRAMA AND LEARNING- HOW DRAMA CAN BE INTEGRATED ACROSS OTHER CURRICULAR AREAS**

I have addressed the arts in terms of its evolution into Irish education and its current standing. Now I will explore the arts and drama in terms of why we use it for learning. This section looks at the reasons why we use drama, how we use drama and its benefits as a pedagogy and a teaching tool. Drama lends itself to integration as it is a multi-dimensional subject area, the concept of integration is in a period of promotion or change with a move towards the idea of transdisciplinary education. The primary curriculum framework (2023) is moving toward a transdisciplinary approach to teaching and learning. Drama has the attributes to be utilised across multiple disciplines and so is already well positioned for the imminent changes, even though the transdisciplinary approach has already been happening in drama for some time, organically.

International research evidence suggest that quality arts experiences enhance students' learning outcomes in all curricular areas (e.g., Ewing, 2011; Catterall, 2009; Bamford, 2006; Deasy, 2002; and Fiske, 1999). Critical thinking and concept development have been lauded as benefits arising from drama education. Borgio, Horack, and Owles (2006) write of the benefits of using drama to promote critical thinking in primary schools.

Brown and Ploydell (1999) find that drama can create a potent stimulus for the use and practice of language. This supports Dinapoli's (2009) view that language development is scaffolded by our emotional intelligence or emotional response to drama. Dinapoli recommends using drama as an approach to language study, as dramatic dialogue is representative of normal conversation, more realistic and emotional. Booth (1985) states that reading and drama are a closely linked learning process as drama can bring the text to life to further the readers understanding. Tarlington (1985) claims drama is a powerful pre-writing activity, again as it brings the story to life and provides a meaningful context in which writing can take place.

Imaginative drama lessons and activities can be used to help encourage and improve children's writing, speaking and listening skills (Goodwin, 2006). Macro claims that drama fosters many literacy skills as 'it allows students of any age to become part of the learning process' (Macro, 2015, pg. 338). Ripstein (2018), in her research on connecting art, drama and literacy through storytelling, reports on multiple wins for the students involved with an interdisciplinary approach to learning:

'The children's observation skills and critical thinking improved. Their paintings and drawings began to demonstrate an understanding of the use of colour, shape, and line to represent meaning. Their oral explanations of their paintings' stories gave significance to the children's work and allowed them to express their full ideas without having to worry about the conventions of getting their thoughts on paper. The children's dramatisation of their stories brought their ideas to life and provided a stage for reflection, an introduction to peer review, and a meaningful opportunity for improving their stories. Directing, performing, and revising also promoted social confidence. Ultimately, a desire to tell a story—resulted in a combination of art, expression, and discussion that allowed all of the children to be successful in multiple ways' (Ripstein, 2018, pg. 21).

Martinez *et al.* (2000), Coleman & Davies (2018) and Coleman & Lind (2020) promote drama as an effective tool to assist the teaching of mathematics. Martinez *et al.* state that: 'almost any fable or fairy story can be turned into a maths story' (Martinez *et al.*, 2000, pg. 54). Dramatisation can be used to introduce new maths concepts, to approve the dynamics of learning and to sustain participation during maths class, according to Martinez *et al.* Cotton & Toft (2015) explore how drama techniques can enhance the learning of mathematics and that the two disciplines have similar aims. In 2019, Cotton & Toft continued to look at a transdisciplinary approach and research the benefits of using drama, maths and history to learn how history impacts on the understanding of how we operate in the current worlds and a model for teaching and learning being cooperative activities. They write about drawing on techniques from mathematics and drama teaching to explore other curriculum areas and disciplines, specifically history in this project. Weaver (1999) finds that recreating historical events through drama consolidates the children's learning.

STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics) is having a moment in terms of its power as a transdisciplinary concept. Burnard *et al.*, (2023) confirms it's a positive approach in their research on how science and the arts can work together. Walan & Enochsson (2019) say there are several arguments for using drama and science together, which they study by combining story and drama to teach science to young children in Sweden. McGregor (2012 & 2014), promotes using drama in science education to stimulate the development of inquiry skills. Drama can promote collaborative learning and thus increase students' motivation to learn science (Abed, 2016). McGregor and Duggan (2017) observe that drama conventions used in strategic ways can even motivate students to want to become scientists and change the world.

'Drama needs to be recognised for what it does best, which is to negotiate meanings through engagement with imagined realities' (Toye & Prendiville, 2007, pg. 81). Drama is a popular addition to any subject as students can engage with the content through imagined realities or create an era in time through the fictional lens. Drama education is aimed at students discovering or learning about themselves. How drama can be integrated across other curricular areas and the concept of a transdisciplinary education is discussed in chapter 11

#### 2.5.1 **DRAMA AND CHILDREN'S SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GROWTH**

A study entitled 'Enhancing the teaching of classroom drama' from Perry (2012) testifies that drama is beneficial in developing social awareness skills. Teachers involved in the study outline the key values of drama in the classroom:

- Encourages creativity and imagination;
- Enables the expression of appreciation;
- Engages a variety of skills;
- Allows students to express what they may be unable to in words (difficult topics or troubled past);
- Helps self-esteem, confidence, and enjoyment; and
- Develops cultural and social awareness as well as life skills. (Perry, 2012, pg. 23).

All of these points support a concrete argument for the benefits of drama education. Drama can have a constructive effect on a child's development and not strictly in an academic sense. While core subjects do take precedence in a child's education, schools must cater to the development of the child's emotions, social skills, personality, and their character, these are also curricular areas. Drama can present situations where students are challenged to examine how they treat others who may be different from them, e.g., different cultural backgrounds. Role-play can demonstrate to students the appropriate way to treat their peers, with respect and acceptance.

Drama can provide unique contributions to the development of the child: 'drama provides a unique gateway to learning and affords a dimension of knowledge that is otherwise inaccessible' (NCCA, 1999b, pg. 3). According to the *Drama Guidelines* (NCCA, 1999b), successful process drama will reflect life in a metaphorical way for students and by doing so can clarify elements of real life. Drama is about real life, by using drama as a tool to promote inclusion; students will deal with life issues in a safe and controlled environment. Pecaski-McLennan (2007) in her research of the benefits of drama in classrooms, claims that drama can promote self-confidence and self-expression through drama exploration and risk-taking activities that reflect real life personal situations and feelings: 'by using drama as a means of exploring issues in the classroom, it is possible to celebrate participants' individuality and to create caring and nurturing relationships among students' (pg. 451). Reynolds (2002) agrees with this by suggesting that 'drama and creative arts participation can enhance self and sensory awareness, stimulate thinking and encourage social skills, relationships and self-esteem' (pg. 63).

Kempe and Tissot (2012) argue that drama can help social skills and inclusion. In their research, they use drama as a tool to develop social skills with special needs students within a mixed ability class. The authors make the point that drama is undervalued within the education system as a tool to aid social skills: 'the challenge is how to find a way to provide an ethos in inclusive practice within a specialist setting that will still allow for individual attainment of goals with a diverse student population' (Kempe *et al.*, 2012, pg. 101). They report that drama provides the framework to help students develop their social skills and it supports the class in developing inclusive practices. In their research on promoting inclusion, Stickley *et al.* (2011), discuss skills development with a participatory arts group entitled 'The Stage Life'. Skills developed by the participants during the sessions are social, such as turn taking, conflict resolution and listening to one another' (Stickley *et al.*, 2011, pg. 256). Drama supports the development of confidence, self-esteem, and social skills in students with special needs.

'Drama is one way of balancing the cognitive and affective attributes of genuine communication...activities based on getting students to react instinctively to others in emotional circumstances can stimulate learner creativity, communal awareness and personal growth' (Dinapoli, 2009, pg. 98).

Drama is an excellent tool to draw emotion into learning. In Dinapoli's study, he claims that by introducing emotion or real-life situations into the learning, the student's communication is more fluid. Communication skills are an important trait of students' social-emotional development. Communication assists students in working out differences or problems with their peers. Pecaski-McLennan (2012) declares role play essential for children to practice problem solving strategies to gain the skills necessary to confidently and proactively resolve social conflicts: 'role-playing can promote rich learning in children as it engages their emotional, cognitive, and verbal skills through active play that explores real-life personal feelings and situations' (pg. 407). Kemple (1996) supports Pecaski-McLennan's postulation asserting that children engaging in dramatic role-playing activities have reduced aggression, better turn taking abilities, greater empathy and improved peer cooperation. Being proficient in problem solving or compromising with peers is a social skill needed by all children at school. Drama helps children to consider and reflect upon their personal responses when they communicate with their peers; it provides an emotional response to problem solving. Engaging

children in dramatic activities provides an active, hands-on approach to problem solving and social development that are not commonly present in other subjects.

When discussing drama to promote children's social emotional development, this is a component of emotional intelligence or emotional quotient (EQ). Emotional intelligence refers to the ability to recognise, understand, manage, and effectively use emotions in oneself and others. According to the Cambridge dictionary (2023) the emotional quotient is a measure of a person's emotional intelligence which is their ability to understand their own feelings and the feelings of others. This section has given an overview of how drama can promote children's social emotional development and their EQ. Castillo-Viera *et al.*, (2021) says that drama promotes the development of different dimensions of emotional intelligence such as emotional expressiveness, self-control, motivation, self-awareness and social skills. This is similar to research from Cruz *et al.*, (2013) and Motos (2018) who find that drama activities help to explore and express feelings and may be used as a teaching strategy for students' emotional development.

While special educational needs are not the focus of this study, it is hard to ignore some of the research that highlights the benefits of drama education for special needs students. Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a disorder that typically affects levels of attention/concentration, impulsivity, and hyperactivity. Research has shown that there are a wide variety of interventions that can be implemented outside of the school environment, however interventions for teachers to implement to enhance levels of concentration with ADHD are limited. Clotworthy suggests that: drama education strategies, either used in isolation as a teaching methodology or as part of a process drama can be used at all class levels in all subjects to enhance levels of concentration in children with ADHD' (2015, pg. 52). Clotworthy, researches how drama could increase levels of concentration in children with ADHD: 'during the process drama, the students displayed increased levels of concentration (e.g., could sustain concentration for longer than in other subject areas)' (2015, pg. 51). Peter (2021) uses drama to enhance children's communication in a special education school. Using a drama pedagogical framework to explore story and understand social narrative, many children made notable gains including; an emerging awareness of make-believe, developing social skills for group working, and an increased ability to generate ideas within make-believe, something students with additional learning needs can struggle with (pg. 445). There are notable developments in Ireland to increase access to arts education for special education

schools to enhance social-emotional development. The 'I am Creative' program was developed to specifically cater to the unique requirements of children and youth in Special Education schools, in line with the objectives set out in the Creative Youth Plan (CYP). According to Morrissey (2024), this initiative has notably enhanced the provision of arts education, with a particular focus on visual arts, within special school settings. The research highlighted a consistent dedication among all involved parties towards maintaining high-quality arts engagement that would persist beyond the life span of the program. This dedication was reflected in heightened expectations for the students, alongside increased motivation and confidence among educators, Special Needs Assistants (SNAs), and artists. The initiative also promoted a high degree of experimentation, collective ownership of the learning process, and the integration of the program into comprehensive school planning and self-evaluation practices. The findings underscore the potential for educators, artists, and SNAs to significantly enrich one another's practices through collaborative efforts, provided there is ample opportunity for such partnerships. However, the research also underlines the necessity of long-term collaboration to ensure the durability of the positive changes introduced by the initiative (Morrissey, 2024, pg. 60).

Drama's role in fostering social, emotional skills and development is not a new hypothesis. 'The idea that theater fosters social cognition has long been championed by drama therapists and some psychologists, neuropsychologists, and special educators' (Hartigan, 2012, pg. 33). Úna McCabe (2007) gives an overview of the benefits of drama education under the following headings; drama develops the ability to communicate, drama develops language, drama develops physical creativity and discipline, drama develops the ability to understand and communicate the emotional lives of self and others, drama develops imagination and drama makes learning more active, tangible and enjoyable (pg. 4-6).

This section gives a broad over view on the role drama can play to support social emotional development. The next section looks at the role technology can play in drama.

## 2.5.2 DRAMA IN A DIGITISED WORLD AND THE AFFECTS OF COVID-19 ON DRAMA

Teaching is becoming more technologically advanced every day. Traditional teaching practices will always exist, but now they can be enhanced and improved to make learning more accessible and fun. In 1992 Douglas Coupland invented the term Generation X (Gen X) to describe a generation that married an existence of pre-technology with the existence of emerging technology. This then developed into Generation Y (Gen Y), today's generation, where technology is not only a part of everyday life, life can often revolve around technology. In his book *Masterclass in Drama Education*, Michael Anderson discusses the challenges that Generation Next (N-Gen) will face. Anderson (2012) discusses research from the Kaiser Institute in America that predicts N-Gen will come to formal schooling more exposed to devices with screens than any other form of literacy. Mabrito and Medley (2008) argue that N-Gen will process and interact with information in a fundamentally different way than previous generations. This prediction is probably already a reality, given the advancements in technology and our over reliance on technology during the Covid-19 pandemic. They may have a completely different approach to learning and engagement with the curriculum as a result of prolonged interaction with technology. The Kaiser Family Foundation published research in 2010 stating that young people spend on average 7.38 hours daily using a variety of technological devices. While this figure is a cause for concern as it limits time on physical activity and meaningful face-to-face social interaction, educators and specifically drama educators, have to identify methods to incorporate technology into their teaching so we can cater for N-Gen.

‘Even though Generation Next is saturated in media, they are not necessarily more equipped to create or appreciate the aesthetics of drama and theatre. So, while technology may be new(ish), the teacher’s job is the same- to deepen and extend the understanding of their students’ (Anderson, 2012, pg. 21).

Anderson clearly states that while technology will play a role in current and future generations, teaching and learning is an art form that students will always need to guide their creative process in the drama classroom. He outlines principles or guidelines that teachers could consider using as a framework to redesign the process required to meet the learning needs of Generation Next:

- Learning is socially mediated
- Learning is controlling appropriate technologies, not just using them
- Learning spaces must be changed
- New media should be taught alongside traditional literature in the classroom (2012, pg. 21-23).

Anderson and Cameron (2013) affirm that we have moved on from the moment in education where teachers had a choice to engage with technology or to continue teaching without it. Any educators who were still resisting had no choice but to rapidly adapt to using technologies in education in 2020 when Covid-19 became a global pandemic: ‘our lives and critically the lives of our students are saturated with various technologies that have strong potential when blended with drama pedagogy’ (Anderson and Cameron, 2013, pg. 214). For example, a simple project like recording a performance scene in class and watching it back to learn about performance techniques can be developed into a more complicated journey of recording and editing a full script. ‘Technology and drama allow for a playful reinterpretation of time, space and presence’ (Anderson and Cameron, 2013, 241). There are endless possibilities with digital technologies alone, and the wealth (or threat) of opportunities which social media platforms can bring is another layer of learning again. Technology in theatre has existed for a long time, with lights, sound and set design but now it does, and has to exist in the classroom, in arts education as well. ‘Much of the work of the past decade at the intersection of drama, education and technology has explored ways to manage, accommodate or appropriate the advance of technologies on existing curricular and practices’ (Anderson and Cameron, 2013, pg. 227). Cameron and Anderson suggest that a new, more ‘digitally native’ group of drama educators are changing the landscape of researchers interested in drama and digital technologies, which has progressed how drama and technology can be intertwined, the Covid-19 pandemic further developed this journey.

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on delivering drama education, as it has on many other aspects of education and society as a whole. With all schools and universities closing their doors to prevent the spread of the virus, drama education had to move online. This has been challenging for drama teachers and students, as it can be difficult to deliver the same level of engagement and interaction that is possible in a classroom setting. Many drama productions and performances had to be cancelled or postponed due to restrictions on public

gatherings. Drama is an art form that involves physical interaction, including touching and movement. However, with social distancing guidelines in place, these types of interactions were limited, making it more difficult to deliver drama education in a traditional way. The pandemic has had an impact on funding for the local arts, as many activities and performances had to be cancelled, the revenue generated from these events were lost. Many drama programmes have had to reduce their budgets, making it more difficult to deliver the same level of programming and support for students. In the UK, 84% of teachers responding to National Drama's Covid Impact Study said the pandemic had a "significant impact" on drama education, teachers reported a lack of confidence, increased anxiety, poor skills development and reticence to perform among students after remote learning was introduced (Jowett, 2021). Theatre and drama experiences for young people and children in schools have been profoundly affected by Covid-19 (Hunt & Wooster, 2021). Lockdown in Derbyshire, in the UK, resulted in rapid replanning for director Nathan Powell who had to convert a production of participatory theatre into a digital format. The director worked with the actor students online, who then recorded their performances and submitted footage to be edited. Such an approach relies on the teacher to facilitate the material. With pupils no longer coming into the school to interact and participate with actor-teachers in a specially created context, Hunt and Wooster (2021) report that the experience is being lost. Gallagher *et al.*, (2020) reflects that the push to 'innovate' 'pivot' and 'adapt' theatre, drama, and education more broadly in the wake of the covid pandemic, has left artists, educators, and students with little time to pause and consider what has been lost when schools closed in Ontario, Canada.

'Thinking through 'loss' in drama education during Covid-19 (loss of community; loss of ensemble) has compelled us to consider what new pedagogies, practices and modalities educators can employ in efforts to provide a now 'placeless' youth cohort with some sense of material 'rootedness' in a fluid, online world' (Gallagher *et al.* 2020, pg. 641).

There are many stories that will echo this experience, but going forward, this is a significant learning opportunity on how we adapt, evolve and continue to embed digital technologies in drama education.

'The pandemic with its disturbances and diffusions provides grave challenges but also provokes a potential for re-interpreting and re-conceptualising what drama and

technology might be two decades into the twenty-first century. It provides an opportunity for us to re-imagine not only what the drama curriculum could be but how our communities might shift expectations and approaches to schooling in a ‘post-fact’ world’ (Cameron & Anderson, 2022, pg. 517).

Technology has become an essential tool for delivering drama education, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic. Technologies of all kinds are a persistent feature of theatre and education, including those forms enacted beyond traditional (usually physical) notions of stage or classroom (Cameron & Anderson, 2022). Freebody and Finneran (2021, pg. 167) also point to the impact of applied forms that create integration of technology and drama for their participants who may be situated, not in a theatre, but in their communities using a hybrid of drama and technology to explore, respond and represent issues critical to them. After Covid-19 and on-line learning, coupled with advances in technologies, there is a shift that Freebody and Finneran identify in their discussion of drama and digital realities, observing: ‘nothing is “going back to the way it was” (2021, pg.168). The shift in student dispositions and preferences that Freebody and Finneran point to is also reflected in their arts-making processes. Whether in a classroom or theatre, digital technologies are embedded in drama and theatre making. This reflects a generation of not only students, but humanity, who live a large proportion of their lives in, through and on screens (Oswald *et al.*, 2020), so much so it has become integrated seamlessly into their lives.

In their research on ‘*Drama, Digital pre-text and Social Media*’, Carroll and Cameron (2009), used technology to, build belief and tension to create role plays as part of their drama lessons in Australia. Identifying O’ Neill’s five qualities of a good pre-text for process drama (1995, pg. 136), they identified that their case study met the same criteria, using technology as a pretext. The students’ received text messages to start the drama and the storyline played out through the digital pre-text of a social networking sites that provided opportunities to inject tension into the drama. The facilitators incorporated the use of mobile phones, mobile phone cameras and online profiles to allow for questions to be raised about issues such as identity and power in environments affected by digital technology, including the classroom and students’ social lives. ‘The use of technology that is part of the participants’ everyday communication and social networking was an economical and powerful way to introduce the drama. The use of technologies that might otherwise be seen as transgressive in the school environment

allowed opportunities to interrogate current behaviours and policies’ (Carroll & Cameron, 2009, pg. 310).

Boyd (2008) reports that improvised drama when combined with digital technology appears to take on some of the characteristics of social media forms, most notably in the persistence of the traces of the drama on the website and the phone messages. The fact that the drama lives on when out of role and was searchable in the form of digital artefacts adds a whole new dimension to the out-of-role reflection.

Dimililer *et al.*, (2017) combine technology, drama and creative writing for a research study focusing on the importance of using technology in learning, specifically in drama and creative writing. The study found that using technology in education is advantageous for the students’ creative writing skills and ability to use drama activities to bring their writing to life.

Bravo *et al.*, (2021) explore the potential and challenges of using storytelling and drama activities with robot actors in science education. They suggest that the introduction of robots in storytelling and drama activities provided students with a multisensory and hands-on learning experience: ‘the storytelling and drama activities with robots provide students with a multi-sensory experience that become active, engaging, tangible, and remarkable learning activities’ (Bravo *et al.* 2021, pg. 329). Observations from the research reveal that this approach combined digital technologies and science concepts, that created and fostered skills in students and it creates a positive classroom environment, and it improves the students’ attention and motivation.

Students can use VR or AR to explore the setting of a play, or to create their own virtual performance space. Xin Tang (2022) uses AR in her research on ‘*Application and Design of Drama Popular Science Education Using Augmented Reality*’ in a drama arts school in Shenyang University in China. The research uses AR and VR technology to stimulate students’ learning initiative in drama education. The research first briefly introduces the concepts and characteristics of AR and VR technology, it then details how the algorithm can design drama activities, including ‘drama animation design, character modelling design, drama scene design, logo pattern design, and animation design’ (Tang, 2022, pg. 11). It reports that 42% of the students claimed the project helped them with singing, 23% of the students say they can master

other types of drama, 18% of the students can better learn and master the movement in drama, and 10% and 7% of the students can master a lot of drama knowledge.

Similar to Tang's (2022) research on AR and VR technology, a case study on affinity spaces and drama education found the use of technology positive when using a prototype online role-based scenario management system. The large research project which explores a new area of integrating applied drama and serious games to improve crisis communications was conducted by Bossomaier *et al.*, in 2010: 'using Affinity Spaces and drama education can prompt and facilitate the sharing of beliefs, literacies, values, actions, knowledge, practices and social interactions around a particular domain' (Anderson & Cameron, 2013, pg. 238). The case study was the first of its kind to use digital media, virtual spaces and drama conventions to produce a hybrid of technology and drama for learning. The project required a scenario development language, called Communication Representation and Specification Language (CRASL). The aim of CRASL is to provide a non-technical scenario creation language, modelling a typical lesson plan that a teacher might create for a drama session. This project also has similarities to Carroll and Camerons' (2009) research on using digital technologies as a pretext for drama as the system is designed to allow pre-programmed messages to be delivered to participants to introduce tension into the scenario. The teacher can manipulate the scenario in real-time by triggering the playing of media files, or by engaging in chat with the participants (Anderson and Cameron, 2013, pg. 240). The research focused on training and development in crisis communication management in relation to a flood.

In addition to looking at examples of research with drama and technology and how Covid-19 impacted drama and technology, the push to embed technology into the arts and creativity has already gained influence in Irish youth services. 'Creativity and technology are areas that have experienced accelerated growth and are emerging as a key driver to future community development and opportunity' (Kinia, 2021, pg. 10) *Creative Ireland* has a number of initiatives which are discussed in chapter 10, however, it is relevant to note here that as part of the Creative Youth Project, Creative Ireland, have also established *Creative Technologies*. This initiative was launched by the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, at the Creative Youth Conference 2021, the *Creative Ireland Programme*, in partnership with Kinia (formerly Camara Ireland).

Creative Technologies supports interest in future technologies and skills development by training youth workers in areas including: robotics, animation, sound production, visual design, augmented/virtual reality and makerspaces. To identify a starting point for the programme, a digital needs analysis was conducted by Kinia in 2021. The project included 88 different youth groups, across 19 counties from January to June 2021. These were Tusla (Child and Family Agency, Ireland), Children and Young People Services Committees (CYPSCs) and Education and Training Board Ireland (ETBI).

The report highlights that youth setting providers at all levels require an awareness of the opportunities that exist in using creative technology to reach educational outcomes (Kinia, 2021, Pg. 35). Based on what the report found, Kinia recommended ways for Creative Technologies to establish themselves more in youth groups and services across Ireland. They recommend; implementing a digital creativity awareness campaign, developing a system of credentials that recognise achievements and skills development for young people and educators and to build a sustainable structure that hosts a professional learning community (Kinia, 2021, pg. 45).

The report highlights that creativity and technology are emerging as a key driver for future opportunity and that supports are needed for those working with youth groups and services. Creative Technologies has also established accredited training with the ETBI. For example, QQI (Quality and Qualification Ireland) accredited Digital Youth Work modules within existing youth work courses to augment the skills of youth workers; or new QQI modules for Youth reach settings or School Completion Programmes as a pathway to further education and learning and support career pathways and apprenticeships (Creative Ireland, 2023).

To conclude, although technology does not stand as the central focus of this research, its impact on the role of arts in education is substantial and thus merits the discussion provided above. As aptly noted by Anderson and Cameron (2013), the era where teachers could choose whether to engage with technology has long passed. Gallagher *et al.*, (2020) states, we are compelled to consider new pedagogies, practices and modalities of teaching, in the wake of Covid-19 but also in light of consistent new technologies and Artificial Intelligences (AI). It is imperative to expose our students to and educate them about these technologies, as this has become a permanent facet of education. Our backgrounds can affect how we teach. If teachers are engaged with digital technologies, social media and online platforms outside the classroom,

will this enable them to bring it into the classroom? The effect our backgrounds and experiences have on our teaching is discussed in the next sections.

## **2.6 THE IMPACT OF TEACHERS' BACKGROUNDS AND IDENTITIES ON DRAMA AND ARTS EDUCATION**

### **2.6.1 TEACHERS' BACKGROUNDS**

This section explores the intricate ways in which educators' personal histories, professional experiences, and epistemological beliefs shape their approaches to teaching drama, emphasising the necessity of understanding these elements to enhance drama education. The backgrounds of teachers significantly influence the effectiveness of drama instruction in schools. This research endeavours to investigate the impact of teachers' prior experiences with drama and the arts. Central to this inquiry is the exploration of teachers' attitudes and opinions towards drama education and how their personal backgrounds and experiences shape their approach to teaching drama. To address this question, we must examine the role that our beliefs and backgrounds play in shaping our teaching methods.

Research into the dynamics of learning and teaching reveals that the environment, encompassing cultural, ideological, and biological factors, plays a crucial role in shaping educational outcomes (Watson, as cited in Walker, 2017; Moss & Brookhart, 2012). For teachers, their formative experiences, educational background, and teacher education significantly influence their pedagogical strategies and their receptivity to integrating arts into the curriculum. The culture, language, traditions, and beliefs instilled from a young age form the backbone of their teaching philosophies, notably in subjects like drama where personal engagement and expression are central (Sugerman, 2000; Fudenberg *et al.*, 1998; OECD, 2009).

A critical aspect of this research involves directly querying teachers' beliefs regarding drama education, given the substantial impact these beliefs have on instructional methods and student outcomes. People usually have epistemological beliefs that have a significant impact on how they impart knowledge to others (Sugerman, 2000). The relationship between teacher beliefs and classroom practice has been widely discussed. There are some studies (Beck *et al.*, 2000;

Haney & McArthur, 2002; Levitt, 2002; and Roehrig & Kruse, 2005) that report on teacher beliefs having a significant impact on classroom practices, while others did not find a clear correlation between teacher beliefs and classroom practices (Mellado, 1998; Simmons *et al.*, 1999). Ultimately, there is a connection between beliefs and classroom practices (Richardson, 1996; Roehrig & Luft, 2004), despite the controversial relationship. This underscores the importance of epistemological beliefs in shaping educators' approaches to teaching the arts, including drama. Our beliefs often stem from and are intrinsically linked to our backgrounds and experiences, significantly contributing to the formation of our identities.

According to Watson's theory of learning, learning takes place as a result of stimulation by the surrounding environment (Walker, 2017). For teachers, the environment they grew up in, their school experiences and teacher education all contribute to how and what they learn. Therefore, what is learned, the way it is acquired and the time is taken to learn is determined by the influence of many factors including environmental, cultural, ideological, and biological (Moss & Brookhart, 2012). Whether teachers come from an arts background or not is typically determined before they come to their initial teacher education.

In the application of techniques and topics as a teacher in the classroom, the educator demonstrates a sense of belief in what they are implementing for their students. It is necessary to consider what a sense of belief means for people. The theory of belief encompasses a wide range of philosophical, psychological, and sociological perspectives that seek to understand the nature and formation of beliefs. Beliefs are cognitive attitudes or mental representations that individuals hold to be true or false, and they play a fundamental role in shaping our thoughts, actions, and perceptions of the world. The *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* asserts that belief is a basic and important feature of the mind. The beliefs one hold, if changed, can produce other changing beliefs as well, becoming a fact you store in your mind (Stanford Encyclopaedia, 2019). According to Calderhead (1996), beliefs generally refer to commitments and ideologies. Anthropologists, social psychologists, and philosophers have agreed upon a commonly accepted definition of beliefs: 'beliefs are thought of as psychologically held understandings, premises, or propositions about the world that are felt to be true' (Richardson, 1996, pg.103). In educational settings, Haney *et al.*, (2003) defines beliefs as 'one's convictions, philosophy, tenets, or opinions about teaching and learning' (pg. 367).

In education, one must also consider that the theory of belief impacts the students taught by each teacher. The facts which make up the mind and way in which the teacher conducts class

influences the learning for each student. Sak notes (2004), ‘one’s beliefs are very important in shaping classroom practices’ (pg. 222) in a case study on teachers’ creative beliefs. Sak reports that participants’ beliefs regarding creativity directly influence their pedagogy. In assessing teachers’ conceptions about creativity, for example, Mullet *et al.*, (2016), find that their beliefs are based on their experiences and training. ‘Our analysis revealed that although teachers value creativity, their conceptions of creativity are uninformed by theory and research on creativity. Teachers feel unprepared to foster or identify creativity in their classrooms; they equate creativity with the arts; and personal and cultural beliefs affect their perceptions of creativity and creative students’ (Mullet *et al.*, 2016, pg. 9). Teacher beliefs regarding personal creative ability play a role and results from Rubenstein *et al.*’s (2013) study find a high correlation between teacher self-efficacy and self-perception of creative abilities. Mullet *et al.*, says that this indicates that teachers’ beliefs about their own creativity can influence the value they place on creativity in their classrooms (2016, pg. 26). Huang *et al.*, (2019) investigate the effects of creative role identity and self-efficacy on teachers’ attitudes towards the implementation of teaching for creativity and found that teachers’ creative self-efficacy mediated the relationship between their creative role identity and their implementation attitudes. Farmer *et al.*, (2003), find that individual self-reviewing of general creativity significantly contributes to the formulation of a creative role identity. Lee & Kempe (2014), find that teachers with creativity-related experiences are likely to have positive beliefs and encourage teaching practices that foster creativity.

For drama, teachers’ beliefs are essential to understanding its use or lack thereof. In research conducted on teacher belief systems and attitudes toward drama, Errington, asserts that: ‘outcomes of drama for the child are largely dependent upon a range of beliefs that the teacher brings to the study of drama’ (Errington, 1985, pg. 2). A case study conducted by the Institute of Education in Singapore, maintains that providing training on teaching drama (specifically process drama) can ultimately change the teachers’ beliefs about drama. They report that before the training, they felt drama was about producing a ‘product,’ but learned that it was the process of drama that they should be using in the classroom (Foo Aik, 2015).

In assessing the current use of arts and drama within the educational context and the incorporation of these practices by teachers in their classrooms, a critical examination of teachers’ beliefs, experiences, and training is essential. An exploration of teachers’ beliefs allows for the identification of potential correlations between their convictions and the presence

or absence of drama in their classrooms, particularly when these beliefs are intertwined with their personal experiences and backgrounds. This underscores the relevance of including questions about the participants' beliefs concerning arts and drama in this research. Our beliefs often stem from and are intrinsically linked to our backgrounds and experiences, significantly contributing to the formation of our identities.

#### 2.6.2 **TEACHER IDENTITY AND ITS FORMATION THROUGH BACKGROUNDS AND BELIEFS**

Exploring the concept of teacher identity is crucial to understanding the backgrounds of educators and how these backgrounds shape individuals personally and professionally. Teng (2017) defines teacher identity as a dynamic process through which educators develop their own understanding and knowledge of how to embody and enact the role of a teacher. This view moves beyond traditional notions of professional learning, which previously focused on the acquisition of competencies and skills as prescribed by educational institutions and societal norms, to include a broader, more complex understanding of identity as influenced by societal, cultural, political, and historical contexts, as well as through interpersonal interactions (Arvaja, 2016; Teng, 2017).

Teacher identity, as such, is both an individual and collective phenomenon, characterised by unity and multiplicity, continuity, and change. This concept draws from postmodern and poststructuralist theories, suggesting that identity encompasses various dimensions and sub-identities shaped by different contexts and interactions. These theories highlight the fluid nature of identity, which constantly evolves through social and cultural engagements and internal dialogues within oneself (Teng, 2017).

However, Arvaja (2016) raises concerns about relying solely on postmodernist and poststructuralist views due to their implications for an individual's ability to maintain a coherent self-identity amidst constant change. To address this, a combined approach incorporating modernist theories, particularly Dialogical Self Theory inspired by Mikhail Bakhtin's work, is proposed. This approach views identity as multi-voiced, with each 'voice' representing different aspects of one's identity and the diverse contexts in which these aspects manifest. Hermans (2001) extends this concept by describing how these voices form a narrative

that integrates experiences and personal meanings, thereby maintaining a coherent sense of self despite the multiplicity of identities.

Hermans' framework is particularly useful in understanding the construction and expression of teacher identity. It suggests that teachers navigate through various 'I-positions'—such as being an introvert personally but adopting an extroverted demeanor in teaching—highlighting the role of narrative in linking these positions into a cohesive identity. This narrative construction allows educators to reflect on their experiences and how these shape their professional actions and interactions within the educational setting (Hermans, 2001).

The development of teacher identity also involves emotional dimensions, as emotions play a crucial role in shaping one's professional and personal sense of self. Teachers experience a range of emotions that influence their teaching practices and interactions with students and colleagues. Recognising the emotional aspects of teaching can enhance educators' understanding of their identities and how these are expressed in different contexts (Arvaja, 2016; Teng, 2017).

Furthermore, teacher identity negotiation often involves reconciling personal and professional selves, a process that requires reflection on one's values, strengths, and the roles encountered in the educational environment. This negotiation is particularly pronounced for student teachers, who must balance the expectations and identities of being both learners and educators. The process of integrating diverse I-positions and developing a coherent identity is essential for teachers' well-being, satisfaction, and engagement in their work (Arvaja, 2016).

Teacher identity in the classroom plays an essential role in ensuring success and learning for students during their time in drama class. Historically, the idea to have a student-centered classroom has prevailed as the best practice, but a focus on the teacher's understanding of self and teaching methods also proves effective for the instruction of students. A teacher needs to recognise their interaction with their students has an impact on delivering effective or ineffective instruction (Wales, 2009). Teachers are unique because the role requires a shift in identity throughout the day, moving from the role known in popular culture as respected public servant, to the role of a mother or father, to nurse, to an arbitrator, confidant, among many others. Teachers being able to balance these identities are necessary during the school day as they are reflecting personas towards their students. The teacher's clothing, facial expressions,

and movements around the room all influence students and their perception of learning and the class.

In understanding one's identity as a drama teacher, the teacher must perform as a teacher and a professional, perform as a dramatic character, and educate their students about how the process of performance contributes to their learning. The idea that drama teachers, as a whole, have an identity which shapes them as a particular sort of educator, is explored through Kempe's study. He finds that some of the participants identified themselves as 'teachers whose art is teaching drama,' while others saw themselves as 'dramatic artists who teach' (Kempe, 2012, pg. 530). It is through this study that Kempe is able to contend that drama teachers, in building identity, typically have an interest in drama at a young age, 95% report an affinity to drama before the age of 16 (pg. 527) and that their career has been influenced by teachers. Kempe highlights here that a strong arts background is determined before the age of 16. This demonstrates that students entering into initial teacher education (ITE) are arriving with this background or sense of identity before any formal instruction takes place. Understanding that one will educate students as a professional is part of the identity as self. Learning to create your craft as an educator and working towards the completion of standards, for example, encompasses the 'role' aspect of teacher identity. Further, the third part of a teacher, particularly in drama, is that of the performer and is argued that student teachers with respect for the triadic (self, role, performance) approaches ensures success for the development of teacher identity (Kempe, 2012).

In a study on teacher identity and its effect on the classroom, Bukor (2015), researches how one's personal and professional experiences are central to teacher identity. The study looks at teacher identity from a holistic perspective, and offers correlations between teacher identity and effectiveness in the classroom. The call for change in professional development is asserted by Bukor, contending that by offering professional development that addresses the professional personal aspects of being a teacher, would provide a more empathetic attitude towards students and colleagues (Bukor, 2015). By looking at drama teachers from a holistic point of view, and encouraging the reflection on one's self and in identifying one's identity, the progression of drama education and success for students can continue and increase.

Over the course of the last 15 years, the landscape of initial teacher education in Ireland has undergone significant transformation. The establishment of a Teaching Council in Ireland,

along with the introduction of a four-year Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) degree and a two-year Professional Master of Education (PME) programme, reflects Ireland's commitment to enhancing the quality of teacher education (Kenny, Finneran & Mitchell, 2015). Amidst these developments, the concept of teacher identity has emerged as a crucial focus in the preparation of future educators, influenced by both personal backgrounds and educational experiences (Alsup, 2006; Darling-Hammond & Cobb, 1996; Day et al., 2007; Deegan, 2008; Haniford, 2010; Korthagen, 2004; Lopes & Pereira, 2012; Rodgers & Scott, 2008; Sugrue, 2004).

In the context of primary education, Irish students, from around four or five to twelve or thirteen years of age, are exposed to a curriculum that spans six areas, including the arts—visual art, music, and drama (NCCA, 1999a & NCCA, 2024b). Primary school teachers in Ireland are trained to deliver the entire curriculum, necessitating comprehensive education in all subject areas during their teacher training. Before the study by Finneran *et al.* (2015), there was a notable lack of research into how arts education was integrated into teacher education in Ireland. Their pioneering study aimed to explore pre-service teachers' perceptions and values of the arts, as well as how engagement with the arts influenced their emerging identities as teachers (Kenny, Finneran & Mitchell, 2015).

The study focused on first-year students enrolled in the B.Ed. and Bachelor of Education in Education and Psychology (B.Ed. & Psych.) programmes at an Irish university. It revealed that engaging with the arts modules often challenged the students' preconceived notions of the arts and arts education, shaped by their prior experiences or lack thereof. These new understandings of the arts were seen as integral to the development of their teacher identities, providing a dynamic framework through which to view their professional growth (Kenny, Finneran & Mitchell, 2015).

This finding aligns with earlier research advocating for activity-based learning (Davies, 2010; Kenny, 2014; Ní Chroínín et al., 2013), emphasising that introducing teacher education through participatory arts experiences can be inclusive, active, and transformative (Kenny, Finneran & Mitchell, 2015).

The potential for a vibrant arts education culture in Irish school hinges on teachers' willingness to invest time and effort into its implementation. Teachers' backgrounds play a crucial role in this context, with identity formation beginning long before formal teacher training. The type of teacher one becomes is deeply influenced by childhood experiences, developed talents, and

pre-existing beliefs and principles. Previous studies highlight that prior knowledge and experience in the arts significantly contribute to the multifaceted development of teacher identity, particularly in how drama is taught or utilised as a teaching tool (Pitfield, 2012; Sefton-Green et al., 2011). Thus, prior engagement with the arts enriches the evolving identity of teachers, shaping their approach to arts education (Kenny, Finneran & Mitchell, 2015).

Conceptually, it would be impossible for everyone to teach in the same way because everyone is very different. Especially in a subject like drama, while the concepts and the underlying learning could be the same, a teacher's personality and identity will always be reflected in their style of teaching. 'To say that a facilitator of a drama workshop only operates from one philosophical framework is to deny our mercurial expressions of self, identity, power, voice, and agency' (Duffy *et al.*, 2013, pg. 3). Individuality will always present itself, individuality shapes identity, identity shapes the kind of practitioners we are. Drama is a subject that will allow teachers to present and celebrate their background and identity.

This section highlights the importance of understanding teacher identity and backgrounds as a complex, multifaceted construct that encompasses personal and professional experiences. This research looks at participants' identity and backgrounds to explore if their backgrounds play a role in their arts education teaching as it is relevant to their perspectives and attitudes towards drama and the arts.

## **2.7 CONCLUSION**

The realm of contemporary drama has evolved far beyond the scope of its traditional thinkers. Today, the new age of drama extends its boundaries, embracing a multifaceted landscape that centres on the interplay of context and identity. This literature review serves as a foundational exploration into the underpinnings of this research journey.

Within the context of drama education, I give a brief historical overview and the contributions of educationists like Heathcote, Bolton, Neelands, O’Neil, and O’Toole. Their legacy has paved the way for a richer understanding of the subject, creating a legacy upon which we build our exploration of contemporary drama's significance. Throughout this review, I cast a spotlight on the myriad benefits of incorporating drama education into curricula, ranging from holistic personal development to its unique advantages for individuals with special educational needs. I detail the journey of drama and technology, demonstrating how they have been combined in the digital age. I examine the impact of teachers' backgrounds, beliefs, and identities on the teaching and learning experience. This dialogue lays the foundation for a deeper exploration in subsequent data analysis sections.

I now transition into the methodological approach to this inquiry, which finds expression in the form of a case study, enriched with an ethnographic focus. In the chapters to follow, I will unpack how this methodology is designed and executed, offering an insightful roadmap for understanding the practical aspects of the research. This journey into the transformative landscape of drama in the 21st century promises to be an exciting and enriching one, and the subsequent chapters will illuminate the path ahead.

### **3 EXAMINING THE DRAMA IN SCHOOLS**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter focuses on the research methodology and methods applied during this study. According to Cooper and Schindler (2008), methodology is described as the systematic way of seeking a solution to a problem. The purpose of this chapter is to outline the methodological approach adopted in this study and to justify its values as a means of addressing the research questions and aims. The methodological approach used is a qualitative one, involving a series of case studies with an ethnographic focus that probe attitudes and beliefs. An overview of the data collection procedures used and an explanation of the data analysis processes are detailed. The specific aspects that the methodology chapter addresses also include the research design, population and sample, interviews, coding and analysis of data, data protection and ethical considerations.

#### **3.2 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

Qualitative research aims to achieve an in-depth understanding of the situation or study. Qualitative research has been described as a powerful tool for engaging with big questions and problems (Anderson, 2012, pg. 129). Ackroyd (2006), reports that advances in thinking concerning various qualitative research lenses have been applied to research in drama education only recently, however, it has had a ‘distinguished place in human disciplines’ since the 1920s and 1930s (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, pg.1). Qualitative is a suitable approach for the exploration of teacher’s attitudes toward drama education. Qualitative research is a subjective research approach that seeks to describe experiences of life and assign meaning to such experiences (Munhall, 2012; Grove et al., 2014). Merriam (2009), describes four characteristics to illustrate qualitative research: firstly, the focus is on process, understanding and meaning; secondly, the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection; thirdly, the research process is inductive and includes iterative cycles of analysis; and finally, the end thesis or product is “richly descriptive” in order to capture the nuance of context (Merriam, 2009, pg. 14). These four characteristics closely describe the journey of this research. Marshall and

Rossmann (2011) describe hallmarks of qualitative research as ‘pragmatic, interpretive, and grounded in the lived experience of people...emergent and evolving’ (pg. 2). A qualitative approach enables the me to obtain open and honest insights and locate it in an appropriate cultural and theoretical context. This is an appropriate frame within which to seek rich insight and meaningful experiences from teachers in Irish primary schools about their experiences with drama.

Qualitative research has numerous criticisms. The writings of Denzin and Giardina, (2008); Creswell & Miller, (2010); Lather & St Pierre, (2013) and Morse, (2015), dispute the credibility of the research because of issues of subjectivity. Qualitative research by its nature is personal as it often explores the participants’ experiences or feelings. The credibility of a qualitative inquiry is dependent on the degree of reflexivity of the researcher as it “is forged in the transactions among what is done and learned and felt by the researcher. It is an intensely recursive, personal process” (Ely, 1991 pg. 1). I am the researcher in this project and the sole researcher of this work and therefore all the decisions, for example: research questions; themes to be explored; who to include in the sample, are all mine. These decisions inherently shape the nature of the study and the have implications for the trustworthiness of the findings, but that is the essence of qualitative research. Generalisability or external validity of the kind that can be achieved in quantitative research is not a goal of qualitative research, but procedures such as providing rich descriptions of the research context and sample may be used to assist future researchers in determining the transferability of findings to other samples and populations (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Similarly, objectivity is not a goal of qualitative research, but the confirmability of findings can be enhanced through the researcher’s effort to remain mindful of and suspend her personal biases during the course of the study.

### **3.3 CASE STUDIES**

Case study is an established research strategy that has been utilised in the social sciences for over 40 years (Simons, 2009 & Rule and John, 2015). Case study applicability has developed over time, and it is now not only used in social studies, but also in practical fields such as education, environmental studies, business fields, and social works. A case study is where we examine some phenomenon by identifying, observing and documenting data to look for

specific characteristics (O'Toole, 2006), case studies are descriptive, explanatory, or exploratory (Zainal, 2007). According to Hancock and Algozzine (2016), case studies use multiple pieces of evidence to explore a contemporary research issue and are conducted within a natural context. Case studies are research designs that seek to analyse specific problems and issues within the confines of a particular situation, organisation, or environment, and 'one of the advantages cited for case study research is its uniqueness, its capacity for understanding complexity in particular contexts' (Simons, 1996, pg. 225). The design of a case study involves a researcher's investigation of how a process occurs within a bounded context (Yin, 2017). A 'bounded context' may be an individual or an organisation that is easily distinguished from other, similar individuals or entities. In a qualitative case study, the aim is to understand how a process occurs within a bounded context according to the perceptions of persons familiar with the context and the process. Advocates of a case study methodology argue that it is a successful way of studying phenomena and that the prolonged period of time spent conducting the fieldwork and data collection enables the researcher to demonstrate a deeper understanding in their area of expertise (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995; Nisbett and Watts, 1984; Simons, 2009). The case study is identified as a valid research design for this project, in which a description of the state of drama in Irish primary schools is derived from the reported perceptions and experiences of the teachers who are responsible for the implementation of drama.

In this case study, the bounded context or case is defined as an individual Irish primary school. The processes or phenomena of interest are teachers' experiences and perceptions (or lack thereof) of drama education in his or her classroom, his or her background in drama and drama education, perceptions of his or her school's culture as it relates to drama, and his or her experiences and perceptions of the benefits of drama for students.

