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An Exploration of the Barriers and Enablers of Children's Lived Participation within the Primary School Context

Thesis presented by

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for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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Table of Contents

DECLARATION **1**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS **2**

ABSTRACT **3**

CHAPTER ONE: AN INTRODUCTION **5**

BACKGROUND 5
RATIONALE/ RESEARCH FOCUS 9
RESEARCH AIM AND QUESTIONS 12
METHODOLOGICAL INFLUENCES, SCOPE AND DESIGN 13
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK 14
STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS 15

CHAPTER TWO: CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION: ORIGINS, TENSIONS AND DEVELOPMENT **18**

INTRODUCTION 18
THE BIRTH OF THE PARTICIPATIVE CHILD 18
CONCEPTUALISING CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION 22
Formal performative and informal everyday lived participation *24*
Models of participation *26*
Professionals' role within Children's Participation *28*
THE UNCRC - LEGITIMIZING CHILDREN'S RIGHT TO PARTICIPATE 31
Potential of UNCRC in relation to children's participation rights *34*
CONCLUSION 40

CHAPTER THREE: CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION WITHIN THE SCHOOL CONTEXT **42**

CONCEPTUALISING STUDENT PARTICIPATION 42
THE BENEFITS OF STUDENT PARTICIPATION 46
SCHOOL HIERARCHY, CHILDREN'S SUBORDINATION AND PARTICIPATION 47
INSTITUTIONAL OBLIGATIONS RESULTING FROM THE UNCRC 49
THE HIJACKING OF CHILD PARTICIPATION AS A FORM OF SOCIAL ORDER 50
THE CONSTRUCTION AND PROMOTION OF STUDENT PARTICIPATION WITHIN IRISH LEGISLATION AND POLICY 55
MOVING FORWARD 60
CONCLUSION 61

CHAPTER FOUR: A RIGHTS-BASED PARTICIPATORY METHODOLOGY **62**

THE RESEARCH FOCUS 62
The aim of the research *62*
Operationalising Participation *63*
THE RESEARCH PARADIGM 64
Ontological Considerations *65*
Epistemological Considerations *65*
Methodological Approach *66*
RIGHTS-BASED PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH APPROACH 67
Defining participatory research *67*
Children's Rights Approach *72*
Capacity Building *74*
Formation of Child Research Advisory Groups (CRAGs) for this Research *75*
Reflecting on the rights-based participatory methodology employed in this study *80*
DATA COLLECTION 81
Research Sites and Participants *82*
Overview of methods *85*
Observations *86*
Adult Interviews *88*
Child Focus Groups *89*

Pilot Study ... *94*
DATA ANALYSIS ... 95
QUALITY AND RIGOUR ... 99
Quality and rigour within the Framing of the Research ... *100*
Quality and Rigour within Research Design and Process ... *100*
Quality and Rigour within Research Conclusions ... *102*
Reflexivity ... *102*
Ethical considerations ... *107*
CONCLUDING COMMENTS ... 114

CHAPTER FIVE: ASSEMBLING A THEORETICAL TOOLKIT ... 116

INTRODUCTION ... 116
A RELATIONAL/SPATIAL APPROACH TO THE RESEARCH PROBLEM ... 117
EDUCATIONAL PARADIGMS, PEDAGOGY AND CURRICULUM ... 120
Applying the concept of Educational Paradigms ... *123*
Pedagogy and Curriculum ... *124*
POWER ... 131
Conceptualising power within this research ... *132*
Applying the four faces of power to addressing the aim of this research ... *136*
CONCLUSION ... 138

CHAPTER SIX: EDUCATIONAL PARADIGMS: THE BELIEFS AND VALUES THAT (UP)SET THE STAGE FOR PARTICIPATORY PRACTICE ... 141

EDUCATORS' BELIEFS AND VALUES ... 142
Constructions of Children ... *166*
CHILDREN'S PERSPECTIVES ... 175
Children's Constructions of Self ... *176*
Children's priorities and values ... *178*
CONCLUSION ... 180

CHAPTER SEVEN: PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICE AND PARTICIPATION ... 182

CONCEPTUALISING THE CURRICULUM ... 182
POWER AND PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH ... 186
Children in leadership positions ... *187*
Self and Peer-assessment ... *189*
The Co-construction of knowledge ... *190*
Teacher as a non-expert ... *191*
Children taking initiative ... *192*
Transmissive Mode ... *194*
POWER AND DISCIPLINE ... 195
Maintaining Classroom Order ... *197*
Maintaining the children's focus ... *209*
Control and participation ... *211*
Power and Discipline - Conclusion ... *213*
CONCLUSION ... 213

CHAPTER EIGHT: RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN EDUCATORS AND CHILDREN AND THEIR IMPACT ON PARTICIPATION ... 215

CHILDREN'S DESIRE TO BE LISTENED TO WITHIN TEACHER/PUPIL RELATIONSHIPS ... 216
THE ROLE OF THE PERSONAL IN SUPPORTING POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS AND ENABLING PARTICIPATION ... 219
RESPECT: A MECHANISM OF BOTH LIBERATION AND OPPRESSION ... 227
HIERARCHY AND POWER SHARING ... 235
CONCLUSION ... 242

CHAPTER NINE: PARTICIPATION THROUGH PEDAGOGICAL SPACES AND STUDENT/EDUCATOR RELATIONSHIPS - A WHOLE-SCHOOL PARADIGM ... 244

INTRODUCTION ... 244

EDUCATIONAL PARADIGMS 244
Pedagogical Practice: a means to enable or constrain children's agency and participation 247
Beliefs and Values Underpinning Pedagogical Practice and Associated Power-Dynamics 249
Pedagogical Power-Dynamics 254
STUDENT/EDUCATOR RELATIONSHIPS: SETTING THE TONE AND POSITIONING CHILDREN 260
A personal dimension to professional relationships 261
Respect: a mechanism to oppress or to liberate 265
The Role of Student/Educator Relationships in (Re)Constructing a School's Hierarchical Structure. 269
POWER: PRODUCING PEOPLE AND SPACES THROUGH WEBS OF RELATIONS 270
CONCLUSION 274

CHAPTER TEN: CONCLUSION 277

KEY CONCLUSIONS RESULTING FROM THIS RESEARCH 278
Overarching Conclusion: student's informal everyday lived participation holds the key to transformational change, and is made possible through a whole-school approach grounded in the development of an educational paradigm that enables a more egalitarian hierarchical structure and educator/student power-dynamics 278
CONTRIBUTIONS TO EXISTING KNOWLEDGE 283
Contribution to progressing children's lived participation in school contexts 284
Theoretical Contribution 284
Methodological Contribution 286
FURTHER AVENUES OF EXPLORATION AND RESEARCH DISSEMINATION 288
Dissemination 289

BIBLIOGRAPHY 291

APPENDICES 318

APPENDIX 1: INFORMATION/CONSENT - CRAGS 318
APPENDIX 2: INTRODUCTION LETTER TO SCHOOLS 320
APPENDIX 3: INFORMATION/CONSENT - CHILDREN IN FOCUS GROUPS 322
APPENDIX 4: INFORMATION/CONSENT - PARENTS OF CHILDREN IN FOCUS GROUPS 324
APPENDIX 5: INFORMATION/CONSENT RENEWAL FOR CRAGS 326
APPENDIX 6: INFORMATION/ CONSENT TEACHERS 328
APPENDIX 7: INFORMATION/CONSENT PRINCIPALS 331
APPENDIX 8: ETHICAL APPROVAL 334
APPENDIX 9: CHILD-FRIENDLY OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH FINDINGS FOR CRAGS 335
APPENDIX 10: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR EDUCATORS 339
APPENDIX 11: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR FOCUS GROUPS 341
APPENDIX 12: LIST OF COMMITMENTS MADE WITHIN *THE NATIONAL STRATEGY ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING 2015-2020* (DCYA, 2015) IN RELATION TO CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION AS RELEVANT TO THE SCHOOL CONTEXT. 342

Table of Figures

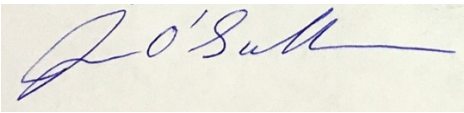
Figure 1. Lundy's Conceptualisation of Article 12 (Lundy, 2007, p. 932) 33
Figure 2. Lundy's Voice Model Checklist for Participation (DCYA 2015, p. 22) 57
Figure 3. Situating the research themes within the presentation of findings 99
Figure 4. Conceptual Tools and their Application 117
Figure 5. The alignment of curriculum models and pedagogical modes 130
Figure 6. A conceptualisation of the process of co-specification and its impact on the barriers and enablers of participation 132
Figure 7. Key themes in relation to the beliefs and values inherent in educational paradigms 141
Figure 8. Educators' key beliefs and values as relevant to the research question 142
Figure 9. The 'Problem Solving Frog' - used to support children to resolve conflict 206
Figure 10. Picture created by child in CRAG discussed in pilot school (St. Seáns) focus groups 229
Figure 11. Image used in pilot school (St. Seáns) focus groups 237
Figure 12. A summative illustrative representation of the key findings 277

List of Tables

Table 1. Overview of participating schools 83
Table 2. Participant/Method overview 85
Table 3. An overview of the process of analysis. 97
Table 4. Participatory and Transmissive Pedagogical Modes: Conceptual differences 128
Table 5. Words used by educators to describe the children in their class 166
Table 6. Approaches to eliciting compliance 196
Table 7. Spatial/relational elements that serve as barriers or enablers to children's participation/agency within pedagogical practice 248
Table 8. Key Beliefs and Values within Pedagogical Approach 250

Declaration

This is to certify that the work I am submitting is my own and has not been submitted for another degree, either at University College Cork or elsewhere. All external references and sources are clearly acknowledged and identified within the contents. I have read and understood the regulations of University College Cork concerning plagiarism.



Jane Maeve O' Sullivan

April 2021

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Abstract

Since the adoption in 1989 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) children's right to participate has gained widespread recognition, with children's participation growing significantly within policy, practice and research arenas. The dominant focus and growth, however, has been in relation to the collective/representative voice of children within formal participatory mechanisms and structures. Considered to a lesser extent, but equally important, is children's right to participate informally within their everyday lives. A lack of focus on children's informal everyday lived participation within the school context, a key site in relation to most children's everyday lives, has resulted in a gap in knowledge with regard to what such participation looks like, how it can be assessed or measured, and thus, how its facilitation can be assured in accordance with the UNCRC. This research addresses this gap by generating knowledge which contributes to our ability to ensure that each and every child's right to participate within their everyday school lives is respected, developed and facilitated.