There are arguments against using a qualitative case study approach, including that the trustworthiness of findings may be weakened by the biases of the participants whose reports are used to characterise the process of interest, and by biases of the researcher that may influence the data collection and analysis processes (Flyvberg, 2006; Nisbett & Watt, 1984; Verschuren, 2003). Researcher bias may weaken the confirmability of the findings by making them outcomes of the researcher's preconceptions rather than of participants' perceptions and experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Participants' biases and misperceptions can weaken the credibility of the findings, by making them inaccurate descriptions of the process of interest

(Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007; Flyvberg, 2006; Ruddin, 2006; Thomas, 2010). If participants' biases are temporary, they may also weaken the dependability of findings, by making the findings unlikely to be replicable at a later time. However, the qualitative case study approach can also involve procedures to limit the influence of these potential weaknesses. In this study, a member-checking procedure was used to allow participants to take a second look at their interview responses and offer any suggestions for revision that would make the responses more accurate. Having the participants consider their responses at the time of the interview, and then reconsider their responses at a later time, can limit the extent to which transitory biases weaken the dependability of the findings. Member-checking can also be used to limit the extent to which transcription errors limit the credibility of the findings. Participants were also assured that all reasonable precautions would be taken to ensure their identities remained confidential (as discussed later in this chapter). Ensuring the confidentiality of participants' identities encourages participant honesty by reassuring them that there will be no negative consequences if they give candid responses during their interviews.

The relatively small sample size in this study may also weaken trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Although generalisability is not a goal of qualitative research, the small size of the sample and the delimitation of the research context to primary schools within a small geographic area may limit the transferability of the findings to other populations and samples. To allow future researchers to assess the transferability of the findings to samples and populations in which they may be interested, detailed descriptions of the participants and the case schools in this study have been provided.

A further means of addressing potential weaknesses in the qualitative case study design that may negatively affect credibility and dependability is to use a multiple case study design, to facilitate comparison across similar cases and identify common patterns that are not dependent on perceptions of a single case (Yin, 2017). A multiple-case study design was used in this research. Cases included 15 Irish primary school teachers, in which processes and cultural influences related to the teaching of drama were described by teachers. The use of case study in this research project aims to enhance the credibility of the research by preserving the 'multiple realities, the different and even contradictory views of what is happening' in each drama classroom (Stake, 1995, pg. 12). An attractive quality of the case study is that it allows you to capture multiple realities and contradictory views, as not every classroom and not every teacher's experience has the same narrative: 'exploring teacher's experience of teaching drama

in the subject provides a rich, deep and complex picture to analyse' (Anderson, 2012, pg. 144). A case study approach allows me to capture the complexities and realities of what it is like for teachers to teach drama currently. Stake (1994) advises taking from the case what we feel will help us learn the most. Anderson (2012), states the material chosen from the interview transcripts and developed into a narrative should be appropriate to the themes and sub themes of the research. Thus, Irish primary teachers have been identified as cases, because they are the most direct and immediate source of information about how and why they teach and have taught drama. Additionally, the interview protocol has been designed to elicit participants' reports of their perceptions and experiences while minimizing the imposition of researcher preconceptions, by using open-ended questions that encourage participants to report their perceptions and experiences in their own words.

One notable advantage and strength of the case study in this research is that it allows significant flexibility in defining the case, as 'case studies can be about specific individuals, about specific contexts, or about a specific practice' (O'Toole, 2006, pg. 44). This case study is about specific individuals, teachers, in a specific context, schools, and about a specific practice, teaching. A case study, such as this one, provides a lot of data, and although generalisations cannot be made as a result of the analysis, it is an insight into a process that provides; a 'close-up' context of the teacher in the classroom, a 'mid-shot' context of the teacher in their school and a 'wide-shot' that illuminates concerns of drama teaching in the context of the curriculum (Anderson, 2012). As outlined in the introductory chapter of this research, this project is a 'snapshot' of what is currently happening in drama education in Irish schools; the case study is the vehicle used to explore and collect the data to provide that 'snapshot.'

There is another methodological layer in this study. The teachers in this case study are 'studied', their personal views and beliefs are deliberated upon. When exploring a group's personal experiences and perceptions, this is also the study of a culture. A case study is a type of qualitative research, which generally refers 'to the practice of investigating and interpreting a culture' (Ackroyd, 2006, pg. 6). Studying a culture is the methodological approach of ethnography (Creswell, 2007). While this is not an ethnographic project, there are elements of ethnography incorporated. Thus, this research is categorised as a series of case studies viewed through an ethnographic lens to explore the experiences and perspectives of the participating teachers. An explanation and justification of the incorporation of an ethnographic focus is provided in section 3.4.

### 3.4 CASE STUDY WITH AN ETHNOGRAPHIC FOCUS

Berk (2003), describes ethnographic research as a descriptive, qualitative technique. Ethnography is best suited to exploratory research; it can draw a wide scope of qualitative methodologies together thus helping to learn through research (Agar, 1996). Brewer defines ethnography as: ‘the study of people in naturally occurring settings or fields by methods of data collection which capture their social meanings and ordinary activities...in order to collect data in a systematic manner but without meaning being imposed on them externally’ (2000, pg. 6). Ethnographic researchers attempt to develop an understanding of how a culture works: ‘ethnography centres on the observation of a society or culture’ (Lutz, 1993, pg. 108). Ethnographic studies are methods of acquiring knowledge of households, schools or communities from a local point of view. They are a means of understanding different categories of human experiences from a close and personal point of view. Ethnography is based on the inferences that a researcher makes after understanding actions and events from specific environments. Thus, ethnographic studies imply that the researcher is trying to understand a certain culture (Fairhurst and Good, 1991). The study of culture involves listening to people, observing their behaviours, and then making a conclusion from listening or observing them (Brewer, 2000). In this study, I will study Irish primary teachers in the contexts of their own lives and school cultures. An ethnographic focus is appropriate because school culture may exert a significant influence on teachers’ implementation of drama, so a cultural focus will allow me to more deliberately explore the teachers’ perceptions and experiences of the culture in which they work and its influence, if any, on their drama instruction. This research design will enable us to learn about curriculum as ethnography involves fieldwork and in-depth engagement with the participants in their natural settings, it allows researchers to gain a deep understanding of the specific context in which the curriculum is implemented. This contextual understanding is crucial because curricula are not one-size-fits-all; they are shaped by the unique characteristics of the educational environment, including the school's culture, community demographics, and resources available. Curriculum is not static but rather dynamic and influenced by various factors. Ethnographic research captures the complexity of curriculum enactment by examining how it evolves over time and how it is shaped by the

interactions among teachers, students and schools. It can reveal the hidden curriculum—the unintended lessons and values that are conveyed through educational practices.

Emerson *et al.* (2011), describes ethnography as participating and observing in the on-going life of a natural setting in to produce written accounts of what was observed. ‘An ethnography may be written as narrative or stories, with issues raised, but not necessarily conforming to a chronology of events, and including description, analysis, interpretation and explanation of the key features of a group or culture (Cohen *et al.*, 2011, pg. 539). Typically, ethnographic research employs three types of data collection namely interview, documents, and observation (Suter, 2012). This research uses ethnographic interviews because it is premised on exploring lived cultural experience (Creswell, 2007). While ethnographic interviewing entails a face-to-face encounter between the researcher and the participant, it is not a straight forward question and answer format in the conventional sense, instead, it involves the collection of, ‘reports of behaviour, meanings, attitudes and feelings that are never directly observed in the face-to-face encounter of the interview but are the data the question is supposed to reveal’ (Brewer, 2000, pg. 63). The case study allows me to record the interview answers in a conventional sense, and the ethnographic focus broadens the phenomenon of interest from teachers’ perceptions and experiences of drama education to include their perceptions and experiences of the influence of their school culture on drama. This approach allows the ethnographer to write their interpretation of what was meaningful and significant by observing with ‘acuteness’ and with a ‘new lens’ (Emerson *et al.*, 2011).

Combining research methodologies is not a new phenomenon. O’ Toole (2006), argues that case study can be a method or a methodology. Within research, ‘you can declare your methodology as a case study, or you can focus it as an ethnographic case study’ (O’ Toole, 2006, pg. 44). A case study orientation can have an ethnographic design. Originating in anthropology, ethnographic case study research is used when one wants to explore the observable and learned patterns of behaviour, customs, and ways of life of a culture-sharing group (Hancock and Algozzine, 2016, pg. 31). Ethnography is an approach to research and not a specific data collection technique. An ethnographer can adapt and use a mix of methods appropriate to a situation, and research techniques can complement each other. Ethnography generates rich qualitative data, these data sources offer nuanced insights into curriculum practices and experiences, going beyond quantitative metrics and statistics. Case studies are applicable to this study as it seeks to understand a subject and to have an intensive and holistic

exploration of the teacher's perception of drama education. To achieve a holistic exploration of teacher's perception, ethnography plays a part. Ethnographic methods are ideal for this study as there is an objective to explore, understand and gain knowledge of a group of teachers that share a particular culture.

Case studies with an ethnographic focus typically involve face-to-face interaction with the participants, during which the researcher visits the day-to-day lives of the respondents. The outgrowth of this effort is a holistic description of the group that incorporates both their views and the researcher's perceptions and interpretations of the participants' functioning (Hancock and Algozzine, 2016). For example, this research has an interest in the culture of a school or a dynamic within drama education, and I visited the day-to-day lives of the respondents in their classrooms to study this culture. Ethnography succeeds if it teaches us about a cultural setting (Wolcott, 1973). Curriculum is influenced by cultural and social factors, and ethnographic research excels at uncovering these influences. Researchers can explore how cultural norms, traditions, and societal expectations shape the curriculum, as well as how the curriculum, in turn, impacts the culture of the educational setting. The findings from ethnographic case studies can inform educational policy and curriculum development. Researchers can provide recommendations based on their in-depth understanding of the curriculum's strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement.

A traditional case study differs from a traditional ethnography in its objective and procedures. In a traditional case study, the focus is on how a process occurs within a bounded context, according to the perceptions of persons familiar with the context (Yin, 2017). The objective of the traditional qualitative case study is to describe how a process occurs. The researcher may or may not be immersed in the context during data collection, but if any immersion is practiced (as for conducting face-to-face interviews or researcher observations), the researcher is present as a data-gatherer and observer, rather than as a participant in the process. In a traditional ethnographic approach, in contrast, the objective is to describe the culture of a group of people, rather than a process within a bounded context such as an organisation (Creswell, 2012). The researcher's approach will often involve immersion as a participant in the culture, rather than as a non-participating observer of a process in a bounded context.

The hybrid approach of a qualitative case study with an ethnographic approach is appropriate in this study because it combined elements of traditional case study and traditional ethnography in a suitable way. In this study, the case is defined as an individual Irish primary school teacher.

The process of interest is the teaching of drama. However, to fully understand the reasons why drama instruction took the forms it did, it is necessary to understand the culture of Irish primary schools as it relates to drama. Thus, the objectives in this research include describing a culture, as a means of contextualising how and why the processes of drama instruction occur as they do within the bounded contexts of primary schools. The need to describe school culture makes an ethnographic focus appropriate. The need to describe the processes of drama instruction within a bounded context makes a case study appropriate. The need to contextualise descriptions of drama-instruction processes within descriptions of the school cultures that in part determined them makes the hybrid approach of a qualitative multiple-case study with an ethnographic focus ideal for this research. Conducting a case study with an ethnographic focus is valuable for learning more about curriculum because it delves deeply into the lived experiences and contextual factors that shape curriculum implementation. It provides a holistic and nuanced understanding that can inform curriculum design, educational practice, and policy decisions.

To conclude, I brought two research methodologies together to help carry out this research and label it a case study with an ethnographic focus. This approach provides a representation of data of a group of professional peers with cultural idiosyncrasies. The case study with an ethnographic lens provides a rich insight into real life experiences in the classroom. As I anticipated, and as the findings in this study indicated, the processes of drama instruction within the bounded contexts of Irish primary schools could not be understood without the context of pervasive cultural evaluations and perceptions of the drama within the schools.

### **3.5 IDENTIFYING THE SAMPLE**

The procedure or process of selecting people to participate in the study to satisfactorily address the research questions is known as sampling. I followed a process beginning with identifying the population, specification of the sampling frame, specifying the sampling method and determining the sample size (Marshall *et al.*, 2013). The quality of a piece of research stands or falls not only by the appropriateness of methodology and instrumentation but also by the suitability of the sampling strategy that has been adopted (Morrison, 1993). Questions of sampling arise directly out of the issue of defining the population on which the research

focuses: 'factors such as expense, time, accessibility frequently prevent researchers from gaining information from the whole population' (Cohen *et al.*, 2007, pg. 100). Therefore, I needed to obtain data from a smaller group or subset of the total population. This smaller group or subset is the sample. It is common practice for a large or nation-wide study, to use the total population and work down to the sample. By contrast, less experienced researchers often work from the bottom up, that is, they determine the minimum number of respondents needed to conduct the research (Bailey, 1978). The concept of data saturation is often used in qualitative research to determine when a sample size is sufficient (Fusch and Ness, 2015). Data saturation is achieved when additional data collection and analysis yield no new insights or themes. In this study, data saturation was achieved when analysis of two consecutive interviews (the fourteenth and fifteenth interviews) resulted in the creation of no new NVivo child nodes, indicating that the patterns and themes in the data from those two interviews represented further confirmation of themes derived from earlier interviews, rather than new ideas or themes. Data saturation was therefore achieved with 15 participants, and participant recruitment and data collection were concluded.

I used a combination of purposeful sampling and convenience sampling when identifying possible research participants. Purposeful sampling is commonly used in research utilising case study to generate in-depth understandings through the selection of 'information-rich cases'. These cases should be selected with the goal of producing significant amounts of data relevant to the study (Patton, 2002, pg. 46). The researcher has the task of identifying 'key participants in the situation whose knowledge and opinions may provide insights regarding the research questions' (Hancock and Algozzine, 2016, pg. 29). As the name suggests, purposeful sampling is used to access 'knowledgeable people,' i.e., those who have in-depth knowledge about particular issues, maybe by virtue of their professional role, power, access to networks, expertise or experience (Ball, 1990). There is little benefit in seeking a random sample when most of the random sample may be largely ignorant of particular issues and unable to comment on matters of interest to the researcher, in which case a purposive sample is vital (Cohen *et al.*, 2017, pg. 115). The priority with purposeful sampling is to acquire in-depth information from those who are in a position to give it. The participants in this study were purposively selected based upon their appropriateness to the research aims. Participants were selected for maximum variation in the location and size of their schools, as well as their years of teaching experience and personal exposure to and comfort with drama education. Although generalisability is not a goal of qualitative research, my attempt to achieve maximum variation across significant

characteristics of the sample was intended to enhance the potential for findings to be transferable to other Irish primary teachers and schools.

Examining a large sample is difficult in terms of time, finances and inaccessibility. For example, the number of teachers in the country is large, and it would not be practical to seek the perspectives of each of them regarding drama education. For this reason, a small number of teachers were selected, to represent the entire population of teachers, and this was executed through convenience sampling.

‘Convenience sampling involves choosing the nearest individuals to serve as respondents and continuing that process until the required sample size has been obtained or those who happen to be available and accessible at the time’ (Cohen *et al.*, 2007, pg. 113).

Identifying and gaining access to interviewees is a critical step, geographical location and availability are considered. Selection of interviewees directly influences the quality of the information attained. Although availability is relevant and my own ability to travel to the interviewee, this should not be the only criterion for selecting interviewees and why a combination of purposeful and convenience sampling was used. Hanock and Algozzine (2016), recommend the most relevant consideration is to identify those persons in the research setting who may have the best information with which to address the study’s research questions. Then you must identify if the potential interviewee is willing to participate in an interview. Finally, the researcher must have the ability and resources with which to gain access to the interviewees (Hanock and Algozzine, 2016, pg. 29). ‘They (the research participants) may be similar or dissimilar, redundancy and variety each having a voice. They are chosen because it is believed that understanding them will lead to a better understanding of this case study (Stake, 2000, pg. 432). This research seeks a variety of opinions, so maximum variation in the sample is desirable; teachers who hold a drama or an arts background and those who do not claim to have a similar background.

### 3.5.1 IDENTIFICATION OF POTENTIAL RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

I as the principal investigator, used convenience sampling in two categories to get a balanced representation of opinion and experience of drama in the primary curriculum.

Category 1: Teachers actively and publicly involved in drama activities who are known to me in person or through their public appearances.

Category 2: Teachers who might not regard themselves as drama ‘specialists’ or who do not have a declared a public interest in the area.

I contacted teachers who potentially had an interest in the study based on my prior knowledge of the teacher’s interest in arts and drama education. If they were interested in taking part in the research, they were asked to suggest like-minded teachers and equally teachers whom they knew to not have a particular interest in drama also. Through networking with teachers known to me (who were and also who were not taking part in the research), contact was made with teachers in different schools and different parts of the country who were unknown to me personally. When supplied with their contact details, these teachers were phoned and the research was explained to them, information was sent to them and they were asked would they be willing to take part and sign the permission agreement. After a suitable sample was established and agreed with the research supervisor, meeting times to hold the interviews were set up and conducted over a period of three months.

This study included a sample of 15 teachers from a variety of backgrounds- Although fifteen is a small sample size, ‘this was not a limitation as it is usual for qualitative researchers to work with, ‘small samples of people nested in their context and studied in-depth, unlike quantitative researchers, who aim for larger numbers of context- stripped cases and seek statistical significance’ (Miles and Huberman, 1994, pg. 27). The participants are from urban schools/rural schools, newly qualified teachers/ experienced teachers, either men or women and schools in a range of socio-economic contexts. This is a convenience sample driven by my personal contacts, geographical location, ease of access and willingness to participate. The sample group includes a population of participants from 15 schools. Schools selected had different dynamics and the participants selected also have differing teaching experiences.

#### **The Significance of Drama**

Table 1 includes an overview of the study participants’ demographics. The sample schools selected are a combination of rural and urban areas. 10 of schools are co-educational. Schools

selected have enrolments from 200-700 children. The table also details the years of service of each participant, their backgrounds and offers an overview of how the participants were identified for the research. Only information offered by the participants has been included. For example, some volunteered the location of the school, some volunteered the religious status of the school, the enrollment size etc. The details given on each school varies.

Name	Location	School Dynamic	Teacher comes from an arts background	Teachers' Years of Service	How did you identify the participant for the research
1. Amy	Urban School Limerick City	600+ students Co-educational Non-denominational	No	4	Known to me as a colleague and interviewed in her classroom.
2. Ann	Urban School Cork City	500 students Co-Educational Gaeilscoil (Irish speaking school)	No	16	Known to me from school and interviewed in her classroom.
3. Breda	Rural School County Kerry	Co-Educational Gaeilscoil (Irish speaking school)	Yes	8	Participant recommended to me by a colleague and interviewed in her classroom.
4. Cillian	Urban School County Laois	370 Students Urban School Single sex-boys	Does not come from an arts background but developed his own interests in the arts.	19	Known to me as we went to college together and interviewed in his classroom.
5. Claire	Cork Rural school	200 students which includes 4 units for children with additional learning needs Single sex-boys	Yes	8	Known to me as we went to college together and interviewed in her classroom.

6. Don	Urban School Limerick	240 students Co-Educational Special Needs School	No	27	Participant was not known to me but I requested his details through a colleague as he worked in a special school. He was interviewed over the phone.
7. Ed	Urban School Limerick City	600+ Students Co-Educational Gaeilscoil (Irish speaking school)	Yes	11	Participant recommended to me by a colleague and interviewed in his classroom.
8. Ger	Urban School County Clare	Deis School (designated disadvantaged)  Co-Educational until 1 <sup>st</sup> class (7/8 years) and single sex girls until 6 <sup>th</sup> class (12/13 years).	Yes	5	Known to me as a colleague and having a strong arts background. She was interviewed in her classroom.
9. Jack	On the Suburbs of the city (Participant did not state the county)	Co-educational Non-denominational	yes	9	Participant was not known to me and recommended to me by a colleague as having a strong arts background. The interview took place in Mary Immaculate College by his request.

10. Jean	Limerick Urban School	Co- Educational 700 Students	No	NQT (Newly qualified teacher) in her first year.	Known to me as a colleague and interviewed in her classroom.
11. Jill	Urban School County Dublin	Senior Catholic School, Co- educational (3 <sup>rd</sup> to 6 <sup>th</sup> class only- 9-13 years). 250 Students	No	7	Known to me as a colleague and interviewed in her classroom.
12. Marie	Urban School Kildare	400 students Catholic Single-sex girls	No	20	Participant was not known to me and recommended to me by my mentor as having a strong arts background. The interview took place in Mary Immaculate College by her request.
13. Max	Rural School (Did not state the county)	210 students Co-educational	Yes	15	Participant was not known to me and recommended to me by a colleague as having a strong arts background. The interview took place in Mary Immaculate College by his request.
14. Sarah	Rural School West Cork	415 students Single sex- girls	yes	8	Known to me as we went to college together and

					interviewed in her classroom.
15. Ursula	Urban School Large city school	Co-Educational Non-denominational	no	35	Known to me as we worked in the same school and interviewed in her classroom.

*Table 1; Sample Profile*

Hertwig and Pleskac (2010), explain that a small sample size can give a sharper focus to the research which leads to a more specific dataset and generalisable outcomes. While I did travel to conduct interviews, some of them were local to me, and therefore, this meant that the costs were lower, for example, less travel. This small sample was suitable for limited resources and helped me establish a better rapport with the respondents. These advantages improved the quality of the study conducted using a small sample.

### **3.6 RESEARCH INSTRUMENT**

Researchers must employ methods that are fit for the research they are undertaking' (BERA, 2011, pg. 9). This research employs a series of interviews as the most suitable research instrument and the following section details why. Interviews using open-ended and follow-up questions allow participants to express their perceptions and experiences in their own words, so interviews not only help to limit the influence of researcher bias by minimizing researcher influence on the form and content of responses, they open the possibility for themes and concepts unanticipated by the researcher to emerge (Anderson, 2012, pg. 144; Leavy, 2017). The series of interviews captures teachers' reflections and feelings towards the structure and culture of drama education in schools.

#### **3.6.1 DATA COLLECTION - INTERVIEWS**

Interviews are conversations involving questions directed to a person to elicit some information from respondents. Interviewing is a fundamental form of qualitative data collection, and is built on the basics of human interaction, conversations, and exchange. Interviewing is ‘one of the most common and most powerful ways we use to try to understand our fellow human beings’ (Fontana and Frey, 1994, pg. 367). They are a key data collection method utilised to obtain an insight into the participants’ individual experiences (Guest *et al.*, 2013, pg. 116). All interviews focus upon a verbal stimulus to elicit a verbal response, as a starting point (Brewer, 2000; Silverman, 2001). Additionally, Patton (2002, pg. 4) asserts that interviews enable the researcher ‘to yield in-depth responses about people's experience, perceptions, opinions, feelings, and knowledge’. Interviews in ethnographic studies help to unfold the meanings of a particular theme in the real-life situation of the subjects and from their own points of view. Interviews are advantageous as they can reflect behaviour, experiences, attitudes, and perceptions of the respondents. The use of this method of data collection helped me to understand the respondent’s feelings, thoughts and opinions. Interviewing is a primary data collection method used to construct qualitative case studies (Stake, 1995; Simon, 2009) because it provides a ‘uniquely sensitive and powerful method for capturing the experiences and lived meanings of the subjects’ everyday world’ (Kvale, 2007, pg. 1). Anderson (2012), claims the aim of interviews is to engage in a conversation that creates mutually constructed meaning.

### 3.6.2 CONDUCTING INTERVIEWS

A single one-to-one, semi-structured interview was conducted with each participant. The questions were prepared but allowed the interviewee to respond in an open fashion. The full set of questions are included in the appendix 3. An ethnographic approach allows a researcher ample time to ask open-ended questions and investigate the research questions with the participants. Open-ended questions enable respondents to speak freely and share their message without limitations (Cohen, 2007). A flexible approach was adopted through a combination of unstructured and semi-structured interviewing techniques, where the researcher and the participants both have input into the process (Anderson, 2012; Creswell, 2007). Anderson (2012), says semi-structured interviews are more honest, morally sound and reliable as the

respondent is allowed to express personal feelings and therefore presents a more realistic picture than that of traditional methods. Forgetting the rules of traditional interviewing allows participants to express themselves more freely and thus have a greater voice in the project (Fontana and Frey, 1994). The interviews were semi-structured and at all times I endeavoured to be unbiased. I did not distort the responses by asking leading questions or suggesting words or phrases to participants. The opening questions framed each interview, giving the respondents a context as they did not see the questions in advance of the interview. These opening questions steered the respondent towards the topic of drama education, giving me the scope to ask more open, unstructured questions as the interview progressed, where the respondent had more independence to structure their responses as they desired (Bowden, 2000; Yates, Partridge & Bruce, 2012). In an ethnographic study, the respondent's feelings, opinions and personal point of view are critical. Thus, in this study, I included as many open-ended interview questions as possible. The interview questions were carefully chosen to measure factors that address the research questions outlined in previous chapters. A full list of the closed and open-ended questions is included in the appendices, for example: (1) Tell me about the dynamic of your school (rural/urban, co-ed/single sex, etc.); (2) Does your school have a drama policy (3) Do you use it? Is it effective; (4) What is the attitude to drama education among colleagues in your school or can you comment?

Certain techniques should be employed when conducting interviews (Morrison & Pole, 2003). The process should be tactful and ensure some sensitivity in the approach. Interviewer etiquette is paramount. Listening skills are a significant element in interviewer's etiquette. 'LISTEN, LISTEN and LISTEN MORE' (Ely, 1991, pg. 67). By listening reflectively, the researcher will better understand what the interviewee is sharing, as well as understanding the significance of the information for making inferences about the research topic at hand (Brounéus, 2001, pg. 136). Being a reflective listener means I can listen while also draw meaning from the responses. To assist, the interviewer used a recording device to ensure that they captured the entire interview and to allow for transcription.

Interview etiquette requires the researcher to keep and observe boundaries and distance with the respondents. With regards to this, I did not interrupt the respondent as they provide their responses to the interview questions. While it is imperative to get clarification and to have the respondent focused on the interview questions, I avoided interrupting the respondent:

‘The researcher should remember that time spent talking to the interviewee would be better spent listening to the interviewee. In other words, the researcher should limit her comments as much as possible to allow more time for the interviewee to offer their perspectives (Hancock and Algozzine, 2016, pg. 41).

Taking notes or jotting during interviews was also avoided to avoid any potential strain to relations with participants and to avoid distracting them (Emerson *et al.*, 2011).

The interviews were conducted in the classrooms for thirteen of the participants, and two in an office space on a college campus. This allowed for the participants to feel comfortable and at ease as each chose where they would prefer the interview to be conducted. Interviews often dig deep into the feelings, emotions, and experiences of the respondents. Some of the feelings can be overwhelming particularly because the respondent divulges their personal experiences in the presence of a stranger (interviewer), and they may not be sure how the stranger would respond or view such personal experiences. In this instance, the respondents were asked to recall childhood experiences in their families and school life, relating to drama and performance/acting. While nothing upsetting or overwhelming presented itself throughout the course of these particular interviews, I must always be prepared to deal with such a scenario. Establishing a good rapport with the respondent and developing a trusting relationship with the research participants will help in the event of any upsetting issues arising.

All interviews were audio-recorded using a digital recorded device. Interviews were transcribed verbatim by myself and then compared with the recording to ensure accuracy. During the transcription process, interviews were de-identified by replacing real names with pseudonyms and redacting potentially identifying details (e.g. names of schools or colleagues). Recorded interviews are stored only on a password-protected drive to which only I had access, and have been deleted from the recording device.

### **3.7 DATA ANALYSIS**

Data analysis serves as an instrumental role in research. The main purpose of the data analysis section in dissertation writing is to summarise, arrange, and give meaning to the research data

(Burns and Grove, 2007). Data from interview transcripts should be read as a complete corpus, to explore the entire record of field experience and then coded on a line-by-line basis (Emerson *et al.*, 2011). This process refers to arranging data into distinct individual components for individual analysis. Derived from the data sources to provide ‘an in-depth understanding of the central phenomenon,’ themes are then developed (Creswell 2005, pg. 241). The process ends with data that can be used to make inferences, recommendations for future studies or aid in decision making.

### 3.7.1 NVIVO

When conducting qualitative research, the researcher is the main tool for analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, and Merriam, 2009). However, there are qualitative software tools that can aid a researcher in the process. As noted by Bazeley (2007), ‘the use of a computer is not intended to supplant time-honoured ways of learning from data but to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of such learning. The computer's capacity for recording, sorting, matching, and linking can be harnessed by the researcher to assist in answering their research questions from the data’ (pg. 2). For many researchers, the most complicated step in the research process is that of analysis (Gliner *et al.*, 2009; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). Knowing which analysis to use with different types of research questions and various types of data can be very confusing, especially for a novice researcher. It was apparent to me that the data would need to be coded to sort it into data sets or common themes. Gale, Heath, Cameron, Rashid, and Redwood (2013) indicates that the categorisation process of organising and coding data is crucial in conducting successful data analysis. According to Gale *et al.*, (2013), coding entails the reduction of data into meaningful details that allows exploration, comparison, and categorisation. The categorisation process is essential in organising and coding data. After consulting with Bazeley and Richards (2000) and Bazeley’s (2007) works on qualitative research, I identified Nvivo as being the most suitable software for this project: ‘Nvivo organises raw data and links them with memos and “databites” where researchers might make codes and analytical notes, and then edit and rework ideas as the project progresses’ (Walsh, 2003, pg. 253). In Walsh’s (2003) research on teaching qualitative analysis using Nvivo, the coding system used within Nvivo is described as;

'The coding system is a way of labelling certain aspects of your data and sorting the information into distinctive categories. It is an easy way of keeping track of your ideas as well as documents about specific topics. Coding lets you use words, phrases, and ideas directly from the text and you can, capture information about things (such as how someone was feeling when something happened) and explore them further when you decide it's time' (pg. 253-254).

Nvivo has its own lingo that needs to be mastered to use the programme. For example, the researcher manoeuvres from one document to another using features called "doclinks," "nodelinks," "databites," and "datalinks" (Walsh, 2003). A few words that are unique to NVivo, and which are helpful to understand, include nodes, tree nodes, and free nodes:

'Nodes are similar to codes for comparison analysis. Thus, nodes are what a researcher uses to place meaning on different parts of the text. Tree nodes are groupings of nodes. As more nodes are created, the researcher can organise the nodes into tree nodes. Finally, free nodes are nodes that have not been added to a tree' (Leech and Onwuegbuzie, 2011, pg.74).

The author creates 'nodes' to mark relevant concepts and topics in text documents that can be searched and analysed, then these sections or 'parent nodes' are divided into sub-sections or sub-themes also known as 'child nodes.'

Within the coding stripes window, I identified the main nodes of the research. The Nvivo software aided me to code the data and identify the main nodes or themes. NVivo was applied in the organisation and interpretation of data into thematic interpretations. Data were analysed using the six-step procedure described by Braun and Clark (2006). The six steps of the procedure were: 1) reading and rereading the interview transcripts to gain familiarity with their content; 2) generating initial codes by placing different transcript passages that expressed similar ideas and experiences into the same NVivo child node, which was labelled with a phrase that summarised its content; 3) grouping similar codes into more comprehensive themes, by placing child nodes with similar content under the same parent node, and labelling the parent node with a descriptive phrase; 4) reviewing and refining the themes by reading the data to ensure it was appropriately clustered and categorized, and transferring data between nodes and

renaming nodes as needed; 5) defining the nodes in relation to the research aims, and; 6) producing the presentation of the results provided in chapters 4 through 8.

Table 2 is a screenshot of the parent nodes and child nodes being identified in the analysis process.

The five main themes identified as part of the research are;

1. Importance of Drama Education in School
2. Awareness and Interest among Teachers
3. Implementation of Drama
4. Importance of Drama on Students' Learning and Development
5. Impact of Teachers' Backgrounds and Past Experiences.

Nodes			
Name	Sources	References	
Implementation of Drama		15	161
Challenges		12	33
Classroom Management		2	2
Curriculum Overloading		4	4
Disconnection from experience and implementation		4	5
Lack of Confidence		4	4
Lack of Training & Available Resource		4	5
Spacing Issue		5	6
Time Constraint		4	5
Drama- Standalone or Integrated		9	18
Drama Techniques		13	25
Conscience Alley		5	5
Hot Seating		4	4
Role Play		7	7
Frequency		12	12
Requirement for Reference document		14	55
CPD Course		4	4
Drama Curriculum Document		14	30
Suggestion		10	13

●	Teacher Awareness & Personal Interest		5	9
●	Teacher Confidence		5	7
☐	Learning & Development		15	105
●	Benefitting special needed students		10	13
☐	Experience and Examples		12	20
●	Negative Experience		7	7
●	Positive Experience		9	9
●	Learning for students from drama		7	14
☐	Skills and traits		14	43
●	Emotional Intelligence		3	3
●	Empathy		4	5
●	Express views		7	7
●	Language Development		3	4
●	Listening Skills		2	2
●	Self Confidence		10	11
●	TeamWork		2	2
●	Student's response		8	8
☐	School Culture with respect to Drama		15	146
●	Attitude among Colleagues		12	16
●	Believer in Drama Education		15	15
●	Drama Policy		15	19
☐	Extra Curricular Activities		1	1
●	Additional Fees		2	2
●	Post of Responsibility		15	28
●	Priority		11	13
●	Regular Implementation		14	20
●	School Plan for Drama		15	19
●	Supervision & Guidance		9	10
☐	School Dynamics		15	32
●	Co-ed		11	11
●	Rural		4	4
●	Single Sex		6	6
●	Urban		11	11

Table 2; NVivo screenshot showing codes and themes

### 3.8 ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

Ethical challenges are a common phenomenon when conducting a research study. The challenges culminate through all stages of the process, from writing to designing to reporting. Ethical considerations are fundamental for improving understanding of the necessary attributes essential for conducting credible, reliable and accurate research. The various aspects of ethics in research include ethical clearance from the relevant authorities, confidentiality/anonymity, and ownership of the study.

BERA (2011), recommends that educational researchers should operate within an ethic of respect for any persons involved in their research. As this study involved interviewing the research participants, the researcher was wary of any influence on the research process due to personal background, biases and possible motives (Kervin *et al.*, 2006; O' Toole, 2006). Participants should be treated with sensitivity and freedom from prejudice. All ethical issues involved while carrying out this research are acknowledged, the necessary ethical clearance from the Mary Immaculate College, Research Ethics Committee (MIREC), has been sought and granted and I abide by strict ethics in accordance with guidelines and standard research guidelines in the field of MIREC. When conducting ethical research, informed consent of those you are going to interview or observe must be sought according to Bell (2010). As the target research group is adults, their participation in the case-study acted as their consent, and they also signed an agreement to participate in the research. As discussed previously, Bell (2010), advises that confidentiality and anonymity should always be promised to participants. As well as protecting the identity of the participants and their school, pseudonyms for participants are used when discussing the research where necessary. All data and information collected as part of the research are safeguarded and password protected.

I sought male and female teacher participants for the purposes of this research to give a fair and accurate account of teacher perspectives. As I am female, I am vigilant to respect and accept male opinions and to report the findings of the data without my own personal views. Sex/gender issues are not a focus of this research. The participants were interviewed separately, and their answers/feedback is not available to the other participants. I would like to highlight at this juncture that some of the participants were known to me from attending university together or as colleagues. Specifically, 9 participants were known to me and were contacted by

me and requested to participate in the research. I identified them as suitable candidates as I was aware of either their arts background or lack of arts background. 6 participants were not known to me and were recommended to me by colleagues as their school fitted in with a school demographic that was not already in my sample, for example, Don in a special school. Other participants filled the requirement to have a mixture of arts background teachers and non-arts background teachers. These participants were recommended to me when I asked colleagues and friends to suggest people who they thought may fit the requirements. When these potential candidates received a brief over of the research, they agreed to be contacted by me if they were interested in participating. This is detailed in table 1. There are no ethical implications with knowing participants in the research before the study began as the questions focus on their practices in their own classrooms and their backgrounds. My relationship to the participant was irrelevant to the interview questions.

At all times during this project, I strive to be professional and unbiased. The data is analysed as accurately as possible, so it is a true reflection on the teacher's thoughts and opinions. A high standard of respect is demonstrated to the participants at all times as advised by BERA (2011). To the best of my ability, this research has been conducted in a safe and responsible environment.

### **3.9 INFORMING CONSENT**

Participants were requested to sign an informed consent form (appendix 1) with the research details related to the study purpose, benefits, risks, and confidentiality. The purpose and nature of the study have been explained to the participants in detail. Participants were advised that their participation is voluntary and that they will not be offered any form of compensation. The participants were also advised that they are free to withdraw at anytime from the research. They are also encouraged to report to MIREC or the research supervisor any challenge or an aspect of discontent that they may encounter. Against this backdrop, the participants were requested to append signatures on the informed consent form acknowledging that they understand the study requirements and affirmation of their willingness to participate in the study. The informed consent form also informs the participants of the related study routines such as the audio recording of the interview, although their refusal to be recorded would affect their

eligibility to participate for study. The interviews were conducted in a convenient location as suggested or consented to by the participant, which was the participants own classroom and schools or college campus. The interviews were maximum one hour in length. The participants of this study are respected through-out all stages of this research.

### **3.10 DATA PROTECTION- MEASURES TAKEN TO ENSURE THE CONFIDENTIALITY OF COLLECTED DATA**

There are specific principles and practices used to protect data, and that I am bound by the principles of the Data Protection Act 2018. I recognise and am adhering to data guidelines for storing, protection and maintaining data for research purposes. This relates to any data that could positively identify a living individual that took part in the study. The anonymity of the 15 teachers who participated in the research is guaranteed through protecting the data.

Throughout the thesis, all participants are allocated a pseudonym, by which means they are identified in formal data-sets and analysis from the outset of their participation in the project. A link control sheet has been generated which contains both the real identity and pseudonym. This is the only place both appear together. This link control sheet is kept in an encrypted drive on the office PC of the researcher. For data protection, the digital data (transcripts, recordings, etc.) are stored on an encrypted portable hard-drive in the office of the principal investigator. No copies of the data have been or will be made. The data on the hard-drive is stored in the office of the researcher for the duration of the project. Encryption software is utilised throughout. I require the data until the completed Ph.D. document has been submitted and have successfully passed the Viva Voce. Assuming the timeline goes to plan the data will be kept on file for a further four years to facilitate any queries or further investigations that may arise.

### **3.11 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

This is a small-scale study that does not claim to give a definitive answer to drama education, but instead, a snapshot of a range of experiences at a particular moment in time. Miles and Huberman (1994), state that small sampling is not a study limitation as the individual teachers

and their context is studied in depth. A small sample size can give a sharper focus to the research which leads to a more specific dataset (Hertwig and Pleskac, 2010). This teacher-centred case study is not research that is generalisable into any kind of commentary. It provides knowledge in context, knowledge that we presently do not have in an Irish context. Therefore, this research does not necessarily have limitations; it tells different stories. What about some of the limitations we talked about in terms of (i) perceived reticence of some of the participants to talk openly and freely about drama in their school; and (ii) the fact that the sample is inherently skewed towards the research question i.e., it does not and should not claim to be a representative sample of Irish primary school teachers.

As previously stated, 9 of the participants are known to the researcher, this does not limit the study, but served a specific purpose. Having participants who are supporters in drama education and who come from strong arts backgrounds is necessary to enrich the data and tell the story of how drama is used in the classroom. Had I engaged 15 participants with whom I was unfamiliar, or who lacked a specific interest in drama or the arts, their feedback would not have sufficiently addressed my research questions, which were tailored to investigate drama education. See table 1.

### **3.12 OBJECTIVITY**

Objectivity is a critical aspect of research. While qualitative data cannot be objective, my main objective is to produce reliable and valid results that potentially help to inform or even change policies or guide stakeholders in decision making. Objectivity is a determinant of a study's reliability and validity. Validity and reliability of research may depend on how a researcher collects data, the analysis of the data and the interpretation of such data. Presentation of the findings is also a factor in the validity of the research. A common denominator in all these factors is my influence because a researcher is at the core of every step of the research and it is the primary determinant of the objectivity of research.

Having an objective research study means ensuring that the data to be used is factual and accurate and free from the researcher's influence or bias. Wagner *et al.*, (2012) indicate that objectivity in a research study ensures that the results are factual while the provided answers

do not include the opinion of the researcher. In its purest form, research objectivity is a mind frame in which personal beliefs, preferences, predictions or prejudices have no influence on a researcher's process of collecting and analysing research data. The literature emphasises the importance of research objectivity particularly because of the need for research reliability and dependability. Thus, it is vital to treat social facts as independent things meaning that any preconceived notions and perceptions about social facts should be abandoned during research.

Acknowledging the nature of this research and the methodology employed, it is undeniable that there is subjectivity present. I am a proclaimed drama advocate, as such, total objectivity is hard to obtain. However, I clearly acknowledge here, my own lack of objectivity and place that front and centre. Furthermore, a cross-checking exercise of the data was carried out to ensure that the results are true and a reflection of the respondent's opinions, with as little researcher influence as possible. I believe that the specific methods improved the objectivity of the study and the results presented are reliable dependable, and a true reflection of the respondents' perceptions of drama education.

### **3.13 CONCLUSION**

This methodology has been carefully crafted to explore and enhance our understanding of how a small group of participants uses drama education within the classroom. In this section, I have substantiated the rationale for employing a case study approach with an ethnographic focus as the most appropriate methodology for addressing my research questions. Through the use of interviews as our primary research instrument, I was equipped to gather in-depth and rich data that allowed me the opportunity to delve into and evaluate the teachers' viewpoints and perspectives related to drama education. The ensuing analysis of this data is presented in the next chapter.

## **4 AN OUTLINE OF THE TEACHERS' VOICES ON DRAMA**

This chapter marks the transition into the narrative aspect of drama within the context of Irish primary schools. In previous chapters, I laid out the rationale and research questions for the narrative's purpose (chapter 1), provided an in-depth analysis of the historical trajectory of drama in arts education in Ireland and its advantages (chapter 2), and detailed the research methodology (chapter 3).

In the chapters that follow (chapters 4-8), I delve into the experiences and perspectives of the teachers involved, gaining insight into their perceptions of drama education. This section explores how drama may be perceived as facing challenges, and yet simultaneously stands on the cusp of change (chapter 10). Moreover, it will examine possible solutions as we navigate the era of new curricula in Irish primary schools (chapter 10 & 11).

This chapter serves as an initial overview of the data, offering an initial glimpse into the voices and insights of the participating teachers. It serves as a roadmap, mapping out the prominent issues confronting drama education. These teacher voices illuminate the challenges faced by drama education, paving the way for a deeper analysis in subsequent chapters. Although the participant sample is relatively small, it provides a valuable account of the state of drama education directly from the teachers. These teachers are essentially providing a 'health check' for the state of drama education. They pinpoint the critical areas that require attention and improvement.

The title 'Towards a Living Model of Drama' encapsulates the essence of this project and is also a proposed framework, which comprises two parts. Towards a Living Model of Drama, Part I, provides a synopsis of how the landscape of drama and arts education is evolving throughout the course of this research. It highlights new initiatives that schools and teachers can leverage to support arts education in their classrooms, often in collaboration with external agencies. Part II of towards a living model of drama, offers ideas to empower teachers to enhance arts education from within their classrooms. As emphasised in the introductory chapter, this thesis maintains a hopeful outlook, with a living model of drama discussing positive developments already in motion and presenting recommendations for addressing the challenges that can be resolved.

After transcribing the interviews and reviewing the data, I evaluated the results to construct the following report of the main categories and subcategories using Nvivo software, which are displayed in Figure 3. From the teachers' responses in the interviews, this is a summary of the 5 main categories and subcategories. This chapter gives a brief over view of the raw data that is developed into themes in the following chapter.

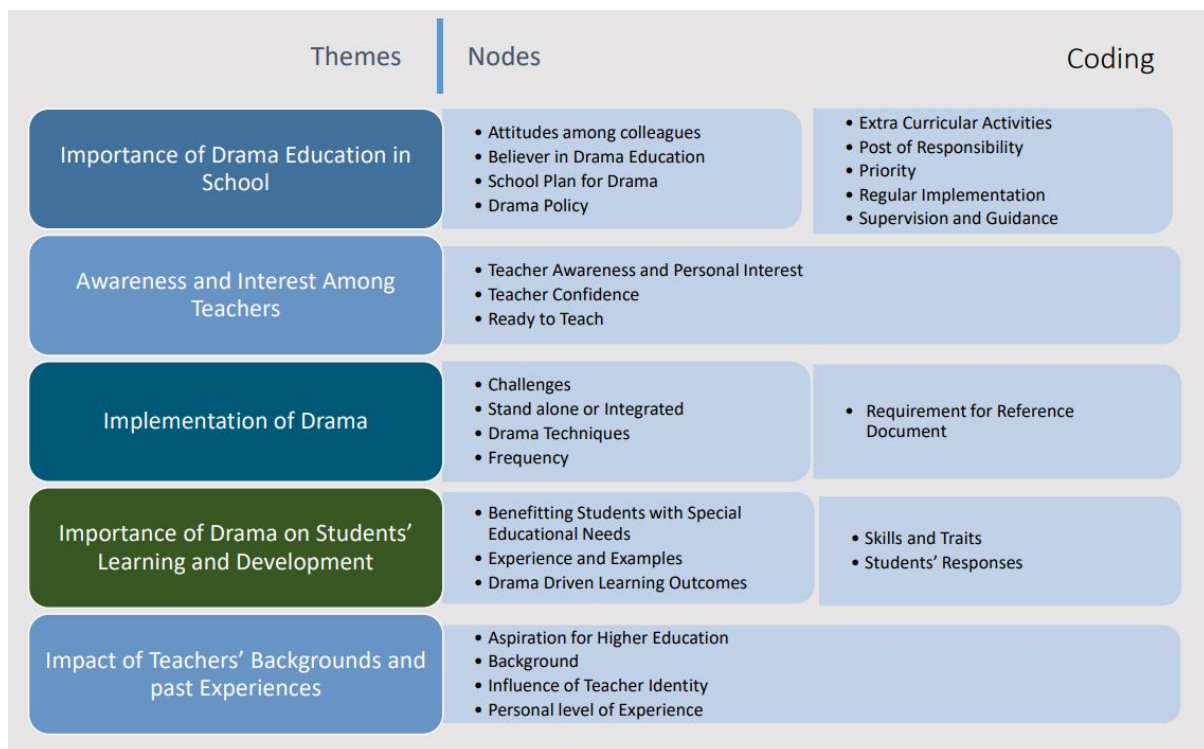


Figure 3; Categories/Parent- Nodes & Sub - Categories/ Child- Nodes

#### 4.1 IMPORTANCE OF DRAMA EDUCATION IN SCHOOL

The first category gives a current standing of drama education in Ireland, I wanted to investigate the culture of drama in schools and if it played a role. Here is an overview of the themes related to the importance of drama education in schools.

For the drama to be a successful curricular area, there has to be a commitment to using the subject and implementing it frequently. A school would need to have a positive drama culture for its successful implementation. A school having a positive drama culture greatly depends on

the attitude and interests among staff members. The participants in this research report that their colleagues could motivate them to teach drama or de-motivate them in relation to drama teaching. This points at there being a positive drama culture in schools, when teachers are motivated by their colleagues and potentially a negative drama culture when their colleagues do not support drama as a subject.

In addition to a positive drama culture to promote the importance of the subject area, colleagues' attitudes play a role in the frequent or successful use of drama. The participants were asked about attitudes among colleagues in relation to the standing of art, music and drama. Of the teachers interviewed, 5 of participants reported that their colleagues look upon art, drama and music as subjects often seen as extras or a subject that is just for fun. This demonstrates that a portion of staff in these schools do not place a high level of importance on teaching the arts and do not actively promote them as subject areas.

As it is a curricular area, all primary schools are required to have a school plan for drama- a document that lays out the vision for drama as a curricular area within the school and which describes modes of teaching and learning, cross-curricular integration, progression from class-to-class assessment, etc. Of the teachers interviewed, 7 report such a plan is in place for drama. None of those who had a plan in place reported making regular use of that document and many express the belief that it was in place for the purposes of external inspection (by the Department of Education Inspectorate), rather than being a support document for teachers within the school. This points to the existence of a number of potentially significant issues. Firstly, it may demonstrate a lack of interest amongst the school leadership and staff for drama as a curricular area. Secondly, it illustrates a lack of 'local' planning for drama in the schools of over half the respondents. This should be the planning document which mediates the national curriculum into the local context for the school. Finally, the lack of a school plan for drama also seems to indicate that schools are not concerned with an expression of concern about its absence from teachers, parents or indeed the inspectorate.

Schools are not required by the DES to write a drama policy. A policy can be good practice to again ensure progression from class-to-class, to have guidelines on how drama is to be implemented and to have a reference document for staff, so that everyone is aware of the policy to be adhered to. Most of the participants are unaware if a drama policy exists in their school. No one reported making regular use of a drama policy and many express the belief that it is,

like the drama plan, in place for the purposes of external inspection, rather than being a support document for teachers within the school. Similar to the drama plan, the lack of a drama policy, demonstrates a lack of interest in the subject, a lack of planning and a lack of concern for the subject area.

Within the curriculum, arts are currently allocated three hours a week. The primary curriculum framework is suggesting this allocation will become a monthly allocation under the new proposals (NCCA, 2023). The current three-hour allocation per week can be an hour for drama, art and music or the school/teacher can decide how to break up the time allocation each week, depending on how much time is needed for each area in any given week. For example, a visiting music teacher or large-scale visual arts project may require more than an hour each week. It is assumed that over the course of the term, the time allocations would balance out if some areas received more than others in any given week. Participants in this research were asked how the three hours were used in their schools. They report that their schools do not adhere to a one-hour time slot for drama education, and on balance, music and art occupy most of the three-hour allocation in a normal week. This outlines the lack of importance placed on drama in these schools as there is no commitment to ensuring there is an even balance among the arts subjects.

Some schools had extracurricular activities in the form of art, music, speech and drama, which take place after school. These are separate initiatives from the school and students are required to pay additional fees for these lessons. Some participants reported that their school had guest drama teachers that come in during school hours to teach drama. Most of the participants reported that kids have a lot of interest in drama, music, performance and attend classes/stage schools outside of school. The fact that schools engaged artists and practitioners to provide extracurricular tuitions in these areas demonstrates that the school places value and importance on these subjects as extracurricular activities and provided this service for its students.

Assistant Principal Posts (APP) or posts of responsibility are a common practice in Irish schools. Teachers can be appointed as an APP within their school and be charged with coordinating various aspects of school life, including subject areas. The participants were asked about APPs in their specific schools and whether there is a drama coordinator. Of the teachers interviewed, 8 of the participants mentioned that there is no specific post of responsibility for drama in their school. Some schools have a specific post for arts education or drama but when that teacher retired, their post was not replaced. This is a result of the 2008 economic downturn,

when the DES underwent severe budgetary cuts. In 2023, the school provision for APPs is being reinstated. The DES is attempting to reinstate these posts of responsibility, which will alleviate pressure on school management. The fact that over half the participants claim to have no post of responsibility for drama could be related to the budgetary cutbacks. We are unable to directly relate it to the importance of drama in schools without the specific data on teachers retiring and posts being lost within schools.

Traditionally, importance is placed on academic subjects. The research found that priority is always given to the academic subjects. The participants report that due to curriculum overloading and the importance of reading and writing, drama is considered hard to fit into the teaching day. The teachers recall that drama is usually, the first subject to get 'squeezed out' or dropped off the timetable in any given week. This highlights that emphasis is not placed on drama and that it is viewed as the subject area that can be dropped first when the timetable is overloaded or when academic subjects demand more classroom time.

Drama is sometimes viewed as a product, with importance placed on a school performance. The participants in this research report that drama time is used for the preparation and performance of a show. The data shows that some schools had a school drama or musical performance once a year or once every two years. Most of the schools had these performances on occasions like Summer and Christmas time. This research is not highlighting that this is wrong, but showing where these schools place value and importance in terms of where drama teaching time is being used. Some participants said that the show could be considered the drama allocation for the entire term. This shows us that these schools are not investing in frequent drama teaching. While a school performance has many worthwhile benefits for its students, it is not the entire drama curriculum, and it presents a lack of commitment to regular and effective drama teaching.

Upskilling or engaging in continuous professional development (CPD) is an expected of Irish primary teachers. Teachers are required to engage in it every school year during school planning and in-service training days. Many opt to take further CPD courses during term time and during holiday periods. The participants were asked about further training in drama education or if they received guidance or recommendations for further training. The teachers' report that there is limited training and guidance provided for the implementation of the drama curriculum in their schools and through-out their teacher education also. Of the participants, 6

report that there is no supervision carried out or guidance provided for drama lessons in their schools. This highlights the lack of importance placed on drama education in these schools as there is no value placed on CPD in drama. There does not seem to be any supervision in the subject area and staff are not encouraged to engage with further training.

## **4.2 AWARENESS AND INTEREST AMONG TEACHERS**

Participants believe that those who are passionate in drama and the arts, are confident with their abilities in the classroom and performed well. Implementation of drama in the classroom comes from the interest level of the teachers and their love towards it. Some of them love to bring their past experiences as children into the classroom or their current experiences as performers. The following is an overview of the theme; awareness and interest for drama among teachers.

Confidence and competence to teach drama is required for teachers to actively engage in teaching the subject. Confidence to teach the subject is part of theme; interest and awareness among teachers, as potentially teachers would be more confident to teach drama if they possess a strong interest and awareness in the subject. Only a few of the participants talked about teacher confidence in their interview. Of this small group who discussed it, 4 of them emphasise the importance of confidence to teach drama. This indicates that the participants do not place a lot of value on the need for confidence to teach drama.

The theme of interest and awareness among teachers can be analysed in relation to the participants initial teacher education (ITE). Participants were asked to reflect on their experience of drama during their ITE and if their experiences at college shapes their approach and style of teaching. 5 of the participants report that their participation in drama lectures throughout their teacher education shapes their approach and style of teaching. Their experience of drama at college helps them to be more confident drama practitioners and they use their experiences to enhance their drama teaching. The participants also report that those who have a strong drama background (either because of their home, community or personal interest) are confident in this area. This points us to the fact that a 1/3 of participants claim that ITE plays a role in the teachers approach to drama teaching and those who came from a strong arts background, had interest and awareness in the subject, thus are confident to teach it.

In contrast, participants who do not have a strong drama background require resources, effective planning and confidence in the subject to implement drama lessons. This group report that they need a lot of time, planning and resources for them to carry the lessons successfully. This demonstrates that for participants who do not have a strong arts background, they do not have a high level of interest and awareness and are not very confident to teach drama.

### 4.3 IMPLEMENTATION OF DRAMA

This theme is concerned with learning how drama is implemented in the classrooms of the participants. I want to give an overview or snapshot of what drama looks like in their classroom. When it comes to the implementation of drama, each participant has their own style of implementing. Some of the teachers teach drama as a specific skill while others use it throughout the curriculum as a teaching methodology. This tells us that drama is being taught as both a standalone subject and being integrated across other disciplines as a teaching tool.

Exploring the use of the drama curriculum document (DCD) is included as it reports on whether the participants make use of the DCD when implementing drama in their classrooms or not. Each of the participants agreed that there should be some reference document with drama activities to use in schools. Of the participants, 9 report that the DCD is not particularly useful to them. Participants reflect that it is too '*jam packed*' and that there are not enough specific ideas and examples in the document. They advise that it needed to be developed a little bit more and should be more structured. 5 of the participants referred to the DCD as a planning tool. This demonstrates that a high number of participants do not engage with the DCD when planning and have the desire for a new, more structured document.

Implementation of drama becomes very difficult because of the challenges teachers face. There are various common challenges that restrict the teacher to practice it on a regular basis. The following were the most common challenges identified through-out the interview transcripts:

**Classroom Management:** Some teachers report that it is difficult to control the class during drama education. Participants discuss the challenges around classroom management saying

some students treat drama as a joke, they don't take it seriously, which makes implementation arduous. This indicates that teachers are reluctant to implement drama if they are going to have difficulty with maintaining classroom management or encounter misbehaving.

**Curriculum Overloading:** Curriculum overloading for teachers refers to a situation in which educators are expected to cover an excessive amount of content or subjects within a limited amount of time due to issues like; high education standards, testing and assessment, meeting diverse student needs etc. Curriculum overloading is the most common challenge faced by most of the participants as they claim drama takes a lot of time in terms of planning and resources. Teachers feel that as a result of curriculum overloading that they do not have sufficient time to plan and implement drama in their classrooms.

**Disconnection from experience and implementation:** Most of the participants received instruction and education in drama during their ITE. They report a disconnect on transferring that knowledge and experience from their ITE to the classroom for a number of reasons. Many of the participants report to have positive experiences with respect to drama lectures at third level education, however, most of them state they have forgotten the lecture content, drama conventions and elements by the time they started teaching in a professional capacity. The teachers believe that they require CPD to refresh their ideas and reinvigorate their drama teaching. This tells us that there is a disconnect from experience and implementation as the content covered in ITE did not transfer to the classroom. The teachers say they need further training and CPD, therefore, the ITE process for these participants did not equip them efficiently to teach drama.

**Lack of Confidence:** confidence to teach the subject is in the previous theme of awareness and interest among teachers. It is also appearing as a challenge in the theme of implementing drama as participants report a lack of confidence to teach the subject. Drama as a subject is unstructured, one cannot measure it. Teachers report that they are unsure how to plan for drama, in terms of implementing and how to plan a complete series of drama lessons. Also, if teachers are not sure or confident in what they are teaching, they are not happy with their lessons. These teachers feel they need to be completely confident to conduct drama lessons in their classroom and to have clearer aims on what they are trying to achieve. This indicates to us that a lack of confidence in the subject impedes these teacher's ability to implement drama into their classroom.

**Lack of Training & Available Resources:** A disconnect from experience and implementation is discussed as a challenge. Teachers report the need for further training but find there is no adequate training available. There is an overall lack of CPD, further education and courses being offered for drama education, according to the participants. Teachers feel that there is no adequate program to guide their drama teaching. They recommend that there should be a proper program laid out to direct the teaching of drama. Also, teachers find it challenging to locate drama-based resources. Teachers report that drama education is an intangible aspect of the curriculum, that there is no common way to teach it and no obvious starting point for the subject. As a result, it tends to be pushed to the side, according to the participants.

**Spacing Issue:** Lack of space is common challenge for most subjects across the curriculum and not a unique experience for teachers attempting to teach drama. There is a vast amount of Irish primary schools in old buildings across the country in need of redevelopment, renovation and in some cases, entire new buildings. A space to conduct arts education can be considered a luxury that not every school can enjoy. Drama is a subject that requires movement and space. Lack of space is a major problem faced by the participants. There is a lack of space within their schools for the purpose of drama. They do not have, like most schools, a designated art space. The solution to this, a common practice in Irish primary schools, is to rearrange the furniture and move the tables and chairs out to the perimeter of the room, to create an open space in the middle. Preparing the classroom for drama is a “*nightmare*” according to one of the teachers, when moving the desks to free up space for drama. Therefore, lack of space makes the teaching of drama difficult.

**Time constraint:** Time constraints in the curriculum refer to limitations on the amount of instructional time available to cover the required content within an educational program or course. The teachers, in general, argue they do not really use drama because of the time constraints on their classroom timetable. They do not have time in the day for drama as they are at capacity in terms of curriculum content to be covered. They also report to be feeling stressed and under pressure to cover the curriculum, that they do not have the time to give to teaching a standalone drama lesson. This points us at the fact that these teachers do not view drama as part of the curriculum: they report to not have time for drama as they are trying to cover the curriculum. Drama is not included in their efforts to cover the curriculum, the time constraints seem to be applicable to the core subjects here, but not drama. While time constraints are a challenge in the curriculum, not having time for drama as the teacher is trying

to cover the curriculum mirrors the previous themes of importance placed on drama and interest and awareness among teachers. The value placed on drama teaching is low.

Figure 4 defines lack of space as the major challenge facing teachers in the implementation of drama. They need to remove desks and chairs to conduct drama lessons which makes the subject more difficult and time consuming. If this challenge can be overcome, there are then 6 subsequent challenges for the teacher to manage (curriculum overloading, disconnection from experience, lack of confidence, lack of training, availability of resources and time constraint in the classroom).

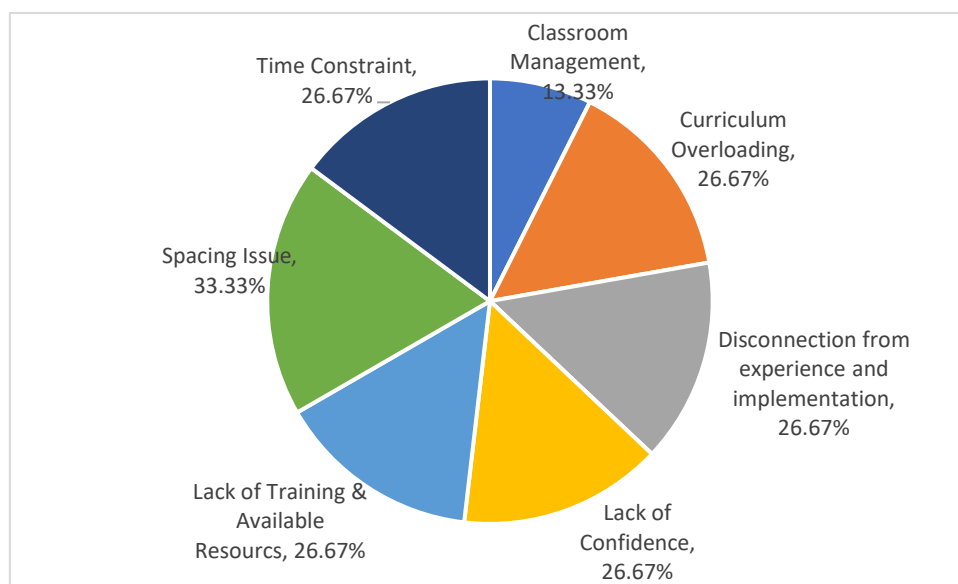


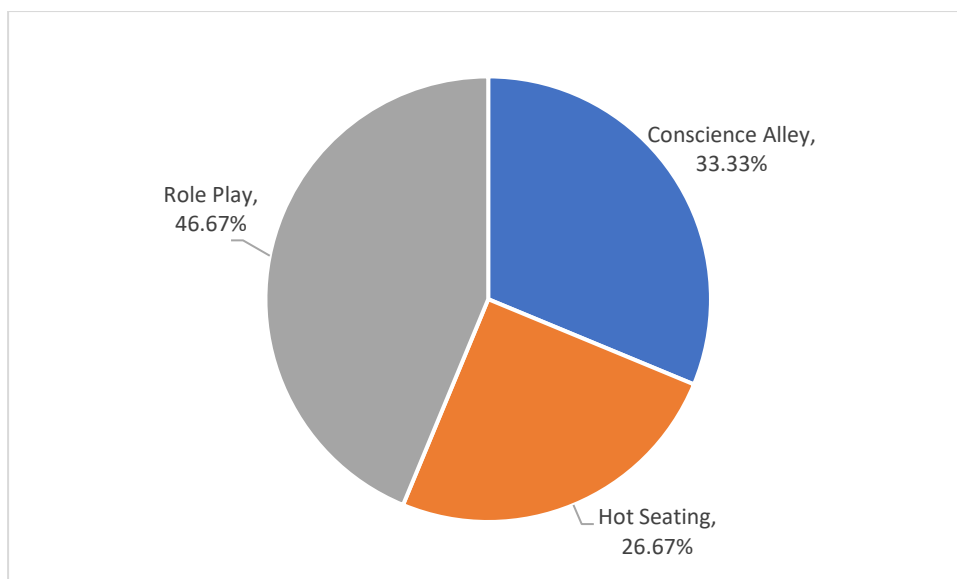
Figure 4; Major Challenges for Drama in Schools

Drama is a teaching methodology that is multi-faceted and can also be adapted and integrated into other subject areas. As this research is seeking to provide a current standing of drama education, I want to present an overview of what is currently happening in classrooms in term of drama. Participants were asked what their practices are and what drama typically looks like in their classroom. The participants discuss using ‘hot seating’, ‘role-play’ and ‘conscious alley’ as drama techniques in their classrooms. I was expecting a more comprehensive list of drama techniques being used in Irish classrooms, given the wide scope of drama. There are no acknowledgments to the elements of drama, the prerequisites for making drama, or the strand units of making, performing and reflecting on drama, as per the DCD.

Each participant has their own techniques for drama implementation. The most common techniques being used and which teachers describe by are as follows:

1. **Conscience Alley:** a technique to explore multiple facets of a character's choice within a specific dilemma. Students stand in two lines facing each other, creating a path or walkway. Usually, one line is considered to be the 'good conscience' while the other is the 'bad conscience'. Students walk through an alley of their peers, while listening to different scenarios that could happen as a result of their actions.
2. **Hot Seating:** Hot-seating is where a person is chosen to become a character of the story or content being studied. Students and the teacher interview the character(s) of the story or topic. Students can interact or debate with the student in role as a character. This often happens where students sit in a circle and character being 'hot-seated' is in the middle.
3. **Role Play:** Students work in groups where they have to create a scene within a certain theme or topic. Teachers considered this to be beneficial because it allows children the opportunity to increase their confidence at public speaking in class. It also puts kids into real life situations so they can develop empathy and social skills as well.

Figure 5 shows that most of the participants, 7 used Role Play as their main drama technique. It was then followed by Conscience Alley, 5, and lastly Hot Seating with 3. This tells us that the drama being taught in these classrooms is heavily relying on only three drama conventions. The elements of drama education as per the Irish primary school DPD are; time, space, role and character, belief, action, place, tension, significance, and genre. These are not mentioned in the research. Neither are the drama strand units; exploring and making drama, reflecting on drama and co-operating and communicating in making drama. This reinforces the earlier point that the teachers are not using the DCD as they feel it is jam packed and unclear.



*Figure 5; Percentage Use of Drama Techniques*

#### **4.4 IMPORTANCE OF DRAMA ON STUDENT'S LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT**

This category covers the learning and the overall development of children by practicing drama. Each participant shared their different experiences, discussed the benefits of drama and the skillsets children develop. The following is an overview of the importance of drama on learning and development.

There are many benefits to drama presented in chapter 2. This discussion details that drama can support learning and development for main stream children and students with additional learning needs. All participants had the view that both main stream children and students with additional learning needs can benefit from drama in the curriculum. This demonstrates that these teachers value the importance of drama on learning and development.

Drama can be used as a teaching methodology or as an art form in the curriculum. The participants all agree that drama education has great value as a teaching technique and as an art form in their classrooms. They concur it can be very beneficial if drama is linked with issues where children learn how to deal and react in real life situations, through the fictional lens of

drama. This demonstrates that the participants recognise the value of drama for learning and development in terms of using it to teach life skills in a safe environment.

All of the participants come from a variety of different school demographics and each participant has different experiences in dealing with students with additional learning needs. Some of their students have speech and language problems, some have medical and psychological problems or some present with emotional behaviour disorder. The participants report that drama helps each of them to express their emotions and feelings. Students with additional learning needs who are shy and do not talk in class, come forward and engage completely. Participants are surprised by students with additional learning needs contributions in drama classes. This demonstrates that the participants identify drama as a tool to support development and learning for students with additional learning needs.

Drama provides a vehicle to explore the curriculum in an active environment. The teachers report that drama allows their students to explore their feelings, their emotions and ideas in a safe environment. The interviews also confirm drama is a great way to explore languages, history, science, geography, and subjects that often lend themselves to being very text-based. This feedback demonstrates that the participants agree that drama helps the children to explore curriculum content in a different way.

As discussed in the previous themes, drama teaching has its challenges. The participants report both positive and negative experiences while teaching drama. The most positive and frequent example is watching children develop their confidence and grow out of their shyness. The negative examples are usually related to bad behaviour or disruption during drama instruction.

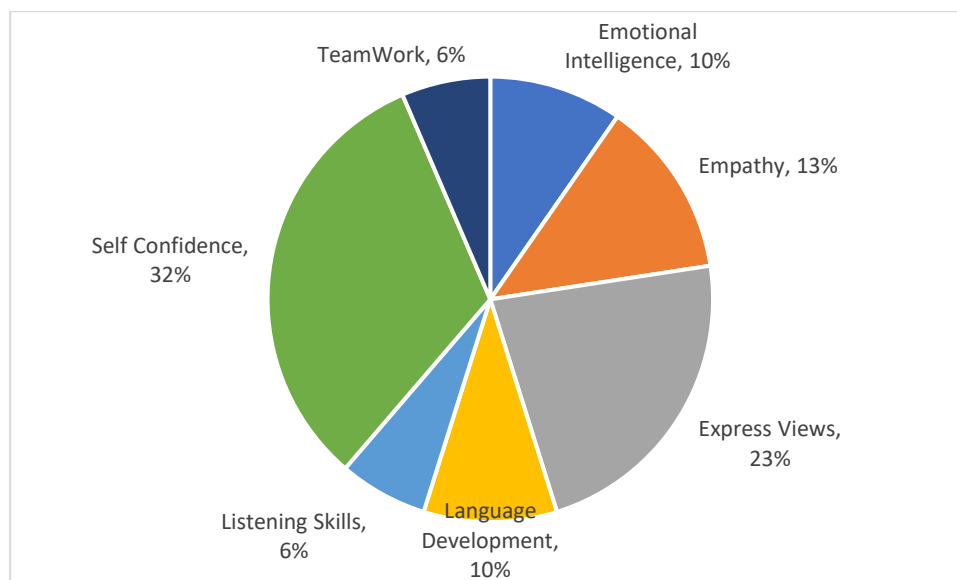
All participants hold the view that drama is very good for cognitive development.

The following is a list of skills and traits mentioned by participants in the interviews:

1. Emotional Intelligence
2. Self Confidence
3. Empathy
4. Expressing views
5. Language Development
6. Listening Skills

## 7. Team Work

Figure 6 describes the percentage composition of various skills children learn due to drama education. Emphasis is put on self-confidence by 9 of the participants. 6 of the participants believe that drama education provides students with the ability to express their views and opinions in a free manner. Drama helps them to come out of themselves and express their emotions. Other major skills the teachers identify are: empathy, emotional intelligence and language development, with their percentage shown below.



*Figure 6; Percentage Composition of Skills and Traits Learned*

This theme focuses on the importance of drama for learning and development. The participants' responses give an insight into their positive perspective on drama for learning and development. They also mention that students enjoy drama. This is the useful feedback to gain as part of this theme. Participants discuss the students' excitement and their love for drama lessons. They enjoy working in groups, participating in debates and role play. They report that students are having fun and learning at the same time. Children felt like that their opinions are valued in the drama. Role playing in drama inspires the children to delve deeper into the experience. All of this feedback offers insight into the fact that drama makes their students

happy. Children being happy at school is imperative for a high standard of learning and development to take place.

#### **4.5 IMPACT OF TEACHERS' BACKGROUNDS & PAST EXPERIENCE**

In Chapter 1 and 2, I discuss the role of the teacher in terms of teacher's backgrounds. Whether a teacher comes from a strong arts background plays a role in the type of teacher they are and can shape their teacher identity. Their belief in what they are teaching also plays a role, in terms of their commitment and passion to implement it effectively, i.e., do they have to believe in something to endeavour to do a good job? Each participant is asked about their background and past experience with respect to drama. Many of them have personal experiences with drama either at school or throughout their teacher education. Some of the participants have extracurricular backgrounds with drama because of their home or community, others because of their own personal interest. The following is an overview on the impact of teachers' backgrounds and past experiences on their teaching in drama education.

To gather insight into the teachers' backgrounds and interests, I enquire about their willingness to engage in further education in drama. This feedback is relevant as teachers report a disconnect between what they learned during their ITE and transferring this knowledge to the classroom. Of the participants, 8 are willing to engage in further study in the arts. A few of the participants have an aspiration for higher education in drama. Some of them were interested in curricular development or CPD, but not in terms of formal education like going back to college to study drama. They are more interested in doing in-service (a form of CPD) in drama education. Also, most of the teachers have a specific interest in arts in general, rather than drama or acting specifically. This indicates that these teachers are willing to engage with further education and training but only a few of them consider this important at post graduate level, while others view a CPD course as sufficient.

Teachers' backgrounds and experience in the arts can shape their teacher identity and their belief in the subject area. Some of the participants' families are immersed in the arts, where members of their family are involved in one or more activities like, drama, musicals, acting or dancing. Some thought themselves as fortunate that their mom, dad and teachers encouraged

them. They were able to perform from a very young age and it then became part of them and their identity. For other participants, they have a strong drama background only because of their own passion and interest. For them, arts or drama was not part of their family life or community, they pursued it as they loved to perform. These teachers claim that their experiences help them to teach drama. Of the participants, 13 are positive in the belief that their background in arts or drama had greatly influenced their own identity, and subsequently, their teacher identity. They believe that their teacher identity helps them to teach and understand students' perspectives better. They believe that any teacher would probably bring their childhood into the classroom. This demonstrates that past experiences have a positive impact on their style of teaching and they are willing to bring these experiences into the classroom as much as they could. Some participants in the research have no experience or background in drama education, therefore, past experiences in drama have no impact on their teacher identity or ability to teach drama.

Participants share their school and teacher education experiences in terms of their stage performances or participation in extra-curricular activities. Most of them had experience in at least one of the below mentioned levels:

1. Primary- 9 of the participants did not participate in any drama related activities at Primary School.
2. Secondary- 7 of participants did not experience drama classes while at secondary school. 20% of the participants were involved in activities like art, drama, acting or music outside of school.
3. College- 13 of participants did take part in drama activities at college level. They report to have participated and enjoyed drama. Most of them had drama lectures where they had an opportunity to learn in a different forum and they became completely engaged as part of their teacher education in drama.
4. Outside teacher education- 9 of the participants engage in summer courses, partake in drama or musical societies, or have been keeping up to date with new drama teaching resources. Two participants pursue their passion in drama and have completed post

graduate study in the form of a master's degree and written a thesis in drama education. 6 of them have not engaged in any further professional development courses in arts or drama education outside of their preliminary teacher education.

#### **4.6 CONCLUSION**

This section provides a collective summary of the insights shared by the teachers. It serves as a preliminary glimpse into the forthcoming thematic discussions and comparative analyses of the teachers' voices and comments in the subsequent chapters. The teachers' perspectives are carefully examined through the lens of four overarching themes: significance of drama, being a supporter of drama, making drama happen and drama for living and learning. These themes illuminate the areas where teachers identify challenges and opportunities in delivering drama education and aligning it with the curriculum.

## **5 DISCUSSION THEME 1: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF DRAMA**

### **5.1 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF DRAMA: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

The main purpose of this case study is to determine the current standing of drama education in Irish primary schools. The previous chapter is an overall view of the teachers' assessment of the state of drama, and the next four chapters discuss what this means in relation to the importance, significance, and current standing of drama in schools. These themes have been identified as a result of the teachers' voices in this research, it tells the story from their point of view. When we read all these teachers' individual contributions to the story and stitch them together under the four main themes, it appears that the role of drama in Irish primary schools is fragmented. The next sections pinpoint where, how and why drama is struggling in Irish classrooms. There is a changing context in arts education approaching with the anticipation of a new curriculum and other extra-curricular developments in the arts. Perhaps in pinpointing the cracks at this point in the thesis will scaffold the hopeful approach of chapters 9 and 10, where I try to eradicate the cracks by identifying how the landscape of the arts in school has evolved in very recent years and look to the future development of drama and arts education.

To understand the current standing of drama education in Ireland, I sought to investigate the cultures of participants' schools regarding the perceived significance and lived presence of drama. The subthemes that will be discussed include: a positive drama culture, attitudes to drama education, the existence of a drama plan or policy, drama as a priority with time constraints and assistant principal posts are discussed from the point of view and the experiences of the teachers as part of the theme; the significance of drama.

#### **5.1.1 IS THERE A POSITIVE DRAMA CULTURE IN YOUR SCHOOL?**

Respondents report that a positive drama culture in a school greatly depends on the attitudes of staff members. If teachers are positive and enthusiastic towards the subject, it fosters a positive drama culture. Most participants in this study report that their colleagues had negative attitudes towards drama, regarding it as a frivolous recreational activity rather than a useful teaching tool. Ed, states:

*“I’d say the attitude is very flippant towards [drama education]. I would imagine because it’s very rarely, if ever, discussed as part of a staff meeting, and you never hear of a teacher at break time saying, oh I did a drama lesson there and it went great, or it went bad, I don’t think I’ve ever heard it, to be honest, from a staff member in eleven years”.*  
-Ed

Ed’s point is clearly that there is a certain invisibility or hidden culture of drama in schools. Ger provides insight into the reason why many of his colleagues might regard drama education as frivolous, citing the urgency in Irish schools of improving students’ literacy and numeracy. Ger indicates that many of his colleagues perceive drama as subordinate to maths and reading:

*“To be fair to the staff and the school, there’re so many issues in terms of literacy and numeracy, and it’s so stressful in terms of giving them basic skills, that a lot of people don’t really take drama as a priority”.*  
-Ger

Jack expresses a similar perception to Ger’s, stating that his colleagues saw drama as subordinate to the more urgent core subjects of maths, English, and Irish. Similar to Finneran (2016) who states full adoption of drama into the curriculum in Ireland has witnessed endless disputes over the recent years and according to McCoy *et al.* drama receives less time than the other subjects (2012, pg. 50). Jack and Ger’s remarks suggest that the existence of a pervasive perception among their colleagues that drama is a subject in competition with other subjects for time and resources, rather than a pedagogical tool that can augment students’ assimilation of the subject matter in any course. Drama has an unusual nature in that it is a subject but also a method. Many educators accept the fact that drama is a powerful pedagogical tool. Its frequent application in the cross-curricular context has been the source of misunderstanding

among educators (Sara, 2015). Teachers are unsure of where to place it in their teaching; as a subject or a method or both.

*“I think [drama is] probably not seen as a key part of the curriculum, it’s seen as something that people look down their noses at. Certain people look down their noses at art and drama and music and P.E. Those subjects are often seen as, you know, if we have time to do something fun, but outside of that, we cover our Irish and English and maths, and what we don’t realise is that 90% of children will probably never use drama in whatever profession they end up doing. Most children will be typing things up”.*

-Jack

Clare reports that among her colleagues there be a generational component to some teachers’ disregard of drama as an effective teaching tool, stating that older colleagues tended to perceive drama as frivolous, while younger colleagues tended not only to be more accepting of drama, but to incorporate it into teaching whenever possible:

*“I think it’s quite a divided situation, I think a lot of the younger members of staff are happy to teach drama and put emphasis on it as much as we can, and I think the older members of staff are quite scared of the situation and think it’s just a waste of time and there’s not enough time in the curriculum for arts”.*

-Clare

Potentially this is teacher identity and belief playing a part here. Clare’s comments on a generational difference could be implying that the older members of staff were not as exposed to the arts in school and as a result their lack of experience has not shaped their teacher identity or informed their beliefs around the value of arts education. The younger cohort of teachers may have been exposed to a richer arts education in school and perhaps had more access to extra-curricular activities that were arts based growing up than previous generations. This may

shape their teacher identity to be more arts inclined and to believe in the benefits of arts education for their students.

Sarah reports a positive perception of drama among her colleagues, but her response suggests drama is perceived primarily as a recreational activity ('something people enjoy') rather than a pedagogical method, and that drama is only provided in her school in an intermittent and extracurricular manner, by a teacher who is not a member of the permanent staff. Sarah states:

*"I think that [drama is] very welcomed, and I think it's something that people enjoy. We have an outside drama teacher that comes in every second year to do a school performance or show".*

-Sarah

Jill describes a situation in which drama education is conducted regularly, but at a minimal level and no is one coordinating the learning at a whole school level:

*"They get somebody in to do classes once a week, and that is all the drama that is done".*

-Jill

A peripatetic or visiting teacher is a common practice in Irish primary schools. They are usually a specialist teacher, who is not employed or linked directly to one school but travel between schools to deliver on a particular area. They are an meaningful contribution to Irish education as it offers schools an opportunity to bring in a skill or talent they might not possess on staff. Without this resource the children may not have the exposure to whatever discipline is brought in by a specialist teacher. Types of peripatetic teachers can include; language teachers, speech and drama teachers, artists, musicians, dance teachers, sports coaches etc. Sarah is highlighting the drama teacher that assists with the school show, without the assistance of an outside teacher or agency, a whole school production can be a challenge for a school to manage in house.

Smyth (2017) reports on how much children enjoy schools plays; specialist teachers have an influence in Irish primary schools. We must all heed Jill's comment on the weekly visits: 'and that is all the drama that is done'. A peripatetic teacher is a wonderful resource for schools to access if the funding is available, but the learning as a whole should be coordinated and linked to the rest of the curriculum for meaningful learning to take place.

Somewhat more unexpected than participants' descriptions of their colleagues' and school administrators' indifference to drama education are their own unanimous affirmations that they are strong supporters of drama and believe in the subject. Breda expresses and explains her enthusiasm for drama education in stating:

*"I think it's a brilliant way for a weaker child to become more confident, for the boisterous child to have a time where they can blow off steam, kind of in a more structured environment as opposed to letting them go mad. I think it's brilliant. For language, it's amazing. It's a great way to explore language. I think for history, science, geography, all these things that can be sometimes very text-based, you can give the children the break in the middle of it and let them explore it in different way. I think it's a brilliant way to integrate a load of different subjects into your teaching, and I'd be definitely in favour of drama".*

-Breda

Breda displays her passion here for drama and demonstrates her belief in the subject area as a means to explore the curriculum. Her personal philosophy of teaching is leading her to integrate the curriculum, recognise that it provides opportunities for both weak and boisterous students and it offers opportunities to deviate from text-based learning. Breda's teacher identity is evident in this quote, she can confidently bring drama into teaching and give her students an avenue to explore the content. Clare said of her attitude towards drama education:

*"I'm a total believer. All the way".*

-Clare

Clare's comment demonstrates that belief plays a role in what we are teaching (Beck *et al.*, 2000; Haney & McArthur, 2002; Levitt, 2002; Roehrig, & Kruse, 2005).

All of the participants in this research all claim to be believers in drama education.

'Almost without exception, every teacher of maths, science, woodwork and so on believes inherently of the importance of their subject within the curriculum; drama teachers and researchers also need to be specific about which parts of their pedagogy are transformative and what specifically is being transformed' (Anderson, 2012, pg. 11).

Believers in drama would say that drama can transform learning, can even perform miracles in the classroom in some cases. Neelands (2004), explores the concept of miracles in drama. The use of the term 'miracles' here is to describe accounts of events which claim some profound and new change in a student. Such miracles can also function as symbols of hope and faith within the struggles of everyday classroom life. They can also be treated as 'holy' and 'scriptural' in their cultural usages. These localised stories of hope are echoed sometimes in the claims of researchers and others in the field whose hero narratives include evangelised reports of personal victories in making miracles happen against all odds. These stories, embedded in the liberal tradition, become the proof of drama's efficacy in resolving a range of 'problems' which might include various forms of student dysfunctionality or student resistance to the orthodoxy of the school's curriculum plan and practices' (Neelands, 2004, pg. 47). Neelands also urges caution and that we have to be critical in how we view miracles.

Ursula's response emphasises the potential for drama to be instrumental in facilitating learning across the spectrum:

*"I think [drama] is a fantastic tool"*  
-Ursula

Ed explains why his positive perceptions of drama education does not always translate into implementation of that education in his classroom. He does not teach it as often as he should, even though he sees the merit in it:

*“Do I believe drama is being taught as often as it should be? I wouldn’t say it is, no. I don’t teach it as often as I’m supposed to, either, to be perfectly honest about it. Not half as often as I should teach it. But I strongly believe there is a place there for it, but how to get the mix right and how to make sure it’s being implemented by every teacher in every classroom in every school, I’m not sure how that could be done or achieved, but I think there is absolutely merit in it”.*

-Ed

Sarah expresses her positive perceptions of drama, both as a means of enhancing language instruction, and as a standalone subject:

*“I completely see the value in [drama] and I think it’s really important. This merger of language and drama together, I’m for it, to a degree, but I also think it is a separate thing and there needs to be ownership for it as well. But I do think I am an advocate of it, working with my languages at the moment. I do think it can stand on its own as well”.*

-Sarah

Teachers’ descriptions of their own perceptions of drama education are therefore consistent with the findings of previous researchers such as Martinez *et al.* (2000), McCabe (2007), Coleman & Davies (2018) and Coleman & Lind (2020), who describe drama as an effective pedagogical tool.

Kempe and Tissot (2012) also argue that drama can help social skills and inclusion development, and argue that drama is undervalued within the education system as a tool to aid social skills. ‘The challenge is how to find a way to provide an ethos in inclusive practice within a specialist setting that will still allow for individual attainment of goals with a diverse student

population' (Kempe and Tissot, 2012, pg. 101). Although most participants in the present research do not directly attribute their support for drama education to these broader benefits for students' character development, their descriptions of the importance of drama for students' learning and development (discussed in Chapter 7) indicated they are aware of, believe in, and value these benefits. Despite the teachers recognising the positive benefits of drama, their responses do not report on a positive drama culture in their schools. A poor attitude to drama education is a barrier to recognising the significance of drama for students' learning and general well-being.

#### 5.1.1 DOES YOUR SCHOOL HAVE A DRAMA POLICY?

*"Not that I'm aware of"*  
-Ann

*"I don't know"*  
-Cillian

*"I'm not sure"*  
-Breda

All schools are required by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) in Ireland to have a number of policies, including for example; Health and Safety, Bullying, Child Protection, and Enrolment and a Code of Behaviour. They are also required to have a *'plean scoile'* or a whole school plan for individual subjects. A drama policy is not required by the DES, however, and it is left to the discretion of the individual school whether they will write and implement one themselves. A drama education policy would ensure there is a plan in place and a protocol to be followed in terms of drama education.

Nine participants in this study are uncertain of whether or not their schools had a drama policy when asked. Clare and Max both indicate their schools' drama policies are under development. Clare stated:

*"That's being worked on at the moment".*  
-Clare

Max is preparing to develop a drama policy himself, after convincing his principal to allow him to proceed with developing policies for arts education:

*“I asked [the principal] if I could privately do them and bring them back to her. First, she said no because it would be unfair to me, but I insisted until she said she'd love it. So, I started with music, and we did the music policy. We have the policy section at the front with the rationale and with the policies for music, and then I did a whole-school plan for juniors to sixth class. Only a couple of months ago, I had a student-teacher in for four weeks and I used those four weeks to do the visual arts plan. Drama is next. If it was my choice, I would have done music, drama, visual arts, but I was encouraged to do visual arts next, a slight hierarchy of subjects”.*

-Max

Max demonstrates his teacher identity by showing his commitments to the arts. He also presents his strong personal leadership skills by firstly, volunteering to do the work, and secondly, by convincing his principal to allow it. His personal leadership is compensating for institutional failings. Max recognises that policies will not be developed, in an area he is passionate about, unless he puts himself forward and takes ownership of the role.

Marie and Jack reported their schools had drama policies, but the policies were not implemented. Marie stated:

*“I think a drama policy does exist. Not that I've ever seen it, nor the other staff members as I'm aware. I think one person was put in charge of doing it a number of years ago when it became apparent that one was needed [to present to the inspectorate]. But there was no thought put into that process”.*

-Marie

Jack stated his school had a drama policy, but that it had not been distributed and was not followed:

*“We do [have a drama policy], but I don’t think it was distributed very well. So, I don’t think we’ll be implementing it or anything like that”.*

*-Jack*

These comments highlight a potential lack of commitment to the arts amongst school leadership. According to these teachers, the policies are either not being written, not circulated or not being made available for use if they are written.

Don was the only participant who reports his school had a drama policy of which he had made use.

*“I have used it. We have a teacher in the school who is big into the arts; drama, music and art and wrote the policy. The main thing I would use it is for is SPHE and English, not a strict drama lesson but more integration”.*

*-Don*

Don gives us another example of a teacher in his school displaying their teacher identity, they are passionate about the arts, and demonstrate their personal leadership by developing policy, when it is not required by them. It is the role of school management and administrators to oversee and develop policy as good practice. The lack of commitment to develop a drama policy potentially shows a lack of interest or willingness to promote the subject. These teachers’ reports of school administrators’ general lack of support for drama education confirm the findings of previous researchers. Despite the projected benefits of drama education, full adoption of drama into the education curriculum in Ireland continues to be controversial (Finneran, 2016).

Although drama is acknowledged as part of the arts curriculum in Ireland in 1999, there have been no further national developments or new initiatives or policies related to drama since then (Sara, 2015). That data shows that emphasising drama education is rare in individual schools.

Research from Bamford (2006) and Robinson (1999) indicated that primary schools tend to marginalise the arts. Within arts, music and visual arts seems to take priority, with drama being left off the timetable or used only with English or other subjects as a pedagogical aid. Drama, Film and Theatre Studies will be a Leaving Cert Subject at post-primary school in the coming years and drama will take its place as a core element of the arts curriculum, in the primary curriculum framework. All new and very welcome documents in terms of drama education in Ireland that will hopefully change the narrative surrounding the significance of drama in school and policy development.

### 5.1.2 WHAT TIME ALLOCATION DOES DRAMA HAVE?

Arts education gets three hours a week in the curriculum. Drama education can be given a one-hour time-slot as a standalone subject or integrated across other academic subjects. It is the teacher's decision how to allocate and use the time within this framework. However, the subject typically receives less than the prescribed time (McCoy, Smyth, and Banks, 2012, pg. 50). According to the participants, not all schools adhered to this requirement.

It was unsurprising that teachers in this study indicated that drama is given a low priority in their schools. Clare describes the low priority given to drama in relation to core subjects, and also in relation to P.E.:

*“I think the day is just so busy trying to get your reading, writing, maths, and anything else, even P.E., there's such a strong emphasis on P.E. now with all these initiatives coming in, so getting to drama is actually hard to get that far in the day”*

-Clare

Ed describes drama as the first subject to be omitted from the curriculum when teachers faced time constraints:

*“I know there are all the other demands, especially when you’re in a communion confirmation class, and all the other distractions and interruptions that are going on. It just becomes impossible to find time to teach a subject like drama, and I find out that the eleven other subjects in the curriculum, it’s probably the first one that gets squeezed out or dropped off the timetable in any given week”.*

-Ed

Jean provides a response similar to Ed’s, admitting drama is the first subject she tended to cut when she needed to make time in her teaching schedule:

*“I always feel that drama is the one thing that, okay, I went over time here so I’ll skip drama and fit the other thing I lost out in here”.*

-Jean

Max indicated his school had decided as a whole to cut back on time devoted to drama education, with the agreement that drama would be incorporated into other subjects. Max noted, however, that this planned integration of drama into other subjects had not occurred:

*“When we had to take time from certain areas, it was decided that time would be taken from drama because it could be integrated in other subjects, which, of course, doesn’t happen”.*

-Max

Max states ‘which, of course, doesn’t happen’. This is an point here. Why doesn’t it happen? The decision to integrate drama is to save time, while it demonstrates the school’s low value placed on drama, the commitment to be integrated across other curricular shows that the school

still intends for drama to take place. However, this does not happen, and from Max’s comment ‘which, of course, doesn’t happen’, indicates it is no surprise that therefore drama does not happen at all. Overall, a low priority is placed on ensuring drama is allotted its correct amount of teaching time among the teachers in this research. Don even suggests that the low amount of time dedicated to drama is a result of inspectors’ indifference to drama education, which reinforces his school’s tendency to place a low priority on the subject:

*“I don’t think inspectors are interested in things like [drama], versus the core subjects”.*

-Don

In order for drama to be utilised and used effectively in the curriculum, it needs to be receiving its allotted weekly time at a minimum, whether standalone or integrated. Reporting on teachers’ lack of commitment to this time allocation is significant to drama, significant to the fact that it is being underemployed, repeatedly every week, in classrooms across the country.

### 5.1.3 IS THERE A POST OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE ARTS IN YOUR SCHOOL?

*“No one is in charge of music, drama, or the arts”*

-Marie

*“Nobody has a post for drama”*

-Jack

Posts of responsibility are part of a school's leadership and management structure. They are promotion posts and are referred to as Principal, Deputy Principal, Assistant Principal I and Assistant Principal II (Gov.ie, 2020). I ask the participants about the presence of posts of responsibility in their schools and am referring to Assistant Principal Post I (APPI) or Assistant Principal Post II (APPII), which can also be described as middle management. Teachers in positions carry out roles and responsibilities integral to the administration, management and

leadership of the school, for which they receive additional pay. In theory, APPI and APPII's are also tasked with representing subject areas and over seeing their implementation. However, as a result of budgetary cuts during Ireland's 2008 economic downturn, if a post holder left the school, stepped down from their post or retired, these posts were not replaced. I investigate whether the participants had active APPI and APPIIs for drama or arts education in their schools. This is often a teacher with a specific interest in a certain subject area, such as the arts, who as the post holder would coordinate arts-based activities. APPI and APPIIs receive a token increase in salary, so really it would be driven by the teacher's own interest and passion. I mention the teachers in this study, like Max and Don, who took it upon themselves or another teacher in their school did, to lead drama and arts education. Often, no extra monetary incentives exist for teachers to lead drama or take on leadership in arts education, i.e., to organise visits from specialist teachers, organise trips to theatre, write and distribute a school plan or policy etc. Individual teachers' perceptions of drama are significant to the state of drama education in Ireland, as this study indicates, as individual teachers who promote drama education on their own initiative may facilitate students' exposure to the subject and its benefits in spite of administrative indifference, lack of middle management or the overall low value placed on drama in schools.