This thesis identifies and engages in an exposition of the factors that both influence, and act as, barriers and enablers to children's lived participation within a school context, in addition to the spatial/relational process(es) by which such barriers and enablers are (re)constructed. Using a rights-based participatory methodology, comprising interviews, focus groups and observations, data was gathered and analysed from five Irish primary schools. Employing a spatially/relationally orientated theoretical framework that forefronts the concepts of power and educational paradigms, the perspectives of educators and children were analysed, both in and of themselves, and in relation to the interactions and practices observed within each school. The findings reveal that within each school a particular educational paradigm prevailed, which was both shaped by, while also shaping, student/educator power-dynamics. This research exposes the significant role a school's educational paradigm and associated power-dynamics play in the production of particular specifications of people and spaces, and the related mechanisms, structures and norms that determine the level and quality of participation afforded to children. Inextricably interconnected beliefs, values and

practices concerning children, education and participation which constitute the educational paradigm as it relates to children's lived participation, underpin both pedagogical practice and student/educator relationships – two key sites of barriers/enablers of children's lived participation. Ultimately the findings reveal that the development of participatory school cultures requires a whole-school approach to achieving a more egalitarian hierarchical school structure and educator/student power-dynamics. A paradigmatic shift that encompasses a rights-based perspective of the child is an integral aspect of such a whole-school approach.

This research generates original knowledge which furthers a spatial/relational, rights-based conceptualisation of participation that encompasses, and extends beyond, current conceptualisations grounded in decision-making events, to include everyday practices, encounters and relationships. These findings are significant in that they provide knowledge that can contribute to the progression of children's participatory rights within a school context, while also having important theoretical implications for how children's participation is conceptualised.

Chapter One: An Introduction

Background

Childhood is socially constructed, determined not only by biological factors but also situational factors such as culture and time, resulting in multitudes of 'childhoods' (Jenks 2009; Hayes 2002; Aries 1962). While childhood is a 'universal feature of the life course' (James and James, 2004, p.20), so too is it a social structure created by the discourses and practices of a given society at a specific time. In particular, the social, political and economic circumstances of a society play a leading role in the construction of childhood (Powell et al, 2012). The manner in which a society constructs childhood is not arbitrary, but rather comes about as a result of the culmination through time of that society's particular social determinants and discourses regarding childhood, becoming ingrained in the social policies and law, and enacted through specific social practices (James and James, 2004). Children themselves also play an active role in the construction of childhood as their actions, both individually and as a social group, serve to reproduce or contest the structure of childhood (Oswell 2013; James and James 2004).

In the past biologically-based essentialist constructions of children prevailed. However, from the 1990s a new paradigm of childhood, emanating from the field of childhood studies, has recognised that children play an active role in their own lives and development, and are thus, not simply a product of their upbringing (e.g, Hammersley, 2017; Horgan et al 2017; Percy-Smith, 2010; James and James, 2008; James and Prout, 1997). Today, two prevailing paradigms of childhood dominate the discourse; a deterministic model and a constructivist model. The deterministic perspective is grounded in essentialist constructions of children, and views childhood as a universal state determined by biology: children are positioned as the passive recipients of social and educational moulding with the end result, a productive adult, being the desired goal. This perspective marginalises children from society by viewing them as adults/citizens-in-waiting, and human 'becomings' (Uprichard, 2008) rather than human beings. Inherent in a

deterministic construction of childhood is a needs-based developmental perspective. Such a perspective marginalises children through their construction as deficient and incomplete, leading to them being 'othered', and rendering them both voiceless and powerless, while disregarding children's agency and autonomy (Zhao, 2010). James and James (2004) argue that the denial of children's agency through their positioning as 'other' marginalises and excludes children from society through policies and laws aimed at protecting them. In addition to being a feature of a developmentalist perspective, the view of children as immature also contributes to a protectionist perspective which emphasises children's vulnerability as a consequence of their immaturity. While the protection of children is both right and moral, with the right to protection being a key feature in the UNCRC, an overly protectionist perspective serves to silence and disempower children which, paradoxically, can result in their endangerment.

The constructivist perspective, however, 'challenges the biological basis to childhood' (Wyness, 2018b, p.64) and acknowledges the active role children play in their own lives and development, viewing children as full citizens in their own right (Gabriel, 2017). James and James (2004) argue that although this progressive rhetoric is strong, many adults, including governments and policymakers, still revert to more traditional deterministic perspectives and ideologies in their interactions and practice, thus denying children's agency. Drawing on the ontological perspective of social constructivism Devine (2003) reminds us that identity is socially constructed. Discourses relating to childhood influence the perceptions children have of themselves, while discourses also construct schools, which in turn constructs childhood in a particular way within this space (Devine 2003). Adding a relational lens one can see that identity is not constructed through discourse alone but through a network of heterogonous materials, of shifting associations and dis-associations between human and non-human elements. Devine (2003) notes that 'how power is exercised between adults and children in school also influences the way children view themselves as children, in particular their perception of themselves as persons with a right to exercise their voice on matters which directly affect them and have their views taken seriously and treated with respect' (p.2). It is, therefore, not just the discourses that construct children's

identities within the school space, but also the practices within the school, the material resources available to children, children's bodies, and so forth. While undoubtedly discourse impacts on our perspectives regarding all of these elements, it is none the less important to consider all elements in order to examine and illuminate the processes and practices that produce and reproduce children's identity within the school context.

As discourse and practice began to problematize the deterministic, developmental-based view of children as passive recipients of adult provision (De Castro, 2012), and recognise children's agency, a duality within childhood emerged - children's *needs* (as emphasised within a deterministic perspective), and children's *agency* (as emphasised within a constructivist perspective). Roch (1999, cited in Tammi 2013) argues that there is a constant tension between meeting children's needs and supporting their agency. Tammi highlights the very tangible reality of this tension within the classroom context and argues that in order to progress, research should seek to focus on this tension to develop a 'creative balance […] between democracy and control, between pupil involvement and curriculum, between agency and structure' (Tammi, 2013, p83). Ghirotto and Mazzoni (2013) also highlights such a tension, arguing that educators' 'power' should be recognised as a resource, rather than solely as an impediment to student participation. The UNCRC has solidified children's right to exercise agency, and to play a role in decisions that impact their lives. While several of the Convention's Articles support children's participation rights (McMellon and Tisdall, 2020; Twum-Danso Imoh and Okyere, 2020; Lundy, 2007), it is Article 12 in particular that has served as the foundation stone for what has become known as the right to be heard or the right to participate (Lansdown, 2010). This Article articulates and upholds children's right to voice their opinion on any matter that concerns them and to have that opinion considered in accordance with their age and maturity (UNCRC, 1989). Article 12 proved revolutionary with regard to the recognition of children's agency, and played a key role in the growth of child participatory policy and practice.

The ratification of the treaty by all but one country (the US), has strengthened and progressed the view of children as active agents on a global scale. However, near-universal ratification does not guarantee its successful implementation. The Committee on the Rights of the Child (the Committee) has noted that whilst State parties reaffirmed their commitment in 2002 to implement Article 12, the realisation of the right to be heard enshrined in this Article continues to be impeded in many States due to traditional values and practices, as well as political and economic obstacles (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009). So too has it been argued that children's right to participate has become narrowly focused on formal representative participatory mechanisms and structures that facilitate the inclusion of children as a collective social group, whilst overlooking the participation of individual children within their everyday lives (Wyness, 2018a; Graham et al, 2018; Horgan et al, 2017). A significant number of research studies have studied children's participation by exploring formal participatory mechanisms, processes and projects (see Chapter Two: *Children and Young People's Participation: Origins, Tensions and Development*). However, there have been calls for research to explore children's everyday experiences of participation, and to recognise participation as a situated relational phenomenon (Graham et al, 2018; Horgan et al, 2017; Percy-Smith, 2015; Wyness, 2012; Prout, 2011; Mannion, 2010). By generating original knowledge regarding the spatial and relational factors that impact children's everyday participation within their school lives, this research answers these calls.

While formal collective participatory mechanisms and structures have contributed to significant and important achievements with regard to the facilitation of children's right to be heard, they have failed to challenge the traditional view of children or to disrupt adult decision-making power (Moran-Ellis and Tisdall, 2019; De Castro, 2012; Alderson, 2010; Lansdown, 2010). Thus, they have failed to achieve radical social change. Collective participatory mechanisms and structures are based on a narrow conceptualisation of participation, grounded in Article 12, which focuses on children's participation within formal decision-making contexts. Reconceptualizing children's participation to encompasses everyday informal lived experiences and the intergenerational dialogic encounters that occur within

multiple social processes (McMellon and Tisdall, 2020; Horgan et al, 2017; Percy-Smith, 2010; Mannion, 2010; Lansdown, 2010), holds significant potential with regard to the achievement of radical transformative change. Such a reimagining of participation enables the generation of knowledge with regard to the cultural conditions needed for the realisation of children's everyday informal lived participation (Graham et al, 2018) within all adult/child spaces and relationships. The realization of children's lived participation within pedagogical practices and student/educator relationships serves to challenge existing unequal educator/student power-dynamics and deterministic constructions of children within educational contexts. Thus, it has the potential to achieve the radical transformative change which has eluded formal collective student participation to date. This research generates important knowledge which can be used to progress children's everyday participation within the school context, and thus, contribute to the achievement of such radical transformation.

Rationale/ research focus

This research seeks to identify the barriers and enablers of children's everyday informal lived participation within a school context. In seeking to identify and explore these, this research is concerned with the facilitation of children's lived participation within their everyday school lives. In a large-scale study involving over 66,000 children and young people in Ireland, participants identified school as one of the top three best *and* worst things about growing up in Ireland (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2012a). While such a finding may at first seem contradictory, it illustrates the importance and impact of school on children's lives. When school is a positive experience it is one of the best things in their lives, but when it is a negative experience it is one of the worst. Devine (2019) notes that schools have 'profound implications for [children's] experience of their childhoods, their rights and their well-being' (p.11). Within the family and the public sphere, children's voices are increasingly being included and considered. However, it is within the school context that the realisation of this right is proving to be particularly problematic (Horgan et al, 2017). A study published by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) (2015), which explored

children's experiences of participation in decision-making at home, in schools and in communities, revealed that of the three realms, children were most dissatisfied with the extent to which they were heard within the school context. The study noted that children had 'low expectations of schools being participatory sites and recognised that they had little say in anything apart from peripheral matters in school' (DCYA, 2015, p.4). As noted by Anderson et al (2019), in recent years there has been an increase in policy, practice and research focusing on children's participation within the school context, nonetheless research (e.g. Graham et al, 2018; Giannakaki et al, 2018; Horgan et al., 2017) has identified a gap in knowledge with regard to what participation within a school context looks like, what its constitute parts are, what influences it, and how it can be assessed and developed. This research addresses this gap by generating knowledge that contributes to the development of a transformative conceptualisation of children's everyday informal lived participation within the school context, and the identification of the factors that serve as, or contribute to, barriers and/or enablers of children's everyday lived participation within their school lives.