Ursula is the only participant who reported that her school has a drama post of responsibility. Ursula believes but was not certain a drama post of responsibility existed at her school, and that the teacher holding the post was responsible for promoting and implementing drama education:

*"I think there is somebody who has [a post of responsibility for drama], and they book classes in to see shows and plays that might come up in local theatres. That person would go around and ask "Would you like to go?" And she books the classes in".*

-Ursula

Some schools once had specific posts for arts education or drama, but when the post holder retired, the post was eliminated. The implications of this means that their school has no appointed post to lead arts education and unless a teacher volunteers to coordinate arts

education for the school as a whole, progress and development in the arts can be slow. Sarah, for example, states:

*“I know there were people before the retirements set in four or five years, there were people that were heavily involved in arts outside of school, and I think it kind of fell, the responsibility [for drama] fell to them”.*

-Sarah

Jill’s school has a post for visual art, but not for drama, as she states:

*“There is an arts post, just for visual arts”.*

-Jill

In most participants’ schools, students’ access to drama depended on individual teachers’ enthusiasm for the subject and willingness to volunteer their time. Jack, for example, states he and a colleague provide the only drama in their school:

*“There’s two of us who have a keen interest in drama, we take it upon ourselves in the sense that we organise staging’s of different types of drama, but that only covers one area of the curriculum so I wouldn’t call it the post of responsibility for the curriculum but rather for performances”.*

-Jack

Jean indicates that drama education is only made available in her school when teachers organised holiday shows, stating:

*“A lot of teachers would do Halloween and Christmas shows and plays”.*  
-Jean

Max states that an informal, unpaid arts education post of responsibility has been created for him at his school through his advocacy as he campaigned with the principal to appoint him to the position:

*“Anyone could take an informal post of responsibility. There was no pressure because obviously, it's not recognised and you wouldn't be paid for it. So, I being passionate about the arts, asked if I could become an arts post of responsibility. I did all three positions in arts education [music, visual arts, and drama]. I got intense with it as well, having just done my masters”.*

-Max

Clare's school also has one teacher who has taken responsibility for arts education, apparently on an informal, unpaid basis of the kind Max describes:

*“There is a teacher in SET who takes on the drama side of thing like activities, school plays, anything that happens in the school that requires any drama, but I don't think that role has been officially given to them”.*

-Clare

Clare goes onto say that the organisation of plays is aided by the benefit of proximity to a strong drama society in its community, despite no official post holder being in place:

*“There’s been quite a nice relationship with drama in the part that I’m living in, because there are other things going on, Macra (Macra ne Feirme, young farmers, who have an amateur drama society), the drama society, so I think because of that influence on the community, [drama education] happens”.*

*-Clare*

Reliance on a single teacher, if the school is likely to have one, to coordinate drama in the absence of incentives or support from Management, APPIs, APPIIs and colleagues can limit drama education, however, as Ed states of the situation in his school:

*“There is one teacher in school, and she takes responsibility for art, and I’m sure drama is covered as part of it, so that’s the way that works. The only thing that ever happens through drama is that she comes to us once or twice a year telling us there’s a show on at a local theatre and are we interested in taking our class to it. But other than that, to be honest, I’ve never seen any workshops taking place in the school in drama or never seen any in service dedications to drama”.*

*-Ed*

Reliance on teacher volunteers to promote and lead drama also creates the possibility that no other teacher would volunteer, some participants indicate. In schools where no members of the staff have come forward to take responsibility for drama, students are likely to have minimal exposure to the subject. Sarah reports that drama at her school is biennial and conducted by an outside teacher:

*“We have an outside drama teacher that comes in every second year to do a school performance or show”.*

*-Sarah*

Sarah describes how this infrequent exposure to drama results in only transitory benefits for students. Without a post holder ensuring what is learned during the biennial classes, progress is lost. Any learning or development the students and teachers gained from the experience of an outside specialist is not maintained, if it is not continued and monitored. Every second year, when the specialist teacher returns, it can be described as reinventing the wheel as the knowledge gathered two years previously has not been progressed. This demonstrates a lack of development for the arts education programme in their school.

*“The benefit the children get, even when it comes down to the way they speak, their articulation, their expressiveness, you can see that kind of come to a peak for the show, then it’s gone again”.*

-Sarah

Ed notes that no drama education occurred at his school, except the drama he and a few colleagues voluntarily implemented, again without any formal structure or post holder leading the learning for continuity.

*“I’d say there’s very little emphasis placed on [drama]. I’m teaching in sixth class and we do a piece of drama every year with the kids, we’re actually rehearsing it at the moment, and it’s basically a twenty-minute cabaret show that we put together which includes drama, music, dancing, and singing. But other than that, I would say, especially from first class all the way to fifth, there’s very little drama happening in the school”.*

-Ed

The sporadic, informal nature of drama education in many participants' schools may be disadvantageous to students, given Dunn's (2011) finding that many of the benefits of drama for students depend on regular, consistent, and well-informed implementation:

'Where the application of drama strategies takes place in isolation, in an ad hoc manner or without a keen understanding of how dramatic forms, conventions and elements interact with one another, the work can become purely functional. In these situations, the teaching becomes artless, resulting in approaches that do little to add value to existing practices or to the depth and quality of the experience for learners' (Dunn, 2011, pg. 617).

The lack of a post of responsibility or leader in the subject area in these schools shows there is no long-term commitment to the significance of drama.

## **5.2 SUMMARY**

Participants indicate that prevailing perceptions of drama education among their colleagues and administrators tend to be negative or dismissive. Most participants perceive their colleagues as regarding drama as frivolous and recreational, and as very much subordinate not only to the perceived core subjects of maths, English, and Irish, but also to P.E., visual arts and music. Drama is typically the first subject to be cut from schedules when teachers are pressed for time. Other teachers at most participants' schools appeared to be unaware of the evidence supporting the use of drama as a pedagogical tool for teaching other subjects, or of the benefits researchers have observed in drama for improving students' development and behaviour. Leaders in most participants' schools also appeared to be indifferent to drama, with the subject being given the lowest priority, and with most schools neglecting to develop a drama policy, or failing to make staff aware if such a policy even exists.

Indifference or hostility to drama education among school leadership and staff is significant to the state of drama education in Ireland, because national DES policy leaves the coordination and implementation of drama to the discretion of schools. In most participants' schools, drama depended on a few teachers' volunteering to teach the subject, often on an informal,

intermittent, and unpaid basis. In some participants' schools, the dependence on interested teachers volunteering had resulted in a lack of drama education, except in relation to biennial holiday concerts that more reliably generated enthusiasm among staff than the prospect of volunteering to develop and lead in drama on an ongoing but unpaid basis. In schools where drama education occurred regularly and consistently under the supervision of a post holder, the programme is typically very limited in time (e.g., one hour per week) or frequency (e.g., for a brief interval once every two years).

Teachers in this study described themselves as supporters of and in some cases as active advocates for drama education, and a few had taken the initiative to volunteer to teach drama. If participants' descriptions of their colleagues' and administrators' perceptions of drama are accurate, drama may often be perceived as a frivolous recreational activity that threatens to divert time and resources away from core curriculum. Such a perception would be in stark contradiction to numerous researchers' conclusions that drama is a valuable pedagogical tool in core subjects (e.g., Martinez *et al.* 2000; McCabe 2007; Coleman & Davies 2018 and Coleman & Lind 2020), as well as a means of developing essential life skills and positive character traits in students (e.g., Kempe & Tissot, 2012; McCabe, 2007). Given that drama education in Ireland is at present so dependent on individual teachers' perceptions of the subject and willingness to plough an individual furrow, the theme discussed in the following chapter may provide valuable insight into the conditions that contribute to teachers' support for drama.

## 6 DISCUSSION THEME 2: BEING A SUPPORTER OF DRAMA

As discussed in the previous chapter, the successful implementation of drama education in the participants' schools often hinges upon individual teachers' enthusiasm for the subject, the cultivation of a positive drama culture, and the willingness of teachers to volunteer their time for teaching and coordinating drama activities. To achieve the objectives of this study, it is crucial to comprehend how and why individual teachers, collectively advocating for drama, have developed favourable perceptions of the subject. Many participants attribute their support for drama to their positive experiences with the subject during their college education. While some participants had prior exposure to drama in primary and secondary school, most recount unfavourable encounters. Notably, in Ireland, the arts, encompassing visual arts, music, and drama, are initially combined in the early years of primary education and are collectively referred to as 'arts education'. Subsequently, in later education, at post-primary school, they are segregated into distinct subjects and become non-compulsory (Waldron et al., 2011). Primary school teachers are responsible for teaching all the arts, although in some schools, as noted by the teachers in this study, specialist drama instructors are involved. This theme of being a drama supporter examines the participants' personal experiences and their motivation to support drama, based on their encounters with drama and the arts, both in their personal lives and throughout their educational journeys.

### 6.1 WHAT IS YOUR EXPERIENCE OF DRAMA AT SCHOOL?

Six participants in this research report exposure to drama while in primary school.

Amy was the only participant who describes an entirely positive experience, saying:

*"I had a great experience of drama in primary school. It wasn't just pure drama. We did performances. There were more school musical concerts than drama concerts, but drama was encouraged".*

*-Amy*

Although other participants report negative experiences of drama in primary school, they attribute their negative experience to the manner in which drama was organised and taught, rather than to the subject itself. Drama seems to have been taught in an ad hoc manner with a lack of consistency according to the participants so their experiences of drama at school did not give them a good foundation of what drama is or how effective it can be in the classroom. Clare reports negative experiences of drama in primary school, but she attributes these experiences to the regimented and sporadic nature of her exposure:

*“I didn’t have a great experience in primary school with drama. We didn’t do it very often. Every four or five years there would be a massive play on the stage and kids would line up outside someone’s office and audition. It’s like cattle going to market, really”.*

*-Clare*

Jill accounts for her negative experiences of drama in primary school in her report that most students were excluded from prominent roles in the occasional productions. This demonstrates that there is an over reliance on performance as a sole methodology, and not drama as an art form or a process to explore the curriculum. Also, if students are excluded from prominent roles, it shows that not every student is given the same chance to experience drama:

*“We had shows, I think every second year, that was it, it was always the same people that were picked for the main characters. I hated it”.*

*-Jill*

Both Clare and Jill have only the occasional show as a memory or an experience of drama at primary school. This demonstrates they had little exposure to drama as a subject area at primary level. Eight participants report some exposure to drama in secondary school. Amy speaks positively of the collaborative nature of drama in her secondary school:

*“Students from the woodwork department would design the set, physics students would do lighting, arts students decorated the stage. It was a collaborative, team effort, a school effort”.*

-Amy

A show or performance is not the aim of the drama curriculum but this approach is a good example of transdisciplinary education and demonstrates how the arts can bring many disciplines together into one learning project. Drama can work for a variety of learning styles and lends itself to cross-curricular or transdisciplinary work quite naturally. Participants who report negative perceptions of their exposure to drama in secondary school attribute their feelings to their personal disinclination to participate, rather than to negative perceptions of the subject or the way it was taught. Jill, for example, states:

*“I hated [drama]. I avoided it. I did speech and drama up until first year, in secondary school outside of school, and it just wasn’t me. I’m not an actress. It wasn’t for me, and I never had any part of it”.*

-Jill

Clare attributes her negative secondary school experiences of drama to her perceived lack of talent and confidence:

*“I still never took a main part. I sang behind the stage, on the stage and pretended while the other person sang, I couldn’t act, I wasn’t confident”.*

-Clare

Both Jill and Clare associated speech and drama and shows with being an actress, having talent or being confident. Both experienced drama as a product. Neither of them views drama as a process, or as a mode of learning/exploring while at school. There is only one aspect of drama revealed to these students and it is an over emphasis on talent and performance skills.

## 6.2 WHAT IS YOUR EXPERIENCE OF DRAMA AT COLLEGE OR DURING YOUR ITE?

Thirteen respondents participated in drama activities while at college level, and they report these experiences as positive. Breda indicates that drama appeals to her outgoing nature:

*“I would be quite social, and enjoyed drama, so I was always an active participant”.*

-Breda

Cillian, in contrast, enjoys drama despite a slight personal disinclination. He admits to being too self-conscious. This is definitely a challenge for teacher education among a cohort of students. When they start third level education, most of them will just have come from post-primary school and studying for state exams. When they enter ITE, participating in active learning, and drama workshops especially, can be an alien concept for them. Students can be uncomfortable with the participatory aspect of the workshops and reluctant to enter the fictional lens required for the workshop to be successful.

*“we were probably a bit too self-conscious to really get into [drama], but I enjoyed it”.*

-Cillian

Clare reports a very negative experience of drama in secondary school, but she describes how an effective teacher helped her to enjoy the subject in college:

*“I was working with people I really enjoyed, and the lecturer was fun . . . There was a lot of engaging in dramatic content, and I think the fact that the lecturer was a very engaging personality anyway, and always kind of gave a demonstration or put you on the spot and made you feel uncomfortable for a moment, then you really realised you enjoyed it, I think it kind of helped how I take on my role as a drama teacher”.*

-Clare

It seems teacher education has a difficult task of undoing some of the negative experiences these students had in school. ITE needs to demonstrate the positive affects drama can have for themselves and for their own students and to encourage them to adopt it into their teaching. These comments demonstrate the importance of strong, impactful lecturers in ITE courses to impress upon student teachers the significant role the arts play in the classroom for learning and development. The participants report here that their lecturers changed their view and understanding of drama. The lecturer may also have the burden of undoing some misguided understanding of what drama is and help the students to see beyond drama as a performance or a product.

Ed appreciated drama in college as a break from more formal subjects:

*“I really enjoyed the drama lessons, I suppose, it was the one time I felt that you were kind of in a space where you weren't doing formal reading, writing, maths type of stuff, but you had an opportunity to learn in a different forum or type of way, so my experience of it was very good”.*

-Ed

Jean's perception of drama is positive from college also, where she engaged with the subject without the pressure to perform well:

*“I saw more of a positive aspect [of drama] from college. Where it's not all about putting you up on your own and having to display yourself and make a fool of yourself. It was different. I don't know, college makes it more a bit easy-going I suppose”.*

-Jean

As with Jean and Clare, enjoyment of drama in college has changed Marie's opinion of the subject to a positive one:

*“I think [college is] where [my love for drama] started, because I had two really brilliant drama lecturers there, and they were young, vivacious, and full of life and energy for the subject”.*

-Marie

Jill's perception of drama is positive as a result of her college experience also. She recalls engaging with the subject in a childlike way, where there is no pressure to perform well and experimentation is encouraged. Jill is presented with the opportunity to play from her lecturer. Something all children love to do and can usually do quite easily. All this feedback from the respondents highlights the importance of why teacher education is vital, receiving a high standard of ITE is definitely impactful as it changed these teachers' opinions on drama who had had negative experiences at school themselves:

*“We had to go to drama and participate in it as if we were children, in different settings. It was really good, they showed me things I didn't have any experience with”.*

-Jill

The previous theme discusses a disconnect between college and a transfer of knowledge to the classroom. This is disappointing in light of the fact that the participants report a positive drama experience from college. This theme highlights the significance of a high standard of ITE and impactful lecturers.

### 6.3 EXTRA-CURRICULAR DRAMA INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE HOME

In addition to their exposure to drama through formal education, eight participants report that extracurricular exposure to drama during childhood or adolescence reinforces their background in the subject. Ger states:

*“I have a strong enough background [in drama]. I was in stage school from 7 to 18, and we learned acting and dancing. That was my first experience of improvisation and role-play”.*

-Ger

Breda also reports extensive extracurricular experience, saying:

*“I would have done a lot of dramas growing up, from 11 to 16, the youth club would put on a drama every year and take part in competitions”.*

-Breda

Youth clubs are community-based organisations or facilities in Ireland that provide young people with a safe and supportive environment where they can engage in a variety of recreational, educational, and social activities, these often include drama. Youth theatre is also a common community-based organisation in Ireland. It is a unique form of theatre that is

defined by the contribution of young people by engaging its members to be active participants in group or ensemble drama approaches. The participants in this study mention their positive experience with drama at extra-curricular activities. There is a large body of research that address the role of extra-curricular activities on a range of cognitive and noncognitive outcomes for children (Pitts 2007, 2008; Farb & Matjasko 2012; Arthur *et al.* 2015). There is also a large body of research that has consistently found a significant association between extra-curricular activities and positive developmental outcomes and social behaviours for children (Barnes *et al.*, 2007; Bohnert, *et al.*, 2009; & Bundick, 2011). Breda mentioning her experience of youth clubs shows us that extra-curricular activities play a role in their positive experiences which represents the findings of the above researchers. Extra-curricular does not always mean a structured class or community group. Positive exposure to the arts can happen in the home or among our social circles. Marie reports growing up in an artistic family, which facilitated her extra-curricular exposure to drama.

This demonstrates to us that personal and family values play a role in the types of extra-curricular activities that take place in the home. Often activities children are exposed to at home will translate into their hobbies and identity:

*“Arts were a part of my house in terms of my mom doing some amateur acting. My dad was a member of a band and played lots of music himself. We were sent off to music lessons when we were very young, and then subsequently I joined a drama group, then a big production. It just kind of snowballed”.*

-Marie

Ed attributes his readiness to teach drama due to his extra-curricular exposure to drama activities. He describes his early and prolonged participation in drama as the source of his confidence:

*“My experience of drama is very positive, because of the home, the community, and that gives me the confidence to be able to, I suppose, teach it and work with groups in school and teach it as part of a school subject, but I can totally see that for 90% of my colleagues, they wouldn’t have the same experience as I have.”*

-Ed

Cillian, in contrast, reports his childhood family were indifferent to the arts, but he has pursued engagement with drama out of personal interest:

*“My family wouldn’t be particularly artsy, but I am myself. I play a bit of music, but when I was younger, I would have participated in local activities and I would’ve been really involved in Scór na nÓg from when I was about eight, nine, ten, up until maybe fourteen, fifteen. Every year we would’ve participated in that. I would’ve been quite successful, too. In the parish and in the dioceses, so yeah, quite a bit”.*

-Cillian

Scór na nÓg is an Irish Gaelic Athletics Association (GAA) competition that combines the Gaelic Games with the social and fun element of Ireland’s traditional past-times. There are eight events/disciplines in Scór nÓg that cover all aspects of Irish culture including; Figure/Céilí Dancing, Solo Singing, Ballad Group, Recitation/Scéalaíocht, Nuachleas/Novelty Act, Instrumental Music, Set Dancing and the Table Quiz. What is worthy of noting here in Cillian and Marie’s comments is that fact that an interest in one area of the arts cross-influences their interests in other areas. This suggests that an arts- rich environment is really impactful.

Ger suggests his personal interest in drama and subsequent extracurricular exposure to it are motivated by a desire to overcome his shyness:

*“I was quite shy. Then when I started doing shows and getting parts, I loved acting on stage, and I loved it from then on”.*

-Ger

Participants’ attributions of their positive perceptions of drama to positive curricular and extracurricular experiences of the subject are consistent with the findings of Russell-Bowie *et al.*, (1995), they indicate that if preservice teachers have a strong background in a subject, they will feel more confident about teaching it. Their research reports that 15% of preservice teachers felt they had a strong background in drama, and therefore felt able to teach drama. Historically, it can be speculated that, teachers in Ireland did not incorporate drama in their curriculum because of a number of factors, including lack of funding and other resources, lack of training and the low priority placed on the arts. Despite the fact that drama is supposed to be part of the curriculum, drama has rarely been implemented effectively by generalist teachers (Waldron *et al.*, 2011).

Lack of support for drama education by many teachers may be a result of their inadequate exposure to the subject through formal and extracurricular education (see Russell-Bowie, 2013). A federal survey of arts establishment in Ireland in 1999 – 2000 by the National Centre for Educational Statistics (2002) indicates that 94% of primary schools had some system of music training, 87% had visual arts instruction, but fewer than 20% had any category of drama or dance teachings (Kelsey, 2012). Ireland’s educational institutions lack of support for drama education may therefore be self-perpetuating, with teachers who were not exposed to drama during their own formative years being less likely to feel confident teaching drama to their students. It is significant, then, that all participants in this research report some exposure to drama during the course of their formal education, and that a majority had undergone extracurricular instruction in drama. Given that all participants describe themselves as enthusiastic supporters of drama education, the findings about teacher backgrounds appeared to be consistent with Russell-Bowie’s (1995) conclusion that a strong background in a subject makes teachers more willing and able to teach it. As discussed in chapter 2, Ireland is currently going through a period of change and thanks to the Creative Youth Plan 2023-2027, there are

future plans in place to centre arts education firmly into the lives of young people. Research of this nature will hopefully present a different dialogue if it were repeated in ten years' time.

#### 6.4 ARE YOU CONFIDENT IN TEACHING DRAMA?

When teachers in this study are asked directly about their readiness to teach drama in schools, their responses are more mixed. Ursula, for example, said about drama:

*“I think it’s a fantastic tool . . . I’m just not good at it”.*

-Ursula

Although all participants express the opinion that drama should be included in the curriculum, most participants suggest that a background in the subject is not sufficient preparation for effective teaching, and that a keen personal interest and aptitude is also necessary. Although all participants report some background of exposure to drama, only six participants report they feel prepared to teach drama to their own students. Sarah states that educational exposure to drama is insufficient, and that a teacher needs to have a personal enthusiasm for the subject to teach it effectively:

*“I think [my confidence in teaching drama] comes from me, from my interest level and my love of the arts. . . The thing is, when you leave college, you forget that you have to breathe that kind of enthusiasm into things yourself. It’s not about you waiting for somebody to give you the resources to do it, you have to be the facilitator of it all”.*

-Sarah

Marie also attributes some teachers' incorporation of drama into teaching as a personal predilection rather than of formal training. She claims they are confident to teach it as they are interested in it:

*“Some teachers in the school have a particular interest in the arts. Even though some [arts], like drama, are definitely not working from whole-school policy, it’s just that [some teachers’] interests are being incorporated in their teaching”.*

-Marie

Max attributes the fact that he informally volunteers to lead drama in his school to his ‘passion’ for the arts, which he develops from his arts background. His background gives him confidence to demonstrate leadership in the area.

*“I, being passionate about the arts, asked if I could become an arts post of responsibility. I did all three positions in arts education. I got intense with it as well, having just done my masters [in education and the arts]. I suppose with the numerous initiatives, we should be constantly revising and reviewing the policies and school plans for other subjects”.*

-Max

Although a background in drama does not cause all participants to feel prepared or confident to teach drama, all but one participant indicates that a background in drama nevertheless exerts a significant, positive influence on their current teaching practices. Ed, reports that drama has not shaped his teaching style, but he still considers his background in drama a positive experience. Amy describes her teaching style as positively influenced by drama and Breda states that her background in drama improves her teaching:

*“I’m aware of giving [drama] skills to the children when it comes to reading prayers and things like that, standing up and looking at the audience and trying to project your voice to the back of the church”.*

-Amy

*“I can use [drama] as a resource by acting things out and being dramatic and changing voices and stories and just using my experience and drama to enhance lessons, I think it’s good”.*

-Breda

Don describes his background in drama as a helpful factor to facilitate differentiated instruction for his students:

*“[Drama] has definitely had an influence. Especially at my school where my kids have to learn in a different way, for the kids we are working with, I think it’s great that I can use things like drama, and create happiness and teach them how to deal with their emotions and stuff like that”.*

-Don

These comments from Don, Amy and Breda demonstrate really broad understandings of how drama enables learning, much beyond what the curriculum envisages. Drama gives Don a place to create happiness for his students and a space to deal with their emotions. This demonstrates that drama can go above and beyond the learning outcomes a teacher set out to achieve. Ger describes his background in drama as something that helps shape his style of teaching by engaging students, especially younger students:

*“I think [drama] helped me to be a teacher. Now I’m able to stand in front of a classroom. Practicing being on stage, performing, learning lines, taking on roles, it gives you self-confidence so you’re able to present yourself in a certain way as a teacher, and not be nervous. I often like to play with younger classes, pretend I’m different characters”.*

-Ger

Rieser offers insights into why a teacher’s proclivity for drama, whether natural or developed, may be essential for effective instruction. Unlike most other subjects, drama is a cognitive, artistic and experimental process in which teachers must sometimes relinquish their authoritative role to help students explore and grow (Rieser, 2012, pg. 53). Some teachers have a willingness to play, experiment, take risks and partner with their students, but others may feel uncomfortable in doing so. Participants in this research all reported some background in drama, but a majority also describe themselves as lacking confidence in their ability to teach it, suggesting that some degree of Russell-Bowie’s (1995; 2011; 2013) findings are correct and that exposure leads to confidence and competence, which is needed with respect to drama teaching. This possibility is consistent with Teng’s (2017) conclusion that teachers’ sense of agency is negatively influenced by a lack of adequate professional training, a hierarchical relationship between student-teachers and school mentors, and unsupportive school administrators. These contextual factors can contribute to feelings of vulnerability and powerlessness that may make inexperienced teachers who are not predisposed towards playfulness and experimentation uncomfortable with teaching drama. In addition to this, Bandura (1997), indicates that the confidence of teachers is a significant factor in how well the subject is taught. Generalist primary teachers’ lack of confidence when it comes to the arts is well documented internationally; Kenny and Morrissey (2020), Kind (2007) and McDonald *et al.* (2019) discuss it in their research on Teacher Artist Partnerships. Snook and Buck (2014) identified the lack of confidence in their research on artists in schools, similar to Bamford’s (2012), research on arts and cultural education. Alter, Hays, and O’ Hara (2009), highlight lack of confidence in the arts in their research on the challenges of implementing primary arts education and Andrews (2016), reports that teachers’ vision of their own artistic ability is limited in his research on professional development in the arts.

Participants in this research describe their formal and extracurricular exposure to drama in terms that suggest a more traditional, leader-follower dynamic. Teachers who are not temperamentally inclined toward the playfulness, risk-taking, experimentation and partnership Craft (1997) described as necessary for effective co-creating drama may not have had adequate opportunities to cultivate a sufficient level of comfort with these practices, which are at the heart of drama education. The conclusions of Russell-Bowie (1995; 2011; 2013): that exposure to a subject lead to confidence and competence in teaching it, may therefore be that not all modes of formative exposure to drama are equally effective preparations. To transition comfortably from passive enthusiasm for drama education to active advocacy and initiative, teachers may benefit from experiences specifically in co-creating drama, in which the non-traditional characteristics of drama instruction described by Craft (1997) are consciously exercised and reinforced. This suggestion is consistent with Hermans' (2001) conceptualisation of the multi-voiced identity, in which a normally introverted teacher may adopt an extraverted mode of self-presentation when required, with practice making the teacher more comfortable and self-assured in manifesting this aspect of identity. The development of a new drama curriculum may encourage more Irish teachers to teach drama, but exposure to co-creating drama may increase their confidence and willingness to teach it. Max gave a response consistent with this view in stating that a teacher's confidence was key in effective drama instruction, and was more important than learning pedagogical techniques:

*"I discovered that [teaching drama] wasn't rocket science, it was confidence. If you are okay with doing this in front of children, to go outside of the classroom and come back dressed as a clown, for you to be able to confidently go in and tell the children 'It's not me!' If you have the confidence to do that, you will be able to do the drama lessons".*

-Max

Thus, learning about and practicing co-creation of drama could be one of the solutions to help promote drama education and fully engage teachers. This would be consistent with another finding of Russell-Bowie's (2013, pg. 69), that many teachers have developed the perception that drama education involves, 'just giving children a script and having them read and perform

it.' Russell-Bowie added that this approach was traditional, and that many teachers may have experienced it in their own schooldays. Findings in this research confirm Russell-Bowie's observation, indicating that many participants' negative, early experiences of drama are of a regimented and authoritarian style of instruction, and the positive experiences that allowed them to enjoy drama in college are of a more co-created variety.

Teacher Artist Partnerships (TAPs) could also be beneficial for teachers to further their confidence and to upskill. TAPs, along with other new initiatives in Ireland are discussed in chapter 10. Teachers who feel unprepared or unwilling to teach drama are not at fault, from the responses in this research it appears that teachers are not currently being offered the right tools to comprehend and undertake the task of teaching drama in Irish schools. It appears that being a supporter of drama is not enough to make drama happen.

## **6.5 SUMMARY**

This theme largely suggests that teachers who come from a strong arts background felt confident and competent to use drama in schools, but were unsure if they were adequately prepared to teach it. Teachers who do not come from a drama background, while claiming to be drama supporters, are less confident and competent with their abilities in the classroom. There is a mixture of exposure to teachers who remember it from school and those who did very little, to none at all. All of their experiences translate to their positive or negative endeavours to implement drama in their classrooms and ultimately to the type of drama supporters they are.

## 7 DISCUSSION THEME 3: MAKING DRAMA HAPPEN

### 7.1 MAKING DRAMA HAPPEN: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Whether and how drama education occurs in participants' schools depends on factors including the significance of drama within a school's culture and the backgrounds and experiences of individual teachers. Drama may be considered as both formal and informal education, as there are various techniques available, and implementation style is typically at the discretion of individual teachers. As we have seen in previous chapters, drama education in participants' schools is neither regular nor frequent. Participants indicate that drama's marginal status results in the subject's relegation to an occasional, pedagogical tool integrated into other subjects. Curriculum overloading, time constraints and a lack of adequate, standardised guidance for teachers of drama compound the tendency in participants' schools' cultures to dismiss the importance of drama. The areas which present roadblocks to making drama happen discussed in this theme are the frequency of teaching drama and the challenges of teaching drama, whether it is used as a standalone subject or an integrated pedagogy and what is taught as part of the drama lesson.

### 7.2 HOW OFTEN DO YOU TEACH DRAMA?

Four of the teachers in this study say they are able to conduct drama education more than once per week. Their responses indicate that they are able to incorporate a significant amount of drama because they prioritise the subject. Don teaches drama three or four times per week, while Ann says: "definitely more than once a week". Jill teaches drama four times per week because she considers it important for the success of her students with additional learning needs:

*"I teach drama an awful lot in learning support, especially with the children for social skill groups, so it'd be in small group settings, and I do it about twice a week with two different groups, one with emotional problems, and one with social problems".*

-Jill

Jill demonstrates the value she places on drama by making drama happen with her social skills group frequently. Although the other participants describe themselves as valuing and supporting drama, they are often unable to make time for the subject. Jean, for example, states:

*“I try to do [drama] once a week. I have it timetabled in for the hour that you're supposed to do it. I try and do it once a week but sometimes things can happen”.*

-Jean

Sarah also tries to make time for drama as an incorporated teaching tool, but is sometimes unable to:

*“I would love to say weekly, but that's not the case. I suppose I do my very best to introduce it through my languages, and that's where I'm using it mostly”.*

-Sarah

Sarah makes drama happen as an integrated pedagogy while some participants appear to neglect drama in favour of other priorities. Marie said she teaches drama:

*“Rarely. I teach drama when I remember it or when it fits into a subject for integration”.*

-Marie

Sarah does not explain why she does not always have the time for drama but does mention her intention is to integrate it, Marie has the same aim and uses drama when it fits into another

subject. Marie struggles to make drama happen frequently and sometimes only when integrated.

The reports of most participants that they are unable to include drama in their schedules regularly are consistent with findings of previous researchers. Lachman (2018) notes teachers' tendency to omit drama education. However, Lachman attributes teachers' lacking support for drama to a dearth of personal background in the subject and resulting negative attitudes. Participants' responses related to theme 2; being a drama supporter, are inconsistent with Lachman's explanation, indicating that even teachers in this study who rarely teach drama have some background in drama and very positive perceptions. More consistent with the accounts of teachers in this study is Kenny *et al.*'s (2014) report that teachers have minimal time in the primary timetable to include drama in the curriculum. The time is allotted within arts education but teachers in this study failed to give drama the time the curriculum recommends. A significant roadblock to the theme of making drama happen.

### **7.3 IS DRAMA A STAND ALONE SUBJECT OR AN INTEGRATED PEDAGOGY?**

No matter how frequently or infrequently participants in this study teach drama, most report that they implement drama as an integrated pedagogical method in other subjects (usually history, Irish or English), rather than as a standalone subject. According to Bodilly *et al.*, (2008), music and visual arts tend to be taught more as standalone subjects with drama being included in languages. Ann, who reports she teaches drama more than once per week says:

*"I teach it as part of English and Irish".*

-Ann

Don's teaches drama three to four times a week and is also integrated rather than standalone:

*"I haven't got the time to have a standalone drama class. It doesn't fit in except in my other lessons".*

-Don

Marie, who teaches drama 'rarely,' explains why she only uses it as an integrated teaching tool, despite her strong background in the subject:

*"I've studied teaching drama and all the rest of it, and when I go to the classroom, I find I'm under so much stress to get everything done that I actually don't put the time in to teach a standalone drama lesson, so it's kind of incorporated into other subject".*

-Marie

This tells us that even strong advocates for drama, with a strong arts background still have difficulty implementing drama as a standalone subject and settle for integration. Max is the only participant who teaches drama as a standalone subject. He says:

*"It's standalone. I confess I usually only get to one, but I try to get to two. It's half an hour before lunch, but the children have had a long section of academic work by then. They tend to be relaxed and get involved. . . . When we had to take time from certain areas, it was decided that time would be taken from drama".*

-Max

Researchers have observed benefits in drama education, whether it is taught as a standalone subject to develop positive character traits and social skills in students (e.g., Kempe and Tissot, 2012; McCabe, 2007), or as a pedagogical tool integrated into other subjects such as maths (e.g., Martinez, 2000; Coleman and Davies 2018, Coleman and Lind 2020). However, Dunn (2011, pg. 69) finds that when the teaching of drama is of the ad hoc kind, students may not experience its benefits. The teaching taking place in the classroom of these participants is more considered than ad hoc drama, but it does seem to lack overall planning. This theme of making drama happen is also consistent with theme 1; the significance of drama, with no post of responsibility, there is no one is coordinating the learning, there is no one overseeing whether drama takes place as a standalone subject or whether it is integrated, there is no overall planning for what is being taught or no plan for progression. It seems Dunn's description of ad a hoc drama is how drama is being delivered in these classrooms, at times.

#### **7.4 WHAT DOES DRAMA LOOK LIKE IN YOUR CLASSROOM?**

When looking at the theme of making drama happen, getting an insight of how drama is taught, helps us to understand the nature of drama education being offered in Irish primary schools. Using process drama to make and explore stories is a common way that drama is used in classrooms. When participants discuss their lesson activities for teaching drama, they describe a limited range that are currently being used. They do not mention story, process drama, the guidelines or strand units of the current curriculum and focus more on drama techniques or conventions. The participants discuss using 'hot-seating', 'role-play' and 'conscience alley'.

Role-play is the technique most frequently used by participants, with seven teachers reporting they used it. Typically, in role-play, students work in groups to create a scene related to a certain theme or topic. Jack says role-play allows children the opportunity to increase their confidence and public speaking in class, and to develop empathy and social skills. Jack describes his perception of the importance of role-play as:

*“Role-play is hugely important in my opinion because it allows children, if they have a keen interest in drama, to increase their confidence, but also, it can put kids in real life situations so they develop empathy and kind of social skills as well”.*

-Jack

Sarah reports using role-play to enhance history instruction:

*“I would get the children to take on a role and bring the court scene to life”.*

-Sarah

Cillian has his students engage in role-play in creative teams:

*“I would get them working in groups as well where they have to maybe create a scene or something like that with a team or topic”.*

-Cillian

Five teachers report that they use the conscience alley technique. Conscience alley (Neelands & Dobson, 2000) is a useful technique to explore multiple facets of a character’s choice within a specific dilemma. Typically, students stand in two lines facing each other, creating a path or walkway. One line is considered to be the ‘good conscience’ while the other is the ‘bad conscience’. Students walk through this alley of their peers, listening to advice and predictions from either side related to the choice that must be made.

Amy has used conscience alley to prepare a student for real-life experiences:

*“I used conscience alley, letters back and forth for different scenarios. So I remember using it in that area to prepare this girl for her move to Australia”.*

-Amy

Don also uses conscience alley to prepare students for real-life decision-making:

*“I make someone walk through an alley of their peers, conscience alley, and give them different scenarios that could happen as a result of content they put online. Because very often, they only see one [potential outcome]. But having them do that just opens up their minds to so many things”.*

-Don

Four teachers report that they use the technique of hot-seating. In hot-seating, a student is chosen to become a character in the story or content being studied. Students and the teacher interview the character regarding the story or topic. Students can interact or debate with the student in role as a character. Often, students sit in a circle, with the student-as-character being ‘hot-seated’ in the centre. Clare said of hot-seating:

*“I hot-seated some of the characters, and then we just had discussion and debate in circle, so I think a lot of the children enjoy that”.*

-Clare

Jean had also used hot-seating, and said of the technique:

*“I like to use hot-seating. Either teacher in role or else a student in role, based on oral English lesson, let's say. We've learnt about Roald Dahl or whatever, so Roald Dahl would come into the middle”.*

-Jean

Although hot-seating, role-playing, and conscience alley can have significant benefits for students, these three techniques by no means exhaust the possibilities of drama education. I am particularly surprised that storytelling is not mentioned. Storytelling is described as both the simplest and most compelling dramatic technique (Farmer, 2019). Students, particularly in junior classes, like listening to stories, and this provides ample opportunities to use drama techniques such as freeze frames, acting out a characters, and inventing and performing different endings to the story. The participants do not discuss movement and how we can use our bodies to tell stories.

None of the participants make reference to the current drama curriculum document when teaching drama. The strand units of; exploring and making drama, reflecting on drama and co-operating and communicating in making drama, provide a framework on which lessons can be based. The participants do not seem to base their lessons on the strand units. The elements of drama, according to the DCD are; belief, role and character, action, place, time, tension, significance and genre. The participants do not mention or reference the elements when planning or teaching drama. Previous feedback from the teachers demonstrates that they do not make use of the DCD, so it is not surprising that they do not reference it when asked about how they teach drama.

They mention children enjoying and engaging with the subject matter and how they love role-playing. The participants only acknowledge a limited amount of drama techniques. Some other common drama techniques which are not mentioned by the participants in this research include; improvisation, mime, flash-forward and flash-backwards, forum theatre, mantle of the expert, marking the moment, narration, role on the wall, soundscape, spotlight, tableaux and thought tracking. This is not a definitive list of drama techniques; I am just highlighting there are many

other examples of drama techniques. Participants' omission of the fictional lens, building belief, using our bodies to tell stories and the DCD's elements of drama seems to indicate that these concepts do not play a role in their drama teaching. This type of delivery does not meet Dunn's (2011, pg. 69) requirement that drama should be based on 'a keen understanding of how dramatic forms, conventions and elements interact with one another,' so the application of drama strategies would not 'take place in isolation.'

## 7.5 WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES OF TEACHING DRAMA?

Frequent drama education, either integrated or standalone, using drama activities mentioned in the last section is a challenge for the participants. The challenge most participants cite first are time constraints, which are associated with curriculum overload in their schools. Ger, for example, links time constraints with curriculum overload:

*"We literally have no time in the day [for drama]. There's so much to cover. We don't have time for music and things like that, everything has to be incorporated into another subject".*

-Ger

Breda agreed, stating:

*"I would say curriculum overloading [is the greatest impediment to drama]. We're trying to get in between confirmation and practices, between drama and practices, covering music, getting Irish, English, and maths taught, I would feel a bit overwhelmed in sixth class with what has to be done".*

-Breda

Clare describes a heavy teaching load that left little room for drama:

*“The day is just so busy trying to get your reading, writing, maths, and anything else, even P.E., there’s such a strong emphasis on P.E. now with all these initiatives coming in, so getting to drama is actually hard to get that far in the day”.*

-Clare

Ursula describes herself as feeling somewhat overwhelmed by curriculum overload:

*“I just feel we have so much to do. If I could upscale myself in the subjects that are of real value to them, I feel I am doing a great job. I feel that drama is a kind of, it should, I suppose, come into every subject area that you do, but I feel that I am so busy with curriculum overload that I have no time”.*

-Ursula

However, time constraints are not the only impediments to drama that teachers faced. Additional probing of teachers’ perceptions of the barriers to drama elicited other significant challenges that limit participants’ ability to provide frequent drama teaching. Many participants cited the difficulty of retaining all the drama techniques learned in college over years of subsequent teaching, during which no drama refreshers or resources were provided to them. Ed states:

*“I’d have to say is that all the good ideas that we learned in college may be experienced in college as part of drama education, most of them were forgotten by the time we started teaching, which was a real pity because I don’t think enough of what we did in college translated into the classroom”.*

-Ed

In specifically addressing the tendency towards attrition in a teacher's repertoire of drama activities over time, Ed added:

*“How to use those various elements of drama in the classroom, I know we covered all of them in college, but there's a lot going on, and that stuff doesn't stay with you unless you use it immediately”.*

-Ed

Jill explains the disparity between the high quality of drama training she and other teachers she knew had received in college, and her present lack of versatility in implementing drama:

*“We came out [of college] with great ideas, we knew how to use the curriculum, so yeah, we would be well-trained. You forget it now because it was years ago, but there's no time. There's no time to do all these techniques”.*

-Jill

Sarah agrees with other participants who discuss the tendency of their memory of many drama techniques to lapse through disuse, and added that occasional refreshers might restore teachers' familiarity with drama:

*“I kind of just think the arts are something that you need constant renewal and refreshing, because they're the quickest thing to forget in the curriculum because it's so loaded, so it's a pity in-service is gone because I think the arts are lacking as a result”*

-Sarah

Other participants also spoke of the unavailability of useful refreshers in drama to re-familiarise teachers and renew their confidence and competence in teaching drama. Ed recommends continuing professional development (CPD) to address this need:

*“The improvement of drama, I think, like I mentioned already, is through CPD, it’s through giving teachers ideas, teaching them skills, teaching them again how to use hotseating and roleplay, how to use those various elements of drama in the classroom. I know we covered all of them in college, but there’s a lot going on, and that stuff doesn’t stay with you unless you use it immediately. I think rather than just resources, it’s about the CPD side of it, because as we know from other subjects, resources are no good unless you know how to use them”.*

-Ed

Other participants express the opinion that standardised curriculum resources for teachers have the potential to provide adequate guidance for effective drama instruction. Ger believes a standardised drama curriculum would better ensure optimal drama education than the present system of leaving the curriculum to the discretion of individual teachers. There is a standardised curriculum, it is currently under review, but the DCD offers the strand, strand units, perquisites for drama and the elements for drama. It also states the learning aims and objectives for each primary school level and provides examples of learning for each primary school level. Ger’s comments highlight the lack of adherence paid to the DCD.

*“I feel like there should be more of a program laid out, it would be easier if we were all following the same thing. I think if a child hasn’t done drama at any stage of their education in school, they haven’t a clue. It’s very hard to start from scratch. I feel that there isn’t an adequate drama program out there to guide you”.*

-Ger

Max agrees that a standardised drama curriculum would help teachers implement drama more effectively, and describes many teachers as experiencing uncertainty when trying to engage students with the subject. I think the teachers are requesting a prescribed document when talking

about a standardised document, which is not generally what curriculum is. There are many drama texts with endless lesson ideas and content available. Perhaps teachers need to focus on marrying the learning outcomes from the curriculum to resources and drama lessons they source themselves and would like to use in class.

*“I find that with drama, [teachers] don’t know where to start. Maybe they’re the ones who did hot-seating in college. So, they’d have one or two drama games that they’d play, but with regards to constructing a plan for drama, I don’t think that there’s a common way to do that so it tends to be pushed to the side”.*

-Max

Jean refers to challenges she has encountered in attempting to find resources and reports that she would prefer to have a content driven curriculum or a skills-based approach to drama that has structure:

*“It’s very hard to find resources based on drama. You might Google up some fun drama games but I’d rather have a structure”.*

-Jean

The consequence of participants’ tendency to forget drama techniques, and to have little success in finding ways to refresh their knowledge, reinforces the lack of confidence they feel in their ability to teach drama. Ursula, for example, states additional resources for teachers would be useful to her because:

*“I don’t feel confident teaching [drama], and I don’t have enough ideas to teach it. I don’t feel that I’m trained enough to teach it”.*

-Ursula

Marie describes how a teacher’s lack of confidence can cause him or her to deliver drama instruction ineffectively, or omit it altogether:

*“Unless you’re a hundred percent sure and confident of what you’re doing, [drama] can go a little poorly. I think that’s one of the major reasons why teachers have so many problems teaching drama, because they’re just not a hundred percent sure of what they’re doing. And it’s not that you need to know where it’s going to finish, it’s just that you’re not completely confident of what you’re doing”.*

-Marie

Some of the participants mention the lack of structure around drama and therefore find progression, attainment and assessment difficult. Ed speaks of his own lack of confidence in their ability to evaluate students’ performance in drama without additional guidance. He says it is easy to evaluate progression in music or dance as you can see if they can play the instrument or follow the dance routine. He questions how you measure drama. According to the NCCA’s DCD: ‘assessment in drama is concerned with monitoring the development of the children’s drama skills and concepts and the success with which they learn through an engagement with the three strand units of the curriculum. This entails a consideration of both the drama objectives and the learning objectives inherent in the content’ (1999, pg. 43). The DCD goes on to say that the most practical assessments to use for drama are; teacher observation, teacher-designed tasks and tests work samples, portfolios and curriculum profiles. These assessment tools are described and explanation is offered on how to use them in the document. Some of these assessment tools are the same ones you would use to assess music and dance also. If a teacher can apply these

assessment tools and evaluate progression in music and dance, it is not too complex to apply the same assessment tools to drama:

*“I suppose for me, music and singing and dancing are more structured, and it’s more formal because you can easily define whether a kid can or can’t play an instrument or dance or sing a song, whereas in drama, how do you judge it, how do you measure it? I wouldn’t have the confidence to go out and deliver that”.*

-Ed

As participants suggest, there is a need for good resources in the form of policy, teachers’ books, or drama manuals which have a proper structure to be followed to ensure drama is conducted regularly and efficiently. Resources such as these could guide teachers and ensure students are experiencing a wide variety of drama-specific skills. Participants expressed a strong wish that the drama curriculum be revised to include more specific ideas and structure. All participants agree there should be a revised document which would help them to teach drama. This guidance should come from the Irish educational bodies, be it the DES, the NCCA, Oide or a national education service provider. Amy looks for additional guidance by stating:

*“I’d like to get a formal lesson plan with structure, so that’s something that can be a dramatic approach with ideas for what you want in a drama lesson. That can give you ideas, and throughout a number of weeks in a work term, divide a drama program rather than having the idea of 101 games, where you’re not actually delving into any particular issue in that”.*

-Amy

Most participants say that they do not find the current DCD adequate to meet their need, as it does not detail and describe how to implement drama education. They find the document too theoretical and wordy, requiring them to spend too much time attempting to extract practical advice. Aims and objectives are stated, but without enough examples or concrete guidance that

teachers can immediately implement in the classroom. Of the inadequacy of the DCD to meet the needs described in the previous quotation, Amy continues to say:

*“[The DCD] gives us some of the theory, but I think for teachers who aren’t designed to be drama teachers, who aren’t comfortable with drama, I think it could give us more ideas, it needs to be developed a little bit more. The curriculum documents don’t explain exactly how to go about it as much as they should”.*

-Amy

Breda agreed, in reference to the DCD:

*“I would prefer something more practical”.*

-Breda

Cillian has similar input:

*“[the DCD is] too wordy and you’re mining for information, it takes too long”.*

-Cillian

Don says aspects of the DCD does not apply to his students:

*“It could be improved, it’s very wordy. Some of it just doesn’t apply to the kids I have”.*

-Don

Jill compares the DCD to other curriculum documents:

*“I think like a lot of the curriculum documents, they’re very, very general, and too jam-packed, and there’s not enough specific ideas and examples”.*

-Jill

Marie gives an exceptionally negative description of the DCD in stating:

*“I think it’s so broad and general and vague, it is the most disturbing piece of documentation. I don’t know how they expected any teacher to go out and teach something substantially with that piece of writing. Half those pages are blank”.*

-Marie

These comments demonstrate that faith in the DCD is low, it is not being used in the classroom of these participants, they find it hard to teach from it and do not reference it when asked to discuss how they teach drama. It also seems like the participants want more specific direction, almost like a prescribed document. Generally, curriculum can be very broad. The new primary framework will not be a prescribed document, there is a gap here and potentially the need for another document to supplement the arts education curriculum document when it is published.