In the Irish context, the commitments identified in the Action Plan within the *Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making* (DCYA, 2015) addressed children's participation within school councils, whole-school inspection processes, national student consultations and research exploring the student experience. The Action Plan thus focuses on formal representative participation and lacks actions that measure, assess, or monitor children's individual lived participation within schools. This research is, thus, both timely and important. In identifying barriers and the enablers of children's informal participation within their school lives, and the factors which impact their (re)creation, this research provides valuable knowledge which can enable schools and educators to assess and promote children's everyday informal lived participation, and contribute to the development of policy that supports both formal *and* informal participation within the school context.

Whilst initially setting out to explore children's right to participate as articulated in Article 12, the conceptualisation of participation, and consequently the research

focus, evolved as the research progressed. This occurred as a result of both the data generated and emerging literature, whilst in the field. Drawing and building on the work of others (e.g. McMellon and Tisdall, 2020; Graham et al, 2018; Horgan, 2017; De Castro, 2012; Percy-Smith, 2010; Mannion, 2010; Lansdown, 2010; Lundy, 2007), this study conceptualises children's informal everyday lived participation within a school context from both a spatial/relational and a rights-based perspective as; *the right to participate in intergenerational dialogic encounters within multiple social processes embedded in everyday contexts and interactions, and encompassing both decision-making and non-decision-making moments*. Whilst such a conceptualisation recognises both decision-making and non-decision-making contexts, it nonetheless draws on Lundy's conceptualisation of Article 12 (2007), in arguing that such lived participation requires the elements of space, voice, audience and influence. The focus of this research rests on students' participation within student/educator spaces and relationships and associated power-dynamics. This study is thus, interested in the opportunities children experience to participate within pedagogical processes and student/educator relationships, and the impact of educational structures, mechanisms and norms on such opportunities. In particular, this research explores key elements within a school's educational paradigm, which impact the level and nature of participation made possible within the culture of a school. In doing so, this research addresses a gap in knowledge with regard to the impact of individual schools' ideology on student participation (Giannakaki et al, 2018).

Finally, my rationale for conducting this study is both personal and political. As discussed in more detail within Chapter Three: *A Rights-Based Participatory Methodology* my personal and professional journey has led me to care deeply about the facilitation of children's participation within their school lives. As a child, I felt both voiceless and powerless. Being one of eight children, I seldom had the ear of a parent, while in primary school corporal punishment was still practised with great enthusiasm. School for me, was a place of fear, where I endeavoured to do what I was told without being noticed – I was not very successful. This experience contributed to me being drawn to becoming an early-years educator, and to the desire to empower children that served as a foundation

to my practice. My own children's experiences in primary school over the last fifteen years has revealed to me the lack of voice still experienced by some children within schools today. Thus, my decision to explore the barriers and enablers of children's participation arose from a desire to contribute to the development of knowledge and awareness with regard to children's right to be heard. My goal is to contribute to the actualisation of children's full and meaningful participation within their school lives.

Research Aim and questions

The aim of this research is to *identify* and *explore* the (re)creation of the barriers and enablers of children's lived participation within a primary school context, and the factors that influence the creation of such barriers and enablers. Thus, this study aims to generate knowledge that can contribute to the realisation of children's everyday lived participation within their school lives being realised.

In particular, this study aims –

- To progress a spatial/relational orientated rights-based conceptualisation of participation that encompasses both decision-making and non-decision-making moments or contexts, in order to further both the theorisation, and the facilitation of, children's informal everyday lived participation within pedagogical processes and student/educator relationships.
- To develop existing knowledge with regard to the cultural and structural factors within schools, which impact on the level and nature of participation afforded to children within their everyday school lives.
- To reveal the mechanisms (structures, processes and norms), and associated power-dynamics, by which the educational paradigm within a school impacts children's lived participation.
- To explore the impact of student/educator relationships and associated power-dynamics on children's lived participation.
- To honour and include the perspectives and priorities of children in relation to student participation, both through the inclusion of children as research

participants and through the inclusion of Child Research Advisory Groups (CRAGs) within the research process.

The following three research questions were developed to guide the research process:

1. What are the barriers and enablers of children's lived participation within the primary school context?
2. What are the key factors influencing children's lived participation in primary schools?
3. How are these barriers and enablers enacted in everyday norms and practices within student/educator interactions in primary schools?

Methodological Influences, Scope and Design

This thesis is based on a small-scale qualitative rights-based participatory study. In considering the most appropriate and ethical research design to address the research question(s), choosing a rights-based participatory approach was an obvious choice. Indeed, given the research topic, such an approach was fundamental to the integrity of the research. Upholding children's right to be involved in the research is a key ethical aspect of this research. To this end, two CRAGs contributed to the research process - one group consisting of five children aged between 5 and 8, the other consisting of five children aged between 9 and 12. The role of the CRAGs was to provide children's perspectives on the research focus, process and findings. The benefits, challenges and impact of their involvement are documented and discussed in detail within Chapter Three: *A Rights-Based Participatory Methodology*. Thus, an important output of this study is its contribution to existing knowledge, and its furthering of the conversation, in relation to children's participation in adult-led/PhD research.

Five primary schools located within Ireland participated in this study. Methods used to generate data included semi-structured interviews with principals and teachers (n = 12), focus groups with children (n = 9), and non-participant

classroom observations (five weeks in total - one week within each of the five schools). This combination of methods enabled the generation of data concerning educators' and students' perspectives, in addition to data with respect to educator/student interactions and practices. Observation as a method of data collection is relatively uncommon in studies exploring student participation. Of the countless academic texts concerning children's participation within a school context, read throughout the life of this research project, only three (Thornberg and Elvstrand, 2012; Yamashi and Davies, 2010; Devine, 2003) included observation as a method for gathering data. Yet this method proved to be a particularly important and valuable method within this study. Analysis of participants' stated beliefs and values, in relation to the practice observed revealed many of the key insights provided within this research.

Theoretical Framework

A bespoke theoretical framework was devised to provide the most appropriate lens through which to interrogate the data, interpret the research findings and address the research questions. This framework is based on the premise that people and spaces are in a constant process of co-specification[1] (Mannion, 2007), with the resulting specifications (of people and spaces) serving as/ contributing to/ encompassing, barriers and enablers to children's lived participation. This spatially/relationally orientated approach is in-keeping with the conceptualisation of lived participation as a situated relational dialogic process. The concept of educational paradigms and a four-dimensional concept of power are used to illustrate the process(es) by which particular specifications of people and spaces are co-created, and to explore the barriers and enablers to children's lived participation within resulting mechanisms, structures and norms. The detailed analysis of the power-dynamics at play in both the barriers and enablers themselves, and the process by which these are created, as facilitated by this theoretical framework, is a key and original contribution made by this research.

[1] Used by Mannion (2007), the term co-specification refers to the on-going socio-spatial process by which people and the spaces they occupy mould and shape each other, and determine the meanings that are attributed to them.

Structure of the thesis

The layout of the thesis is as follows:

Chapter Two: Children and Young People's Participation: Origins, Tensions and Development

This chapter provides a synthesis and analysis of the literature pertaining to children's participation, providing both a comprehensive overview and in-depth analytical discussion of the knowledge-base from which this research emerges and builds upon. The chapter discusses the birth of the 'participative child' and the factors that influenced such an emergence. So too does it highlight the value, dominance and limitations of performative participation and the centrality of adult/child power-dynamics within children's participation. The case is made for the need to develop a spatially/relationally orientated, rights-based concept of participation, that more readily supports children's informal everyday lived participation.

Chapter Three: Children's Participation Within the School Context

This chapter examines the literature on student participation. The limited and ad-hoc nature of student participation, and the dominant focus within policy and practice (including research) on formal collective participation is highlighted. The case is made that student participation that is underpinned by an academic performance-orientated agenda, as opposed to a children's rights perspective, is limited in its ability to affect social change. This chapter illustrates the need to develop knowledge that can further children's informal everyday lived participation within their school lives.

Chapter Four: A Rights-Based Participatory Methodology

This chapter presents and justifies the methodological influences, design and associated decisions taken throughout the research process. The philosophical assumptions underpinning the research design are considered and discussed, as are the appropriateness of both the chosen approach and research methods, to answer the research question(s). The measures taken to assure quality and rigour within the research process are detailed.

Chapter Five: Assembling a Theoretical Toolkit

This chapter presents the theoretical and conceptual tools employed to develop a theoretical framework to interrogate the data and answer the research questions(s). The concepts of power; educational paradigms; pedagogical modes and curriculum models, and their affordances[2]/role in a spatial/relational analysis of the data, and the conceptualisation of children's participation, is presented.

Chapter Six: Educational Paradigms: The Beliefs and Values that (Up)set the Stage for Participatory Practice

This chapter begins to tell the story of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). It presents findings in relation to the beliefs and values inherent within educational paradigms which contribute to the (re)creation of barriers and enablers to children's participation. In particular, beliefs and values concerning children, education and participation are shown to be key/interconnected aspects of a school's educational paradigm, which shape opportunities for children's lived participation within their everyday school lives.

Chapter Seven: Pedagogical Practice and Participation

This chapter presents the findings in relation to the pedagogical practices, including issues of discipline, observed during fieldwork. In doing so, the beliefs and values regarding children, education and participation (identified in the previous chapter) underpinning, and educator/student power-dynamics inherent in, such practices are considered in relation to the facilitation of children's lived participation.

Chapter Eight: Relationships Between Educators and Children and their Impact on Participation

This final findings chapter presents findings in relation to the nature and quality of student/educator relationships as relevant to the facilitation or obstruction of children's lived participation. The findings highlight educators' control of the nature and boundaries of student/educator relationships, and the role of

[2] The term 'affordances' is used in this thesis to describe the potential uses or applicability inherent in a thing, such as, for example, a concept or the UNCRC.

student/educator relationship norms in maintaining children's position within the school hierarchical structure. In particular, practices and norms concerning respect, and the existence of a personal dimension within student/educator relationships, play a key role in children's subordination/empowerment, and in the facilitation of children's lived participation.

Chapter Nine: Participation through pedagogical spaces and student/educator relationships - a whole-school paradigm

This discussion chapter draws on the theoretical tools and the literature to provide analyses of the key themes to emerge from the data presented in the previous three findings chapters. In doing so the discussion generates an original contribution to knowledge, addressing the research 'problem' and answering the research question(s), through the identification and exploration of the barriers and enablers of children's lived participation within a primary school context. In this chapter the key two themes to emerge from the data: pedagogical practice and student/educator relationships, are analysed, and the argument is made that a paradigmatic shift, both with regard to how participation is conceptualised, and in relation to schools' educational paradigms, is needed in order to realise children's meaningful everyday lived participation within the primary school context.

Chapter Ten: Conclusion

This final chapter articulates the key conclusions drawn from the research. It showcases the original contribution to knowledge provided by this thesis, in particular its contribution to the practice and scholarship of children's participation. The chapter ends with the identification of further avenues of exploration and research dissemination.

Chapter Two: Children and Young People's Participation: Origins, Tensions and Development

Introduction

This chapter provides a comprehensive review of literature in order to situate this work within current knowledge and debates, providing both a context and a rationale for this research. The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section (*The birth of the participative child*) provides an analysis of the factors that served to create a view of children as agentic and worthy of investigation, highlighting the intertwining yet divergent nature of these influencing factors. This analysis provides important context for later discussion with regard to the impact these formative factors have on how participation is conceptualised and practiced. The second section of the chapter (*Conceptualising children's participation)* highlights the dominance of collective representative participation and the central role of power in how participation is conceptualised. Drawing on the literature, the argument is made that progressing children's participation, both conceptually and practically, requires reconceptualising participation as a spatial/relational (dialogic) process, as indeed, is done within this study. The third section (*The UNCRC - Legitimizing children's right to participate*) examines the potential of the UNCRC to further children's participation, arguing that interpretations of the Convention have limited conceptualisations of participation, which in turn have served to inhibit radical social transformation. This section further explores the potential of Lundy's (2007) conceptualisation of Article 12 *in addition to* broader understandings of participation rights, in (a) answering the research question and (b) recognising and valuing children's priorities in relation to their participation within the school context.

The birth of the participative child

Chapter One: An Introduction provided in-depth discussion on the socially constructed nature of childhood, detailing key constructions and their implications for children's experiences. This section provides a brief overview of the

development of, and the factors that influenced, the view of children as active, able and needing to be heard. While the argument that childhood is socially constructed was first made as far back as the early 1960s by Philippe Aries (1962), it was not until the 1980s and 1990s that the 'new' sociology of childhood emerged arguing for the acknowledgement of the socially constructed nature of childhood, and for the recognition of children's agency and rights (Tisdall and Punch, 2012). Framing children as competent social actors as opposed to passive and dependent (Tisdall and Punch, 2012; Mayall 2000; Qvortrup 1994; James and Prout, 1997) the 'new' the sociology of childhood challenged the marginalisation and construction of children as passive objects (Horgan et al, 2017; Mayall, 2000) that resulted from then existing theories of socialisation (for example Parsons and Bales, 1955) and Piagetian child development (Tisdall and Punch, 2012; James and Prout, 1997). As other disciplines began to engage in the discourse the field of *Childhood Studies* emerged (Tisdall and Punch, 2012). In acknowledging children as social agents, childhood studies precipitated the recognition of childhood as a social category rather than a transient phrase, and thus, as a structural category of society (Qvortrup, 2014, 1994), and as such deserving of examination. Traditionally considered within the context of the 'mother and child' Mayall (2000) argued the need to 'extricate children, conceptually, from parents, the family and professionals [in order to] study the social condition of childhood and write children into the script of the social order' (p.243). Subsequent interest in studying 'children as a social group and childhood as a social phenomenon' (Mayall, 2000, p.247) further contributed to conceptualisations of children as social agents who play a role in shaping their lives, with a right to have their experiences and perspectives considered, and their participation supported (ibid). As noted by Mayall 'if we understand children not just as individuals but as members of a social group, then we are forced to reflect on that group's rights to participate in constructing the social order, social policies and practices' (2000, p.256). Childhood studies thus, played a key role in the construction and promotion of the 'participative child' (Horgan et al. 2017, p.274) through its conceptualisation of children as active agents and as relational beings (Wyness, 2018b; Horgan et al. 2017; Tisdall and Punch, 2012; Mayall, 2000). Indeed, one of the central tenets and contributions of childhood studies is the affirmation of children are agentic

beings who should be facilitated in their participation within the world (Wyness, 2018b; Hammersely, 2017; Horgan et al, 2017).

While, clearly, children have always participated in their lives (Tisdall et al, 2009a), the focus on child participation first emerged in the 1970s (James and James, 2004). Initially slow to grow, in the 1990s awareness of the potential of children to participate was lacking and it was not until the 2000s that 'participatory activity' gained significant momentum and came to feature prominently within international policy development (Thomas, 2007, p.201). Sinclair (2004) argues that this growth can be attributed to 'the consumer movement and the demand for 'user involvement'; the children's rights agenda, in particular Article 12 of the UNCRC; and a new social science paradigm which challenges the perception of children as incomplete adults' (cited in Thomas, 2007, p. 201). Thus, three factors played a role in the growth of the participation agenda; the neoliberal agenda, childhood studies and the UNCRC (Raby, 2014). Neoliberalism refers to ideology and policy that prioritises free market competition (Smith, 2019). Western neoliberalism values autonomous individuals who can negotiate the marketplace, and underpins the use of children's participation as a mechanism to prepare children to become consumers rather than citizens (Raby, 2014). Czerniawski (2012) notes that the neoliberal educational policy framework within the British context repositions children as clients/consumers and is a key driving force in the growth of children's participation within the school setting. The neoliberal agenda can be seen within the promotion of participation within schools as a way to achieve the performative agendas of those in power rather than to empower and liberate children (Bragg, 2007). Thus, while the neoliberal agenda has been, and indeed still is, a driving force behind the participation agenda, as discussed further in this chapter, it has been a key factor in the failure of the movement to achieve social transformation.

Horgan et al (2017) posit that the three key factors that influenced the child participation agenda are (1) the construction of children as social actors (2) the construction of children as rights holders and (3) the recognition of the relational nature of children's lives. Notably, these three influencing factors did not occur at the same time. First came the acknowledgement of childhood as socially

constructed and the recognition of children's agency and rights. This contributed to and was consolidated by the UNCRC, following which critiques of both - children as autonomous rational beings (Prout, 2005, 2011; Lee, 2001) and the individualism inherent within interpretations of the UNCRC (Mason and Bolzan, 2010) - contributed to the recognition of children's lives as being interconnected and relational. Thus, while initially framing children as autonomous rational agents, internal critiques led to the recognition that children, like adults, are interconnected and interdependent (Tisdall and Punch, 2012). This evolution of thinking contributed to moving further from essentialised constructions of children, and to view children as 'context-dependent relational beings influenced by the structures and relationships in which they are embedded' (Horgan et al, 2017, p.276). A relational view of children recognises the interdependent relational nature of children's participation and subsequently the need for children's participation to be framed within intergenerational dialogue (Leonard, 2016; Wyness, 2012).

Children's participation within the policy arena in particular, has grown significantly and gained prominence. Tisdall and Davis (2004) state that '[c]hildren and young people's participation has never before been a more popular policy demand' (p131). Drawing on Olcay and Radermacher (2004), MacNaughton et al, (2007) suggest that adults include children in decision-making for ethical, and/or practical reasons and also for reasons of excellence. While Olcay and Radermacher do not explicitly identify children's *right* to participate or the UNCRC, children's rights are intrinsically included under both the umbrellas of ethics and excellence. Within the research context, compliance with the UNCRC is a key requisite for best practice in research concerning children upheld by university ethical committees and funding bodies (Wyness, 2018a; Farrell, 2016; DCYA, 2012b). This has led to a growth in research which encompasses children's perspectives, and in research employing participatory methodologies. Lundy (2018) notes that since the UNCRC was introduced in 1989 there has been a significant increase in research exploring children's collective participation, while De Castro (2012) attributes the growth in child participation to the reimagining of children as active agents, as opposed to the vulnerable charges of

adult protectors. Percy-Smith and Thomas (2010) suggest that of all the factors that have contributed to the swell of participation the UNCRC is perhaps the most significant. Thus, while various authors choose to focus on particular influencing factors and their impact on the participation agenda, it is clear that (1) evolving conceptualisations of children and childhood provided through childhood studies, (2) the legitimising and promotion of children's rights through the UNCRC, and (3) a neoliberal performative agenda which serves the market and institutions of power, all play(ed) a key role in developing and furthering the participation agenda and shaping how participation is conceptualised and practiced. The publication of the edited collection *A Handbook of Children and Young People's Participation* (Percy-Smith and Thomas, 2010), and the more recently published *International Perspectives and Empirical Findings on Child Participation: From Social Exclusion to Child-inclusive Policies' (*Gal and Duramy, 2015) showcase the significant growth in both the concept and the practice of participation in the years following the UNCRC in both Majority and Minority worlds[3], and reinforce the conceptualisation of the 'participative child'.