Another potential issue with the primary curriculum framework is teachers' willingness to change. Change within the Irish curriculum is inevitable, but some teachers may be afraid of change, experience anxiety from it, or just prefer to continue teaching the same content in the same style as they have always done. Academic institutions are often bombarded with continual efforts and related strategies that aim to change the existing status quo (Kenny, Finneran and Mitchell, 2014). Integrating and implementing changes in the Irish education system is not an easy undertaking, as there are likely to be numerous hindrances (Day and Prunty, 2015). However, I think it is clear from these teachers' voices that change is required, especially in terms of a DCD and a guideline on what to teach. Clarity and a drama plan could eradicate this ad hoc style of teaching drama in terms of making drama happen.

The integration of drama into Irish schools has been prolonged, and evidently based on the responses of the participants in this research, not fully successful. Curricular change of any kind is often a challenge for teachers, and drama's full incorporation into the curriculum means encouraging teachers as well as students to be creative, potentially posing a challenge to those who are not naturally creative or who do not perceive themselves to be so. In particular, teachers having to change their role from a didactic one to that of a facilitator of learning may feel threatening to teachers (Kenny, Finneran and Mitchell, 2014). As a society we have moved away from didactic methods of teaching and endeavoured to place the child at the centre of their own learning but this has not been a widespread overnight change and teachers are more likely to ignore new curricula that does not appeal to their strengths, or that provoke student resistance (Lachman, 2018). Given that Irish educational policies do not state how drama should be taught, there is a possibility that the difficulties surrounding the implementation of drama will influence the outcome more than the projected benefits.

## **7.6 SUMMARY**

As teachers in this study and previous researchers indicate, time is a particularly significant constraint to implementing drama. Teachers already experience the burden of heavy workloads and curriculum over-crowding. The pressure to take care of numerous students and cover large amounts of material inclines teachers more towards the pragmatic benefits of neglecting drama than towards the theoretical benefits of full drama implementation (Lachman, 2018). Thus,

implementation of drama in Irish schools is limited not only by a lack of investment from the governing bodies such as the DES, the NCCA and Oide, but by the reluctance of overburdened and underprepared teachers to radically alter their pedagogical methods when they lack adequate guidance and time. The teachers' voices in this theme told us they often do not meet the required amount of time in relation to drama teaching, drama is regularly integrated as a teaching methodology and not planned for as standalone art form. A lot of this is due to lack of confidence and guidance, and a limited understanding of drama from the participants. The teachers' voices reflected that the challenges to drama are time constraints, curriculum overload, lack of confidence, lack of CPD, and poor guidance in terms of a curriculum document or plan to follow. All of these issues present difficulties in the classroom in terms of making drama happen.

## 8 DISCUSSION THEME 4: DRAMA FOR LIVING AND LEARNING

While the previous chapter outlined various factors impacting teachers' capacity to teach drama, it is noteworthy that teachers in this study maintain highly positive perceptions of drama's value for their students. Participants have conveyed numerous advantages of drama, including skill development, the reinforcement of positive character attributes, and the overall enjoyment of drama lessons among students, whether integrated into other subjects or presented as a standalone subject. In this theme, the teachers' voices reflect upon students' enjoyment of drama, the positive impact it has in the classroom, and the positive impact it has on students with special educational needs in the classroom.

### 8.1 THE POSITIVE IMPACTS ON DRAMA IN THE CLASSROOM

Participants regard students' enjoyment of drama as beneficial because it made students more receptive to learning. Jack, for example, says:

*“My classroom is willing to volunteer for drama, they’re excited for drama, they express themselves”.*

-Jack

Sarah expresses the opinion that drama makes students enthusiastic about learning, and that enthusiasm is necessary for successful instruction:

*“There’s excitement in the room. I think that every child needs to be enthused to learn”.*

-Sarah

Jill reports a similar observation of students' enjoyment of drama, and adds that even shy students responded positively:

*“They kept asking me every day to do more of it, so they really loved it. All of them loved it, even the quiet ones”.*

*-Jill*

These comments from Jill, Sarah, and Jack, highlight the fact that students love engaging with drama, it encourages enthusiasm and they ask to repeat the activities. Aside from the benefits attached to teaching drama, we sometimes undermine how much students love it. The voices of the teachers in this research reinforce children's love of drama. Jean emphasises that drama is beneficial both to shy students and outgoing ones:

*“I think it's fun for the kids to be able to let go and just to be able to express themselves, to have a bit of fun. It works with the kids who are brilliant and very dramatic. They can really express themselves. Then for the quieter kids, they can work in a group”.*

*-Jean*

Researchers provide insight into why drama may not only be beneficial, but also enjoyable, for many students. Drama curriculum includes interrelated fictionalised activities that engage and explore learners' feelings, knowledge and ideas. At the primary level, the emphasis is on making drama a tool for investigating feelings and ideas, and for examining the relationship between people in the real or imagined world (DES, 1999). Mulryan-Kyne (2005, pg. 17) found that when children participate in drama, the lesson usually requires movement and getting up

from their traditional position of sitting at a desk. Movement and performance provide students with opportunities to take a break from traditional forms of learning, to develop fine and gross motor skills by coordinating their bodies, and to become comfortable moving around the space for their enjoyment and learning. Students are encouraged to explore and experiment with various body movements while communicating a range of moods as part of the drama. The teacher is expected to facilitate this process by harnessing learner's capacity for make-believe, as Amy notes:

*“[Drama] feels like a teacher-student relationship, more of a collaboration type of experience for children, and I think it often allows children to explore their feelings and their emotions and ideas”.*

-Amy

Like Jill and Jean, Amy observes that almost all her students respond positively to drama, and that drama as an integrated pedagogical method is particularly valuable for motivating quiet children to express themselves. Amy further observes:

*“I know I’ve had children who are nervous or shy and don’t like expressing themselves in front of their peers, but I think that often happens when you do drama on stage or as part of a big class or group, whereas when they’re [participating in drama] with their pairs or in little groups, they’re more open. They can be more free with their personalities and letting their emotions out. . . Children feel like their opinions are valued a bit more when we go into a drama methodology”.*

-Amy

Incorporating drama into children’s learning can be a valuable tool for helping children feel that their opinions are valued and encouraging them to express themselves more freely. It not only supports their emotional development but also enhances their overall communication and interpersonal skills. Amy’s comment here demonstrates that drama not only supports the nervous or shy children, there are more layers to their learning as she describes their ability to

let their personalities out and share their opinions. Don also notices marked benefits in drama education for shy children:

*“It can bring kids out of their shells, and you will just see a whole new person”.*

-Don

Are there many subjects on the curriculum that have the ability to do what Don describes? It is an outlet that affords many students that chance to come out of themselves and show their personality. As Jean and Jill suggest; the possibilities for self-expression inherent in drama are beneficial to all students. All participants refer to increased confidence and fluency in self-expression as a significant benefit students receive from drama. Jack expresses the opinion that drama can be especially effective in helping boys to overcome inhibitions associated with gendered expectations for masculine behaviour:

*“There’s an epidemic of young males committing suicide. I do think that’s come from self-esteem, and I do think drama can definitely give people the tools to deal with that, you know, what you do, who do you talk to, how do you communicate it to people. . . For boys growing up, the expectation is that you don’t show emotions, you don’t try, you don’t talk about your feelings. . . Drama, I think it’s the key to resolving a lot of issues there. Giving [boys] the skills to role-play or how to deal with your issues or talk about things, how to communicate them, how to be confident enough”.*

-Jack

Jack observes issues that indeed lend themselves to exploration through drama. Drama provides a space to learn and develop communication skills through role-play. These types of activities could help support young males with internal struggles as they can be reluctant to talk. Drama can be a space to work on mental health issues. Drama can provide a safe and supportive environment for boys to communicate and express their emotions, challenge stereotypes that

discourage boys from discussing their feelings and promote emotional expression and healthy communication among boys. In her research on using storytelling, drama therapy and drama in education with boys, Dix (2015), says the boys began to express their emotions in a profound manner through the medium of drama. Sallis (2011) looks at the role of drama pedagogy to educate boys, he reports that using drama establishes positive and collaborative relationships; teaches to demonstrate care for the other students/friends and encourages accepting diversity including gender, race, ability and sexuality (pg. 57). Sallis also highlights that there is rich research on the role of drama in the lives of girls; Gallagher (2001); Hatton (2003, 2004, 2013) and Rivière (2005) but that research on the role of drama in the lives of boys is scant.

Clare recalls an example of a student who had become more confident and outgoing while participating in drama:

*“He was a very shy character, and how he took on the role and embodied everything that needed to be, it was just amazing, and he wasn’t a confident character on a day-to-day basis. He’s very small and unassuming, but he just took this role on and literally brought it to life”.*

-Clare

Clare’s experience is similar to Ed’s as he describes how the freedom of pretending to be a different person during role-play has given a particularly shy child the opportunity to experiment with demonstrative self-expression:

*“My one kid who just became this completely different child when he was involved in drama. It was fascinating to see it because usually he was the shy, reserved guy, but then took on this role in drama and just almost exploded. It was great to see it, so drama obviously gave him the opportunity to express himself and show off. So, it definitely does happen when you do roleplay, where you give a kid a different role and they get to be someone else or pretend to be somebody else”.*

-Ed

Allowing a child, a safe space to take on a different role and be confident to communicate and express themselves is a unique opportunity that drama offers. Ed and Clare's comments demonstrate that they have seen the social emotional developments children can gain from drama (Kemple, 1996; Stickley *et al.*, 2007; Hartigan 2012). Marie recalls how drama seems to give a child with language deficits access to language skills he could not normally call upon. Marie outlines how herself and the rest of the class are shocked when they see how the role-play generates so much language out of a student who usually struggles to express himself:

*“A child who was from an African country, who had very little language, and it wasn't due to English as a second language, his expression in the language was just very limited. We were doing a drama about a playground and I came as teacher in role and I was going to take them to the playground, and he was so expressive in that moment. This child would walk into the classroom, and you could assess him yourself, that he had no language. Just the depth of some make-believe play seemed to produce all this language. I just couldn't believe it. I think all the other children were shocked at the same time”.*

-Marie

Marie's comments demonstrate that drama can be an invaluable tool for language development as it serves as a stimulus for language use and practice by fostering expressive communication, expanding vocabulary, and enhancing fluency. Booth (1985) and Tarlington (1985) find that reading, writing and drama are a closely linked learning process as drama can bring the text to life to further the readers understanding. Brown and Ploydell (1999) and Dinapoli (2009) recommend using drama as an approach to language study, as dramatic dialogue is representative of normal conversation. Imaginative drama lessons and activities can be used to help encourage and improve children's writing, speaking and listening skills (Goodwin, 2006). Macro (2015) claims that drama fosters many literacy skills as students become part of the learning process and Ripstein (2018) connects art, drama and literacy through storytelling as the interdisciplinary approach to learning is effective for not only language development but other subject areas too.

Participants' observations are broadly in keeping with findings of Pecaski-McLennan (2007), that drama is an effective tool for increasing students' self-confidence and ability to express

themselves. In her research of the benefits of drama in classrooms, Pecaski-McLennan argues that drama can promote self-confidence and self-expression through exploration and risk-taking activities that reflect real-life personal situations and feelings; ‘by using drama as a means of exploring issues in the classroom, it is possible to celebrate participants’ individuality and to create caring and nurturing relationships among students (pg. 451). Participant’s contributions in this study also resonate with the finding of Reynolds (2002, pg. 63) that drama participation can enhance students’ self-awareness and improve their social skills and self-esteem. Overall, the voice of the teachers here is unanimous in saying that students enjoy drama and it has a positive impact on learning.

## **8.2 THE POSITIVE IMPACTS OF DRAMA ON STUDENTS WITH ADDITIONAL LEARNING NEEDS**

Participants reported that students with additional educational needs may benefit even more than mainstream students from drama’s enhancement of self-expression and social skills. Most participants (as with Marie earlier) report that drama is effective in assisting students with special needs to engage with learning and expressing themselves more freely and appropriately. Cillian recalls:

*“There was one student in particular, he is on the autistic spectrum, but he is in the 99th percentile for his cognitive ability and he has atypical language, so he’s very intelligent, but it’s sometimes hard to get him to talk, to communicate. Because of his atypical language, he doesn’t socialise well with his peers, but through some drama exercises, he’s seeing in a different light, and it really helps his social skills where he could be funny or sarcastic or compassionate, he can show empathy and a lot of these feelings”.*

-Cillian

Ursula believes that drama is useful in helping students with additional learning needs rehearse for common situations. Ursula states:

*“Maybe for children with special needs, where you would dramatise going to the cinema or McDonald’s, and they would have to act out how you order chips or burgers, I think that’s very valuable”.*

-Ursula

Ursula’s perception is consistent with the statement in the DES's Drama Guidelines (1999) to the effect that successful process drama reflects life in a metaphorical way for students, and by doing so can clarify elements of real life. Process drama uses metaphor and symbolism to represent real-life situations and experiences. By abstracting these situations, students can examine complex and sensitive topics without the emotional intensity that may come with a direct, realistic approach. Metaphors make it easier for students to relate to and understand the underlying themes. This allows students to explore, learn, and grow in a safe and engaging manner. It enables them to connect with the material on a personal level, develop critical thinking skills, and gain valuable insights into the complexities of the world around them (Verriour, 1984 & McNaughton, 2010). Process drama is not new, but it is an innovative pedagogy that develops skills and the all over holistic development of the child (Anderson, 2015; McLaren *et al.*, 2021; Wells *et al.*, 2021; Wells & Sandretto, 2017; Wells *et al.*, 2023).

Ed remembers an instance when drama allows a student with additional learning needs to express himself more comfortably. Ed’s observation is consistent with the finding of Athiemoalam (2013), that drama can help students with additional educational needs improve their clarity of expression in oral communication, which is needed both during and after their school life. Ed recalls:

*“I had one kid who had a lot of problems both medical and psychological. He also had a sight condition where he had very poor vision, only 20% vision, and the resource teacher . . . along with myself, produced a drama with him. She got him to act out various parts initially, and it was hugely effective for him, because, I suppose, of his poor vision, he finds it really hard to express himself in writing . . . and then orally, his contributions are very much not age appropriate in class, so because of that, he doesn't contribute much orally in class. But when he actually produced the drama on this particular storybook, he just, once again, got a huge opportunity to express his emotions and feelings and almost became a new child as a result of it”.*

-Ed

Using drama with students who have additional learning needs is effective as you can tailor the approach to their unique requirements as Ed has done here. Clotworthy (2015) promotes using drama with additional learning needs students. Teaching through drama has long been championed by drama therapists and some psychologists, neuropsychologists, and special educators according to Hartigan (2012). Ed also references that team teaching is effective with this student. Team teaching is a strategy that involves two or more teachers working together to plan, deliver, and assess a course or specific content area. It is often used in educational settings to enhance learning outcomes and provide students with a more comprehensive and diverse learning experience; it can be particularly beneficial for students with additional learning needs as there are multiple teachers in the room to assist and implement the programme. More one on one attention and care can be offered to these students if there are multiple teachers in the space. Partridge & Hallam (2005) says that team teaching is not just a technique, it is a thoughtful and creative mechanism for fostering a dynamic student-centred learning environment (pg. 103). Crow & Smith (2005) and Day & Hurrell (2012) discuss the benefits and challenges of team teaching and the importance of creating a learning community and maintaining the commitment to collaboration. Ed's description of the team-teaching collaboration for this specific student is successful as the student expressed their feelings and emotions, which Ed reports as usually being a challenge.

Ger observes a student with an emotional-behavioural disorder beginning to participate appropriately in class through drama:

*“I have a child that has emotional behaviour disorder, and oppositional defiance disorder. He is very difficult to manage in the classroom, and he is all around very, very difficult. But when we started in September, a [role-playing drama] on the airport. I didn’t know how it was going to go. I initially almost fell over, because he was sitting there as the pilot, he directed everyone, and normally when he does group work, he’s very aggressive, pushing people and screaming at them, so I was very nervous about doing it with him, because I thought he would be really aggressive with the children in it. But the minute he got the role as the pilot, he was unbelievable. He was a completely different child. He literally organised the whole class, and he knew exactly what to do, he had everyone in their seats. If someone was doing the wrong thing, he would correct them. He was thriving”.*

*-Ger*

Ger’s observation is consistent with those of Pecaski-McLennan (2012, pg. 407) and Kemple (1996) who find that children engaging in dramatic role-playing activities have reduced aggression, better turn-taking abilities, greater empathy and improved peer cooperation. Being proficient in problem-solving while compromising with peers is a social skill needed by all children at school. As Amy states:

*“They learn that they have to be part of a team, it can’t be just a one-man drama show, but often for performances to work well it’s a team effort”.*

*-Amy*

Ger and Amy's comments point us to the fact that they identify drama as a vehicle to teach and reinforce social skills. Drama brings an emotional dimension into problem-solving, and helps children to consider and reflect upon their personal responses when they communicate with their peers. Drama-driven learning requires students to work as a team, and to practice meshing their inner and outer worlds by cooperating while they explore their imaginations and emotions (Murchan and Shiel, 2017, pg.52). Participants in this study observe that drama offers students the chance to build confidence, improve their concentration and attentiveness, and increase their ability to share their emotions and perceptions with others in a clear and appropriate manner, similar to the findings of McCoy *et al.* (2012). Participants observe manifestations of these benefits in improved character traits and skills in their students. As well as observing social skills development and learning how to express themselves, the participants also identify an improvement in emotional intelligence as a result of using drama. Ed perceives this improvement as a process of self-discovery, saying:

*“[students] learn a bit more about their own emotional intelligence”.*  
-Ed

Cillian perceives improvements to emotional intelligence as outward-facing:

*“Drama is a great way of introducing emotional intelligence and demonstrating it to people”.*  
-Cillian

Closely related to improvements in emotional intelligence was the increased empathy some participants observe in their students. Jack said:

*“[students] develop empathy and social skills through drama”.*

-Jack

Cillian states he teaches drama specifically to:

*“Teach compassion, empathy, these things”.*

-Cillian

Jill explains how she observes drama increasing her students’ empathy:

*“I use [drama] for empathy towards others . . . It opens [students’] minds to other situations that they maybe weren’t aware existed, social situations or social circumstances. It’s very good to help them understand what other people might be going through in their lives, but they might not understand”.*

-Jill

Developing empathy can often be a challenge for students with additional learning needs. Jack, Cillian and Jill’s comments point us to drama’s ability to assist students in developing empathy, which is developing their emotional intelligence (otherwise known as emotional quotient or EQ). As discussed in chapter 2, using drama as an educational and expressive tool can indeed promote and enhance emotional intelligence (Cruz *et al.*, 2013; Motos 2018 & Castillo-Viera *et al.*, 2021) in individuals of all ages. Emotional intelligence refers to the ability to recognise, understand, manage, and effectively use one's own emotions as well as the

emotions of others. Toye and Prendiville (2000), Dinapoli (2009) and Manon (2021) discuss how drama can enable developing the child's emotional quotient.

### **8.3 SUMMARY**

Participants' contributions seem to tally with Perry's (2012, pg. 23) findings that drama is beneficial in developing and improving students' creativity, imagination, self-expression, self-esteem, confidence, enjoyment of learning, social awareness and social skills. The reports of participants in this study echo existing research and support a concrete argument for the benefits of drama education. Drama can have a constructive effect on a child's development, and not solely in an academic sense. While the curriculum takes precedence in a child's education, schools are also required to contribute to the development of the child's emotions, social skills, personality, and character. Drama can present situations in which students are challenged to examine how they treat others who may be different from them, such as fellow students from different cultural backgrounds or different abilities. Drama can demonstrate to students the appropriate way to treat their peers, with respect and acceptance.

Pecaski-McLennan (2012) touched on a possible explanation for drama's benefits to children in her description of role-play: 'Role-playing can promote rich learning in children as it engages their emotional, cognitive, and verbal skills through active play that explores real-life personal feelings and situations' (pg. 407). Drama engages the whole student, including his or her cognitive, emotional, perceptual, and social aspects, and this may enhance learning and promote self-actualisation in students.

'Drama is one way of balancing the cognitive and affective attributes of genuine communication . . . activities based on getting students to react instinctively to others in emotional circumstances can stimulate learner creativity, communal awareness and personal growth' (Dinapoli, 2009, pg. 98).

Dinapoli argues that introducing emotion or real-life situations into learning increases the fluency of students' communication. In researching the benefits of drama in classrooms,

Pecaski-McLennan (2007) found that drama can promote self-confidence and self-expression through drama exploration and risk-taking activities that reflect real life personal situations and feelings. This promotion of self-confidence and self-expression through the engagement of the whole person is beneficial to all students and, as discussed earlier in this chapter, may be particularly beneficial for students with additional learning needs.

Kempe and Tissot (2012) argue that drama can help social skills and inclusion. In their research, they used drama as a tool to develop social skills with students with additional learning needs in a mixed-ability class. Kempe and Tissot report that drama provides the framework to help students develop their social skills, and that drama supports the class by developing inclusive practices. The authors further argue that drama is undervalued within the education system as a tool to aid social skills (Kempe and Tissot, 2012, pg. 101). Stickley *et al.*, (2011) researches inclusion in a participatory arts group, and found that participants in the sessions develop social skills such as turn-taking, conflict resolution and listening to one another (Stickley *et al.*, 2011, pg. 256). Like Kempe and Tissot, Stickley *et al.*, find drama effective in supporting the development of confidence, self-esteem, and social skills for special-needed students. Clotworthy (2015, ppg. 51-52) added that drama may be one of the few activities' teachers can implement in the classroom to improve students with additional learning needs' capacity to concentrate.

The belief that drama can help social and emotional skills development in students is not new as Hartigan reminds us that drama fosters social cognition (2012, pg. 33). Úna McCabe (2007) outlines the benefits of drama education as it develops; the ability to communicate, physical creativity and discipline, empathy, self-expression, and imagination, all while making learning more active, concrete and enjoyable (pgs. 4-6). This research confirms previous researchers' findings that drama education can have manifold benefits for children. However, discussions in this research also indicate that the state of drama education in Irish primary schools may need significant improvement before the potential benefits of drama for students are fully realised.

## 9 A SUMMARY OF THE CHALLENGES AND A HOPEFUL OUTLOOK

Four themes emerge during the data analysis to illustrate participants' perceptions of drama in Irish primary schools.

The findings associated with theme 1: The Significance of Drama, indicates the current status and perceptions of drama education in participants' schools. Participants indicate that prevailing perceptions of drama education among their colleagues and administrators tend to be negative or dismissive. Most participants perceive their colleagues as regarding drama as optional or an add on to other subjects, and as very much subordinate not only to the core subjects of maths, English, and Irish, but also to P.E., visual arts and music. Drama is typically the first subject to be cut from schedules when teachers are pressed for time. In most participants schools, drama depends on a few teachers' volunteering to teach the subject, often on an informal, intermittent basis. In some participants' schools, the dependence of drama on interested teachers volunteering has resulted in a lack of drama, except in relation to biennial holiday performances that generate more enthusiasm among staff than the prospect of volunteering to deliver instruction in drama on an ongoing basis. In schools where drama education occurs regularly and consistently under the supervision of a peripatetic teacher, the programme is typically very limited in time (e.g., one hour per week) or frequency (e.g., for a brief interval once every two years). Thus, the state of drama that participants describe in their schools is unfavourable to realising the kind of student benefits researchers attribute to drama.

The findings associated with theme 2: Being a Supporter of Drama, indicates that while most participants consider themselves supporters of or even advocates for drama, few felt comfortable implementing it in their own classrooms. Many participants' negative, early experiences of drama are of school shows with the same students being appointed the main roles repeatedly or a lack of drama exposure. The positive experiences that changed their perceptions of drama in college are of a more co-created variety. However, the late and limited exposure to co-creating drama leaves teachers 'feeling ill-equipped to develop and support creativity in their students (McDonagh & Finneran, 2017, pg. 181). They are unsure of how to use drama in the classroom and lacking confidence to implement co-creating drama for their own students. Teachers who are not inclined toward the playfulness, risk-taking,

experimentation may find it hard to be creative with drama. According to Craft, you need to be 'prepared to take risks ... you look for creative opportunities and you want to experiment with them (1997, pg. 92). These participants may not have had adequate opportunities to cultivate a sufficient level of comfort with those practices, which are at the heart of drama education.

The findings associated with theme 3: Making Drama Happen, indicate that drama education in participants' schools is neither regular nor frequent. Participants state that drama's marginal status resulted in the subject's relegation to occasional use as a standalone subject. It is used as a pedagogical tool and integrated into other subjects. Curriculum overloading, time constraints and a lack of adequate, standardised guidance for teachers of drama compounds the tendency in participants' schools' cultures to diminish the importance of drama. Time is a particularly significant constraint to implementing drama, because teachers experience the burden of curriculum overcrowding. Teachers seem to not focus on the theoretical benefits of using drama with their students and concentrate more on the pressure to take care of numerous students and cover large amounts of curriculum material. When participants discuss their content and techniques for teaching drama, they describe a surprisingly limited set that may have further limited drama's benefits for students. Thus, implementation of drama in Irish schools is limited not only by a lack of investment from the governing bodies such as the DES, the NCCA and the Oide, but by the reluctance of overburdened and underprepared teachers to radically alter their pedagogical methods when they lack adequate guidance and time. Teacher identity does not seem to play a role here, where passionate teachers with strong beliefs in the arts would champion drama and endeavour to implement it. It seems the roadblocks are too high and the leadership not strong enough to support effective drama teaching.

The findings associated with theme 4: Drama for Living and Learning, indicates that participants perceive a number of benefits of drama for their students, including skills development, reinforcement of positive character traits, and students' general enjoyment of drama instruction, whether drama is integrated into other subjects or taught as a standalone lesson. In particular, all participants refer to increased confidence and fluency in self-expression as a significant benefit students receive from drama. Participants also report that students with additional needs may benefit even more than mainstream students from drama's enhancement of self-expression and social skills. Participants' perceptions are in keeping with Perry's (2012, pg. 23) findings that drama is beneficial in developing and improving students' creativity, imagination, self-expression, self-esteem, confidence, enjoyment of learning, social

awareness and social skills. The findings of previous research and the reports of participants in this study support a concrete argument for the benefits of drama education. Drama can have a constructive effect on a child's development, and not strictly in an academic sense. Drama engages the whole student.

The discussions contained in this study show that the participants support previous researchers' assertion that drama can have multiple benefits for children. The analysis also indicates that the current standing of drama in Irish primary schools may need significant improvement before the potential benefits of drama for students are fully realised. In no particular order the following are the barriers to implementation of drama identified by this research:

1. Teachers' lack of early exposure to effective instructional techniques and their resulting discomfort with departures from traditional pedagogical roles and practices.
2. There are widespread perceptions in participants' schools that drama is not as important as other subjects, however, they do recognise it as an effective pedagogical technique.
3. There is a lack of institutional leadership from school governing bodies and middle management in relation to drama.
4. There is a lack of standardised guidance for drama like a useable curriculum document or policy.
5. There is a lack of understanding of the subject area and limited resources for further training and CPD.
6. Time constraints and curriculum overload limits teachers' ability to implement drama.

The identification of these barriers, and the comparison of participants' reports with the findings of previous researchers, demonstrates that drama is struggling.

The recent developments in arts education as discussed in chapter 2 are welcome developments. The Arts in Education Charter 'aims to promote and develop arts education and the arts in education amongst children and young people through an integrated and collaborative approach across government departments, education agencies and arts organisations' (Kenny, Finneran & Mitchell, 2015, pg.159). The Creative Youth Plan 2023-2027 is also playing a key role in arts education and intends to enable the creative potential of every child and young person aged 0-24 through a series of expanded and new initiatives that will be delivered between 2023 and 2027. The following chapters give an overview of new and

very welcome developments in arts in education in Ireland and recommendations for drama and arts education for Irish primary schools.

## 10 TOWARDS A LIVING MODEL OF DRAMA (PART I)

### 10.1 INTRODUCTION

During this research, I have been constantly exploring the benefits of drama education. I have approached this project as an advocate for drama education with the unashamed intent of gathering data to reflect the difficulty surrounding implementation and promotion of drama in schools. This chapter is called towards a living model of drama, an adaptation of Neelands *et al.*'s (1997) concept of living drama in *Lessons for Living*. It seeks to create multiple platforms in which to enable drama to be a living mode of learning in a cross curricular approach.

A 'living model of drama' in the context of enhancing drama teaching across all curricular areas refers to a dynamic and integrated approach. It uses drama the art form, drama techniques and drama principles as tools for teaching a wide range of subjects beyond traditional performance and drama classes. This approach leverages drama's inherent capacity to engage students, stimulate creativity, and enhance learning in various disciplines. By incorporating a living model of drama, teachers can make learning more engaging and effective while fostering creativity, critical thinking, and communication skills across all curricular areas. This approach acknowledges that drama is not limited to the drama class or stage but that it can be a powerful tool for enriching the entire educational experience. A living model intends to highlight positive changes that are currently in development and recommendations of how to enhance drama and drama education in our schools. It mediates the context of these positive changes and offers linkages and possibilities that teachers can avail of to create a living model of drama. There are no clear outcomes to the research other than offering insights into the complexity of teaching drama in Irish primary schools. This is not a problem that cannot be solved by time or resources- it requires a conceptual shift in thinking.

The previous chapters gave voice to the participant teachers in terms of identifying the struggles in teaching drama. These chapters report that drama may not be achieving its full potential. The participant teachers offer insights into the struggles they experience when trying to teach drama and tell a story that drama is potentially disregarded as a result of these struggles. The next two chapters offer a research-based way of addressing the deficiencies around drama that are discussed in the previous chapters. These sections look at what is currently happening

in the world of arts education in Ireland. I am trying to establish the emergence of a new context for the arts in education in Irish primary schools, which allows for the development of a new paradigm of drama in schools. This new paradigm is a new living model of drama. Creating a new context for the arts in education in Irish primary schools, with the goal of establishing a new paradigm of drama, involves a transformative approach to education that embraces the benefits of drama as a dynamic and cross-curricular teaching tool. It involves reimagining the role of the arts and drama, moving beyond viewing them as extracurricular activities to recognising them as essential tools for holistic learning. The new paradigm advocates for the integration of drama across various subject areas in the primary school curriculum. It acknowledges that drama can serve as a bridge between traditionally separated disciplines, fostering a more holistic and interconnected learning experience. It becomes an integral part of the educational framework, enriching the learning experience and equipping students with valuable skills that extend beyond the classroom. This approach acknowledges the profound impact that the arts, specifically drama, can have on a child's cognitive, emotional, and social development. There are positive developments that have been born during the life time of this research, which perhaps makes this research very timely, in terms of where drama and arts education have come from, how it has struggled according to the teachers, and where it is now going.

The landscape surrounding drama has changed over the last number of decades. Those changes are due to the national 1999 curriculum, the Arts Council 'Points of Alignment' 2007, the establishment of the Arts in Education Charter in 2013, and the establishment of Creative Ireland in 2017. These are the big factors that have reformed the role of arts in education and are discussed in 'Locating the Drama in Schools' in chapter 2. Taking into account the factors that have changed the role of arts in education and the struggles the teachers' shared, this chapter looks at a new model we can support to continue this evolution and move towards a living model of drama while addressing where teachers are being presented with challenges.

Towards a living model of drama is the phrase I have chosen to describe how life can be injected back into drama. This is not a fix; this is a paradigm shift or a different way of thinking. What I am proposing will change how drama is seen in schools, not by fixing what is broken, but by changing the rules of engagement and taking a different perspective of what drama in our schools could and should be. A living model of drama is about how we look at drama in schools. Both drama education and non-curricular drama. As long as it is drama for learning

and living, then it is a living model of drama. There are a number of relatively new arts in education initiatives that schools can use to make drama a living, breathing, subject in their schools and also looks at teachers and how they can revive and renew their practices when it comes to teaching drama. This chapter mediates the context of where drama fits, and proposes that it should be alive both inside and outside the classroom. This proposed living model of drama also recommends engaging with arts projects on a bigger scale, classrooms are no longer silos, the learning that takes place inside the walls of the classroom is as essential as the learning that takes place outside it. Schools have many opportunities to situate themselves in a collaborative, creative context within which drama is a living, active thing and which overcomes many of the difficulties reported in this research.

There are a number of characteristics to the proposed new living model of drama. The first one is the changing ecology of arts in education. This means recognising that the landscape of drama has changed due to the emergent initiatives. The ecology is made up of moving parts and needs to continue to grow. This is significant as it is highlighting change. The changing ecology of arts in education fits with the proposed living model of drama as it recognises the evolving nature of education and drama's place within it. These new initiatives represent a forward-thinking and flexible approach to the arts in education. Some of these initiatives are researched by Kenny and Morrissey, (2016 & 2021), Kenny, (2017), Fahy & Kenny (2021), Flannery and McCabe (2022) Fahy (2023) and McCabe (2023), and they give an over view of new developments, highlight their successes and identify the places where growth is still needed. These are discussed in this chapter and have been embedded in Irish schools during this research. None of the participants had engaged with any of the new services when being interviewed so they are strong potentials to support teachers to upskill and confidently implement drama and arts in education in their classrooms.

The second characteristic of a living model of drama involves a concerted effort to increase drama knowledge and confidence among teachers and within their respective schools. This characteristic is essential for the successful implementation of the new paradigm. The living model needs support. These supports should include teacher professional development for existing teachers and ensuring this approach is incorporated into initial teacher education also. Pre-service teachers are going to be the one's implementing the living model from the start of their career and do not have to adapt as existing teachers will. The living model will require mentorship, peer learning and collaborative workshops. Guest artist practitioners and teacher

artist partnerships can also help in the upskilling.

Establishing networks and support systems for teachers to connect with one another and exchange ideas and experiences in the form of online forums, teacher associations, and local support groups in education centres. Institutional commitment will play a role here as the participants discuss indifference from their schools towards drama. Schools should demonstrate a commitment to drama education by including it in their educational philosophy and goals. This commitment can manifest in policies that allocate time and resources to engage in transdisciplinary drama related activities and provide opportunities for teachers to engage in transdisciplinary teaching and learning. Continuous feedback and evaluation mechanisms should be put in place to assess the effectiveness of drama in a transdisciplinary approach and to identify areas where further knowledge and confidence-building efforts are required. Finally, lack of advocacy and awareness among colleagues is presented as a barrier to drama in this research. Raising awareness about the benefits of drama within the school community, among parents, and in the broader public can foster a positive environment for drama in schools, which in turn can boost teachers' confidence in implementing drama activities. The second characteristic of a living model of drama emphasises the critical role of building teachers' knowledge and confidence to use drama. It recognises that well-prepared and confident teachers are the linchpin for successful implementation of drama across the curriculum. Schools must provide the necessary support, resources, and opportunities for professional development to empower teachers to effectively use drama as a teaching tool and enhance the educational experience for their students.

The third characteristic of a living model of drama is the imminent new curriculum. There needs to be a certain openness and inherent transdisciplinary in how the curriculum is constructed. This means that it will encourage the integration of drama across multiple subjects and disciplines, breaking down traditional subject boundaries. It should recognise that drama can serve as a bridge between various subjects, enhancing the overall learning experience. The third characteristic hopes that the new curriculum is being designed to be more engaging for teachers and acknowledge the challenges that teachers may have faced in the past when trying to implement drama in the classroom. It is clear from the analysis of this research that the participants made modest use of the drama curriculum document (DCD). The new curriculum should be more accessible in terms of its practical use in the classroom and offer educators a more user-friendly framework that allows teachers to easily incorporate drama into their

teaching practices. The NCCA published the new curriculum framework in 2020 (NCCA, 2020) and later published the revised document, primary curriculum framework in 2023 (NCCA, 2023). Both were published during the life of this research and therefore play a key role in moving towards a living model of drama as the primary curriculum framework will shape the future of arts education and together with arts in education initiatives will further develop the evolution of drama in Irish primary schools. I hope the new curriculum will prioritise openness between subject areas, transdisciplinarity, and improved accessibility, aiming to make drama an integral and engaging part of the educational experience for students and teachers alike.

The fourth characteristic of a living model of drama requires a pedagogical template or structure to guide teachers and schools. Effective planning and planning for progression seems to be limited among the participants with drama often being cut out of their plan if time does not allow. An accessible document, that plans for the teacher and offers guidelines on progression, could help drama become more of a living entity in classrooms. I am calling this document a Drama Education Support Document. While I hope that the new curriculum document will give teachers the specific guidelines they require, or what the participants alluded to in the research, curriculum is not prescribed, can sometimes be abstract and is open to interpretation. Curriculum should be open and a transdisciplinary approach certainly requires openness and flexibility. However, there seems to be a lack of awareness and understanding of how to use drama, among the participants, they need more support to understand what drama is and what the curriculum requires them to do. A support document could help teachers better interpret the new curriculum document. This document would complement the new curriculum and give teachers guidance on how to use drama in a transdisciplinary context, should they want further support. The idea and relevance behind a support document is discussed further on in the chapter.

The final and fifth characteristic of a living model of drama is the possibilities for cross-curricular integration or how to integrate drama across the curriculum. Drama is inherently transdisciplinary in nature. It draws from various artistic, linguistic, and cognitive elements, making it a versatile tool for learning. By ‘siloeing’ drama into an individual subject, its potential to enrich other disciplines is often underutilised. When drama is integrated into multiple subjects, it can enhance the learning experience. Transdisciplinary learning aligns with the real-world experiences where problems and opportunities often require an understanding of

multiple disciplines. It prepares students to approach challenges with a broader perspective and adapt to various contexts. ‘Siloing’ drama into a separate subject can create artificial boundaries between subjects. Transdisciplinarity helps break down these barriers and allows for a more interconnected approach to education. The world is not divided into neat subject categories. Real-life challenges and opportunities often require a multidisciplinary approach. By teaching students in this manner, they are better prepared to address complex, real-world issues. I think there is a recent shift towards transdisciplinary education which fits with the proposed changes of the primary curriculum framework (2023) and participants in this research who mostly use drama as an integrated methodology. Not a new concept, Neelands (1993) says humanity has always integrated its knowledge but more research in the last twenty years has started to develop the advantages of transdisciplinary education more; MacBeath & Moos (2004); Russel *et al.* (2008); McDonald *et al.* (2019) and Burnard *et al.* (2022). This is discussed further in towards a living model of drama, part II, chapter 11.

In light of the complexities of teaching drama in our schools, there is no quick fix or straight forward solution. So how do I marry the responses from this research to how we can create a living model of drama? We need to build teacher confidence with a vibrant and active model of drama, and I believe that goes beyond an actual curriculum document. Going forward, initiatives like Teacher Artist Partnerships (TAPs), Creative Schools, Creative Clusters, Local Creative Youth Partnership, BLAST, documentation from bodies like the NCCA and Oide, and a new drama education specification are going to support the redevelopment of drama education and the retrofitting of this subject to Irish primary classrooms. In short, a range of supports need to be drafted in and used to include the new curriculum document, outside professional and local community-based projects and continual professional development (CPD). Included in this chapter, is an overview of the aforementioned characteristics of a living model for drama and to investigate how they can address some of the concerns raised in this research.

There has been an acceleration in the volume of research on children’s learning and development in Ireland over the last two decades. Ireland’s first longitudinal study of children (ESRI, 2022), highlights the impact of rapidly changing environments children are in, in relation to their social, economic and cultural environments. The NCCA (2020 & 2023) also illuminates policy developments that impact upon curriculum such as;

1. The provision of two years of universal preschool education (2010 and 2018)
2. The introduction of the National Childcare Scheme (2019)
3. The publication of *Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* (2009)
4. The *Framework for Junior Cycle* (2015)

These new policies have ‘led to changes in what children experience before beginning primary school and in what and how they learn on leaving primary school, highlighting the importance of connections and continuity in curricula along the educational continuum’ (NCCA, 2020, pg. 2).

Along with that, the Leaving Certificate programme is also undergoing significant change with the introduction of a few new subjects, including Drama, Film and Theatre Studies (NCCA, 2024a). This is a positive move in the recognition of the role drama can play in education, but also, in terms of its potential for future change. When this course is completed by the first cohort of students in Ireland, there will then be a demographic of students who have studied Drama, Film and Theatre studies as a Leaving Certificate exam subject. This is significant as it creates a valid place for drama on the curriculum. It enables the arts to be more credible for parents, schools and communities if it can be assessed and measured at state exam level.

A new document that is going to dictate what arts education could look like in the future is the primary curriculum framework, it is going to play an vital role in primary school curricula in the formative years of our students. The draft Arts Curriculum specification was published in February 2024. The Primary Curriculum Framework and the draft specification are discussed in the next section.

## **10.2 THE PRIMARY CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK**

The NCCA is responsible for developing the curriculum in Ireland. As previously discussed in chapter 2, the new curriculum framework, launched in 2020, with the revised document published in 2023. It is designed to provide a more flexible, personalised and student-centered approach to teaching and learning. In light of new research and changing times the NCCA has been working closely with a network of 43 schools comprising of 37 primary, 3 preschools and

3 post- primary schools. The NCCA meet regularly with teachers and principals to identify key research and bring their particular school experiences to the new proposal to design the redeveloped primary curriculum. The vision of the primary curriculum framework has eight principles of teaching and learning (figure 7).



*Figure 7; Principles of Learning, Teaching and Assessment (Reproduced from the NCCA, 2020, pg. 6)*

The principles are broad in nature to reflect the unprecedented change in the way we live and the way schools need to address each student’s different abilities, circumstances and experiences in varied school contexts. The NCCA states that these principles convey what is valued in primary education and what lies at the heart of high-quality teaching and learning in the primary curriculum.

The framework is organized around key competencies that are considered essential for learners in the 21st century.



Figure 8; Key Competencies (Reproduced from NCCA, 2020, pg. 9).

The new key competencies in the NCCA’s curriculum framework seek to equip children with the essential knowledge, skills, concepts, dispositions, attitudes and values which enable them to adapt and deal with a range of situations, challenges and contexts in support of broader learning goals (pg. 7).

Students need to learn how to navigate a wide variety of contexts and situations as they engage in the social world of their home, communities and schools and not only in childhood but as they mature into adolescence and adulthood. The aim of the key competencies is to enable children with these life skills. According to the Curriculum Framework, these competencies or capabilities link closely with *Aistear*’s four themes and the eight Key Skills in the *Framework for Junior Cycle* to make connections with children’s prior learning in preschool and future learning in post-primary school.

These key competencies are addressing our ever-changing educational environment in terms of recognising the need to teach children about their responsibility as a citizen (being an active citizen), addressing more prevalent mental health issues in our communities and the importance of taking care of ourselves, both physically and mentally (fostering wellbeing), as well as, the

advances in technology (being a digital learner). Being mathematical and communicating and using language can be read as a rebranding for maths and languages but being creative and learning to be a learner are welcome additions, that we aspire children to have competencies in. How these concepts are incorporated into the new curriculum and how teaching and encouraging students to be competent in these areas will look like is still unknown.

The new framework emphasises the importance of cross-curricular learning, where subjects are not taught in isolation, but rather, are integrated to provide a more holistic approach to learning for key stage 1 (junior and senior infants) and key stage 2 (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> class). This is relevant for my living model of drama as I look at a transdisciplinary approach to the arts in these chapters. There is also a greater emphasis on the use of technology in the classroom, with a focus on digital literacy and the development of digital skills. The framework also includes a new approach to assessment, where the focus is on ongoing assessment and feedback, rather than traditional summative assessments.

Arts education has the ability to play a role in all of those competencies and key principles. I discuss how arts education, with specific reference to drama, can enhance children's learning in chapter 2. Borgio *et al.* (2006), Brown and Ploydell (1999), Dinapoli (2009), Booth (1985) Tarlington (1985) and Dunn (2017), all explore the effectiveness of drama for languages. Martinez *et al.* (2000), Coleman & Davies (2018) and Coleman & Lind (2020) see drama as beneficial to assist the teaching of mathematics. Weaver (1999) found that recreating historical events through drama consolidates the children's learning. Drama develops cultural and social awareness as well as life skills (Toye & Prendiville, (2007), & (Perry, 2012). Drama and creative arts participation can enhance self and sensory awareness, stimulate thinking and encourage social skills, relationships and self-esteem (Reynolds, (2002), Pecaski- McLennan (2007), Mulryan-Kyne, (2005), Kempe and Tissot (2012) Stickleby *et al.*, (2011). Anderson, (2012), says that drama offers life skills that go beyond the stage and classroom.

There is a wealth of recent Irish research that mirrors these conversations and highlights the role arts education is playing in Irish schools including, co-creating drama McDonagh, (2014 & 2015), McDonagh and Finneran (2017). The advances and benefits of Teacher Artist Partnerships and Creative Schools, Kenny and Morrissey, (2016 & 2021), Kenny, (2017), Fahy & Kenny (2021) and Fahy (2023). Flannery and McCabe (2022) look at wellbeing and the arts in Irish primary education and McCabe's (2023) research on drama education, the drama

curriculum in Ireland and how humour plays a part in drama education are all contributing to the narrative of evolving arts education in Ireland.

As it stands, the new curriculum is a nascent document, with no significant discussion on it as it has yet to be published. It is unclear at this time when it will be launched and there will inevitably be implementation delays and issues but the aim is early 2025. There is currently a stakeholder group working on the framework and draft specifications were released in early 2024 (NCCA, 2023b). The new framework will require changes to teaching and learning practices, and some educators and schools may struggle to implement it effectively. There will be a need for additional training and resources to support teachers in implementing the framework. The framework emphasises the development of key skills, but does this jeopardise subject-specific knowledge? If we are focusing on key skills, are we still teaching mathematical concepts, grammar in languages and drama conventions? I have some concerns about the lack of clarity in the new framework, particularly in relation to drama; its role and how it is to be used in the classroom going forward. The NCCA publications (2020 & 2023) are vague in terms of describing drama, its projected use in the classroom and how it is expected to be taught. My last apprehension is about the amount of consultation, specifically with arts educators and drama practitioners on the future of arts education in our schools. The start of this section mentions the number of schools consulted as part of this process but it does not outline how many specialists or experts in each field were part of the open consultation and development group. I would like to know that experienced and published drama practitioners are contributing to this process to ensure the framework will outline what a high standard of drama education looks like.