Conceptualising Children's Participation

In seeking to define the term participation, one must begin by acknowledging the lack of consensus that exists within the field regarding a definition of children's participation (Wyness, 2018a). Clark and Percy-Smith (2006) suggest that children and young people's (CYP) participation is a multi-layered concept that encompasses CYP's participation in various levels and contexts. Percy-Smith (2006, cited in Percy-Smith, 2015) defines participation as "[t]he democratic action and involvement of individuals and groups in the production and reproduction of their lives and communities" (p. 8). Drawing on this definition, participation is viewed as closely aligned with children's agency and their ability to have an impact within their environments (Oswell, 2013). Reflecting children's

[3] *Majority World refers to third world countries / the 'Global South', while Minority World refers to first world countries / the 'Global North'. This naming convention highlights the fact that the majority of the world is not located within the western contexts that dominate world views (Punch and Tisdall, 2012).*

lived realities, participation also crosses the public/private divide. The realms in which children's participation is examined within the literature include, but are not limited to; the *family context* (Frankel and McNamee, 2020; Martin et al, 2018; Le Borgne and Tisdall, 2017); *the school context*, (Mascadri et al, 2021; Anderson et al, 2019; Sargeant, 2018; Forde et al, 2018; Jones, 2017; Devine, 2003); *judiciary and child protection* (Odinokova and Rusakova, 2019; Tisdall, 2018); *healthcare* (Gilljam et al, 2016; Donnelly and Kilkelly, 2011); *policy development and community/civic engagement*; (Forde et al, 2020; Perry-Hazan, 2016; MacNaughton et al, 2007; Tisdall and Davis, 2004) through their *labour* (Twum-Danso Imoh and Okyere, 2020); and indeed *within research* itself (Horgan, 2017; Gallagher, 2012; Lundy et al, 2011, Kellett, 2010; Coad and Evans, 2008). Tisdall and Davis (2004) note the 'wide range of activities clustered under the umbrella of participation' (p.131), positing that children's everyday actions (play, homework etc.) constitutes participation. Woodhead (2010) notes the extremely diverse contexts in which child participation occurs, from everyday decisions within daily family life to public protests that challenge adult authority and suggests that for children to participate fully in society we must move beyond simply 'giving children a say' (p.xxii) and focus on children as active citizens. In the past, children's participation was viewed from a monological perspective in that the focus was on the right of the child to assert their perspective (Fitzgerald et al, 2010), however, more recently the relational dialogic nature of participation has come to the fore. Horgan et al (2017) argue that the recognition of children as relational beings influenced by the structures and relationships that constitute their context, necessitates participation being framed as intergenerational dialogue. This argument is supported by Mannion's (2010) definition of participation as an 'intergenerational performance' (p.339) influenced by issues of identity, space and power-dynamics. The conceptualisation of participation as multiple social processes embedded in everyday contexts and interactions (Percy-Smith, 2010), and the need to recognise children's everyday lived participation (Graham et al., 2018; Wyness, 2018a; Horgan, 2017; Percy-Smith, 2015; Prout, 2011; Mannion, 2010) is a common theme within the literature. Mason and Bolzan (2010) note that the term participation can be, and is, understood in different ways, arguing that the term camouflages 'semantic and associated conceptual subtleties' (p128).

Formal performative and informal everyday lived participation

As noted, children's participation transcends the public and the private realm and can be both an everyday lived experience or an event/mechanism facilitating collective voice. In recognising a kaleidoscope of participatory instances, Lundy (2019) posits that participation is children, decision and context dependent. Child participation can and does occur in a multitude of different contexts and at various different levels, however, within the literature there is a dominant focus on structured formal participatory spaces and mechanisms, rather than the informal everyday lived participation that occurs in children's everyday lives and within their interactions with others (Wyness, 2018a). Drawing on Percy-Smith (2010), Horgan et al (2017) suggest that participation should be recognised 'as a more diverse set of social processes rooted in everyday environments and interactions' (Horgan et al, 2017, p.275), noting that children value everyday instances of participation over formal 'performative' participation. In recent years there is a growing appreciation of the need to recognise, explore and create meaningful participation for *all* children within the everyday spaces they occupy (Horgan et al, 2017; Percy-Smith, 2015; Percy-Smith and Thomas, 2010; Dadich, 2010; Lundy, 2007), however, hierarchical models of participation are ill equipped to explore such horizontal forms of participation. Recognising children's everyday informal lived participation as acts of citizenship, and the fact that children may seek *not* to participate in the forms offered to them, serves to challenge dominant definitions of citizenship (Horgan et al, 2017). Percy-Smith (2010) argues for a reconceptualization of participation as active citizenship, which he defines as a 'dynamic process of active negotiation in relation to context' (p.1). Such a view is in keeping with a spatial/relational understanding of participation. While formal 'performative' (Horgan et al, 2017) participation is more concerned with the power children and young people have to contribute to decisions within adult-controlled spaces, everyday informal lived participation focus on issues of 'autonomy and self-determination as individuals "participate" in relation to their own agenda and values' (Percy-Smith, 2015, p.7).

Through formal performative participatory mechanisms and structures the perspectives of children and young people, as a social group, are increasingly considered within society and in policy development. Notwithstanding these significant and important benefits, formal performative participation has been criticised for: its failure to challenge the traditional view of children or disrupt adult decision-making power (Moran-Ellis and Tisdall, 2019; De Castro, 2012; Alderson, 2010); its failure to facilitate *all* children's right to be heard (Wyness, 2018a; Martin and Franklin, 2010; Percy-Smith, 2010); the further marginalisation of particular groups of children (Twum-Danso Imoh and Okyere, 2020; Dadich 2010); the tokenistic nature of many projects (Cremin et al, 2011; UN Committee, 2009; Tisdall and Davis, 2004), and a narrow interpretation of participation as 'voice' dominating (Wyness, 2018a; Graham et al, 2018; Horgan et al, 2017). Wyness (2018a) posits that the children's rights agenda has played a formative role in formal performative participation dominating practice and research, and argues that 'narrow institutionalised mode of children's participation' (p.54), such as school councils, are underpinned by adult-driven understandings and agendas. Lansdown (2010) further asserts that despite the proliferation of formal participatory initiatives worldwide, a shift in children's status, from passive recipients to respect as active agents, has not resulted. Fundamentally, formal performative participation has not resulted in the social change needed for children to enjoy their right to participate within all aspects of their lives. Notably, Alderson (2010) reasons that participation projects are primarily concerned with protecting and providing for children and therefore cannot lead to real change and action with regard to children's participation. This poses a challenge for the development of participatory practice, a challenge which can be addressed by progressing children's lived everyday participation. The generation of knowledge that enables and progresses children's everyday informal lived participation has the potential to instigate the attitudinal and cultural shift needed for participatory culture that reflects radical social transformation - a challenge that formal participatory mechanisms and projects have been unsuccessful in achieving.

Models of participation

While the literature yields many different models for assessing and facilitating participation[4], the following discussion provides an overview of the key, most frequently cited models. In seeking to illustrate the many different levels and types of child participation, Hart (1992) adapted Arnstein's (1969) Ladder of Citizen Participation to represent children's participation. Hart (1992) positioned "participatory" situations with zero to low levels of participation such as tokenistic or manipulative participation on the lower rungs of the ladder while the middle rungs represent participation of a more consultative nature. The higher up the ladder, the more child-led the participation, with the highest rung depicting child-initiated participation in which children and adults share decision making (Hart 1992). Developed as a tool to assist the conceptualisation and exploration of children and young people's participation, Hart's ladder came to dominate discussion on child participation throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, however, the ladder was utilised less as a rhetorical device, as intended, but rather more as a rigid hierarchical framework or yardstick for participation, leading to criticism of the model (Thomas, 2007). In response to the limitations presented by interpretations of Hart's ladder, Treseder (1997) removed the inherently hierarchical nature of the ladder in order to highlight that different types of participation, encompassing more horizontal forms of participation and varying levels of children's decision-making power, are appropriate in different situations. Treseder's alternative perspective on power and participation highlights two distinct strands of thought within the discourse on participation. Within one perspective, the validity of participation is judged by the level of power children have within the process. The alternative perspective, as reflected in Treseder's (1997) work, is less likely to prioritise power redistribution as the determining factor. Rather, it looks to the context in order to determine the type as well as the level of participation that is appropriate. The view of power 'sharing' as being essential to achieving optimum participation can also be observed in Shier's

[4] In 2012 Karsten identified 36 different models of participation - available at www.nonformality.org/2012/11/participation-models/, while in 2020 Hussey identified 60 – available at https://www.themandarin.com.au/138699-international-public-participation-models-1969-2020/

(2001) model of participation. This model of participation contains five hierarchical levels:

Level 1 - Children are listened to
Level 2 - Children are supported in expressing their views
Level 3 - Children's views are taken into account
Level 4 - Children are involved in decision making processes
Level 5 - Children share power and responsibility for decision-making

(Shier, 2001, p.107)

Within this model Shier (2001) poses questions at each level to identify openings, opportunities and obligations in order to facilitate the use of the model as a planning tool for practice. While Shier acknowledges that only level four needs to be reached in order to be compliant with the UNCRC, he further argues that level five must be reached in order to achieve 'full' participation and to obtain the full benefits of participation, such as increased self-esteem, responsibility and empathy and to ensure future active citizenship, thus safeguarding democracy (Shier, 2001). Notably, while encompassing the collaboration of adults and children, Shier's model, once more, suggests that the quality of children's participation is determined by the level of children's decision-making power. Given their tacit ideal of increasing children's decision-making power, hierarchical models of participation align most closely with a monological conceptualisation of participation. As such, hierarchical models are most suited to assessing children's formal performative participation, as such participation centres on enabling children to influence outcomes within decision-making processes. The conceptual evolution of participation from a monological to a dialogical process can be attributed to the evolution of the 'participative child' within childhood studies, from an autonomous individual to a relational being, and is evident in the development of horizontal models of participation. One such model, discussed below, is that developed by Lundy (2007).

Grounding children's participation within the domain of rights, and in particular within Article 12, Lundy (2007) developed a rights-based model which identifies

the following key elements of participation: space, voice, audience and influence. These four elements forefront the spatial and relational nature of participation, resulting in a model that aligns coherently with the conceptualisation of participation as a situated relational dialogic process. While most models of CYPs participation are better suited to facilitating and assessing formal performative participatory structures, mechanisms or one-off events (such as student councils, youth councils or research projects), Lundy's model, created in consideration of children's participation within the school context, is ideally suited to assessing both formal performative participation *and* children's everyday informal lived participation within everyday decision-making moments. Additionally, this thesis argues that the elements of this model (space, voice, audience and influence) are also applicable within a conceptualisation of participation that encompasses *both* decision-making and non-decision making moments (see section *'Potential of UNCRC in relation to children's participation rights'*). Unlike hierarchical models of participation, a spatial/relational model (such as Lundy's) constructs participation as intergenerational dialogue (Horgan et al, 2017) within multiple social processes (Percy-Smith, 2010), and can thus, be utilised to investigate and assess children's everyday lived participation as prescribed within the literature (see Graham et al., 2018; Wyness, 2018a; Horgan, 2017; Percy-Smith, 2015; Prout, 2011; Mannion, 2010). Lundy's model provides significant affordances in combining the relational conceptualisation of participation emerging within the field of childhood studies with the rights-based construction of participation necessary to ensure that children's participation is recognised as a legal requirement.