The NCCA is currently consulting on the Draft Primary Curriculum Specifications in various areas, including Arts Education, as part of the redevelopment of the Primary School Curriculum. This consultation again involves various stakeholders through written submissions, questionnaires, focus group events, and participation in school networks. The new specification emphasises a broad experience in the arts as integral throughout a child's primary school journey. 'Arts Education occupies an important space in children's holistic education. By supporting and promoting artistic and creative development, the curriculum enables children to be creative, to express themselves, to explore their feelings and ideas and the perspectives and worldview of others' (NCCA, 2024b, pg. 1). It highlights the importance of engaging, inspiring, and enriching children's lives through art, drama, and music. These

subjects offer opportunities for broad-ranging experiences in the arts, including visual arts, media arts, and dance, playing a valuable role in children's experiences of childhood. This new approach towards increased integration underlines the intrinsic value of each art form while advocating for an integrated approach to enhance and develop learning across different art forms. The updates suggest a move towards leveraging the interconnectedness of art forms to enhance creative and expressive outcomes for students.

The draft specification for the arts outlines its commitment to the key competencies (figure 8), which includes fostering creativity, imagination, and a deeper appreciation for the arts as central components of a well-rounded education (NCCA, 2024b, pg. 9). In figure 9, you will see an overview of the key concepts for drama that are proposed by the draft specification. These are similar to the original drama elements from the 1999 curriculum which included; belief, role and character, action, place, time, tension, significance and genre. Movement and Sound are the two new additions with significance, genre and action being omitted in the new draft.

<b>Drama concepts</b>	
<b>Plot</b>	What happens in the drama.
<b>Role/Character</b>	Roles and characters in the drama, how they look/move/sound/behave and how they relate to each other.
<b>Place/Space</b>	Setting of the drama and how this is symbolised.
<b>Time</b>	Time period, the time of day, the duration or the sequence of the action.
<b>Tension</b>	Dilemma, conflict, issue, problem or mystery.
<b>Movement</b>	The use of the body in exploration and expression.
<b>Sound</b>	The use of sounds in exploration and expression.

Figure 9; Drama Concepts, Draft Arts Curriculum Specification 2024, pg. 12

A new focus from the draft specification is presenting the children as art makers; ‘in Arts Education, being an arts-maker emphasises children’s active participation and engagement in the arts across all stages of the primary school. This includes discrete learning experiences in Art, Drama and Music, and in learning experiences where more than one artform is combined in a meaningful way’ (NCCA, 2024b, pg. 21). The draft specification also advises that a toolkit will be provided to teachers with examples of children’s learning and support materials for

teachers. The aim of the consultation process is to gather feedback to inform the finalisation of the primary curriculum specifications for early 2025.

It has been more than twenty years since the Irish education system has had a curriculum review. The unprecedented change in Ireland and also globally will hopefully be reflected in a new curriculum plan. The way in which children learn has changed dramatically since I myself began teaching in 2008. A significant change in recent years is that classrooms are no longer silos. Classrooms are increasingly open and the ecology is increasingly altering in the way students interact across the school community, inside its walls, and outside into the local community. To put this in context, classrooms are now on nature walks, visiting local residential homes, having trips to other schools for sports, choir, chess tournaments and spelling bees, having tours of local businesses and factories, going to museums and theatres. Covid-19 halted this extension of the classrooms but we have seen a return to normality and it's not just children leaving the classroom, the door is open both ways, with more educational specialists entering the classrooms than ever before. The landscape of how drama works is both inside and outside the classroom. My living model of drama supports this shift in education that classrooms are no longer silos. This model is encouraging teachers and schools to actively engage with new arts in education practices within the classroom but especially beyond the classroom. A living model of drama includes children going out into their communities and living real life experiences. No curriculum document will be able to comprehensively and sustainably be able to deal with all the issues Ireland and the world faces. However, a new document on the horizon is very welcome, particularly for arts education and for clearer drama teaching guidelines. The next few sections give a brief overview on how outside expertise can aid and support drama education in the classroom.

### **10.3 TEACHER ARTIST PARTNERSHIPS**

Exploring Teacher-Artist Partnership (TAP), as a model of continual professional development (CPD) for Supporting and Enhancing Arts Education in Ireland (Kenny and Morrissey, 2016) was set up in response to the Arts in Education Charter (DAHG & DES 2013). The stated remit

of the initiative was TAP as a model of CPD to support and enhance arts education. TAP is a collaborative initiative that brings together artists and teachers to provide high-quality arts education experiences for students. The motivation behind TAP is to help to increase access to the arts for students and to further upskill teachers. TAP provides teachers with new skills and techniques to teach the arts, while also exposing them to different art forms and creative processes. TAP provides students with the opportunity to explore their creativity in a supportive and collaborative environment, to develop critical thinking skills by encouraging them to analyse and interpret art, and to develop their own creative ideas and expressions. A big advantage of TAP is that it creates connections between schools and local artists, cultural organisations, and community groups, building relationships and enriching the local arts community.

According to McDonald et al. (2019), TAP type projects enable teachers to build confidence by learning with an artist and found that teachers are enabled to accomplish more and at higher levels than when working alone. Although the opportunities for teacher CPD enabled by TAP are complex, they hinge on the formation of strong working relationships between teachers and artists. McDonald *et al.* (2019); Hall and Thomson (2016); Wolf (2008) and Kind *et al.*, (2007) discuss the relationships of teacher-artist partnerships in their research. In general, primary school teachers lack arts education skill and knowledge, which impacts on their confidence to teach the arts, according to international research (McDonald et al. 2019; Andrews 2016; Snook and Buck 2014; Bamford 2012; Kind et al. 2007). CPD programmes are one of the ways in which to address teacher expertise. In recent years, governments and arts organisations have looked to TAP type projects as a means to enhance arts education for students and as a means of teacher CPD. Currently TAP in Ireland is based on a model of one weeks CPD for the teacher and 1-2 creative arts lesson per week, in the classroom, with the artist and teacher, over a defined short period of time, typically 6-8 weeks. To enable TAP to be an effective mode of teacher CPD, teacher-artist partnerships need to be nurtured and sustained over a longer period of time (Kenny 2020; 2010; Bamford 2012; Bamford and Glinkowski 2010; Wolf 2008).

Kenny and Morrissey researched three TAP projects including a drama, a dance and a visual arts partnership in Ireland in 2021. They reported that the study shows how ‘TAP can enable highly motivated, arts disposed teachers to develop arts (pedagogical) expertise and to work in new ways’ (Kenny and Morrissey, 2021, pg. 74). The key enablers in this regard are the supports provided by the initiative, which facilitate the building of strong teacher-artist

relationships, risk-taking, reflection and dialogue. It is not being suggested here that every TAP experience will be hugely beneficial to all parties involved, but it is a resource available to teachers in Ireland, with a growing interest. It's a short-term project, that could have long term effects on the quality of the teachers' arts teaching and the students' arts learning. It offers the class teacher an opportunity to work with an artist, who has this specific area of expertise, that could increase the confidence and skills of that teacher in the area of drama. The scale of TAP in Ireland and the statistics of its outreach have recently been published. 'Since the beginning of Teacher Artist Partnership (TAP) in 2014 approximately 23,000 children have been impacted directly by their engagement in Residencies with their teacher and an artist, and over 42,000 children have benefited from their teacher's engagement with the programme' (Buggie, 2023, pg. 2). While there are documented pros and cons to the initiative as discussed in this section, the fact is that 23,000 Irish primary school students have had direct contact with an artist, while 42,000 have benefitted from their teachers' engagement in the programme. A vast increase in children's exposure to the arts in Irish primary schools.

#### **10.4 CREATIVE SCHOOLS**

TAP focuses on upskilling teachers and allowing students the opportunity to work with an artist. After the CPD course has taken place, typically during school holidays, TAP, usually, concentrates on one teacher and one class group for the duration of the project, in one classroom. While this initiative has many merits, it has a small scale, in that it only targets one teacher and one class group at a time. A living model of drama also needs to include projects on a larger scale, to upskill our teachers and provide more exposure to the arts at a whole school level. The Arts Council Ireland have made various contributions to promote arts education, which is discussed in chapter 2. Creative Schools is a flagship initiative of the Creative Ireland Programme to enable the creative potential of every child. Creative Schools is led by the Arts Council in partnership with the Department of Education and the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, and it aims to put the arts and creativity at the heart of children and young people's lives (Arts Council, 2023).

The Creative Schools programme provides funding and support to ECCE (Early Childhood Care and Education Programmes) primary schools, secondary schools and FE (Further Education) across Ireland to enable them to explore and develop the potential of the arts and creativity in their school communities. The programme is designed to support schools in developing a comprehensive and inclusive arts education programme, with a particular focus on engaging children and young people who may not have had previous opportunities to engage in the arts.

The terms arts and creativity are related but not synonymous. They are often used interchangeably, but they refer to different concepts. The arts typically refer to a specific category of creative expression that encompasses various forms such as visual arts or the performing arts like; dance, theatre and music. The arts are often associated with the creation of artworks or performances whereas creativity is a broader and more abstract concept. It refers to the ability to generate new and innovative original ideas. Through the Creative Schools programme, schools are supported to develop a Creative School Plan, which sets out a vision for the role of creativity in the school, and outlines a range of creative activities and initiatives that the school will undertake over a two-year period. Schools are supported by a Creative Associate, who collaborates with staff and provides expert advice and guidance on the development and implementation of their Creative School Plan. This is a particularly advantageous contribution of the Creative Schools programme, noted previously, as the lack of a written plan is often one of the stumbling blocks of arts education. The Creative Schools programme aims to promote a range of arts and creative practices, including visual arts, music, dance, drama, film, and literature, and to foster collaboration between schools and the wider arts community. Since its inception in 2018, Creative Schools has been established in over a thousand schools across 8 regions in Ireland. Over 230 schools were part of the process for the academic year, 2022-2023, (ArtsCouncil.ie, 2023). To date 971 schools, nearly a quarter of all schools in the country [~24%], have participated in the programme. The wide variety of activities undertaken by schools during their engagement in Creative Schools have included circus, architecture, heritage, music, comedy, literature, coding, traditional arts, science, horticulture, film, design, craft, drama, visual arts and dance (Murphy & Eivers, 2024).

Tania Banotti, The Director of Creative Ireland, explains, that:

‘The creative associate is not just going in [to schools] to talk about architecture or music or, even, say, biodiversity or coding. They are going in to explore the idea of creative engagement. They are asking: how can we help develop ways of creative engagement across the curriculum, across the environment of the school as a whole?’ (Keating, 2019).

Creative schools are also mirroring similar international projects in Norway, the UK and the USA, which identify the benefits, challenges, and tensions as a result of engaging with creative associates working with schools. In Norway, *The Cultural Rucksack* managed to bring artistic and cultural work to children in all parts of the country (Christophersen, 2015) and managed to keep the connection between students and arts open even when the artist was not there (Christophersen, 2013). However, Christopherson's research (2015, pg. 76) indicates that teachers did not always experience the same degree of ownership or influence as the artists.

A similar initiative was founded by the UK government in 1999. Creative Partnerships (CP) was set up to explore alternative cross-curricular methods of delivering creative learning (Clennon, 2009), where, schools and cultural institutions gave students the opportunity to develop their creativity (Wood, 2014). CP supported schools to fully embrace the arts and creativity, many parallels can be drawn to this project and the Creative Schools Initiative-Scoileanna Íldánacha, where creative agents worked with the teachers (Fahy & Kenny, 2021). The CP had a positive impact on schools, teachers and pupils but the lack of an effective national infrastructure resulted in an absence of support and guidance in the early stages of the Creative Partnerships initiative (Sharpe *et al.*, 2006).

In the USA, a music creative partnership called Steam Forward was provided by a professional orchestra and included – curriculum development workshops; artist integrated grade-level curriculum guides with multiple instructional units; teaching artist/classroom planning sessions and teaching artist training (Fahy & Kenny, 2021). Research undertaken on the Steam Forward project highlights the need of mutual collaborations from artists and teachers, and the critical role both should play in arts curriculum and planning, reiterates the importance of building relationships over time (Abeles, 2018).

‘Bearing this in mind, it is important that aspiring partnerships such as the Creative Schools Initiative-Scoileanna Íldánacha give teachers their full status as partners on the

creative journey, supporting and enabling them to successfully enhance arts education’ (Fahy & Kenny, 2021, pg. 7).

Overall, the Creative Schools initiative is a step towards promoting the arts and creativity in education in Ireland, and has the potential to make a significant impact on the lives of children and young people across the country. However, Kenny and Morrissey (2020) advise that time must be given to build trust, allow for risk taking and developing efficient ways of work in a partnership for Creative Schools to be effective in delivering arts education in schools. This must also allow time for reflective practices. Which is similar feedback to that noted about TAP. With this in mind, the impact of arts partnerships such as the *Creative Schools Initiative-Scoileanna Íldánacha* could hold strong promise to act as a professional development initiative for teachers, potentially supporting and enabling teachers in their enhancement of arts education (Fahy & Kenny, 2021). There are obstacles and work involved in these initiatives but a combination of them in various schools across Ireland can only improve the provision of arts in our schools.

## **10.5 CREATIVE CLUSTERS**

TAP targets individual teachers and Creatives Schools targets whole school communities, but in general, the arts in our schools need to be shareable, transferable and more accessible. Therefore, the proposed living model of drama also recommends engaging with arts projects on a bigger scale. Creative Clusters is designed to promote collaboration between creative industries and multiple schools working together: ‘Creative Clusters is a pilot initiative of the Department of Education, led by and in partnership with the 21 full-time education centres (Education Support Centres Ireland - ESCI) and funded through the Schools Excellence Fund – Creative Clusters Initiative’ (Gov.ie, 2023). Creative Clusters is also part of the Creative Youth Plan from Creative Ireland, which was published in 2017. The Creative Youth Plan aims to enable the creative potential and to give every child practical access to tuition, experience and participation in art, music, drama and coding (Gov.ie, 2023).

‘Creative Clusters seeks to promote new ways of collaboration between schools, and between schools and the arts and cultural sectors. These collaborations are designed to

improve teaching and learning, and to enable learners and teachers to develop their creativity' (Morrissey, 2023, pg. 4).

A Creative Cluster will typically consist of between three and five schools collaborating on the design, implementation, evaluation and dissemination of an innovative creative-learning project which supports them to address a common issue or challenge. 23 clusters, comprising of 71 schools, was established in 2018/2019 to take part in Creative Clusters. In the academic year of 2019/2020, 68 of these schools continued in the programme with a further 21 clusters, comprising of 76 schools, being added. To date (Feb 2024), Creative Clusters has given 591 schools in 168 clusters the opportunity to work together to develop creative projects and collaborate on new ideas based on their local experience and unique perspective (gov.ie, 2024). Morrissey, reports that as a national initiative comprised of local projects, Creative Clusters holds enormous potential for embedding creativity in Ireland's schools. Morrissey recommends further support and funding is required for current clusters, further training and professional development to include; regional cluster training days for all participants with bespoke training being provided for school principals and continuing research is required to inform future directions of the initiative (pg.11-12). This is still a relatively new project but Creative Schools is available and will be open for applicants over the next number of years. As Morrissey (2023) suggests continuing to embed Creative Clusters in schools' long term, offers plenty of opportunities for schools to work collaboratively and creatively with other schools.

The progression of Creative Clusters, from its establishment involving 71 schools to its expansion to 591 schools by February 2024, underscores its success in fostering collaboration and creativity among schools in Ireland. Morrissey's insights highlight the importance of continued support, funding, and professional development for sustaining and expanding the impact of Creative Clusters. The emphasis on regional training and research to guide future directions points to a strategic approach for integrating creativity into the educational landscape. As this initiative continues to evolve, it presents a vital opportunity for schools to engage in innovative, collaborative projects that enhance learning through creativity.

## **10.6 BLAST**

Another new development in promoting the arts in education is BLAST. In 2021, the DES developed an innovative Arts-in-Education Residency Programme called Bringing Live Arts to Students and Teachers (BLAST). It enables up to 400 new Arts-in-Education Residencies in schools each year (Arts in Education, 2023). In excess of 412 artists are currently trained and registered on the Online Register of Approved Artists, managed by the education center network nationally.

BLAST plans to support the integration of the principles and key skills outlined in the Arts in Education Charter and the Creative Ireland Programme (2017-2022). The scheme is similar to Creative Schools and Creative Cluster as it intends to give students the opportunity to work with a professional artist on unique projects, that are planned and developed between the artist, the teacher and the school. These projects are co-ordinated by the Education Support Centres Ireland (ESCI) network, which consists of 21 full-time education centres. This initiative supports children and young people for the future, where skills like the ability to connect and collaborate with others, engage in creative and critical thinking and practice inclusivity at every level will be paramount to peace, stability, sustainable economic growth and equality (Arts in Education, 2023).

The BLAST initiative represents a significant advancement in arts education, emphasizing collaboration between students, artists, and educators to foster creativity and critical thinking. As it aligns with the Arts in Education Charter and the Creative Ireland Programme, BLAST, akin to Creative Schools and Creative Cluster, serves as a cornerstone for preparing students for a future that values inclusivity, collaboration, and innovation. The ongoing support from the ESCI network underlines the commitment to integrating the arts into educational settings, highlighting the arts' crucial role in developing skills essential for societal well-being, economic growth, and equality.

## **10.7 LOCAL CREATIVE YOUTH PARTNERSHIPS**

The Local Creative Youth Partnerships (LCYP) is another programme funded by Creative Ireland, that aims to promote creativity and culture throughout the country. The LCYP is a collaboration between local Education and Training Boards (ETBs), local authorities, arts organisations, and youth services to provide opportunities for young people to engage in

creative activities and develop their artistic skills. The LCYP programme is focused on supporting and promoting creativity among young people, beyond primary school age and up to 24 years. It aims to provide a range of creative opportunities, including workshops, masterclasses, performances, and exhibitions, that are designed to encourage young people to explore their creative interests and develop their skills.

‘The remit of the partnerships goes beyond that of the “arts” and includes cultural and creative activity in all spheres – including areas such as heritage and the environment, STEM and digital creativity. The range of activities is limitless – everything from traditional and visual arts to coding and tech; music and opera to circus arts, comedy, street arts & spectacle; architecture & design to heritage; film, drama, theatre or dance to literature and creative writing’ (Creative Ireland, 2023).

Each LCYP is unique and tailored to the needs and interests of the local community.

The creation and development of the LCYP is key to realising the vision of the Creative Youth Plan – to enable the creative potential of every child and young person. The LCYP receive funding and training from the Department of Education, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport & Media.

The LCYP are a relatively new initiative but preliminary research conducted by the Laois Offaly Local Creative Youth Partnership said that despite the barriers to the program (the research identified barriers to participation such as transport, cost, lack of facilities and poor availability of creative programmes) that 720 young people were fully engaged in the design, delivery and evaluation of 23 diverse and exciting creative programmes in 2020. These programmes included; Photography, Music, Rapping, Dance/ Creative Movement, Film Making and Video Production, Coding / App Development, Podcasting, Radio Production, Creative Writing, Window design and dressing, Bio-diversity Projects, Ceramic Mural and Youth Theatre (LOETB, 2023).

The arts in education programmes discussed in these sections all have similarities and are available nationally, however, not all counties in Ireland will have them established and running yet. I have chosen the LYCP in Laois and Offaly (Counties in the Midlands of Ireland)

to offer an example of places that have adopted the LYCPs model, are researching the programme to improve it and identifying its successes. The initiatives discussed are worth mentioning as they are living initiatives, that hopefully will grow and improve to be adapted on a larger scale. These are examples of services available to bring the arts and drama inside and outside the classroom which is a characteristic of the proposed living model of drama.

## **10.8 YOUTH THEATRES/ LOCAL PROJECTS/LOCAL THEATRE**

Our classrooms are no longer silos and there are many arts-based activities happening in and around schools that teachers can access and use to breathe life into the arts. I would like to highlight the fantastic amateur societies, children's theatre and youth theatre groups that are continuously active across many towns and cities in Ireland. Plenty of schools attend Christmas Panto or an end of year production as a treat for students. Attending local theatre productions and theatre spaces has educational benefits for children to see how theatres operate, look at performance as an art and to engage with a live story line.

There are already a range of active initiatives embedded in schools that contribute towards a living model of drama. Many schools offer speech and drama classes both during and after school hours. In the context of the arts and education, speech and drama classes may be combined to offer students a comprehensive training in both spoken communication and theatrical performance. These classes may include exercises in voice projection, character development, improvisation, and script analysis, among others. It is common practice for Irish students to take part in recitals, speech and drama exams and *Féile* (Festival), as part of this tuition, both inside and outside school.

Stage schools, also known as performing arts schools, are educational institutions that offer training in a variety of performing arts disciplines such as acting, singing, dancing, and musical theatre. Stage schools provide a comprehensive training program that can include both practical and theoretical instruction. Many schools often work with local stage schools for school productions, summer camps or bringing local stage school teachers into class.

Traditionally, youth clubs in Ireland, are community-based organisations that provide social and recreational activities for young teenagers and are usually run by volunteers, funded by grants, donations, or membership fees. The primary goal of youth clubs is to provide young people with opportunities to develop their social skills, build self-esteem, and engage in positive activities. Youth clubs offer a wide range of activities, including sports, music, drama, arts and crafts, and community service projects. Youth clubs commonly meet in local schools or Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) halls and are sometimes affiliated with the local school.

Macra na Feirme is a national voluntary organisation in Ireland that focuses on the personal development of young people living in rural areas. It was founded in 1944 and has grown to become one of the largest youth organisations in the country, with over 250,000 young people passing through the ranks of Macra na Feirme since its inception (Macra.ie, 2023). Macra offers drama as one of the many activities available to its members. The drama programme provides members with an opportunity to develop their acting skills and to participate in drama competitions and festivals. Members of Macra can get involved in all aspects of drama production, including writing, directing, and acting. They can also participate in workshops and training programs to develop their skills and learn new techniques. One of the highlights of the Macra drama program is the annual National Drama Festival, which brings together teams from across the country to compete in a range of categories, such as one-act plays, sketches, and pantomimes. The festival is an excellent opportunity for members to showcase their talents and to see the work of other teams.

Scór na nÓg is a cultural competition for young people in Ireland, which celebrates traditional Irish culture and heritage. It is organised by the GAA and is open to young people under the age of 17. The competition covers a range of cultural activities, including music, song, dance, and drama, as well as traditional activities such as storytelling and recitation. It provides young people with an opportunity to showcase their talents, develop their skills, and celebrate their cultural heritage. The competition is seen as a way to promote Irish culture and to celebrate the talents and achievements of young people in the community. Scór, like youth clubs and Macra is focused on the local community with links to the local schools and GAA clubs.

A living model of drama is also concerned with a living model of arts and arts in education in general. There are a number of music initiatives embedded in Irish schools which enables arts education to be more accessible. The National Children's Choir (NCC) was founded in 1985.

It is a choral organisation in Ireland that brings together 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> class primary school students from around the country to perform together. The NCC aims to provide schools with a common repertoire of songs that more than satisfies many objectives of the music programme at the senior end of the primary school (NCC.ie., 2023). It has a reputation for excellence in performance with over 9,000 children performing annually in recent years across Ireland. In 2018/2019, 9,301 children from 139 Primary Schools nationwide, performed in 28 concerts singing 15 songs from Classical to pop, folk to musical theatre, traditional to newly composed, unison to 4 part harmony, and in many languages' (NCC.ie, 2023). The NCC also participates in international choral festivals and competitions. This provides its members with a unique opportunity to perform in front of international audiences, to meet other young singers from around the world, and to learn from experienced choral directors and conductors. Music Generation is another popular music programme offered to primary schools where local musicians come into schools one a week to deliver a broad music experience. This is unlike the traditional lessons of recorder and tin whistle, which historically have been typical of Irish school music lessons, in that, the musician introduces the students to a range of different instruments, offers opportunities for composing and teaches the elements of music. Music generation worked with 101,960 programme participants in 2022 (musicgeneration.ie, 2023, pg. 14). Music Generation is another example of the arts living inside and outside the classroom, like the NCC, as practices take place in schools, then students get a chance to meet other students and schools and come together for performances outside of school. Music Generation is Ireland's National Music Education Programme, initiated by Music Network, which is co-funded by U2, The Ireland Funds, the Department of Education and Skills and Local Music Education Partnerships. Music Generation is now a key action within the Creative Youth Plan from Creative Ireland (Creative Ireland, 2023).

If a school does not have access to TAP, Creative Schools, Creative Clusters, BLAST, LYCPs etc. they can still invite local artists to come in and work with children, engage in taking students to a theatre space more regularly, or start/continue with any of the established and recognised above programmes to promote a living model of drama. Engaging with TAP, Creative Schools, Creative Clusters, BLAST and these local community-based projects are all ways of promoting a living model of drama and arts education. They are initiatives to bring arts in education inside and outside the classroom, to engage the student's learning on a broader scale and to enhance their overall experience and exposure of rich arts education. Alongside engaging with some of these initiatives, based on the feedback from the teachers in this study,

they need more direction and support. The primary curriculum framework is a state, legislative document. It is not a pedagogical tool and it is not going to incorporate all the services and initiatives available to teachers. There is the need for a support document to demystify what drama is and how to use it in the classroom. The arts curriculum toolkit could provide such guidance when it is published as part of the incoming curriculum framework (NCCA, 2024b).

The described initiatives in this section exemplify a dynamic shift towards integrating arts more comprehensively within education, bridging classroom learning with community-based artistic engagement. This comprehensive involvement not only enriches students' arts education but fosters a collaborative, inclusive environment that extends beyond traditional classroom settings. To further bolster this evolving landscape, there's a clear need for enhanced support and guidance for educators, including practical resources and clear frameworks that demystify the application of drama and the arts in educational contexts.

## **10.9 A DRAMA EDUCATION SUPPORT DOCUMENT**

It is possible to implement transdisciplinary education while using a drama support document to help teachers understand what drama is and how to teach it. In fact, combining transdisciplinary education and a drama support document can be a powerful approach that ensures both interdisciplinary integration and effective teaching of drama. Transdisciplinary education is discussed in the next chapter but essentially it is an approach that goes beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries. It encourages students to explore complex, real-world issues by drawing on the principles, knowledge, and methods of multiple subjects. It fosters a holistic view of learning and problem-solving. A drama support document is a valuable resource that provides teachers with guidance and best practices for incorporating drama into their teaching. It offers educators a structured approach to understand what drama is and how to effectively teach it. The drama support document serves as a valuable tool to equip teachers with the necessary knowledge and techniques to integrate drama across subjects. Transdisciplinary education and a drama support document can complement each other effectively. The support document offers teachers the knowledge and tools to teach drama, while a transdisciplinary approach allows for the integration of drama across various subjects.

Every child needs a map of the world. Everyone needs a plan when starting a project. The lack of a coherent plan or map is probably the biggest stumbling block towards successfully realising drama education in Ireland. One of the main recommendations of a living model of drama is the need for a drama support document to provide a coherent plan or map.

Any and all of the ways it is currently being used in Irish classrooms, is not ineffective, it just needs guidance to ensure it is developing and progressing the student's drama skills. In the previous sections, TAPs, Creative Schools and outside agencies with particular expertise in drama are recommended to support teachers' ability to teach the arts and to enhance children's learning. However, ultimately the class teacher has the responsibility to deliver a high standard of arts education to their pupils. In conjunction with the new curriculum document and visits from outside experts to the classroom, teachers need a plan for drama and a document that is easily understood and implementable that sufficiently supports the teaching of drama. I hope the new curriculum document for drama education will be clear on what drama is, why we use it and how to teach it. However, curriculum doesn't tell us explicitly what to teach.

This is not a debate on what curriculum is or is not, so I am not going to discuss what curriculum is or is not in depth, but in short, curriculum focuses on learning goals (Alward, 2010). 'A curriculum is the plan that focuses and guides classroom instruction and assessment' (Squires, 2004, pg. 4), it is the container that holds the institutional knowledge of what was the best of past instruction (pg. 7). Squires says curriculum is not standards, tests, textbooks, or programmes. This point is very clear, curriculum is not standards, tests, textbooks or programmes. However, based on the participants in this research, there is a need for a drama programme. There is a need for a plan, one that allows for progression and students skills to be developed. A drama education document could compliment the new drama curriculum to enable teachers to be more confident and prepared to teach drama. In summary, we need to teach students to be drama literate and if we are to create a living model of drama, there is a need for a programme or a drama document is required.

In 2017, the PDST (now known as Oide) designed the fundamental movement skills to support the development of movement skills in young children, with a focus on the key skills of running, jumping, throwing, catching, kicking, striking, and balancing. The programme aims to make children physically literate (PDST, 2017), as these skills form the basis for more complex movement patterns later in life. It is aligned with the Irish primary school curriculum,

and is designed to support teachers in implementing the curriculum requirements in the area of physical education. The *Move Well, Move Often* programme gave clarity to teachers on what specifics are needed to teach students to be physically literate. A similar programme for drama could act as a guide for teachers to ensure students' progress in drama literacy. Drama literacy is not currently something the curriculum describes or aims to achieve but perhaps we should consider what drama literacy is and to help children become drama literate, like the concept of physical literacy. Enabling a child to be drama literate is going to depend on the new elements of drama or arts education in the primary curriculum framework. Broadly speaking it should aim to develop the child's skills in terms of confidence and competence to role play and improvise to exchange opinions and negotiation that naturally occur in group activities. Drama literacy is the ability to understand and engage with stories. It involves developing the skills and knowledge necessary to appreciate and critically analyse elements of drama, such as; plot, role and character development, belief, time, place, significance and genre. A drama education support document could be an initiative to support the development of drama literacy in young children, and to provide valuable resources and support for teachers in this area of drama education. A document like this which captures what the fundamental skills are for drama would be a very welcome resource to support and assist the new drama curriculum. It cannot be written or codified at this time, as it will have to be based on the new arts curriculum when it is published, for example, when the new elements of arts education are available, a document of this type can then be developed as it is meant to act as a support document to the new curriculum. As mentioned above, a drama curriculum document cannot be explicit, as it is more of a guideline. Therefore, in conjunction with the new drama curriculum, a new drama education document is required to explicitly address the issues raised by the participants in this research and why it is so hard to teach drama in Irish primary schools. But ultimately, to develop drama literacy.

Teachers need clear guidance on what a drama lesson should entail. Curriculum or framework will not offer this to teachers. It is expected that from teacher education and CPD that teachers are enabled to deliver effective instruction in all subject areas. Listening to the participants in this research and the research mentioned previously regarding lack of teacher confidence to teach the arts, teachers are clearly struggling to plan and deliver effective drama education. There needs to be more explicit instruction to support teachers and ensure a high standard of arts education, and that includes lesson planning. A drama education support document could

offer this guidance to teachers on how to model effective drama lessons which is discussed in the next chapter.

To conclude, a drama education support document, based on the new Irish drama curriculum would be a welcome resource to Irish education. It should include an easy-to-follow structure for successful drama teaching and allow for progression. All of the reputable educational companies in Ireland have a variety of book schemes for most subjects available to teachers and students. These books give teachers a readymade plan, often with the actual teaching plans done for them for September-June. Drama does not require a workbook to be produced, but the other subjects are so accessible with these resources available and drama needs the same accessibility. A tangible document, ready to use and easy to follow for those teachers who are not confident in drama education.

In terms of a planning document, I think we need a national programme to compliment the curriculum but planning at a local level is also required. I discuss the presence of a drama plan in their schools with the participants in the study. In Ireland currently, schools are required to have a school plan for each curriculum subject, it is yet unclear what the practice will be with the new curriculum and a transdisciplinary approach but it is fair to assume that the five broad curriculum areas in stage 1-4, will need policy and paperwork at a local level. This research shows that the majority of teachers are in schools that either did not have a school plan for drama or they were unaware whether their school had a school plan for drama. If a school plan is in place, it gives the staff a very clear road map of what the school aims for the subject are and how the school envisions it should be implemented. A typical school plan should include the rationale, visions and aims of the subject. The strand and strand units should be identified or curriculum links made evident. Strategies and drama conventions that will be used should be in the policy. How drama fits into a transdisciplinary approach, community links and health and safety should all be included in a drama policy. This is not a new recommendation. Schools should already be doing this. I am highlighting that this practice needs to be re-energised and re-implemented. An effective plan with ready to go resources might motivate teachers to be more proactive with drama and result in drama being a living thing in their schools.

In addition to a national drama document and a local drama document, understanding elements that underpin drama will make drama a living thing in schools. There is no definitive layout on how to plan drama but children should get a chance to be creative. The 1999 drama curriculum

identifies the pre-requisites for drama as; the fictional lens, building belief and a safe environment (NCCA, 1999c). All of these are still relevant but perhaps can be expanded upon and have the opportunity for more creativity. In *Lessons for the Living, Drama and the Integrated Curriculum*, Neelands *et al.*, (1997), have outlined an inspired guideline for the five elements that should be included in every drama lesson.

The Lure- a powerful stimulus to learning, something to lure the students into an immediate feeling of engagement. In drama, there are so many possibilities to create the 'Lure'. Drama lessons can be based on a picture, a phrase, a poem, a narrative, traditional stories, relevant events in their own life. The list is endless, teachers need to understand that they must create the lure to successfully engage students and want to participate in the drama.

Building Belief- is a pre-requisite for making drama and is necessary in the creation of drama. Essentially the drama teacher has very little to work apart from time, space and human presence. Belief has a critical role in establishing and maintaining the fiction (Neelands *et al.*, 1997, pg. 132).

Into Action- Here the concrete situation is established, and the characters within the drama begin to take on sharper definition. This is where the momentum of the drama starts to build up as the desire to find out 'what happens next' provides additional motivation and drives the exploration.

Development- This stage is more concerned with development of understanding rather than the development of the plot. The teacher's task is to try find the particular convention that permits the moment to be fully grasped by students.

Reflection- The class begins to develop its sense of the drama's meaning. 'Experience in itself is neither productive nor unproductive, it is how you reflect on it that makes it significant or not' (Bolton, 1979, pg. 126). Reflections gives a chance to assess the students' learning and for students to recognise the nature and significance of their felt understandings, to apprehend the sense of fiction that was created and consider if the form that was created provided a satisfying artistic and aesthetic experience.

I am not saying that this is the only way to conduct a drama lesson but simply highlighting what a successful drama lesson should have so teachers understand the elements required when planning for drama. A drama education support document is not a book of drama lesson plans (there are plenty of drama books available with this content) but the document should include a model of what a drama lesson would entail so teachers can use it, like the outline from Neelands *et al.*, (1997), to plan.

The section explores the pivotal role of a drama education support document in enriching drama teaching within the Irish curriculum. It emphasises the necessity for clear, structured guidance to empower teachers in delivering drama education effectively. The document should offer a path for educators to integrate drama seamlessly into the curriculum, thereby fostering drama literacy among students. This initiative, complemented by national and local planning documents, could offer an avenue to revitalise drama education, making it a vibrant, integral part of students' learning experience. The call for a document that not only delineates the essentials of drama but also aligns with new curriculum developments, signals a forward-thinking approach to cultivating a rich, engaging arts education landscape.

A Living Model of Drama (Part I), highlights how the landscape of drama has evolved and thanks to the Arts Council Ireland and Creative Ireland, all the new initiatives that have been embedded into our schools from outside supports in recent years. The next chapter, a Living Model of Drama (Part II), continues with recommendations on how to incorporate drama into Irish classrooms, with more of a focus on using drama across the curriculum to target all the different types of learners in our classrooms. In other words, aspects of arts and drama education that schools and class teachers can do independently.

## 11 TOWARDS A LIVING MODEL OF DRAMA (PART II)

*'Tomorrow's world is already taking shape in the body and spirit of our children* are words spoken a number of years ago by Kofi Annan, former United Nations Secretary General and Nobel Peace Prize winner. The words are a reminder of the importance of children's experiences in their formative years and how these experiences shape their lives as children and as adults into the future and the importance of dispositions and skills, such as resilience, creativity, innovation and critical thinking in the young and future generations' (NCCA, 2020, pg. 2). Kofi Annan's words echoes how essential these recent developments in arts in education are and how our education system needs to keep pushing the agenda to promote arts-based education. This chapter continues that conversation.

The participants in this research speak about drama as a standalone subject but report that it is mostly integrated. In this chapter, I want to explore this concept further. In Part I, of a living model of drama, I offer discourse that the ecology of drama and the arts have changed, and that, classrooms are no longer silos. I present an exemplar of how various new initiatives into teaching and learning can support making drama a living, breathing aspect of education with support from outside agencies. This chapter is going to address my internal conflict with identifying drama a standalone art form or an integrated methodology, as the ecology of this debate has also shifted throughout the life of this research.

### 11.1 DRAMA AS TRANSDISCIPLINARY EDUCATION

Drama can be an integrated methodology, an art form, and a living presence throughout the school as performance or artistry, as long as learning is at the heart. The language I am using to explain this can be described as *transdisciplinary*. A move towards transdisciplinary education is a result of a changing world, resulting in the need for education to also adapt. Being creative educators in the 21st century is inspiring, but increasingly complex; 'Educating children and young people to be positive, engaged, active, global citizens has become even more relevant in the face of the complex societal challenges of global health crises, climate change, disruptive geopolitical events, and rising inequalities' (Burnard *et al.* 2022, pg. 166). Our education system needs to work harder to address these issues and perhaps interconnecting

subject areas and collaborating skills and knowledges across multiple disciplines could be a fruitful direction for education. Drama lends itself to collaboration, not only in the obvious place of the arts, but arguably across all disciplines. Perhaps this is why I have struggled with placing drama firmly as a standalone subject or an integrated methodology, as it does both efficiently. It is clear from this research, why the participants struggled with implementing drama in their classrooms, because they were unsure where it should fit in the curriculum. As an advocate for the arts, I want to offer solutions and best practices to support teachers and face the challenges discussed in this research, while also taking into account the changing demographic of education to meet the societal changes mentioned by Burnard *et al.* Looking at drama through a transdisciplinary lens might help teachers to understand the role drama and the arts can play in their classrooms. Integration has always been an educational aim and recommended in the 1999 Irish curriculum but only occasionally realised how effective it is. The idea of transdisciplinary education can further develop how effective integration can be and increase the learning across many disciplines and not just one area like arts.

As AI technologies continue to take hold on how we learn and produce information, the world of education requires a permanent shift towards promoting creative abilities, independent thinking and the ability to develop our skills and talents outside of what AI can do for us. Caught between a future of environmental and social instability on the one hand, and technological and technocratic determinism on the other, the relationship between democracy and education is profoundly challenged (MacBeath & Moos, 2004). I want to begin by offering a definition of transdisciplinarity:

A practice that transgresses and transcends disciplinary boundaries . . . and seems to have the most potential to respond to new demands and imperatives. This potential springs from the characteristic features of transdisciplinarity, which include problem focus (research originates from and is contextualised in “real-world” problems), evolving methodology (the research involves iterative, reflective processes that are responsive to the particular questions, settings, and research groupings) and collaboration (including collaboration between transdisciplinary researchers, disciplinary researchers and external actors with interests in the research).  
(Russell *et al.*, 2008, pg. 460–461)

Transdisciplinarity is not a new concept. STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) and now STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics) offer frameworks for the practice of transdisciplinary teaching and learning. The STEAM agenda seems to be growing in Australia. McDonald *et al.* (2019) share examples of transdisciplinary practices that include collaboration amongst teachers and teacher educators. Burnard *et al.* also look at the concept of transdisciplinary education through the lens of STEAM and argue that creative educational experiences are part of a multiplicity of ways of both making sense and making a difference to the world, but they are not seen as separate endeavours. Making sense and making a difference to the world are a ‘form of transdisciplinary creativity enacted through what we introduce here as “diffraction,” both a methodological and a pedagogical tool’ (2022, pg. 170). I am not going to focus on the meaning of the scientific word, diffraction, but I am highlighting how Burnard *et al.* have married methodology and pedagogy together to from their argument that transdisciplinary education is bringing methodology and pedagogy together. They also note that this is a period of change, and a move towards transdisciplinary education requires time for teachers to play with it and become comfortable with teaching, learning and interacting with teaching across multiple disciplines at one time: ‘Teachers should allow time and space for such explorations and interruptions and should actively engage in “making with” and co-authoring new ways of doing and knowing, with each other and with their students (Burnard *et al.*, 2022, pg. 192) Again, not an entirely new concept as the Irish Curriculum has had integration and thematic planning included in the 1999 curriculum, but the primary curriculum framework is moving toward subject areas in key stage one and key stage two including; languages, arts education, STEM, well-being etc. This is a step further than integrating two subjects and brings multiple subject areas together, while it is apt to describe it as transdisciplinary, however, it is still a form of integrated learning. A transdisciplinary approach to education is an extension of integrated learning. It is not a new concept but a redeveloped way of way looking at integrated learning to include broader subject areas and investigate how we can get these subjects working together like Arts and STEAM have already begun achieving.

This chapter, is aimed at highlighting all the ways we can incorporate drama into our classrooms to develop drama literacy among our students. As discussed in chapter 2 and chapter 10, the primary curriculum framework is going to change the landscape of how we teach drama with key stages one and key stages two moving towards a transdisciplinary education approach. Again, this is not a new concept, Neelands *et al.*, tells us that humanity

has always integrated its knowledge; ‘throughout history, in our attempts to solve the problems that beset us and answer the questions that trouble us, we have always brought a variety of perspectives to bear in our struggles to make sense of the world, and our place within it’ (1993, pg. 13). I discuss curriculum overload in this research, and a transdisciplinary curriculum can be a positive response to the situation and encourage transference of knowledge across different subjects in the classroom and out into the wider world. ‘Integration is understood to be relevant, context-based learning which emphasises the interconnectedness of knowledge, a curriculum, subject to public scrutiny, which offers an objective and comprehensive account of what is to be included, but problematises that which is to be learned’ (Neelands et al., 1993, pg. 16). This is a good description of integration which can be extended into how a transdisciplinary curriculum can work. As well as recognising drama as an art form, drama lends itself to transdisciplinary learning impeccably and has been discussed as a teaching methodology and pedagogy throughout this research. By moving more towards a transdisciplinary approach to how we use the arts in education, we will demystify the ideas around what drama is and how to use it. Therefore, this last chapter highlights how to use drama across multiple disciplines, in the hope that it offers an idea of what transdisciplinary education could look like.

Drama caters for all the different types of learners in your classroom and can also adapt itself into all curricular areas. Along with the implicit understandings to use outside expertise and calling attention to the need for additional resources, we also need to focus on what we already have. Teachers are already skilled and able to cater for the multiple levels of abilities in their classrooms. Drama can be used as a transdisciplinary approach and also cater for a varied and mixed classroom. Figure 9, demonstrates who drama is for in our classrooms. It illustrates how

drama can be transdisciplinary, reminds us to use drama we may have forgotten about and some new concepts I discuss in this chapter. All of them are aimed at different types of learners.



Figure 10; Drama Could Be For...

In the next few sections I will give an overview of how drama can fit into transdisciplinary education and how it is suitable for different types of learners.

### 11.1.1 INTEGRATION FOR IMAGINATION

Integrating drama-based activities into the curriculum with other subjects is recognised for encouraging and motivating students to use their imagination in various contexts (Benson, 1979, McCabe, 2007, Murchan and Shiel, Perry 2012, Fleming et al., 2004, Bolton, 2007, O'Toole & Dunn., 2009, Kempe, 2013). As a component of drama education, Cremin and Roger (2013) emphasise the value of work that enriches the imaginative development of learners. Evidence from a growing body of literature supports the assertions revealed by Cremin and Roger attributing drama as vital in triggering students' imaginative involvement. Ting (2013, pg. 2) elaborates on teachers using role-play to enable students to use their imagination to develop characters. Evidence provided by Ting outlines that the involvement of students in drama activities, like role-play, enables students to delve into imaginative worlds and use what they learn to foster their relationships and communications with those around them. Reports by the INTO (2009), and Kabilan and Kamarudin (2010) in their studies report that through the use of role play and classroom activities in drama enable teachers to motivate their students to read, write, and even excel in extra-curricular activities.

Keleş (2015) points out how using drama as an effective instructional strategy provides a favourable learning environment for students. Similarly, Isyar and Akay (2017), support findings presented by Keles by stressing the relevance of drama for teaching other subjects, such as mathematics, language, and art. Evidence from both studies indicates that drama is effective in improving creativity and supporting individual development skills needed in reading, writing, and acquiring new information. Teachers interviewed in this study reveal that the use of drama as a teaching method not only promoted positive attitudes among the students but also provided a platform for delivering instructions to students.

### 11.1.2 ORAL LANGUAGE & PUBLIC SPEAKING

There is a new language curriculum (NCCA, 2019) for English and Irish in Irish primary schools. Adopting the new language programme, which has initiated a shift in primary

education aims to ensure that primary school students learn and acquire new skills (Kiely, 2017; Lenihan *et al.*, 2016). The implementation of the new language curriculum involves fostering the communication, engagement, and listening skills of the young learners using appropriate playful learning experiences.

According to Cregan (2012), empowering teachers with the requisite knowledge of the current content of language is key for triggering and enhancing students' expected oral language development. These assertions remain relevant as teachers are expected to ensure that their students not only use coherent sentences but also demonstrate impeccable skills when it comes to constructing complex sentences. Murphy (2006) places importance on activity-based classrooms by using play for oral language in the Irish infant classes. Stagnitti *et al.* (2016), highlights the relevance of play on oral language in a study conducted to show the benefits of a child-centred pedagogy versus a traditional teacher-centred model of learning. Using role play, as part of oral language, can further develop children's language skills among the young learners as stipulated in the new curriculum. Oral language development naturally includes public speaking. The integration of drama with public speaking can promote confidence when students stand up and speak in front of their peers. Findings from the thematic analysis in the current study emphasises the relevance of drama-related activities, such as role plays in the classrooms to build self-esteem, creativity, and imagination among students.

Nguyen's (2017) study aims to provide the insights required for promoting and enhancing positive attitudes, oral communication skills, and interactions among students. Findings from this study report that students demonstrate positive attitudes, such as confidence in public speaking as they take part in the drama-based role play activities applied by the teachers.

Public speaking is encouraged from primary students to allow for interactions with their peers and communication with their teachers. The new language curriculum (NCCA, 2019) encourages teachers to use role play and drama-related activities with their students. In their studies, Lee (2015) and Lin (2015) report similar findings to Nguyen (2017) as they report that drama education contributes positively to students' attitudes and public speaking skills. These studies outline the relevance of drama-related activities in addressing shyness, lack of confidence, and disinterest among students. Oral language development does not require a lot of space, planning or time. We are already doing it in classrooms with activities like news time and through questioning and asking students for feedback on their learning.