Professionals' role within Children's Participation

Recognition of the key role played by adults within children's participation is central to both the spatial/relational approach taken within this research, and the conceptualisation of participation as an intergenerational dialogic process. The role of adults in facilitating and sustaining children's participation, in particular as relational views of both children and participation gained prominence, has become widely recognised within the literature, (Akyol, 2020; Jupp Kina, 2012; Lundy 2012; Thornberg and Elvstrand 2012; Waldronet al, 2011; Lansdown 2010;

Mannion, 2007, 2010; Percy-Smith and Thomas 2010). Nonetheless the critique made in 2012 by Jupp Kina that, while adults' role is recognised there remains insufficient engagement within the literature on their role, is still valid today. For example, as noted in the section, *School hierarchy, children's subordination and participation,* it is the capacity of children to engage in, as opposed to the capacity of adults to facilitate participation, that much of the literature focuses on (Moran-Ellis and Tisdall, 2019; Tisdall, 2018). As discussed in Chapter Four: *Assembling a Theoretical Toolkit,* as a consequence of intergenerational power-dynamics it is adults who control adult/child spaces, as well as the nature and boundaries of adult/child relationships within such spaces. Thus, given that participation is a situated intergenerational dialogic process, the two components that determine the nature of participation (spaces and relationships) are controlled by adults. In addition to their *influence* on the process, so too do adults play an active *role* in the creation of the four elements of participation (space, voice, audience and influence). Lundy's (2007) model highlights the role of adults, not only within the facilitation of voice space, audience and influence, but also in providing children with guidance (Article 5) and information (Article 13) in facilitating the realisation of children's right to be heard. While adults' influence and role in enabling or limiting children's participation is thus paramount, the extent to which adults fulfil this role is determined by their beliefs and values (Giannakaki et al, 2018). Sargaent (2018) asserts that participation within the school context is determined by the beliefs and values of the educators, and notes the need for a 'cultural and attitudinal shift' (p.321) in order to realize the goal of children's participation within school contexts.

Deterministic constructions of children, and limited knowledge and skills in relation to participation, can impede adults' ability and/or motivation to support children and young people's participation. Lansdown (2010) argues that in order for children's views to be considered, children must be recognised by adults as active agents rather than passive, vulnerable recipients. Paternalistic beliefs and values regarding children's capacity to participate can contribute to their opportunities to participate being limited on the basis of their protection. The

tension between protection and participation can thus be problematic (Kirby and Laws 2010; Mathew et al, 2010).

A lack of knowledge and skills in relation to participation and its facilitation can also impede adults' ability and motivation to enable children's participation, as can the demands placed on educators as a result of performance based neoliberal agendas (see section: *The hijacking of child participation as a form of social order*). A limited awareness of children's rights has been found to be a key barrier to their implementation (Sargaent, 2018; Lansdown, 2011; Waldron, et al, 2011; Lundy, 2007). Within a school context, Graham et al (2018) found that when educators endeavoured to define participation they focused on the students' level of engagement rather than seeing participation as a relational dialogic event. Lansdown (2011) notes that the successful implementation of Article 12 requires 'training for all professionals who work with children so that they are able to respect and protect children's rights in their day-to-day practice, in their institutions and in their advocacy on behalf of children' (p.49). The UNCRC Committee note in 'General Comment No. 12' (UN, 2009) that all professionals working with children must be provided with such training. However, it is not only training that is necessary in assuring that adults support children's participation, adults, and particularly professionals, must also be motivated to do so. Within the Irish context, while *The National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making 2015-2020* (DCYA, 2015) recommends the establishment of student councils within primary schools, a lack of statutory requirement provides little motivation for schools to do so (Conneely, 2015; Kilkelly, 2008). Goodman and Jinks (2004) argue that three effective mechanisms to exert social influence in order to prevail upon social actors to comply with human rights regimes are persuasion, acculturation and coercion. *Persuasion*, through training and education, and *acculturation*, through peer pressure are thus, needed in conjunction with legislative *coercion* in order to ensure implementation of the UNCRC. While the role of adults is evident in each of these mechanisms, acculturation is particularly imperative in challenging the current cultural response to children, in order to render it socially unacceptable to prevent children from contributing, or to disregard children's contributions and

thus, make children's right to be heard a lived reality. As illustrated within *Chapter Four: Assembling a Theoretical Toolkit*, institutional intergenerational power-dynamics make it necessary for adults to be the instigators of the cultural change required to make children's participation a lived reality within the school context. With regard to coercion, the UNCRC and its enactment through statutory measures and national policy, is a key instrument in ensuring that the role and influence of adults in facilitating participation are met. The sections *Institutional obligations resulting from the UNCRC,* located later in the chapter and *The construction and promotion of child participation within Irish legislation and policy,* located in the subsequent chapter, provides further discussion on professionals' role within child participation, in particular their role as duty bearers in relation to children's rights.

The UNCRC - Legitimizing children's right to participate

As discussed earlier in this chapter, one of the key influences that contributed to the birth of the participative child was the UNCRC, which served as a mechanism for harnessing, consolidating and legitimising the conceptualisation of children as social agents with a right to participate. The UNCRC adds legal force to the case for the development and maintenance of children's right to participate (Lundy and Cook-Sather, 2016). Whilst distinct rights in and of themselves, four rights; non-discrimination (Article 2); best interest (Article 3); the right to life survival and development (Article 6); and the right to be heard (Article 12), serve as guiding principles with regard to the interpretation and implementation of all other articles within the Convention. The indivisible nature of these four articles necessities the inclusion of children's perspectives in the implementation of all other rights, thus, the status of Article 12 as a key requisite in meeting children's rights is enshrined in the UNCRC. For example; Article 28 (the right to education) para 2 notes that 'States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that school discipline is administered in a manner consistent with the child's human dignity and in conformity with the present Convention'. Thus, given Article 12's status as a guiding principal, in order to adhere to Article 28 para 2, children's perspectives must be considered in relation to issues of discipline, while discipline cannot serve to silence children. The exact wording of Article 12 is thus:

> 1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.
>
> 2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

The first part of Article 12 has two components: (a) the right to be heard in any matter affecting the child, and (b) the right for the opinions and perspectives shared to be given due weight, in accordance with children's age and maturity, in any decisions affecting the child. The second part of the article stresses the facilitation of this right within judicial and administrative proceedings. The term participation has become shorthand for the rights contained within Article 12 of the UNCRC (Lansdown, 2010).

Through the UNCRC, evolving conceptualisations of children as social agents with rights, and the resulting construction of the participative child extended beyond academic discourse and participatory initiatives to permeate national and international legislation and policy development agendas. The UNCRC acted as a catalyst for developing both practice-and policy-based children's participatory initiatives (Horgan et al, 2017; Percy-Smith, 2010). The social and political spotlight placed on children through the UNCRC stimulated further theoretical debates about children (Thomas, 2012, cited in Horgan et al, 2017) yet, ironically, so too has it been argued that the dominance of the UNCRC within the discourse on participation has hindered theoretical development (Alanen, 2014a; Alderson, 2012). The UNCRC legitimised children's participation as a legal imperative, as opposed to a 'gift of adults' (Lundy, 2007, p.931) and placed an onus on States to uphold such rights (Landsdown, 2010). However, so too did interpretations of the UNCRC privilege and conceptualise participation, by grounding it in Article 12, as the right to be heard or 'voice' within *decision-making contexts*, and in doing so limit its conceptual development. Lundy (2007) argues that the language used in reference to the rights contained with Article 12, such as *voice* or *participation*,

can serve to soften the commitment required to upholding children's rights *at all times*, not just when it suits adults' agendas. While support for participation is common, Lundy argues, such support may waver when, for example, it challenges dominant thinking or has financial implications, *unless* we see participation as a requirement rather than an option, thus highlighting the need to situate children's 'voice' or 'participation' within the language and domain of rights. To achieve this, Lundy (2007) developed her, aforementioned, model for conceptualising Article 12 (see figure 1 below).

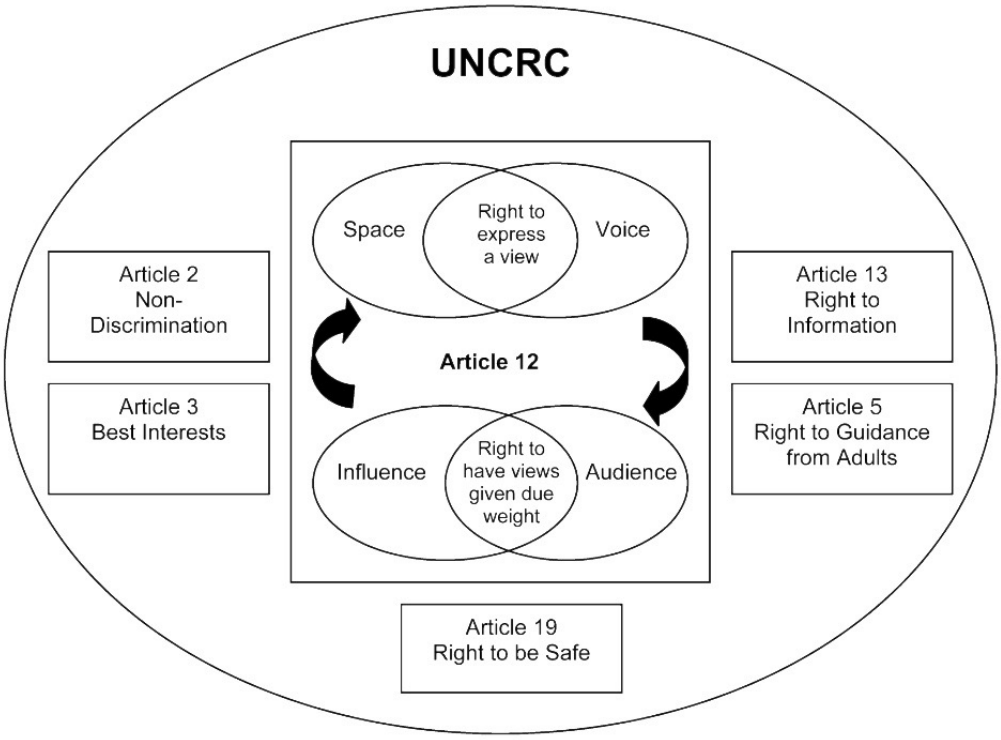


Figure 1. Lundy's Conceptualisation of Article 12 (Lundy, 2007, p. 932)

As noted, Lundy's model has four key elements - space, voice, audience and influence. Space and voice both refer to the first part of Article 12.1 – the right to express an opinion - while audience and influence are concerned with the second part of Article 12.1 - the right to have one's opinion given due weight. Subsequently Lundy herself (2018) and Tisdall (2017) have highlighted the need for children to receive *feedback* on how their perspectives have influenced outcomes. Lundy (2007) then draws on Articles 2, 3, 5, 13 and 19, linking them to the four key components to strengthen not only *all* children's right to participate

(Article 2), but also their right to be supported to do so without risk (Article 19), their right to information in order to make an informed choice (Article 13) and their right to guidance from adults (Article 5). Lundy's model thus, grounds participation firmly within the domain of rights, placing Article 12 as the foundation stone for participation rights, and as a consequence, anchoring the conceptualisation of participation within decision-making contexts and processes.

Potential of UNCRC in relation to children's participation rights

The UNCRC's status as the most widely ratified human rights Convention in the world inaccurately suggests global consensus regarding children's rights. Quennerstedt, Robinson and I'Anson (2018) argue that despite acknowledgment within the literature of the contradictions and tensions within the UNCRC, the limited attention these receive has contributed to children's rights research becoming a 'technocratic discourse' (ibid p.53). The UNCRC, they argue, must be considered as a starting point as opposed to a finishing line in order to allow children's rights to continuously evolve and transform as necessary. Contemporary discussions regarding the nature of children's rights are key to such rights continuing to be relevant to contemporary concerns (ibid). Critiquing the UNCRC is thus an important and necessary undertaking in the pursuit of furthering children's rights. Key critiques in relation to the UNCRC include: its use of vague ambiguous language (Quennerstedt et al, 2018); the lack of children's participation in the drafting of the Convention (Wyness, 2018a); and the privileging of Minority World perspectives and values within the Convention (Twum-Danso Imoh and Okyere, 2020).

The UNCRC has been strongly criticised for the Western-centric bias inherent within the Convention (Stalford and Lundy, 2020; Faulkner and Nyamutata, 2020; Twum-Danso Imoh and Okyere, 2020; Horgan et al, 2017; Tisdall and Punch, 2012), and the UNCRC's potential to 'perpetuate colonial tendencies if accepted uncritically as a global and definitive blueprint for children's rights' (Stalford and Lundy, 2020, p.2). Faulkner and Nyamutata highlight the colonial undercurrents inherent in the UNCRC in stating that 'the new imperialism brandished under the

guise of "children's rights" serves as an effective tool to "beat" the Global South, deflecting from the continued Western dominance within the field of children's rights' (2020, p.66). Highlighting the western-centric individualism inherent in the UNCRC Tisdall and Punch (2012) note that, in contrast, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (Organization of African Unity, 1990) articulates both the rights *and* responsibilities of the child, reflecting a view dominant within Majority World countries of the child as 'having responsibilities, living relationally intergenerationally and in their communities' (Valentin and Meinert, 2009, cited in Tisdall and Punch, 2012 p.258). In particular, the construction of participation from a western liberal democratic individualistic perspective limits acknowledgement of the culturally diverse ways in which children exercise their right to participate (Twum-Danso Imoh and Okyere, 2020). It privileges 'voice'[5] while overlooking, for example, the ways in which children contribute to their families and communities through their labour (ibid). Shier (2010) argues that many participatory initiatives in the Majority World demonstrate more 'varied and developed' (p.215) forms of participation than the Minority World, empowering children and influencing community development. Thus, in practice a diverse range of culturally relevant forms of participation are evident, however, limitations exist in progressing participation from a conceptual perspective when constructing participation from a rights-based perspective (McMellon and Tisdall, 2020) given the dominant construction of participation or 'voice' within policy, literature and practice. While it is clear that liberal western centric ideology does indeed underpin the Convention, the problem is inflated by the dominance of Minority world *interpretations* of the Convention that privilege conceptualisations of participation as 'voice' within decision-making arenas as constructed through Article 12. The challenge, or indeed opportunity presented to us then is to progress participation both practically and conceptually by interpreting the UNCRC in such a way as to utilise the affordances of the Convention to uphold and further children's broader participation rights, as enshrined through multiple Articles, not just its affordances in relation to Article 12. Focusing on children's informal everyday lived participation can serve to de-

[5] Defined by Twum-Danso Imoh and Okyere (2020) as 'the right of children to have a voice or be consulted, especially on topics that affect their wellbeing and welfare' (p.1)

institutionalise participation (Horgan et al, 2017; Percy-Smith, 2015) and contribute to broadening understandings of, and theories in relation to participation within a rights-based approach.

Drawing on the work of Margolin (1978) Twum-Danso Imoh and Okyere (2020) posit that children's participatory rights were originally broader and more holistic in their conceptualisation than they are today, and that children's right to participate has, over time, become narrowly conceptualised as 'voice'. 'Voice-orientated participation' (Twum-Danso Imoh and Okyere, 2020, p.1) is described as the right children have to voice their opinion on any matter that affects them and to have their perspectives given due weight in *decision-making*. Indeed, the majority of the literature in relation to children's right to participate has been grounded in Article 12 and focused on formal performative participation, and as a consequence, has contributed to the conceptualisation of participation as 'voice' and 'the right to be heard' within formal *decision-making* contexts and processes. However, a broader conceptualisation of participation underpinned by the UNCRC has been proposed (Lansdown, 2010; McMellon and Tisdall, 2020). Lundy (2007) draws on Articles 2, 3, 5, 12, 13, and 19, to conceptualise and illuminate the rights contained *within Article 12*. MacMellon and Tisdall (2020) and Lansdown (2010) draw on these Articles in addition to Articles 14 (freedom of thought, conscience and religion), 15 (freedom of association and peaceful assembly), and 17 (Access to information/media) in their conceptualisation of *participation rights*. While acknowledging the importance of Article 12, Lansdown (2010) and MacMellon and Tisdall (2020) do not privilege decision-centred 'voice-orientated participation' (Twum-Danso Imoh and Okyere, 2020, p.1) by anchoring participation rights in this Article, but rather identified a range of rights that together could be referred to as 'participation rights'. A key Article drawn on by each of these authors (McMellon and Tisdall, 2020; Lansdown, 2010; Lundy, 2007) is Article 13 (the right to receive/impart information and freedom of expression). The wording of this Article is as follows:

> The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.

In her model Lundy (2007) draws on the aspect of Article 13 that concerns children's right to receive information, and focuses on the affordances of this Article *in supporting the implementation of Article 12* – that is, providing children with the information they need to form an opinion on matters that concern them within *decision-making* contexts and processes. Article 13, however, also concerns children's right to seek and impart information and their right to express themselves freely. As such, Article 13 also offers affordances in and of itself in relation to participation that are not centred on decision-making. Thus, while prevailing interpretations of the UNCRC have contributed to the dominance of formal performative participation, so too can the UNCRC be interpreted to support a broader understanding of participation that encompasses children's informal everyday lived participation within both decision-making and non-decision-making contexts.

As noted, conceptualising participation as the right to be heard through its grounding in Article 12 places decision-making as a core element of children's participation. While children's right to be heard within decision-making is a crucial facet of participation, and doing so has contributed to significant progress in relation to progressing children's rights, it is reductive to conceive of participation solely as decision-making. While Wyness (2018a) argues that a broader conceptualisation of participation must encompass agency, voice and decision-making, Twum-Danso Imoh and Okyere (2020) highlight that the ways children want to participate, such as through economic and labour contributions to the family, which do not necessarily centre on decision-making, must be recognised if culturally inclusive conceptualisations of participation are to be developed. The decentring of decision-making is also evident within Horgan et al's (2017) definition of participation as 'a democratic task which is difference-centred, acted out in private and public spaces individually and collectively, but is essentially a relational space, where children's play, education, and work all are considered acts of participation' (p.12).

As stressed, conceptualising participation as the right to be heard within decision-making contexts, has many important and significant affordances, however, given its failure to recognise the diverse ways in which children participate both individually and collectively, it is limiting (Twum-Danso Imoh and Okyere, 2020), in particular in relation to younger children, those with disabilities and those children who are already marginalised within society. In addition, Twum-Danso Imoh and Okyere (2020) propose that, what is considered participatory practice, should more closely align with the social and personal relationships and practices that children *themselves* experience as meaningful. This would provide the less adult-centric approach to participation advocated by Wyness, who argues that dominant forms of '[c]hildren's participation [are] modelled on adult-driven conceptions of voice and democracy' (2018a, p.55). Thus, a tension exists between the decision-focused conceptualisations of participation grounded firmly in Article 12 and broader conceptualisations of children's participation within everyday 'horizontal spaces' (Horgan et al, 2017, p.275). This tension is not an inherent feature of the UNCRC but rather a product of alternative areas of focus/interpretations of the Convention as it pertains to participation. This research argues that the UNCRC underpins children's right to be heard in *both* decision-making and non-decision-making contexts. In particular, Article 13, 14, 15, and 17 offer much in relation to legitimizing broader conceptualisations of participation within children's rights discourse, decentring decision-making as a requisite of all forms of participation and, perhaps most importantly, recognising that which children themselves prioritise in relation to their participation. Focusing on 'participation rights' within both decision-making and non-decision-making could serve to progress the conversation beyond its dominant focus on formal performative participation, to also encompass forms of participation that are; more aligned to children's priorities, culturally sensitive and which have greater potential for participation to challenge children's subordinate positioning thus, achieving social transformation.

In considering broader rights-based conceptualisations of participation within the context of this research, the issue then becomes; children's right to be heard both within and beyond decision-making contexts and/or moments. For children to be

free to express themselves and share information, and for their perspectives to be listened to and welcomed and to have an impact within all aspects of student/educator relationships, and within their everyday school lives. In stating that views are 'given due weight' Article 12 implies the centrality of decision-making contexts, however, a broader interpretation of participation rights, in particular drawing on Article 13 (the right to impart information and their right to express themselves freely), recognises children's right to be heard when no decision is being taken. Given that it is a conceptualisation of Article 12, Lundy's model quite rightly focuses on decision-making 'moments', however, its four constitute elements (space, voice, audience and influence) are also relevant to non-decision-making 'moments'. This is possible by recognising that 'influence' (the fourth element of the model) can relate to both decision-making and non-decision-making contexts. For example, rather than influence only being considered in relation to a decision, the influence may simply be that children feel heard – thus impacting on children's identity; children's voices being an integral aspect of the pedagogical process; and children's voices being an influencing aspect of student/educator relationships. Such a reimagining/extension and implementation of Lundy's model can enable us to overcome the conceptual limitations arising from the dominant institutional mode (Wyness, 2018a) of children's participation, that has emerged in response to Article 12 focused interpretations of the UNCRC. Thus, while Lundy's model has been central to furthering formal performative participation, and, as such makes a significant contribution in relation to the inclusion of children's perspectives within decision-making contexts, so too does Lundy's model provide, as yet, unutilized significant affordances in relation to providing a rights-based foundation to a relational conceptualisation of participation as intergenerational dialogue occurring within multiple everyday social processes both within and outside of decision-making contexts – children's informal everyday lived participation.