### 11.1.3 LITERACY, LANGUAGES AND HISTORY

Drama can be an integral component of the literature curriculum (Güngör, 2008; Russell-Bowie, 2013). Research reports that the adoption of drama-based activities and role play form a foundation for improving students reading, speaking, vocabulary, and even listening abilities. Güngör's (2008) study aims to understand the effects of drama and traditional methods on primary school students based on their use of reading strategies and attitudes towards reading. Despite the fact findings from this study report no significant difference between students of the two groups interviewed, those from the experimental group demonstrate positive perceptions towards the use of the drama-based strategies (pg. 21). The results indicate that drama class strategies have a high likelihood of demonstrating increased positive attitudes particularly towards reading. Results and findings from Güngör outline that when students are exposed to opportunities in their learning environment, such as dramatic activities, they easily improve their attitudes towards learning and reading. Teachers who wish to achieve the objectives of fostering the literacy of their students, therefore, should ensure that the learning environment consists of drama-based role-play strategies for motivation purposes.

In their study, Nordin *et al.* (2012), present similar findings to Güngör (2008). Students' engagement with drama activities fosters positive outcomes as they are motivated to use the targeted language among themselves. In this study, participants reveal that teaching with drama activities provide fun for second language learners who actively participate in their learning and the acquisition of the four skills, namely, reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Zyoud (2010) discusses a school, where English is a second language and finds that drama activities are effective in fostering the four language skills. All of the participants in this study are teaching in a multi-cultural setting and are supposed to equip themselves with the appropriate knowledge and skills needed to ensure that students achieve the stipulated goals of reading and literacy. The presence of two languages in Ireland (and often a third language as well) requires teachers to balance students receptive and productive skills.

Greenfader and Brouillette (2013) shares similar sentiments by elaborating on how the integration of drama and dance promotes and builds the foundation for improving the literacy skills in the development of Language among learners. In the study, Greenfader and Brouillette (2003), expound on the teacher-artist partnerships, (discussed earlier in the project), which is attributed as a professional programme aimed to help teachers use drama and creative activities to enhance students reading and verbal interaction within and outside the classroom. According to Greenfader and Brouillette (2003), the implementation is a fundamental strategy for the successful implementation of drama where teachers are prepared appropriately before they integrate drama with other subjects. Macy (2004) elaborates on Rosenblatt's transactional theory of reading as a strategy for using drama to promote reading among the students. Macy identifies that novel study is enhanced by teachers using various types of drama strategies to enhances their students' reading skills.

The idea of using drama to teach history can be attributed to the first use of drama in a class-context by Dorothy Heathcote as reported by Anderson (2012, pg. 33). Primary school teachers are given the opportunity to mould young learners into historical thinkers through the use of drama-based strategies in the subject of history. Smith and Herring present 'walk in their shoes' as they create a historical event through dramatisation to depict the voyage of Christopher Columbus (1993, pg. 425). In the lesson, students are asked to sit with their eyes closed as the teacher takes the leader role and explains that they are the crew members. This lesson allows the children to visualise the crew members they have chosen to represent with the teacher assuming the role of Columbus on the historical voyage. The events that follow allow students to get acquainted with historical facts that promotes character development as they ask their teacher, 'Columbus' questions during the voyage. Using drama to teach history can bring events to life. Farmer (2011), also elaborates on the use of role play as a history teaching strategy where the teacher is in role as a king and the students are serfs. The teacher, as king, is the focal point and can lead the drama to provide an environment that is conducive for learning history and exploring effective drama-based role playing. Strategies such as these will elevate the learning process by placing the students at the centre of the history lessons where students generate new ideas and interact with people from other cultural backgrounds or different eras in time. According to Smith and Herring (1993), "drama is a potentially powerful tool for connecting students with learning content" (pg.18). They further assert that a classroom teacher must take the initiative of creating an instructional environment with the use of drama to connect what students know with what they are pursuing or intending to know.

The action research project conducted by Cochran (2015) studies the effects of role-playing strategies to motivate students to learn history. The study discusses the viability of implementing drama as an effective teaching tool to teach history. In the study the students recognise the significance of the quality learning that was far beyond the factual material provided in the class. In the study, Cochran adopts the ‘Mantle of the Expert’ methodology, which was developed by Dorothy Heathcote in the 1980s (pg. 10). ‘Mantle of the Expert’ is an inquiry-based drama-based strategy which allows students to assume roles of experts. It elicits learning qualities such as; creativity, teamwork, decision making, and thinking like a historian (pg. 38). Participants reveal in this study that they regularly integrate history and drama in their classrooms. Despite the fact that the status of drama in the primary curriculum in Ireland has been disputed over the years, the participants interviewed for this study reveal positive outcomes regarding the teaching and learning processes when using drama and history together.

#### 11.1.4 STEAM

STEAM is a relatively new acronym in education, it refers to the combination and synergistic interplay of science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics. One might consider STEAM to just be an extension of STEM but Burnard *et al.*, (2022), suggest that it should be understood; ‘largely as the assemblage of scientific, technological, and artistic disciplines driving the promise of employability and economic growth, a rich and lively debate has developed in the literature on the particular collocation and/or definition of the arts’ (pg. 169). Ranging from visual and performing arts, digital media, aesthetics and crafts, and even the liberal arts and humanities, the ‘A’ in STEAM can serve a range of different purposes (Colucci-Gray *et al.*, 2017). The arts can be used as a vehicle to share and encourage the general public to engage and witness science, engineering, technology and maths in a creative way. This concept is supported by those seeking to infuse creativity into science by means of the arts, to add to science innovation and its impact potential (see Thurley, 2016, Segarra *et al.*, 2018; Brown, 2019). Approaches to encourage science in a more creative way are also well documented by Colucci-Gray *et al.*, (2019).

Greenwood (2013) promotes the approach to transdisciplinary education. He reports positive outcomes from the revised primary curriculum in Northern Ireland, with the integrated teaching of history, science, and technology. Teachers interviewed for this study reveal that integration is crucial to improving the performance and learning outcomes among the students. Evidence from Greenwood (2013) emphasise that using a pragmatic approach alongside a reflective approach in planning for their lessons is pivotal for ‘curriculum-making’ (pg. 443). Evidence from Drake & Reid (2018) reveal that bringing together digital competencies and integrated curriculum can create a rich learning environment, capabilities needed to match the learning expectations of students in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Shively and Palilonis’ (2018) study examines design thinking as a strategy to develop digital literacy. Employing design thinking as an approach to foster digital literacy, such as critical thinking, problem solving, and producing meaningful content, may help develop methods to integrate digital literacy across the curriculum (pg. 212).

Elwin *et al.* (2019) provide evidence on the results emanating from the decision to teach mathematics and science subjects using drama-based strategies. The study reports the development of a favourable learning environment where the students harness their creativity and problem-solving skills. They suggest that the integration process also requires the teacher to expand their knowledge and teaching approaches purposely to deliver their teaching objectives. Serdyukov (2017) discusses the relevance of equipping primary students with desirable skills for addressing future problems. Findings from a study carried out by Siekmann (2016), reveal how the integration of STEM with drama-related activities was key in supporting and enhancing practical and creative abilities.

Technology is a core part of STEAM. By leveraging technology, drama teachers can create engaging and immersive learning experiences that are accessible to students regardless of their location or circumstances. While technology cannot fully replace in-person interaction and physical performance, it can be a valuable tool for delivering drama education in a variety of contexts. Many drama teachers adapted to the new online environment during Covid-19, finding new and innovative ways to engage their students and deliver effective drama education (discussed in chapter 2). Technology will continue to play a role in supporting young people's artistic development.

Adefila *et al.* (2023) in their study:

‘highlight the holistic and dynamic structure of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary education showcasing how a carefully designed educational approach focused on authentic learning becomes a useful catalyst and scaffold. Learners can engage with a learning environment that is relevant, challenging and meaningful’ (pg. 487).

While they note that research on transdisciplinary education is scant, as an approach to learning that will change over the coming years. The new Irish curriculum is proposing this approach and as it is expected to be rolled out in the next few years, Irish schools and teachers will soon be adapting transdisciplinary teaching and learning into their practice more and more.

## **11.2 RE-INTRODUCING TRADITIONAL CONCEPTS OF DRAMA: EMBRACING THE WISDOM OF THE PAST**

A core aspect of the proposed paradigm shift in drama education is the re-introduction and celebration of traditional concepts that may have become hidden or forgotten in modern curricula. It is an affirmation that, despite the evolving landscape of education, there is intrinsic value in the "old" that should not be discarded, but rather carefully preserved and integrated with the "new." Traditional types of drama, such as mime, dance, physical theatre, and improvisation, have, over generations, proven their worth as invaluable tools for personal and academic development. They have equipped individuals with essential skills, fostered creativity, and provided a holistic understanding of the art of drama. By rekindling these traditions, we ensure that our students not only grasp the contemporary trends in drama but also have a strong foundation rooted in the enduring techniques that have stood the test of time.

One remarkable facet of traditional drama techniques is their seamless alignment with transdisciplinary education. They possess inherent characteristics that enable students to connect various domains of knowledge. Another striking attribute of traditional drama forms is their ability to cater to all types of learners. The kinetic and sensory nature of these techniques appeals to students with diverse learning styles. It ensures that no one is left behind and that all

learners have opportunities to shine, regardless of their strengths or challenges. As we move forward, let us embrace the idea that the preservation of tradition is not a stagnant endeavour but rather a dynamic and evolving commitment to ensuring that our children inherit the best of both worlds—time-honoured wisdom and cutting-edge innovation.

A mime is a theatrical medium that involves acting using only body motions. It is a form of physical theatre that involves using gesture, facial expression, and body language to convey meaning and to tell a story. Unlike traditional theatre, which relies on dialogue and text, mime is a non-verbal art form that relies solely on movement and expression. It is a useful technique to get shy and reluctant students to participate in drama through the use of mime, something that wasn't reported to be used in classrooms by participants. Athimoolam (2013) reports that using drama in education is key in facilitating active participation among students. Athimoolam's study purposely aims to equip teachers with a blueprint of implementing the use of drama-related activities, such as mime, that is expected to improve learning among shy students. Facilitating mime as an integral component of drama in education can motivate and build the confidence of shy and reluctant students. Bahloul (2014) also offers effective ways to implement mime in schools. The use of mime in schools can offer students an alternative communication strategy aided through the medium of body motion, such as the use of gestures. Ünlüer & Özcan (2013) and Ünlüer *et al.*, (2017) discuss the benefits of mime and gesture in schools and their 'gesture shadow mapping' could be an avenue for shy reluctant learners.

Dance is a form of expression that intertwines movement, music, and emotion. It bridges the gap between physical education, creative arts, and emotional intelligence, offering a comprehensive educational experience. It is a highly stylized form of movement that is often performed to music. It can be choreographed or improvised, and may incorporate a wide range of styles and techniques, including ballet, modern dance, jazz, hip hop, and more. Dance and mime are similar arts forms as they both use body movement to communicate. As outlined in the Making Great Art Work Dance Strategic plan 2018, by the Arts Council, in the area of Young People, Children and Education the Arts Council promises to, 'advocate in partnership with the dance sector for the removal of dance from the Physical Education Curriculum to establish it as a separate subject of study' (Arts Council, 2018, pg. 4). This is currently under review with the primary curriculum framework.

One of the unique aspects of dance as a form of expression is that it is not bound by language or cultural barriers. Dance can be understood and appreciated by people from all over the world, regardless of their background or spoken language. LaMotte (2018) in her research on the benefits of dance in an integrated curriculum reports that the majority of the students are more aware of the environment and their bodies after taking part in dance in their elementary school and that the dance-integrated teaching method facilitated greater student learning and student engagement. These findings are comparable to previous similar research on the benefits of dance conducted by Gullatt (2008) and Overby *et al.* (2005 & 2013).

Physical theatre is not a common occurrence in Irish primary schools but it does embody mime and dance which are useful ways to incorporate drama and the arts into a living model of drama and to highlight how concepts we are already using can be extended into theatre in education. Physical theatre is a broader term that encompasses a range of performance styles and techniques that use movement as a primary means of expression. It often combines elements of dance, mime, and other physical disciplines to create unique and engaging performances that challenge and inspire audiences. According to AC Physical Theatre, physical theatre allows for nonverbal communication, expands creativity, allows for abstract thinking and showcases the importance of humanities. Being able to physically tell a story or represent an idea is a sharp contrast to the information overload that has become all too dominant in the current world (AC Physical Theatre, 2018).

Improvisation encourages spontaneity and quick thinking, skills that are indispensable in problem-solving and adapting to unexpected challenges. It is a key element in fostering creativity and innovation across all subjects. Derived from a Latin word 'Improvisus', which means 'the unforeseen' or 'to provide the unexpected', Mæland and Espeland (2017) expand on the understanding of improvisation from different contexts and point out that improvisation involves the practice of being open to new perspectives and actions with spontaneous leads from the audience at a particular moment. In a learning environment, improvisation can take place in small groups or as a whole class. Evidence from research conducted acknowledges improvisation as a powerful teaching tool that promotes creativity, role playing, intuition, and critical thinking among other skills and abilities. Most students love to act, play make-believe and possibly enter into a fictional world (Berk and Trieber, 2009).

Holdhus *et al.* (2016) identifies the challenge that teachers experience in varied pedagogical situations with improvisation. Toivanen, Komulainen, and Ruismäki (2011) indicate that drama and improvisation provide teachers with strategies where students take a partial role in guiding the direction of the class. In terms of the uses and benefits of improvisation, Adebisi and Adelabu (2013) reveal that this strategy can be adopted as a tool for developing students' competency in English. Any topic you have been learning about, you can ask students to perform an improvisation where the conversation must show of all their new knowledge and demonstrate their learning. You would be layering key competencies with integrated subject areas, while assessing, all through the medium of drama.

In my quest to re-energise drama education, I recognise that innovation need not dismiss the wisdom of the past. By reintroducing traditional concepts of drama, we bridge the generations, acknowledging the merits of time-tested techniques and making space for coexistence of the old and the new. It is in this blend of tradition and innovation that we pave the way for a comprehensive, transdisciplinary, and inclusive approach to drama education that can truly empower learners to face the challenges of the future. Dance, mime, physical theatre and improvisation are all vibrant and dynamic performing arts disciplines that offer unique opportunities for artistic expression and creativity. Whether performed on stage, in a classroom, in an after-school activity or as part of a larger theatrical production, these disciplines have the power to captivate and engage audiences of all ages and backgrounds and are useable for teachers trying to incorporate a living model of drama into their classrooms. The reason I discuss them here as they are strategies to be used in my new modes of drama.

### **11.3 NEW MODES OF DRAMA**

#### **11.3.1 H.I.D. (HIGH INTENSITY DRAMA)**

As this chapter seeks to offer accessible possibilities as to how drama can be incorporated into the curriculum these are ways to make drama a living thing in classrooms, without having to upskill and spend a lot of time planning. A living model of drama intends to bring drama into the classrooms as seamlessly as possible, overcoming the roadblocks highlighted by the

research participants. High intensity drama or HID is a concept I have developed as a way of quickly and easily incorporating drama into the curriculum while addressing the issues of ‘lack of space’, ‘lack of training’ and ‘lack of time’ made clear by the research participants. HID is a combination and new take on the popular cardio concept of HIIT (High intensity interval training) and DEAR time (drop everything and read). HIIT is a quick, high tempo exercise class and DEAR is a common lesson break in class where students are expected to read quietly to themselves. By combining the two, High Intensity Drama or HID is meant to be fun, fast paced and exciting like HIIT, and also meant to be spontaneous and not overly structured like DEAR time. The complexity of the classroom environment contributes to the need for changes in strategies regarding how students are motivated and encouraged to learn in primary schools. HID is aimed to provide teachers with ideas on how to tailor effective quick drama or warm up games to break up class time. While there is a specific time allotted for physical education, HID is an opportunity to exercise throughout the day, stimulate students’ imagination, act as a lesson interval or simply a lesson break.

Teachers can adopt ways of breaking up the lessons from current growing literature on drama exercises and warm up games alongside tailoring their own teaching strategies. Martínez *et al.* (2016) recognise HIIT activities, such as sprint, walking, and jogging as some of the cardio type exercises that can be used by teachers in physical education lessons. Similarly, the concept of HIIT can be used at any time of the day and can incorporate any drama technique. For example, the teacher could request students to get into groups and start an improvisation on a topic they are currently learning about. After two minutes, the teacher could blow a whistle and ask the students to quickly change groups and give them a new topic. The drama technique could be changed to freeze frame, mime or the teacher could visit different groups and insert themselves into the group as teacher in role. None of these ideas require planning, reorganisation of the room or specific expertise or skills on the teacher’s part. The children may be a bit apprehensive at the start but if they are told to stand up for HIIT regularly, they will soon learn what to expect and become very comfortable with the concept. There are multiple possibilities with how this can be orchestrated and can be done in the middle of a lesson, on the yard or as a lesson interval and only has to last for five or ten minutes. Therefore, the combination of HIIT and DEAR to create HID could stimulate and promote students’ imagination through intermittent breaks where necessary to ‘lighten-up’ the learning environment and give students a quick and easy opportunity to practice some drama techniques.

### 11.3.2 DRAMA STATIONS!

In my own practice time and space became an issue for me when I became a Special Education Teacher (SET) as the students under my care needed intensive intervention with their literacy skills and maths skills. There are many productive ways to use drama to help with literacy and maths but space was a challenge as well. I had an office where I worked with small groups, but it was not a space for ample movement or that allowed increased noise levels. My learning space was a small corner of a learning support classroom where four other teachers also worked in, with all different class levels and abilities at any given time. Not optimal for drama education and it certainly hindered creativity and performance. I decided to use 'Drama Stations' to overcome my time and space issue. Covid-19 interrupted that initiative due to social distancing and the pods/group systems in Irish schools for two whole school years but we have returned to normality now and this is an achievable way to incorporate multiple drama conventions in a short lesson timeframe when there is an absence of space for movement.

As this chapter seeks to offer accessible possibilities as to how drama can be incorporated into the curriculum, station teaching is a very attainable way to teach multiple drama techniques at one time while also integrating it with other subjects. Station teaching has grown in popularity in recent years in Ireland but is not a totally new concept in the Irish education system (Ó Murchú and Conway, 2017). Station teaching is a practice where the class is divided into small groups that move around the room to different learning stations every few minutes. Kracl (2012), reports that learning stations provide students with a classroom environment that is characterised with exciting and interesting experiences that enhances their learning. The beauty of station teaching is that each station may only last eight to ten minutes in most cases, three stations provides the class with a lesson of thirty minutes drama instruction. The drama stations also offer the teacher an opportunity to tailor each station according to students' needs. Grouping learners is another component of employing drama stations into the classroom, which ensures that students are involved actively in the learning process.

The implementation of drama stations should prepare teachers to focus on integrating appropriate drama-related activities in each workstation to engage students. The following is an example of how drama stations could be integrated. As Milord (2007) highlights the benefits of drama and theatre on storytelling and reading, station 1 could be a reading station where the

group have a story to read or be read to. Station 2 could give the students an opportunity to storytell where they have to provide an ending to the story that they heard on station 1 or offer an alternative ending. Station 3 requires students to create three freeze frames to tell the story. Station 4 is a role play or improvisation of the story and station 5 is a news report where the students have to perform a news reel for the story. The more able students start on station 5; they have no context and must make up their own content for the news reel and work backwards to same story line. The weaker group are given a story or script to work with from station 1. This can be adapted and added to in so many ways and like HIID it does not require a huge amount of planning and preparation, and also similarly to HIID, the students will become more comfortable and confident the more it is practiced.

#### **11.4 SUMMARY OF A LIVING MODEL FOR DRAMA**

To conclude, there are several ways to move towards a living model of drama in Irish Primary Schools.

Provide professional development opportunities: Teachers should receive professional development opportunities to learn how to incorporate drama into their lessons and to develop their own drama skills. This can be done through initiatives like TAP, CPD, Creative Schools, Creative Clusters, BLAST and Local Creative Youth Partnerships.

A transdisciplinary approach: Celebrate drama as an art form but also to continue to integrate drama into the curriculum, with a transdisciplinary approach. Integrating drama into other curricular areas, helps students develop critical thinking, creative and communication skills. This approach may also help teachers to be confident to use drama if it is combined with other subject areas.

Increase collaboration with local theatre groups: Schools should collaborate with local theatre groups to provide opportunities for students to participate in theatre productions and workshops, these could be independent partnerships or some of the national initiatives discussed in this chapter like the NCC, Scór na nÓg or Macra na Feirme.

Create a supportive environment: schools should create a supportive and inclusive environment for drama education, where all students are encouraged to participate and explore their creativity, regardless of their background or ability, the type of learner they are or any additional learning needs.

Increase funding for drama programs: Schools should consider investing more in drama education by providing additional funding for drama programs, including hiring professional drama instructors and purchasing equipment and materials necessary for effective teaching and learning. This also includes recommendations to increase funding for the arts initiatives discussed in chapter 10.

A drama document: There is an overwhelming need for a drama education support document to compliment the Primary Curriculum Framework. All schools should seriously consider the designing of a drama school plan, this provides plan of action to ensure a high standard of drama education and to enable students to be drama literate.

Recommendations provided in this chapter outline ways of using drama in the classroom. Ideas considered in this chapter highlight the ways drama can be used as a teaching tool by integrating the subject into other curricular areas and a standalone subject using methods such as HID and drama stations. Evidence from studies mentioned indicate that the integration of drama into other curriculum subjects and a transdisciplinary approach is identified as an effective way of teaching primary students in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is a short introduction of ways we can address the pitfalls of teaching drama that arose as difficulties in this study.

## **12 CONCLUSION: A NEW ERA FOR DRAMA IN IRISH PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

In an era where the problems we face are multifaceted and interrelated, the arts and transdisciplinary education equips students with the tools to navigate complexity and adapt to the ever-evolving landscape of the 21st century. Having explored the myriad challenges and limitations of current practices, I hope the living model of drama can give some guidance on ways to breathe life back into drama. This paradigm shift is not merely an educational innovation; it is a generational change that advocates a move toward transdisciplinary education. I am proposing a model of drama for living and learning, one that looks to the oral and communal place of drama and the arts in Irish society and its potentiality as a change-maker in Irish education to face the challenges of the future. Drama has unique potential to be a catalyst for change within Irish education. Transdisciplinary education has the means to bridge the gap between traditional subjects, encouraging students to connect knowledge from various domains to address complex, real-world challenges.

The Irish primary school teachers interviewed for this project report that they view the current standing of drama education in Ireland as unsatisfactory, and thus hard to teach, and not reaching its full potential. The culture of their schools and the challenges they faced while teaching drama affects the subject, both within and outside curricular structures. However, all the teachers are 100% believers in drama education and they believe that the implementation of drama had a positive impact on children's overall development. They agreed that it improved the student's social and emotional skills, and that it helped with emotional intelligence and with overall cognitive development. This feedback indicates how transformative drama can be.

This discussion and analysis chapters 5-8 details that the drama curriculum brings forth considerable opportunity, and Irish schools and teachers are certainly hospitable to the arts. Some of the complex reasons as to why drama has not been fully embedded into the Irish curriculum may be because there is a lack of tradition in terms of its place on the Irish curriculum; there are a few teachers with a background in drama; there is an absence of space, and an absence of resources. The lack of confidence in teaching drama automatically makes the work of teachers difficult in Irish schools perhaps because the right background content/knowledge and skill set is not available. The challenges mentioned are some of the

hindrances that are affecting the success of drama in Ireland according to the research participants.

Perhaps we have made the mistake of making drama a sole subject on the Irish curriculum. Certainly, it needed to be a curricular subject to establish its worth or warrant its status in schools, however, according to the participants, it has not reached its potential as a standalone subject. Maybe it should always have been integrated and the reason it is not thriving is because it was restricted to a curriculum subject when it is so much more. Drama has a hugely powerful place in schools as a component of transdisciplinary education. Teachers need more broader spaces in which drama can be used.

Since drama is both an art form and a highly effective teaching and learning methodology, it is clearly complex but also has many merits and warrants its place in Irish education. The brief introduction into the concept of transdisciplinary education in the previous chapter, may remove some barriers to teaching drama in schools because if drama is part of a bigger subject area, the thought of it as a standalone art form is not as intimidating for teachers. Transdisciplinary education involves a problem focused evolving methodology and collaboration across multiple disciplines to promote creative educational experiences for students to make sense of the world and make a difference in the world (Russell *et al.*, 2008 & Burnard *et al.*, 2022). I discuss the fact that classrooms are no longer silos in chapter 10. Subjects are no longer silos either. The growing body of literature mentioned in chapter 11 discusses the advantages of integration and a transdisciplinary approach (Russell *et al.*, 2008; McDonald 2019; Colucci-Gray, Burnard, *et al.*, 2017; Thurley, 2016; Segarra *et al.*, 2018; Brown, 2019; Colucci-Gray *et al.*, 2019; & Burnard *et al.*, 2022).

The Department of Education and Skills in Ireland has recognised drama as a curriculum subject since 1999 and a new curriculum for primary schools is currently being designed. Considering all drama's advantages, it requires further development, support and recognition. There is a need to create an awareness of the importance of drama education in all types of schools (whether rural, urban, mixed class, or single sex). Both the Department of Education and school authorities/teachers need to be more proactive with the drama culture in schools. They need to work together to overcome all the challenges discussed in the analysis chapters and create a plan for drama.

I hope that the primary curriculum framework, along with initiatives mentioned in the chapters of a living model of drama, Part I and II, will bring about further change and will continue to be a positive development for arts education. By adopting a living model of drama, the walls of classrooms and schools will come down to allow for transdisciplinary learning with plenty of arts in education initiatives.

To bring the vision of a living model of drama to life, I offer a roadmap for the implementation of the proposed paradigm shift. The living model demands the inclusion of the old and the new, as well as the process and product-oriented curriculum. It requires collaborative artistic partnerships, teacher development and support with transdisciplinary teaching and learning. The proposed paradigm shift in drama education is a beacon of hope for Irish primary schools. By honouring our cultural traditions, embracing the communal nature of drama and the arts in education initiatives discussed, and advocating transdisciplinary learning, we pave the way for a brighter, more adaptable, and more connected future for Irish education. This is not just an educational transformation; it's a cultural revival and a generational change, placing Ireland at the forefront of educational innovation. The journey may be challenging, but as the curtain falls on this final chapter, I see a future filled with promise, opportunity, and the transformative power of drama.

To conclude, drama is about creating and telling stories. In terms of a storyline, this research went on a journey. Starting from a point of advocacy, it sought to identify if and where there are challenges in drama education. This story initially identifies the problems and where the system is potentially struggling. The future looks bright with new curriculum in development. A factor to remember as I close this story is that the teachers in this research are all believers in drama education. With the new initiatives, new curriculum, and hopeful, positive educators the narrative to this story is changing. This research is entitled towards a living model of drama that locates the drama in schools during a period of change. This story has told us the where, why and the how drama is happening. The period of change is the hopeful outlook for the future.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1- RESEARCH STUDY ON DRAMA EDUCATION–PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET (STUDENT)



#### **What is this research study about?**

This is an ethnographic qualitative research project to determine teachers' perspectives of drama education in Ireland. The population and sample comprises of a variety of teachers from differing opinions- those who believe in drama education within the Irish education system- and those that may have different perspectives on drama education i.e. non-believers.

#### **Who is involved in carrying out this study?**

Laura McEntee, a Ph.D. candidate in Mary Immaculate College.

#### **Why is it being undertaken?**

Primarily, this ethnography is going to explore teachers' attitudes to drama in their classroom. This research is being done to study the phenomenon of drama in the classroom. This research will provide qualitative discourse on the nature and standing of drama education in Ireland. This teacher-centred ethnography will give a report on how drama is being used in the classroom and the effect that teacher identity has on the role of drama in the classroom. Currently, there is no existing research on teachers' attitudes to drama education in Ireland or how teacher identity affects the role of drama in the classroom. This research aims to build a knowledge of how and why we teach drama.

#### **What is involved for the participants?**

Teachers who consent to be involved in the study will participate in a recorded interview. This is a type of interview, where a researcher will come in to a specially convened session, and ask participants to discuss certain aspects of their experience of teaching drama education and their own personal background in the arts in general. This interview will be audio

recorded, and the time will vary from participant to participant depending on content and experiences they choose to share.

#### **Will the researchers know who I am?**

I may know some of the participants as I will approach teachers to participate in the study who come from a strong arts background. Not all of the participants will be known to the researcher depending on who is willing to participate and who the researcher thinks are a suitable candidate to participate. The results of this study will be anonymous. Every effort has been made in the construction of the study to ensure that your anonymity is assured. This is being done in a number of ways:

- Participants will not meet other participants through-out the course of the study. They will not be aware of who the other participants are.
- The interviews will be audio recorded, and after the interview is complete, it will be transcribed for the researchers to read. Any real names mentioned in the interview will be replaced with fictional names (pseudonyms) in the transcript in order to protect their identity.

#### **Right to withdraw**

You are free to withdraw from the research study at any time without giving a reason and without consequence. This can be done by contacting Laura McEntee at the contact details below.

#### **What will happen to the data after research has been completed?**

In accordance with the MIC Record Retention Schedule all research data will be stored for the duration of the project plus ten years: i.e. until 2027. This is to allow me to gather data through out my research Ph.D., and to then keep it for a long period in order that I can compare it to future research if necessary.

#### **Contact details**

If at any time you have any queries/issues with regard to this study please contact:

**Laura McEntee**

**44 Salmon Weir, Annacotty, Limerick.**

**Email: [laura.mcentee@mic.ul.ie](mailto:laura.mcentee@mic.ul.ie)**

**Telephone: 086 3749069**

If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact:

**MIREC Administrator**  
**Mary Immaculate College**  
**South Circular Road**  
**Limerick**  
**061-204515**  
**[mirec@mic.ul.ie](mailto:mirec@mic.ul.ie)**

Thank you for taking the time to read this material



COLÁISTE MHUIRE GAN SMÁL  
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH  
MARY IMMACULATE COLLEGE  
UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK

## Research Study on Drama Education - Informed Consent Form(Student)

Dear Participant,

As outlined in the **participant information sheet**, this study will investigate the role of drama education in Irish primary schools and study teacher identity.

The participant information sheet should be read fully and carefully before consenting to take part in the research study.

Your anonymity is assured and you are free to withdraw from the research at any time.

Please read the following statements before signing the consent form:

- I have read and understood the **participant information sheet**.
- I understand what the project is about, and what the results will be used for.
- I understand that my identity will be protected throughout the study, and my choosing to participate will have no impact upon me.
- I know that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the project at any stage without giving any reason.
- I am 18 years of age or older

Name

(PRINTED):

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Name (Signature):

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Date:

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## APPENDIX 2- MARY IMMACULATE COLLEGE RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

<i>For Office Use Only</i> Application Reference Number:	A16-049
COLÁISTE MHUIRE GAN SMÁL OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH MARY IMMACULATE COLLEGE UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK	<h3 style="margin: 0;">Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee</h3> <hr style="border: 0.5px dashed black;"/> <h3 style="margin: 0;">MIREC-4: MIREC Chair Decision Form</h3>

<b>1</b>	<b>Title of Research Project</b>
<i>‘Irish Primary Teachers: are they believers in drama education?’</i>	

<b>2</b>	<b>Applicant</b>
<b>Name</b>	Laura McEntee
<b>Department / Centre / Other</b>	Drama & Theatre Studies
<b>Position</b>	Postgraduate Student

<b>3</b>	<b>Decision of MIREC Chair</b>
	Ethical clearance through MIREC is required
	Ethical clearance through MIREC is not required and therefore the researcher need take no further action in this regard
✓	Ethical clearance is required and granted. Referral to MIREC is not necessary
	Ethical clearance is required but the full MIREC process is not. Ethical clearance is therefore granted if required for external funding applications and the researcher need take no further action in this regard.
	Insufficient information provided by applicant / Amendments required

<b>4</b>	<b>Reason(s) for Decision</b>
<p><b>A16-049 - Laura McEntee - ‘Irish Primary Teachers: are they believers in drama education?’</b></p> <p>I have reviewed this application and I believe it now satisfies MIREC requirements.</p>	

<b>5</b>	<b>Declaration</b>
<b>Name (Print)</b>	<b>Áine Lawlor</b> <i>MIREC Chair</i>
<b>Signature</b>	 <i>MIREC Chair</i>
<b>Date</b>	<b>5th December 2016</b>

### APPENDIX 3- APPROVED QUESTIONS FOR THE INTERVIEWS

1. Tell me about the dynamic of your school (rural/urban, co-ed/single sex, etc.) without giving me any specific details about the school.
2. Does your school have a whole school plan for drama education, do teachers use it? you use it? Is it effective/implementable?
3. Does your school have a drama policy?
4. Does your school have a post of responsibility for drama and if so what tasks do they undertake as part of this job?
5. What is the attitude to drama education among colleagues in your school or can you comment?
6. Would you say there is a strong emphasis on drama in your school outside a Christmas/Summer performance?
7. How often do you teach drama?
8. Can you give an example of how you teach drama? (A recent lesson or techniques you make use of frequently)
9. Have you ever had a really significant teaching moment through-out a drama class where you feel a student or class were really thriving or benefitting from the lesson? Can you give an example?
10. Have you any experience working with an SEN student and using drama education with them? If so, can you tell me a bit about it?
11. Do you think drama is an effective teaching tool, do you believe it enhances student's learning? How? If not, why not?
12. What specific skills or traits do you think children can learn or experience from drama?
13. Do you make use of the curriculum document for drama?
14. What are you own experiences of drama at primary school?
15. What are you own experiences of drama at secondary school?
16. What are your experiences of drama during your teacher education?
17. Were you ever supervised during teaching placement or by the inspectorate in drama?
18. Do you come from a strong drama background in your childhood/personal hobbies or have you no affiliation to drama outside of teaching?
19. If you do come from a strong drama background, can you tell me about your experience (does it come from family, community, school, personal interest?)
20. Does your drama background influence your teacher identity?
21. Does it have an impact on how you implement drama education in the classroom?
22. Are you inclined to use drama as a teaching tool more as a result of your own identity and personal interests?
23. Do you think drama has shaped your teacher identity in way, shape or form?
24. Have you ever in engaged in further professional development in the arts or drama education outside of your preliminary teacher education?
25. Would you be interested in undertaking CPD or further education in drama education?
26. Would you like to see drama kept as a stand alone subject or do you think it would be more beneficial under the branch of a subject like english or history?

27. Are there any resources for drama education you would like to see coming into schools or any way you envisage drama education could be improved?
28. Are you a believer in drama education?

## APPENDIX 4- INTERVIEWEE TRANSCRIPTS

### 1. Ursula Transcript

Interviewer:

Can you tell me a bit about the dynamic of your school, so rural, urban, co-ed, single sex, any sort of specific details about your school?

Ursula:

It's urban, boys and girls, it's non-denominational, it's in a middle-class area of a city.

Interviewer:

Okay, how long have you been teaching?

Ursula:

35 years.

Interviewer:

Okay, have you been in the same school the whole time?

Ursula:

Yes.

Interviewer:

Okay, does your school have a whole school plan for drama education or for the arts?

Ursula:

Not that I'm aware of. It has one for the English curriculum and for the arts, as in arts and crafts. For drama, I'm not sure.

Interviewer:

And does your school have a drama policy?

Ursula:

Not that I'm aware of.

Interviewer:

Does your school have a post of responsibility for drama? If so, what does this person do as part of their responsibilities?

Ursula:

I think there is somebody who has that, and they book classes in to see shows and plays that might come up in local theaters. That person would go around and ask 'would you like to go?' And she books the classes in.

Interviewer:

What is the attitude toward drama education from the colleagues in your school or can you comment? You don't have to comment.

Ursula:

I'm not sure about my colleagues, but for me, it can be at the end of an Irish class, one is mommy and one is Daddy and they just act out the sentences that we have learned that week. I don't do it every week or for a full half an hour, or whatever.

Interviewer:

Would you say that there's a strong emphasis on drama in your school outside of a Christmas or summer performance?

Ursula:

I don't know about all the classes, I'm in a very large school. I would think not.

Interviewer:

Okay, and you said there that you teach drama with Irish, and you gave me an example of how you teach drama. Outside of Irish, would you ever use drama with anything else?

Ursula:

Because we're in an all Irish school, history, geography, science, all of those are taught through Irish, so drama is quite difficult in it. When I would have a story of Cú Culain and

Setanta [Irish Fable] I would ask them to dramatize their favorite part of their story, just literally. If I was teaching history and I was teaching the story of Naomh Bríd [Irish saint] they would dramatize their favorite part of it, or I might put them into groups and somebody might dramatize the beginning of it, somebody else the middle of it, somebody else the end of it. It's more for history's sake more so than drama as a subject of its own.

Interviewer:

If you don't have anything for the next questions, just say no, I don't have any experience with that. Have you ever had a really significant teaching moment throughout a drama class, where you feel a student or a class was really thriving or benefitting from the lesson? Can you give an example?

Ursula:

Maybe for children with special needs, where you would dramatize going to the cinema or McDonald's, and they would have to act out how you order chips or burgers, I think that's very valuable. I was in special needs at the time, a resource teacher, and I found that very valuable.

Interviewer:

Have you had specific experience with an SEN [special educational needs] student or noticed that an SEN student has benefitted from it? Do you think drama is an effective teaching tool? Do you think it enhances students' learning?

Ursula:

I believe that it's a fantastic teaching tool. I don't feel confident teaching it, and I don't have enough ideas to teach it. I don't feel that I'm trained enough to teach it.

Interviewer:

What specific skills or traits do you think children can learn or experience from drama?

Ursula:

They can learn social skills, language, confidence, they would grow in confidence, they can act out different roles if they're very shy in their day to day when they step into the boots of

another character it could, I presume, bring them out of their shyness and they would grow in confidence.

Interviewer:

Can you remember any experiences of drama at a primary level when you were in primary school?

Ursula:

No. No acting out stories maybe.

Interviewer:

Secondary school level?

Ursula:

No.

Interviewer:

What were your experiences of drama throughout your teacher education?

Ursula:

We had lectures in drama, it was a lot of the language side of it, stories, poetry, exploring language and rhyme, all of that. But the actual teaching of the other side of drama, as in acting out, I can't remember.

Interviewer:

Do you come from a strong drama background in your childhood, personal hobbies, or have you any relations to drama outside of teaching?

Ursula:

Absolutely none.

Interviewer:

So no experiences as a young child, in the community?

Ursula:

No, we would have gone and seen dramas, but for me to be a part of it, no.

Interviewer:

Do you think your personal teacher identity, so kind of who you are as a person, affects how you implement drama in your classroom?

Ursula:

Absolutely. I think if you are very interested in an area, whether it is art, drama, Irish, you are going to impart that to your class.

Interviewer:

Is there any subject that you are particularly qualified in or that you are particularly interested in that you think you would teach very well.

Ursula:

I think I teach Irish well. I think I teach maths well.

Interviewer:

Do you think the way you teach Irish or the way you teach maths has shaped the kind of teacher you are?

Ursula:

Probably.

Interviewer:

Okay. Have you ever engaged in further professional development in the arts or drama education outside your preliminary education?

Ursula:

No.

Interviewer:

Did you engage in CPD or other qualifications after your teacher education in any shape or form?

Ursula:

In drama, no.

Interviewer:

In anything else?

Ursula:

You mean summer courses, anything?

Interviewer:

Yes.

Ursula:

I have in literacy, I've done loads of them through my years, I've done some in PG.E., literacy and maths really.

Interviewer:

If the opportunity arose, would you have any interest in taking further education in drama or the arts?

Ursula:

At this point of my teaching career, no.

Interviewer:

Do you ever make use of the drama curriculum document?

Ursula:

No.

Interviewer:

Why not?

Ursula:

I just feel we have so much to do. If I could upscale myself in the subjects that are of real value to them, I feel I am doing a great job. I feel that drama is a kind of, it should, I suppose, come into every subject area that you do, but I feel that I am so busy with curriculum overload that I have no time.

Interviewer:

Do you think the document is any good? Have you ever looked at it to see if you would use it or if it's relevant to a lesson?

Ursula:

I'm not familiar with it.

Interviewer:

Are there any resources for drama education that you would like to see coming into schools or any way you envision drama education could be improved? So, you mentioned there that you didn't have a lot of ideas, you didn't know where to start with it. So is there anything you would like to see that would help you teach drama?

Ursula:

Well I've heard lately that drama is going to be taken off the curriculum, whether that's true or not. There's a rumor it's going to be put under the umbrella of English. Well, if it is, of course I would like a manual that would tell me step by step, a resource that would tell me what to do.

Interviewer:

Would you be a believer in drama education?

Ursula:

I actually am. I think it is a fantastic tool. I'm just not good at it.

Interviewer:

Do you think that's because you trained 30 odd years ago or because it's something that you as a person are generally not interested in?

Ursula:

I'd say me as a person.

Interviewer:

So if you were back in teacher education, it probably wouldn't shape the way you teach or use it now?

Ursula:

No.

Interviewer:

Alright, thank you very much, that's it.

## 2. Ann Transcript

Interviewer: Tell me about your school, please.

Ann: My school is an urban school; a large number of children, over 600; very busy, lots of extracurricular activities going on; and single grade school setting throughout; and boys and girls.

Interviewer: Does your school have a drama policy?

Ann: Not that I'm aware of.

Interviewer: Do you have a whole school plan for drama?

Ann: Not that I'm aware of.

Interviewer: Is there a responsibility in your school for drama?

Ann: No.

Interviewer: Do you mean not that you're aware of or that there actually isn't one?

Ann: Not that I'm aware of.

Interviewer: My next question would be to ask you how these work or do teachers follow them. Are they effective or are they implemented well? What does the responsibility do? As you said, there are none that you're aware of. Is there any drama initiatives going on in the school at all that you know of?

Ann: There's extracurricular guest teachers that come in after school twice a week.

Interviewer: Are they separate to the school?

Ann: They're after school.

Interviewer: They're not implemented in the school day at all?

Ann: No.

Interviewer: Is it something the kids pay extra for?

Ann: I imagine they do pay for it.

Interviewer: Would you say there's a strong emphasis on drama in your school outside of a Christmas or summer performance?

Ann: I wouldn't say strong, but then again I'm not in the school that long. It's difficult for me to make a judgment on that. From what I see in my own class level, there wouldn't be a strong emphasis. I teach fifth class.

Interviewer: Do you teach drama?

Ann: I teach it as part of English and Irish.

Interviewer: How often do you teach it?

Ann: It would definitely be more than once a week. It wouldn't be a standalone lesson. That would go on for half an hour, but it would be part of lessons.

Interviewer: It's integrated.

Ann: Yeah.

Interviewer: Would you use it as a performance subject to perform within English or Irish or would you use it to explore something or investigate something or research something?

Ann: It would be used in English and Irish. They're the ones that stand out, but I'd use it in SPHE to discuss issues and things like that. It's much easier to discuss it through a character than talking to themselves.

Interviewer: While you're on that point, could you give me an example of how you teach drama? Any techniques you make use of frequently or something that you think really works within drama?

Ann: I suppose the most recent one was friendship. We had an initial discussion about how to be a good friend. Then we had a new child in the class. I played the new child, and it was an improvisation with the child coming in and how the other child would behave. Then we had a talk about it afterwards.

Interviewer: Have you ever had a really significant teaching moment during a drama class where you feel a student or a class was really thriving or benefiting from the lesson?

Ann: I know poetry comes under drama. There was a poem about a child that was misbehaving. We had a discussion; if you were to give that child advice, what would you say? I was very surprised at the reaction of some of the children that may have misbehaved in the class once or twice in the class what their advice was for the child. I really found it was a great tool.

Interviewer: Them to listen to each other give advice they don't always follow themselves.

Ann: Again, it was using the child that was misbehaving poem as a platform for the children to give their advice. I found that very worthwhile. It

wasn't really drama, but they stand up and they're speaking. There is one child in my class who asks every week when are we doing the debate, so it's his time to shine.

Interviewer: He likes it.

Ann: Yeah.

Interviewer: Have you ever had a negative experience teaching drama?

Ann: Not really, other than the usual kind of giddiness.

Interviewer: Classroom management stuff.

Ann: Yeah. It's not a huge issue. It's the same with every subject, PE or math or any time you do something different. There's always a settling period.

Interviewer: Why do you think drama is important or not important for children in primary schools?

Ann: I think it's very important because it's a tool that I use for them to voice their opinions in a safe environment. It allows them to speak properly or to speak publically. I find that's a very important tool for them to have. Even things like saying a poem properly or standing in front of other children and speak clearly.

Interviewer: Confidence to do it.

Ann: Yeah, major confidence. I find that's hugely important.

Interviewer: Do you think drama has its own value as an art form or as a way to experience the world? How? If not, why not? Do you think there's value in using it as an art form?

Ann: Yes. I did teach in a school where there was a huge emphasis on drama. There was such benefit for the children's development of language. A lot of it was done through Irish, so the language they picked up there was more out of any book. It's a tool that you could use for teaching language. More so for the children, it's enjoyment and lifelong confidence building. We always say that the child will remember the performance they had in front of their class or parents ten times more than they'd remember the sums from the class book.

Interviewer: Do you believe that it enhances students' learning?

Ann: Yes. If you are looking at things like language, it's definitely a way for them to explore different – even new vocabulary, things like that.

Interviewer: It's active learning, so it might improve their memory. What are your own experiences with drama?

Ann: I remember a school show. I had attended acting class for a year in secondary school. I was in a pantomime once.

Interviewer: A little bit of dipping your toe here and there.

Ann: Yes.

Interviewer: You said you were in a show in school. Do you ever remember doing drama in school in the classroom like you might have done during your teacher education or was it only ever a performance aspect in drama when you were in primary school?

Ann: I find it hard to recall it being done in the class.

Interviewer: It was just a performance aspect?

Ann: Yes.

Interviewer: We were on the 1971 curriculum, so it wasn't its own subject at that point in time. What are your experiences during teacher education?

Ann: I found it very good. I can't remember the lecturer. There was a lady with brown curly hair, but she was fantastic. Things like still images, conscience alley, all those warm up games and things. I definitely use them every now and then.

Interviewer: You kept the techniques.

Ann: Yeah.

Interviewer: Were you ever assessed in a drama lesson when on teaching practice?

Ann: No.

Interviewer: Do you come from a strong drama background in your childhood or personal hobbies? Have you any affiliation to drama outside of teaching?

Ann: No.

Interviewer: Can you tell me of any experience you had with drama within your family, community, school, or personal interest?

Ann: As I said, I was in the Beauty and the Beast pantomime when I was 13 and that's it.

Interviewer: Do you think that your background, who you are as a person, effects your teacher identity, the kind of person you are as a teacher?

Ann: Yes.

Interviewer: Do you think that if someone came from a very strong drama background it would affect the kind of teacher they are in the classroom?

Ann: Yes.

Interviewer: It's the same. Obviously if you're very musical, you might incorporate a lot into your teaching. Have you ever come across anybody in your teaching career that was of a very strong dramatic background that you thought really brought that into their teaching in any way, shape, or form?

Ann: Yeah. I suppose not as a student, but as a teacher I would have seen other teachers do that. That would have motivated me.

Interviewer: Has any drama experience, whether going to a show or continued professional development or from a colleague, has anything implemented impacted you on how you implement drama within your own classroom? Have you ever had a moment that made you go maybe I should do that or maybe this works better- that was very successful?

Ann: Yeah. It would be more focused on the performance of the drama and how it comes together. Just things like how to speak, how to stand up in front of a crowd, how to speak comfortably, how to practice that. Maybe not coach the child, but how to give them pointers. I would have learned from the teachers how to give more effective feedback and how to keep students focused on the task at hand, whatever task that we were doing, that they wouldn't be going off task.

Interviewer: Would you be inclined to use drama more as a teaching tool to teach another subject or would you use it as something to help the child learn or develop it themselves?

Ann: To teach a subject.

Interviewer: Do you think drama has shaped your teacher identity in any way, shape, or form?

Ann: I suppose when it comes down to confidence and the children's life experience or standing up in front of a crowd, I definitely promote that. I feel it's a worthwhile thing. It's something that they'll carry with them, the success of being able to speak in front of a crowd or to enjoy an experience like that.

Interviewer: At the moment, the title of my piece is *Irish Primary School Teacher: Are They Believers or Non-Believers in Drama Education?* My title has changed a number of times, but at the moment that's still working. My last question is are you a believer in drama education?

Ann: Totally.

Interviewer: Perfect, thank you very much.

### 3. Jean Transcript

Interviewer: Could you tell me about your school, please?

Jean: Okay, it's a co-ed school situated in Munster. It's a [great school] and it's about 650 kids, I think.

Interviewer: It's an urban school if it's in the city.

Jean: Yeah, it's based on the city, yepg.

Interviewer: Perfect. Does your school have a drama policy?

Jean: I don't know.

Interviewer: Okay. What about a whole-school plan?

Jean: I'm not aware of that either.

Interviewer: Okay.

Jean: Even if there was one, it's never brought upg. It's not discussed. It's never brought to our attention.

Interviewer: Is there a person in the school that has a post or responsibility for drama?

Jean: No, I don't think so, no.

Interviewer: Okay. If you're not aware of a whole-school plan or a drama policy, obviously you don't know how any of these work. Do you know of any teachers in school that do really try and follow the drama curriculum or

implement a drama policy? Or if there was a post or responsibility, do you know of anything that's done in school to promote drama?

Jean: I suppose a lot of teachers would do Halloween and Christmas shows and plays. I suppose that's a big bulk of the drama side in that, where they get all the kids either to sing or act or to dance. I'd say that's really the only time of the year that it's really put a big massive emphasis on it for the main bulk of the stuff. For any activity that's coming up, you might put in a big effort but other than that, I can't – I don't think so.

Interviewer: Would you say there's a strong emphasis on drama in your school outside of Christmas or summer performances? Obviously you just said there that you put a big emphasis on for Christmas or whatever. Do you see it anywhere else throughout the year in the school?

Jean: Yeah. I know that there is drama after school. There's speech and drama and there's also drama class. I know a lot of kids go to that, and a lot of kids would do it outside school, but other than that there wouldn't be many main —

Interviewer: It's not an emphasis of the school.

Jean: — yeah, main events.

Interviewer: Do the kids pay for the after-school activities?

Jean: Well they would if it was outside school, but here I don't think so.

Interviewer: If the speech and drama and drama classes are outside school, are they in any way integrated within the school day at all or is it completely separate?

Jean: No, completely separate. I do think, though, they have to pay for the ones after school here. I do think someone separate comes in and does it; it's not a teacher or anything.

Interviewer: Okay. Do you teach drama in the classroom?

Jean: Yeah, I try to.

Interviewer: How often do you teach drama?

Jean: I try to do it the once a week. I have it timetabled in for the hour that you're supposed to do it. I try and do it once a week but sometimes things can happen. I always feel that drama is the one thing that, okay, I went over time here so I'll skip drama and fit the other thing I lost out in here.

Interviewer: Do you ever use drama as treat subject as in, if you're very good, we'll do drama? Or do kids ask for it?

Jean: You know what? I do sometimes, in Irish especially. I know it's hard to motivate kids in Irish so I say, we'll do a bit of drama, and they actually love it. They do. They enjoy just working in the groups and being given a topic and off they go. I do let them mime more so, though.

Interviewer: Can you give me an example of how you teach drama, so a recent lesson or techniques you make use of frequently?

Jean: I like to use hot-seating. Either teacher in role or else a student in role, based on oral English lesson, let's say. We've learnt about Roald Dahl or whatever, so Roald Dahl would come into the classroom and I would have been Roald Dahl and then the children would have had a chance to ask me questions. Then I reverse the role and the kids became Roald Dahl, so that was a bit of fun.

Interviewer: For the purpose of the research, can you explain to me what hot-seating is?

Jean: Hot-seating is where the person that's chosen becomes the character. For example, I was Roald Dahl so I sat in a chair and the kids had to pretend that I was him. They'd have to ask questions then based on the book that we had read and just anything about his life. You are basically becoming the character.

Interviewer: Okay, very good. Have you ever had a really significant teaching moment during a drama class where you feel a student or class were really thriving or benefiting from the lesson? It stuck out, oh my God, this child really is loving this or this child who is maybe really shy is just coming out of themselves because of it? Or did you ever find a particular child flourished through something that was the arts. It doesn't have to be drama; it could be art or music as well. Some child that really thrived that gave you a moment of clarity.

Jean: Well there is a child in our class who struggles with reading, struggles with listening and following instruction, and he's actually brilliant at art. He loves that he can really express himself. It's one of the things that he actually can create a really nice masterpiece at the end of it. It's great to see that he can succeed at something that isn't academic really, something that you can use your hands.

I suppose with the shy children as well, I have a kid who is really quiet. If you mix him within a group it's nice because the limelight isn't just on him. It's mixed between a few so he can do his thing and still be shy but still enjoy being part of a group and not being centre of attention.

Interviewer: Have you ever had a really negative experience teaching drama?

Jean: No, I don't think so.

Interviewer: Something went really wrong.

Jean: No, not really, no.

Interviewer: Any difficulties with classroom management during drama?

Jean: I suppose the kids can become chatty and a bit hyper, but yet again when you're working in groups it's very important to re-emphasise that. You have to listen because when it's your turn, you'd expect the same back. No, I think that's been okay, that side of it.

Interviewer: Why do you think drama is important or not important for children in primary schools? Which do you think, it's important or not important and why would you answer that question?

Jean: I do think it's important. I think it's fun for the kids to be able to let go and just to be able to express themselves, to have a bit of fun. It works with the kids who are brilliant and very dramatic. They can really express themselves. Then for the quieter kids, they can work in a group.

For example, if they were doing mime, then they wouldn't have to speak. They wouldn't necessarily be so shy then and they could do it. It works for both types of kids.

Interviewer: Do you think drama has its own value as an art form or as a way of experiencing the world? How if not or why not? In other words, do you think you can use drama as a tool to help kids understand the world or see things differently or experience important things about life? Does it have a value as an art form for the development of the child?

Jean: I think it can if you link it in with SPHE. To do with things like if a difficult situation arose, how would you deal with it? Putting kids into problem-solving group work like that. Other than that – if you can't integrate it with something like SPHE and a major issue, then not really. Not when they're up – I don't know. That's a tough question to answer I suppose.

Interviewer: Yeah, it is.

Jean: I do think it's beneficial if you link it with something like an important issue or if you're talking about something in oral English, like for example Tsunamis that you could re-enact what you might do in this case. In that way it's fun for them to even put them in and show them on the spot and see what they would do if they were in that kind of a situation, so it can be.

Interviewer: Do you believe it enhances student's learning?

Jean: Not really.

Interviewer: Not really.

Jean: No, not really. I don't think they learn much skill from it. They're more still having fun and linking in everything they've learnt but I don't think they're really taking much skill from it.

Interviewer: What are your own experiences of drama?

Jean: I used to hate it. I was forced to do speech and drama as a kid and I absolutely – because I would have been the shy kid. I'd hate to have been up on stage or I'd hate any of that. Being forced to do that was not fun.

Interviewer: What are your experiences during your teacher education?

Jean: The only thing was then when I went to college I saw more of a positive aspect from college. Where it's not all about putting you up on your own and having to display yourself and make a fool of yourself. It was different. I don't know, college makes it more a bit easy-going I suppose.

Interviewer: Were you ever inspected by a teaching supervisor in drama while on teaching practice through your teacher education?

Jean: No.

Interviewer: Did you have any experiences of drama outside of education?

Jean: No.

Interviewer: Do you come from a strong drama background in your childhood, your personal hobbies or have you any affiliation to drama outside of teaching?

Jean: No. Not anymore, no.

Interviewer: What about going to the theatre, going to see a show?

Jean: No. You know what? I don't really enjoy it. I've often gone to see shows, of course, but no it wouldn't be something that I enjoy doing, no.

Interviewer: It's not something you'd enjoy doing. If you come from a strong drama background can you tell me about your experience? Does it come from family, community, school or personal interest?

Jean: No. The only thing was the speech and drama that I was made – well it wasn't that I was made to. I suppose they thought it would improve my

speech and it would help things like that. No, I didn't enjoy it and we wouldn't really have a strong family background of drama.

Interviewer: Would your parents have sent you to speech and drama because of the speech, to improve your speech or were you shy or anything like that?

Jean: No. It wouldn't have been to improve my speech or anything like that. I would say it was just – I don't know what they call it, elocution lessons at the time. I suppose they thought —

Interviewer: Just an after-school activity maybe.

Jean: I don't know what it was, I don't know. We'd be more of visual arts side not so much the dramatic arts.

Interviewer: Okay. This is a bit of a difficult question; you can interpret any way you want. Does your background influence your teacher identity, so who you are as a person? Do you think it shapes who you are as a teacher?

Jean: You know what? I think it does. I think you bring a lot of what you have yourself in your own personality to your teaching. You're not going to be this really nice person at home and then come into school and be totally different or vice versa. You're not going to be horrible at home and come in and be as nice as pie. I think you are who you are, and when you come into school it's very hard not to be who you are in front of kids.

Interviewer: Okay. You said you don't really have a drama background. Does this have an impact on how you implement drama education in the classroom as in —

Jean: Yeah, I think of course.

Interviewer: — when it comes to whenever you have scheduled drama do you ever feel like, oh God, I have to do that now. You're pulling at strings or clutching at straws to find a lesson or do you feel like you can jump into it, no problem.

Jean: No. I feel that it's very hard to find resources based on drama. You might Google up some fun drama games but I'd rather have a structure. I'd like to know how do you start a drama lesson, what's the middle of your drama lesson, how to end your drama lesson. I don't just want a load of games that you can play. I want a structure to follow I suppose, like a book of lesson plans based on theme work. I just think it's hard to find resources for drama, especially within a school. There isn't resources within this school. There isn't a pack. It's up to yourself really to find them.

Interviewer: Do you ever use the drama curriculum document?

Jean: Yeah, when I'm planning I would. Do you know what? That is good. It gives you a small bit of examples I know it does, but I like to theme my planning. I just feel that it doesn't link in with the themes that I would have been doing. You're on your own then to go off and try to find some sort of a lesson.

Interviewer: If there was continued professional development available to you in drama, made available to the school by government, would it be something that'd be of interest to you or do you think there's other CPD you could partake in?

Jean: Yeah. No, I would. I think that's fun. I'm always willing to take on new CPD courses but I don't see many based on drama. There isn't any.

Interviewer: No, there isn't a lot of options.

Jean: In the education centre, there isn't. I've never put my name down for one because there isn't any. Through college I did partake in a drama lesson. It was actually like a drama course and you got a cert for it and I can't remember the name of it. I did that because I wanted to know more about drama. I thought it was fun. It wasn't what I thought drama was when I was younger. I went and I thought I would go and learn loads, and I did but I just find that when you go to these courses, you forget.

Interviewer: Do you think drama has shaped your teacher identity in any way, shape or form?

Jean: No.

Interviewer: I had a question asking, are you inclined to use drama as a teaching tool more as a result of your own identity and personal interest. As you haven't come from a drama background or it's not something that'd be a strong presence in your classroom, I think we can scratch out that question.

The last thing I want to ask you is I'm looking at, for purposes of my research, people who believe in the merits of drama education or the people who think well it doesn't really fit into the academic calendar, there's not room for it, we don't have the resources for it. I just simply want to ask teachers, to finish, are you a believer in drama education?

Jean: Yeah, I think I am. I think it can be fun. It can be exciting. It breaks the day up for the kids. The kids love it. I do, I'd love to use it more if I could.

Interviewer: Okay, perfect. Thank you.



#### 4. Ger Transcript

Interviewer:

Just to start, can you tell me about the dynamic of your school? Is it a rural or an urban school, is it co-ed or single-sex, is it Deis 1, 2, or 3, without giving me any specific details about the school.

Ger:

It's an urban school, it's a Deis bound 1, we have a mixed school up until first class, so from juniors, seniors first, we have boys and girls, and then from second class on, we just have girls, the boys go to another school. It's urban.

Interviewer:

How long have you been teaching there?

Ger:

This will be my fifth year teaching there. This will be my second year teaching senior infants, and my first year I was in resource learning support role, and then my second year I did my diploma in senior infants. And then my third year I was in a resource learning support role as well, and now I'm in my second in year senior infants again.

Interviewer:

Okay, does your school have a whole school plan for drama education?

Ger:

No, not in my opinion, our school primarily focuses on literacy and numeracy.

Interviewer:

Is that because it's a Deis school or is that because it's the way that the school?

Ger:

I think primarily it's because it's a Deis school, and we think in terms of the children coming to the school, we have a very high percentage of non-national children, and children that

would come to school without speaking English. I think it primarily focuses on them being able to, by the time they leave the school, have really good basis of literacy and numeracy.

Interviewer:

Is it requirement for the school to have a drama whole school plan? Or is it because you're Deis you only have to have literacy and numeracy?

Ger:

I'm not sure. We do have a plan for other subjects, like SESE and things like that, but as far as I'm aware we don't have a whole school drama plan.

Interviewer:

Does your school have a drama policy?

Ger:

Not that I know of.

Interviewer:

Okay, does your school have a post of responsibility for drama. And if so, what tasks do they undertake as a part of this job?

Ger:

No, we don't.

Interviewer:

Is there a post of responsibility for the arts in general? Does anyone take on arts, music, and drama?

Ger:

No.

Interviewer:

So there's nobody appointed to do it that gets paid to do it, is there anybody that opts to do extra work within the school just because it's an area of interest for them?

Ger:

Well, we kind of divide it out between a few of us. So, there would be two teachers, one teacher would do music after school. We have a few teachers that do music in different formats. One teacher used to teach the violin after school, another teacher has started voice as an after-school activity, another teacher then would be kind of in charge of the choir. So, if there were things going on like the school mass, confirmation, communion, that teacher runs the school choir. She would organize music for that, or if we had an event going on in the school, a celebration, the choir would sing for things like that. In terms of drama, there really isn't. I do dance after school, so I can take over the dance aspect in the school. Then in drama, this would be my third year where I have put on a musical. Before I started in the school they used to do a talent show at the end of the year, and every class put on a performance, a dance, or a poem or a song, but then for the last three years, we've been doing a musical. That just gets the children more involved in drama. Every class has something to do in the show, so every class participates in it. Then you have the main characters who get really a lot more involved in drama and things like that, but that's about it.

Interviewer:

What is the attitude toward drama education among colleagues in your school?

Ger:

I think, to be fair to the staff and the school, there're so many issues in terms of literacy and numeracy, and it's so stressful in terms of giving them basic skills, that a lot of people don't really take drama as a priority. I do know that we have been trying to set up a new scheme, especially in the junior classes, that we have been trying to do a big book that we take on for two weeks. Within the planned scheme, there's drama activities. So it's incorporated into the English curriculum, kind of.

Interviewer:

But you haven't experienced much of it being used as a standalone subject, have you?

Ger:

No.

Interviewer:

Would you say there's a strong emphasis on drama in your school, outside of your Christmas and summer performances?

Ger:

No.

Interviewer:

So it's just mainly performance led?

Ger:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

How often do you teach drama?

Ger:

I try to incorporate it into English lessons, I don't teach it standalone.

Interviewer:

Do you think that's because you teach senior infants? Or is it because the type of school that you teach in?

Ger:

For me, I think it's based on the senior infant day, and we have lots of issues, so we literally have no time in the day. There's so much to cover. We don't have time for music and things like that, everything has to be incorporated into another subject. So, it would have to be incorporated into English or Irish or something like that, because we don't have half an hour's class to dedicate to it.

Interviewer:

Does your school take on extra programs that aren't necessarily done in other schools because it's a Deis school?

Ger:

I'm not sure, I would presume so. I do think that Deis schools take on extra initiatives, but I don't know because I'm not in other schools. I do know that we would have to take on extra literacy initiatives, because our literacy would be so low in comparison to other schools.

Interviewer:

Mata sa rang was put into Deis schools initially but then it was rolled out to other schools because it was so effective. Yeah, I think there was another one as well. Aistear?

Ger:

Aistear, yeah. In fairness, we did start that in infants last year, and we used to do a half an hour of Aistear a day, which was obviously a time to play. That was drama, free play, and we used to guide it as well, on topics and characters and that sort, but unfortunately that fell off this year because we had such a high percentage of EAL children that that half an hour must go to English. So, we have to have strict and direct EAL attention. So, that kind of fell by the wayside.

Interviewer:

Okay. Can you give an example of how you use drama? So, if you use it within English, what techniques would you make use of frequently.

Ger:

I would always do it based around a story that we've done. So, yesterday we were doing a story which was about snow bears, three bears that were pretending to be bears in the snow, like polar bears, and I would basically do a freeze frame, or a still image, and we'd talk about the story. So, our English class would be exploring the beginning, middle, and end of the story. And we would draw pictures of each, and then I got the children into three groups, and each group had to give me a freeze frame of the beginning, middle, and end. Now, even for me, and I like drama, the infants are quite small, so even when you're doing a strategy like that, it still has to be guided. I would do a lot of roleplay, and we would still try to incorporate Aistear twice a week, on Thursday and Friday. It's kind of our version of Aistear to suit our needs, so we aim to do three stations. One would be literacy work, another would be an arts and crafts activity, and the third station would be they get to play as the characters in the

story. We were doing Snow White for a while, so they were in Snow White's house. We were learning about the airport, so they were working the planes.

Interviewer:

For the next question, if you have an example, great, if you don't, say nothing comes to mind, don't worry. Have you ever had a really significant teaching moment where you felt a student or the class was really thriving or benefitting from the lesson. So, the reason I asked that question is because I've had a few teaching moments where I worked with special needs students where, in role as a character, they became a different person. They became a more confident, competent person than they would be in reality. So, the fact that they were in role as another character gave them a new lease at life and the confidence they wouldn't have as themselves. So, have you ever had an experience like this while teaching in any shape or form?

Ger:

Yeah, this year I have a child that has emotional behavior disorder, and oppositional defiance disorder. He is very difficult to manage in the classroom, and he is all around very, very difficult. But when we started in September, a story on the airport, on Thursdays and Fridays in the classroom. Normally, on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, the lead up to it, when we were talking about the story, and talking about the airport before they even get to play it, and he wasn't interested at all. I didn't know how it was going to go. I initially almost fell over, because he was sitting there as the pilot, he directed everyone, and normally when he does group work he's very aggressive, pushing people and screaming at them, so I was very nervous about doing it with him, because I thought he would be really aggressive with the children in it. But the minute he got the role as the pilot, he was unbelievable. He was a completely different child. He literally organized the whole class, and he knew exactly what to do, he had everyone in their seats. If someone was doing the wrong thing, he would correct them. He was thriving. We've done the restaurant as well. He needs a role with a bit of control, if he was sitting as a passenger in the airplane he wouldn't enjoy it as much. But he just needs some initiative.

Interviewer:

What happened when he came out of role?

Ger:

He kind of went back to himself, really.

Interviewer:

So he assumed a different personality right there.

Ger:

Absolutely.

Interviewer:

So you kind of answered the next question, but have you any experience with special needs students and using drama education with them? If so, tell me about it. So apart from the story, do you have any specific situations?

Ger:

I did have a child last year who was on the autism spectrum. He actually could not get into it. I really thought he would like it and adapt to it, and I did try several times, I even left the room a few times and came back in as teacher in role. I think I did Humpty Dumpty, and I came back in, and he just couldn't grasp that I wasn't the teacher anymore. I found him difficult.

Interviewer:

Do you think drama is an effective teaching tool? Do you believe it enhances students' learning? How? And if not, why not?

Ger:

I do think it is. But I feel that there isn't an adequate drama program out there to guide you. I would be, I suppose, quite knowledgeable in drama. I've experienced a lot of it. I've been involved in musicals and different stage productions, but I still find it challenging to teach it, I feel like there's not enough emphasis on it, so it's left off. I feel like there should be more of a program laid out, it would be easier if we were all following the same thing. I think if a child hasn't done drama at any stage of their education in school, they haven't a clue. It's very hard to start from scratch.

Interviewer:

Like if you're coming into third class, having never done it before, where do you start?

Ger:

Absolutely. Then you need to spend time on it, even for senior infants now, my class hasn't a clue with drama, they didn't do it last year, you need to spend more time on it to get them into it, whereas I don't have that time. I feel like even if I had 20 minutes just to get them on it, I feel that I lose time because I have to get them in the mindset.

Interviewer:

You said you do believe it's an effective teaching tool. What skills or traits do you think kids can get from drama?

Ger:

I think it's very good for children for social reasons. I think that by far, children that are shy, or that might be introverted, it's fantastic for them to come out of themselves. I also find that for children that might have emotional problems, I always see that children that are very shy or quiet are entertained to no end. It's a lovely thing to see, because initially they don't know what's going on. But then they get it, and they really enjoy it and come out of themselves. They want to ask you questions. Whereas, the usual children who are extroverted will be talking anyway, they're going to ask questions anyway. It brings out the other children, so definitely on the social side. I always think it's really good for cognitive development. They're in a situation where they have to work at a problem, really have to think, even yesterday when we were doing the bears thing, I asked the kids to come up with a question. Initially, they were so confused. But then a few children did come up with really good questions that I didn't even think of.

Interviewer:

Do you ever make use of the curriculum document for drama?

Ger:

No.

Interviewer:

Is there any specific reason for that?

Ger:

I don't think it's very good. I find that they have all the objectives and everything laid out, but there's no examples, nothing concrete. There's nothing that you could actually use in a classroom.

Interviewer:

So when you plan your lessons, you don't consult the curriculum documents?

Ger:

I do for my objectives. But I make up all the others for myself.

Interviewer:

But apart from the objectives, does it help you in planning your actual lesson?

Ger:

Well it would, I suppose. The only reason I would feel it help me is from the objectives, because then I know what I'm actually supposed to be doing. Then I make up the content myself.

Interviewer:

What are your experiences of drama in primary school?

Ger:

I don't really remember doing it. I did do speech and drama after school, which was kind of the only thing I remember. It was an after school program. In the curriculum, I don't remember doing it.

Interviewer:

Experience of drama at secondary school?

Ger:

I only did drama in transition year, when we did a musical.

Interviewer:

So it wasn't drama in the fact that you were doing role play or freeze frames, it was a performance. What were your experiences of drama during your teacher education?

Ger:

Pretty poor. We had a training day on it, and it wasn't very good, and that was about it.

Interviewer:

When you were engaging in teacher practice, were you ever visited during a drama lesson where you had to be supervised by your teaching inspector?

Ger:

No, I don't think so.

Interviewer:

So it was never a requirement that they had to see you in every single subject?

Ger:

No.

Interviewer:

Do you come from a strong drama background in your childhood, personal hobbies, or have you no affiliation to drama outside of teaching?

Ger:

I have a strong enough background. I was in stage school from seven to eighteen, and we learned acting and dancing. That was my first experience of improvisation and role-play. Then apart from that I went into musicals, but it wasn't a drama class.

Interviewer:

If you do come from a strong drama background, which you do, can you tell me about your experiences? Does it come from your family, your community, your school, your personal interests? How did you get involved?

Ger:

I don't know actually. I started very young, and initially I was very shy. I remember when I started stage school, and we had to do improvisations, I was terrified. I would actually rather cry than go into the circle and chain improvise. I used to hate it, and then I got into it and relaxed. I don't think my parents sent me to a stage school because they had interest in it. I have an older sister, she didn't have an interest either. But I was quite shy. Then when I started doing shows and getting parts, I loved acting on stage, and I loved it from then on.

Interviewer:

Does your drama background influence your teacher identity, so who you are as a person and the traits that you bring into the classroom?

Ger:

Yeah, I think so. I often like to play with younger classes, pretend I'm different characters. I do really enjoy it, I like when they laugh at me and have fun, and sometimes make them be teachers. Those are fun teaching moments. Some are terrified of the fact that they have to sit in front of the class and be the teacher, but others would really get into it.

Interviewer:

Would you think your teacher identity has an impact on how you implement drama in your classroom?

Ger:

Yeah, I think so.

Interviewer:

Are you inclined to use drama as a teaching tool more as a result of your identity and personal interests? You said last year that your kids wouldn't do it, but you incorporated in different programs this year. Do you think that is a record of who you are as a person or it's in your plan to implement?

Ger:

Interviewer:

Do you think drama has shaped your teacher identity in any way, shape, or form?

Ger:

Yeah, I do. I think it helped me to be a teacher. Now I'm able to stand in front of a classroom. Practicing being on stage, performing, learning lines, taking on roles, it gives you self confidence so you're able to present yourself in a certain way as a teacher, and not be nervous.

Interviewer:

So you said that you've been involved in performances outside of school, for personal enjoyment. Do you ever get a buzz when you're on stage?

Ger:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

Do you ever bring that buzz with you into the classroom? Do you ever find that it's given you a lease of energy, that you bring energy into your classroom? So if you were doing a show, would you come off stage and be really buzzing about it. Does it give you a new lease of life with your kids in the classroom?

Ger:

Yeah. It gives you energy and endorphins, more sense of fun. In the last two years, having done the musical in the school with the kids, the feedback from it, how other teachers comment on the brilliance of them, their bravery, I think that gives me a buzz as well. From where I'm at now, as a teacher, I find that that gives me a bigger buzz, when a teacher says, 'wow, look at that child,' one who would never go up on stage, or done anything like that before, that gives me a massive buzz to do more, and to get more classes involved. Even now, I'm looking forward to what I'm doing in June.

Interviewer:

Have you ever engaged in further professional development in the arts or drama education outside of your preliminary teacher education? Further training, studies, or qualifications in the arts?

Ger:

I did, not really but I did a week online course in drama music last summer.

Interviewer:

Would you be interested in undertaking a continued professional development in further education in drama?

Ger:

Yeah, I think so.

Interviewer:

Are there any resources for drama education you would like to see coming into schools or any way you wish drama education could be improved?

Ger:

Yes, I would like to see a selection of big books, so that all teachers could use drama. But if it was a big book, and there was a little pamphlet that came with it, based on drama activities and how they are incorporated.

Interviewer:

I think drama needs a textbook, because when you have twenty or thirty kids and you're pulling out your hair and you don't have a plan in advance, that's very difficult. So the whole theory of my research is looking at drama education, huge benefits it might have for development of children in primary school, but we fall into believers and nonbelievers. The teachers who don't have drama background might not believe. So, are you a believer in drama education?

Ger:

Yes.

## 5. Marie Transcript

Interviewer:

This is Laura and I'm here interviewing Marie today and she's going to tell me a little bit about her school and her background. So, Marie, just to start off could you tell me a little bit about your school? Is it rural, is it urban, is it co-ed or single-sex? Any other background?

Marie:

Yepg. My school is in a rural setting and it is a large school, despite it being in a rural area because there's a direct provisional center within the town and there's about 270 enrolled. There are 15 teachers, there is a mixed class up as far as first and then the boys go to a boy's school within the same village. We have a heavy junior side and a smaller senior side. There's a multi-class setting from the second class up and it's single classes from juniors to first.

Interviewer:

You mentioned a direct provision center. What's that?

Marie:

A direct provision center is what would have been known as a refugee center previously but they changed the names in the last couple of years, I think. So any refugees that come into our land, we send to the center. We have a lot of families and it makes the school a very multi-cultural setting.

Interviewer:

So do all these kids then go into the school that you're in? And do they have English as a second language?

Marie:

Yes. There's a huge Polish community in the area as well, so it makes teaching a very varied experience. There's also economic stuff going on as well, with different families coming from different backgrounds.

Interviewer:

So you mentioned your school has mixed classes. Have you ever taught a mixed class?

Marie:

I have taught them.

Interviewer:

Okay, later on I'm going to ask you about using the arts with mixed class settings. Just need to remind myself about things down the line. Does your school have a drama policy?

Marie:

Our school does, I think a drama policy does exist. Not that I've ever seen it, nor the other staff members as I'm aware. I think one person was put in charge of doing it a number of years ago when it became apparent that one was needed. But there was no thought put into that process.

Interviewer:

When you said that one was needed, would you think that was because a WSE or an inspector was coming up?

Marie:

An inspector might have been coming and the nerves were high for the teachers to make sure that something was provided.

Interviewer:

So, paperwork was put in place because it had to be and not because it was needed?

00:02:27 Marie:

Exactly. One hundred percent. The paperwork was made just to tick a box.

Interviewer:

Does the school have a whole-school plan?

Marie:

The school doesn't have a whole-school plan.

Interviewer:

So you don't know whether the drama policy was a separate thing or a whole-school plan?

Marie:

I don't. I don't.

Interviewer:

You don't. So you think maybe the whole-school plan was drawn because the WSE was coming?

Marie:

Possibly.

Interviewer:

Some schools have a whole-school plan that has every subject in it.

Marie:

I think it's a whole school plan with every subject in it. Our school is possibly a little bit different in that it's not open so none of the staff would really be involved in making this, that wouldn't be the way our school would run things. So you would need to gather some courage before you asked for policy.

Interviewer:

I understand what you're trying to say. Is there a post for responsibility of drama in your school?

Marie:

No. Nor the arts. No one is in charge of music, drama, or the arts.

Interviewer:

Are there people in your school in charge of academia, English and maths?

Marie:

I think there are some posts, I'm not sure what they are. The vice principal and assistant definitely have posts, but I'm not sure. They're probably in subject areas but definitely not the arts.

Interviewer:

So you don't see them specifically tagged in subject areas?

Marie:

Unfortunately, no.

Interviewer:

My next question was to ask you how these work-like the drama policy or the whole school plan or the post of responsibility, and to ask do teachers follow them or are they effective or implementable, because you're not quite sure of the whole-school policy and you're not encouraged to ask about them either. Then it's not really a question you can answer?

Marie:

I think because the attitude towards the arts in the school is negative, I think that an emphasis is not placed on them, even though some teachers in the school have a particular interest in the arts, specifically in terms of music. Even though some, like drama, are definitely not working from whole-school policy, it's just that their interests are being incorporated in their teaching.

Interviewer:

Is there a Christmas show or a summer show, anything like that at your school?

Marie:

Once every two years, there's a whole school production. It is financial-based and not based on the arts or what the children are doing in particular, or the development of any specific skill. It is completely financial based. There are specific teachers who will present their own shows within the classrooms, and that's where the resource for drama is obvious, and the arts in general. But other than that, no.

Interviewer:

Would you say there's a strong emphasis of drama in your school outside of the Christmas or summer performances or the end of year show that's on every two years?

Marie:

Only with specific teachers who have an interest in it themselves.

Interviewer:

So you wouldn't walk into your school and be hit with the presence of arts education and developing art skills?

Marie:

No, absolutely not.

Interviewer:

Do you teach drama?

Marie:

This is so funny because my background would suggest that I should be teaching drama all the time. And I do teach drama. And I've studied teaching drama and all the rest of it, and when I go to the classroom I find I'm under so much stress to get everything done that I actually don't put the time in to teach a stand alone drama lesson, so it's kind of incorporated into other subjects, so I feel it's kind of pushed to the edge, so oftentimes, unfortunately, not the recommended amount.

Interviewer:

Okay, how often do you teach drama?

Marie:

Rarely. I teach drama when I remember it or when it fits into a subject for integration.

Interviewer:

Okay. Do you have a space for drama?

Marie:

No.

Interviewer:

Okay, so it requires you going to a room or moving back tables and chairs?

Marie:

Exactly. You would have to remove furniture from the room and push it to the side.

Interviewer:

Okay, if you can't answer this one, don't worry. Can you give an example of how you teach drama? So, a recent lesson or techniques that you make use of frequently?

Marie:

I think what is vital is the importance of drama in the curriculum. I love the drama in history and how it can be used in other curricular areas. I think it's invaluable, especially if you're teaching specific topics. If you're teaching phrases, you're actually putting them to use in the questioning. I think in oral language, for English, drama is invaluable and also for use with novels. I think it's impossible not to integrate it, and that's how I'd use it. So rather than teaching a specific skill on its own in drama, I couldn't resist using it throughout all the curriculum.

Interviewer:

It was always under English, and they're kind of thinking that maybe they can put it back with that, it doesn't need to be a standalone subject. I think a lot of teachers would do what you're doing as well. Have you ever had a really significant teaching moment during a drama class where you feel that a student in your class was really thriving or benefitting from this lesson? I know that's a very convoluted question but if you I give you teaching moment, you might understand the question better. Years ago, I was doing a drama lesson based on a poem of a cat in a tree, and the dad had to go up the tree to rescue the cat, and mom was worried that he'd fall out of the tree, and the kid just wanted her cat back. And I had a classroom of all girls, and I had an autistic child who had very poor communication skills, no self-confidence, would never promote herself for anything. The class was standing in a circle and they all had to walk in and become part of the scene, so one person would be the tree, another would be the cat in the tree, another would be a ladder, and the autistic student walked in and

became dad, who kind of had to leave the drama out and really take it back because she really never demonstrated the ability in class to be able to lead all thirty kids in the room. She took on a role that I was flabbergasted with, so she soothed the mom, soothed the girl, orchestrated getting up the tree and rescued the cat. The minute the drama was over, she went back to being herself again, where she barely talked. But I had never heard her before put so many words together. She communicated verbally amazingly and I could never see that in her oral or written language in class, so I had a really specific moment in teaching where I thought that drama could really work for some children. So I'm just trying to see, have any of the teachers had a moment like that, a moment where they thought, 'wow, this really works.'

Marie:

A hundred percent. I can think of loads of different times. I was teaching junior infants, a child who was from an African country, who had very little language, and it wasn't due to English as a second language, his expression in the language was just very limited. We were doing a drama about a playground and I came in for the teaching role and I was going to take the playground after them, and he was so expressive in that moment. This child would walk into the classroom, and you could assess him yourself, that he had no language. Just the depth of some make-believe play seemed to produce all this language. I just couldn't believe it. I think all the other children were shocked at the same time. When I taught in a multi-grade setting, I noticed that there's not a lot of sanctions between age or gender or anything weird during drama. So I was doing a drama about a famine, and I think we get to a point where the children and you are so lost in it. We were doing scenes from the day that they discovered the blight, and in a family setting they all picked different roles. After we came out of it, I was completely amazed by the difference that was put together. But afterwards, when we came out of it, they found it so hard to leave the belief behind, it had affected them so much that they wanted to hone, they wanted to learn, they wanted to go out. From that lesson, they were inspired to learn more and more about the subject. I think that's one of the major benefits of using drama, that it just inspires children to delve deeper into these experiences.

Interviewer:

I'm going to ask you about mixed classes. So you never found teaching drama with mixed classes a problem?

Marie:

Drama erases everything. It makes the classes distinguishable from each other.

Interviewer:

So that would be the same with your students from the direct provision center?

Marie:

Absolutely. Because the children go into drama and then go into a make believe world, whoever you want to be and wherever you want to be. It eliminates all those things. It's just natural for children. I think they're so much better than we are.

Interviewer:

Have you ever had a really negative experience teaching drama?

Marie:

Yes, I have. I've gotten to the place where, you know, if you're using the heathcock method, if I'm not one hundred percent behind my method, if I have any doubt at all, it shows, and the children know. I remember one time getting the children to a place where we weren't getting anywhere, and I was like, 'okay, I need to move.' I think as a teacher you're like, 'well, okay, this is my end result, this is where I wanted to go,' instead of actually taking the actual bits that you're given in the lesson which actually probably have more value, that the things that the children are saying themselves that you probably should actually follow up on. Instead of doing that, I was forcing them into following me, as the leader, but actually the learning was going to come out of what they had to say, and I just remember once or twice getting to the stage where I didn't know where the drama was going. I wasn't sure how to roll it in and tie it up, or where I wanted them to go. So unless you're a hundred percent sure and confident of what you're doing, it can go a little poorly. I think that's one of the major reasons why teachers have so many problems teaching drama, because they're just not a hundred percent sure of what they're doing. And it's not that you need to know where it's going to finish, it's just that you're not completely confident of what you're doing.

Interviewer:

Well, a lot of the problems that I've seen in drama education myself is, unless you really plan for drama, it's not going to have a really worthwhile effect on your lesson. And to sit and plan the drama lesson, maybe you're trying to get it integrated with another topic you're

doing, or you're worried that it'll be a long lesson, you're trying to tackle bullying or something like that, you do have to plan in advance for it. And it's better to have subsequent lessons that go on a little bit and expand the lesson, so you might have to catch up this week or next week or whatever, but unless you actually put that lesson in place and you know what to do, it just kind of falls apart. And then you as a teacher you might lose interest yourself, because you've become withered then and can't get involved with it.

Marie:

And the line between fact and fiction as well, you know we were teaching a lot of it in history, but when do you let them off and when do you roll them back in, because what is fact and what is fiction? When it's history, you have to be truthful to the experiences that actually happened, the events. So it's hard to really get the best from them if you have to kind of stifle them and pull them in the right direction.

Interviewer:

In second class I find that the boys just want to joke around, and they take it too far and sometimes take the goodness out of it. And the girls get more seriously into it. So you gave me an example of a negative experience, you kind of sum it up as when you're not prepared to teach drama. Why do you think drama is important or not important for children in primary schools?

Marie:

Drama is important, so important across the board. For every subject, socially, emotionally. The most important thing, for me, is that I can use it to teach any subject in the curriculum, in any topic. I just think it's absolutely invaluable. For logic, creativity, reasoning, for anything that the curriculum wants the children to develop. Drama can be pulled on straight away, and all these different learning outcomes are available to you. It can give you a huge amount of skills in school.

Interviewer:

Do you think drama has its own value as an art form or as a way of experiencing the world?

Marie:

Well, drama allows you to experience the experience without actually experiencing it and its consequences. So you can experience death or loss, which is something that is very serious to think of, but that child has already met that experience in a fictitious way before they have those experiences in their life. They get to explore social constructs and social norms that they don't always get in reality, like maybe things they've seen or heard of but have not felt them and how people deal with them. They meet those in drama and they come up with their own reasoning around them. So I think that on a philosophical scale it's hugely important, because you can experience things without the consequences you would face in real life.

Interviewer:

Do you believe it enhances students' learning?

Marie:

Yes. I do believe that. It underpins everything that I think.

Interviewer:

What are your experiences of drama?

Marie:

My own experiences as a teacher?

Interviewer:

Your teaching experiences and your own experiences with drama.

Marie:

Drama has opened a lot of doors for me on a personal level and, subsequently, on a professional level. My interest in it personally has led me to seek further information on how to use it in my profession as well. That's probably one of the main things, one of the main strengths of a teacher, that they bring their interests with them when they come to a classroom.

Interviewer:

Did you mean that you wanted to engage in further education based on this?

Marie:

Yes.

Interviewer:

So, do you mean outside of your teacher education?

Marie:

Yes, so, after completing my teacher education, I then subsequently went to study a master's for education of the arts. I completed a thesis on drama and history integration. I had huge learning through that experience and probably made me question my own position in relation to the arts and drama and the importance of them, and probably came up against a lot of people's attitudes, especially in my own school, about how they felt about drama, and the relevance of my study. So it's interesting, when you start with something like that, that you're actually going to learn about your peers as well as yourself.

Interviewer:

My principal asked me about my research on drama education, and I told her, and she rolled her eyes.

Marie:

I got a lot of eyes rolled. "Oh lovely, very nice," and then no interest.

Interviewer:

What are your experiences during your teacher education? Where did you train? And tell me a little bit about teaching drama there.

Marie:

I trained in Marino. I think that's probably where it started, because I had two really brilliant drama lecturers there, and they were young, vivacious, and full of life and energy for the subject. They probably had only a few years of teaching themselves before they went back to teach in a teacher training college. They were just so enthusiastic about it, so when I finally went on my teaching practices, that was the area that I felt most passionate about. And when the inspector would come for a teacher inspection, that was the thing I wanted them to see. I wanted them to see drama. Because I felt most confident in that area.

Interviewer:

I would say a lot of teachers sway away from that, because they're afraid of classroom management. Did you ask to be supervised in the subject?

Marie:

Yeah, I did. I wanted to be supervised in that subject. I would rather that, they were meatier, there was much more substance in the subject. So yeah, I think that's where it all began in Marino.

Interviewer:

Did you come from a strong drama background as a child? Or personal hobbies? Or would you have no affiliation with drama outside of teaching?

Marie:

The arts were a part of my house in terms of my mom doing some amateur acting. My dad was a member of a band and played lots of music himself. We were sent off to music lessons when we were very young, and then subsequently I joined a drama group, then a big production. It just kind of snowballed. Yeah, it played a huge part in my life and has since I was little.

Interviewer:

So you did bigger productions in recent years, do you mean musical societies? Or drama groups?

Marie:

Drama groups, yeah. Plays.

Interviewer:

Do you ever feel that you get a buzz off it? Do you go into school then excited about it?

Marie:

Yes. I also think it brings me back to the fact that I'm not doing this enough, giving the children the experience of feeling this feeling, and I can bring that to them by going in and they can do their own performing. Just that lovely feeling you get when you go onto stage

and you're somebody else. Some children only come to school for the break, and you can give them even more of a break in this way.

Interviewer:

You said before the interview that sometimes you can get kind of frustrated with teaching. So outside of your personal life, I'm looking at who you are as a person and how it affects your teaching, so you just kind of proved there that you go and really enjoy this passionate hobby of yours outside of school, and it fuels the kind of teacher you are.

Marie:

Yes, absolutely. All those things, no matter what position you're in, when you're doing a role in drama, I think all the stories have morals where there's empathy to be learned. These are valuable things for children to experience. So I think the importance of those, and the importance of kindness, can be given by a drama platform to experience that in a different way. Same as I do when I go out and do it. It's definitely a platform for storytelling.

Interviewer:

So you said you do come from a strong background, and your mom was involved with amateur drama, your dad was involved in band, so do you think that that comes mostly from your family, or your community, or the schooling that you had?

Marie:

I think it's so interesting that you asked me that because I think if I was in any different community anywhere, it wouldn't be the same. There's a huge emphasis, where I'm from, on the arts, music and drama and song and dance. My town has its own types of music, a tradition. I think there's an expectation when you come from that area that you would have that background. If I go anywhere else and tell them where I'm from, they assume I can play instruments and do other things. I do fit the stereotype. I think you're very much influenced by your community and where you come from. I thrive in the situation I was born into.

Interviewer:

Does your drama background influence your teacher identity?

Marie:

Yes.

Interviewer:

And does your drama background have an impact on how you implement drama education in your classroom?

Marie:

Yes, because I think about the way that I've experienced drama, the way it's been taught to me, the way I've been taught to teach drama, the way that I've experienced it personally, and then you bring a mish-mash of your favorite parts of all those instructions and methods and you bring them to your teaching and you manipulate them into the way that you know how to do it best.

Interviewer:

Are you inclined to use drama as a teaching tool more as a result of your identity and personal interests?

Marie:

Probably. I suppose that's probably where all the teachers have difficulty, because if your background isn't in drama, you might not see the significance or importance in drama, you wouldn't understand it quite as clearly as I would.

Interviewer:

Next question you kind of answered already, do you think drama has shaped your teacher identity in any way, shape, or form? You already explained your background information, how you used your spare time, how you brought drama into your teaching, so the last question is really in line with my current research topic. I basically just want to find out from the people that I'm interviewing that use drama in their classrooms or are supposed to be using it because it's on the curriculum, are they believers or not in drama education. So the question is really simple, are you a believer in drama education?

Marie:

I'm a believer in drama education.

Interviewer:

Okay, that's great. Thank you so much. Do you have anything else you'd like to add, something you might think would be useful based on the questions I've asked you?

Marie:

No, I think the study is really important because I think what people like me, who are drama believers, come up against, is the people who are against us. It could be really demoralizing because you go out with a passion for a subject and your peers shrug their shoulders. They don't understand the importance of it. I think that's not their fault, I think that's down to the government of things and departments.

Interviewer:

Two very quick yes or no questions-do you ever use the drama curriculum document?

Marie:

Yes.

Interviewer:

Do you think it's beneficial?

Marie:

No. I use it sometimes because I'm thinking of what the skill is, what the example was, or just in reference to vocabulary of something. But I think it's so broad and general and vague, it is the most disturbing piece of documentation. I don't know how they expected any teacher to go out and teach something substantially with that piece of writing. Half those pages are blank.

Interviewer:

So you talked about your lectures, in Marino, how they kind of invigorated and encouraged you, so do you think that your experience in drama education prepared you to use it in the classroom as a teacher?

Marie:

Yes, and I think having done the master's, I was probed to think about what I thought of

drama in a different way, and those lectures made me question what I was doing when I was doing drama. That actually has enhanced my teaching of it, the “why.” It was just a method of teaching a specific subject before, now it’s why I’m teaching it, and what it’s for. So I think having done the master’s and having experienced lectures with those specific people, it has shaped my idea of drama education and what I think it is.

Interviewer:

Going forward, are there any resources you would like to see being developed for use in the classroom in regards to drama education?

Marie:

Well, the curriculum. I think if they just revised the curriculum and just explained the specific areas and gave solid examples to teachers. Because for me and you now, we’re in a place where we kind of understand what the different components of it are. But if you’re a teacher and you’ve never experienced drama, and you have no idea how to teach it, and you haven’t seen or heard of it since 1999, you’re petrified of going into that classroom, of losing them, of giving yourself over. That’s what you do, you give yourself to them as a teacher when you teach drama.

Interviewer:

Do you think that some kind of CPD or in-service day on drama might change this?

Marie:

I think it would help, but I think one would not make any difference to any teacher in any part of Ireland at the moment. I think it needs to be bigger, I think it needs to be a set of in-services, it needs to be in school, documents are very important. There are oodles of products and text books being thrown at teachers with integration methods and plans, but where are the drama ones? Why are they not available to teachers? And the importance of integration throughout the curriculum, I just can’t fathom it. I think it’s easy for me to say that, but then you go to a school and a teacher has no interest in teaching it, doesn’t see the value in it, that’s when you go against a brick wall whether you have the documents or not. So it’s changing attitudes as well.

Interviewer:

Alright, that was great, thank you so much.



## **APPENDIX 5- HISTORY OF POLICY PUBLICATIONS IN IRELAND**

Appendix 6 shows the history of policy publications in Ireland.

## **APPENDIX 6- HISTORY OF DRAMA RELATED PUBLICATIONS**

Appendix 7 shows the history of drama related publications.