This analysis of the UNCRC reveals that the successful resolution of the research aim requires (a) an exploration of children's participation within both decision-making and non-decision-making contexts and (b), given the indivisible nature of Article 12 (i.e. one cannot know how to implement any Article without considering

children's perspectives on the relevant issues), an exploration and the prioritisation of that which children themselves identify as important in relation to their participation. Thus, the decentring of decision-making as *the* core element of participation is supported not just by the inclusion/consideration of broader participation rights but also, ironically, through the status of Article 12 as a guiding principle. This research utilises Lundy's model of participation to operationalise participation because it aligns most closely with the aim of this study - to explore the barriers and enablers of children' everyday informal lived participation. In meeting this aim the research places considerable value on that which the data reveals about children's priorities in relation to their informal everyday lived participation within their school lives. So too does this research employ an understanding of 'influence' that encompasses both decision-making and non-decision-making contexts. In doing so, this research addresses the need, as identified by the literature, to develop understandings of children's rights-based participation that extends beyond formal performative participation. In bringing together theoretical advances in childhood studies, and an interpretation of the UNCRC that encompasses, but also transcends the right to be heard within decision-making contexts, this research addresses key issues identified in the literature in relation to the development and furthering of participation that can serve to achieve meaningful social change.

Conclusion

Conceptualising children's participation as a situated intergenerational dialogic process offers new possibilities for (a) overcoming the limitations identified in relation to formal performative participation, and (b) advancing children's informal lived participation within their everyday school lives. Such an approach positions adult/child relations and the spaces in which they occur as the central focus. This chapter argues that predominating applications and interpretations of the UNCRC, as it relates to children's participation, have privileged conceptualisations of participation that are centred on decision-making, and have served to forefront formal performative participation. Concurrently, the affordances of the Convention in relation to children's informal everyday lived

participation, in particular in relation to non-decision-making contexts, has received limited consideration. Developing a rights-based conceptualisation of children's everyday informal lived participation has much to offer with regard to furthering children's participation both conceptually and practicably. Children's participatory rights encompasses their right to be heard in relation to decisions that affect them, but also extends beyond decision-making processes and moments to include non-decision-centred acts of participation, in addition to that which children experience as, or seek, regarding their participation. This research progresses a conceptualisation of children's informal everyday lived participation that is rights-based, child-centred and reflects the relational constructivist construction of children that has emerged within childhood studies.

Chapter Three: Children's Participation Within the School Context

This chapter begins with an overview of how student participation is conceptualised within the literature, and notes the lack of, and peripheral nature, of student participatory practice documented. The discussion then identifies the benefits attributed to student participation and the role such benefits have played in furthering participation within schools. The obligations placed on schools to promote student participation by the UNCRC are considered, as are the failures within schools in meeting these obligations. The discussion then proceeds to acknowledge and analyse the failure of student voice to achieve the social change inherently sought within its ideological foundations, arguing that the strength with which neoliberalist performative agendas influence the 'student voice' agenda, in addition to the insufficient influence of the right-based agenda, have contributed to the status quo. The chapter concludes with a discussion on how student participation may be advanced. A key argument presented in this chapter is that progressing student participation, and indeed achieving radical social transformation, requires both a stronger legislative and policy foundation and the development of whole-school participatory cultures that enable children's everyday informal lived participation.

Conceptualising Student Participation

The facilitation and promotion of children's participation within the school context is often described as student or pupil *voice*, (for example, Charteris and Smardon, 2019; Pearce and Wood, 2019; Simpson, 2018; Czerniawski, 2012) thus indicating that it is 'the right to be heard' and to participate in decision making processes, rather than broader 'participation rights', underpinning much of the discourse in relation to participation within the school context. While there has been increasing political, practice and research focus on improving children's participation within the school context 'understandings of what student participation involves; what its constituent elements are; and how schools should measure, assess, and monitor their progress in relation to student participation have been less clearly articulated'

(Anderson et al, 2019, np). Nonetheless, Taylor and Robinson's (2009) definition of student voice as a movement captures many key aspects that remain evident in the literature. They define student voice as 'a normative project [that] has its basis in an ethical and moral practice which aims to give students the right of democratic participation in school processes' (p.161). Charteris and Smardon (2019) highlight the ideological foundations of student voice noting that:

> The student voice movement, with its links to critical theory (Nelson 2017), the rights of the child to be heard (Groundwater-Smith 2011), citizenship education (Groundwater-Smith and Mockler 2016) and radical democracy (Fielding, 2012) has long advocated transformative curricula that 'give learners a sense that they can act on the world' (Rudduck and Flutter 2000).'
>
> (Charteris and Smardon, 2019, p.305)

However, as noted by Taylor and Robinson, there is a gap 'between [the] normative ideal and actual practice' (2009, p.163). Lundy and Cook- Sather (2016) note that the term student voice describes:

> efforts to create opportunities for students to speak from their experiences and perspectives in conversations about school and classroom practices, collaborate with teachers to analyze and revise educational approaches, and participate as legitimate informants and active partners in educational research (n.p.)

Evident in this quote is the grounding of children's right to be heard in the school context within *educational* matters. Given that the structures and activities within schools are academically focused, it is perhaps not surprising that this is so. However, so too do social spaces and practices which also have an impact on children's lived experiences exist within and throughout educational processes and practices. Indeed, while educators tend to focus predominantly on academic matters, children are far more concerned with the social elements of their school experiences (Horgan et al, 2017). Using a participatory methodology John-Akinola et al, (2014) explored children's understandings of participation within the school context. In contributing to the design of the research the children decided to define participation within the study as to 'feel a part of'. Consequently, the data generated spoke to the factors children felt supported their sense of belonging within their school, as opposed to the factors that impacted on their right

to be heard within decision-making contexts. John-Akinola et al's study (2014) highlights both the challenges/affordances of participatory methodologies, and challenges in defining participation. It also reveals the association children make between participating and a sense of belonging within their schools. Lundy and Cook-Sather (2016) highlight the fact that there is both a distinction and an overlap within the literature between 'student voice' and its educational foci, and terms such as 'pupil participation' and 'pupil consultation' used to depict broader considerations of children's participation within a school context. Similar to Lundy and Cook-Sather (2016) this research, while acknowledging its limitations, uses the term student voice to encompass both educational and broader matters (e.g. social) in relation to children's right to be heard within a school context.

Many researchers, in exploring student participation, categorise the spaces or domains within which participation is/is not facilitated (see for example; Anderson et al, 2019; Graham et al, 2018; Mannion e al, 2015; Pérez-Expósito, 2015; Holdsworth, 2000). Within each of these approaches the focus rests predominantly on the power-dynamic between educators and children. Whilst many studies explore educators and/or students perspectives and experiences with regard to student participation (Anderson et al, 2019; Giannakaki et al, 2018; Graham et al, 2018; Forde et al, 2018; Comhairle na nÓg, 2017; John-Akinola et al, 2014), few studies (Thornberg and Elvstrand, 2012; Yamashi and Davies, 2010; Devine, 2003) use observation to examine the situated practices and interactions of educators and children in addition to, and in relation, to their stated beliefs and values. An examination of the perspectives of these two key stakeholders *in relation to* resulting practice provides key information with regard to the impact of beliefs and values on participation that cannot be achieved through the analysis of beliefs and values alone. This approach also provides data that enables an in-depth analysis of the power-dynamics within student/educator relationships and interactions. Drawing on the work of Foucault, Devine (2003) highlights the role of prevailing discourses regarding children and education, and power's productive nature, in constructing children's situated identity and opportunities for children to exercise agency within the school context. In applying a multi-dimensional conceptualisation of power this current study builds on Devine's work by

providing further in-depth knowledge with regard to the mechanisms, structures and norms that serve to shape children's identity and school spaces, in such a way as to either constrain or support children's lived participation. Focusing on power enables the identification and exploration of shifts in traditional educator/pupil power-dynamics, in particular wherein 'different performances of childhood' (Mannion, 2007 cited in Graham et al, 2018, p.1032) are enacted and student/educator relationships are recreated and enhanced (ibid). Thus, in order to generate knowledge that will support children's lived participation within all aspects of their daily school lives, this current research focuses on power, identity and relationships from a spatial and relational perspective, and in doing so, addresses the gap in our knowledge highlighted within the literature in relation to children's everyday lived participation within the school context (Graham et al, 2018; Horgan et al, 2017; Baroutsis et al, 2016; McCluskey et al, 2013; Percy-Smith, 2010; Mannion, 2007).

Despite the significant benefits (discussed below) of student participation (Pérez-Expósito, 2015), the literature indicates that children's opportunities to participate within the school context are very limited and often of a peripheral, ad hoc nature, relying on individual teachers or specific school initiatives (Graham et al, 2018; Stamatović and Cicvarić, 2018; Giannakaki et al, 2018; Comhairle na nÓg, 2017; Horgan et al, 2017), highlighting the need for whole-school approaches to student participation (Graham et al, 2018; Stamatović and Cicvarić, 2018). Collective/formal student voice initiatives, such as student councils, have been critiqued for having limited impact in regard to instigating change (Horgan et al, 2015; Fielding, 2011; Rudduck, 2007). A report by the Secondary Schools' Union of Northern Ireland (2021) noted that the suppression of students' perspectives and the furthering of adults' rather than young people's agendas were key issues within student councils which have a negative impact on their effectiveness as mechanisms for meaningful student voice. Notwithstanding the need to develop more effective student councils, such mechanisms are important because, in addition to providing a platform for the collective voice of children within a school, through them students become critically aware of 'the fields in which they can contend for and accumulate symbolic power and, therefore, […] be better

equipped to empower themselves and collectively challenge established symbolic orders towards just ends' (Pearce and Wood, 2019, p.117). Within the Irish context, however, only a minority of primary schools have formal mechanisms such as student councils for the facilitation of children's collective voices[6]. *Whole-school* approaches support *both* formal performative participation (such as through student councils) and the informal everyday lived participation of *all* pupils, and it is within everyday lived participation that the greatest potential for social transformation exists. Stamatović and Cicvarić (2018) found that both teachers and students identified children's right of expression (Article 13) and participation (Article 12) as the rights that are least respected within the school context. While opportunities to participate are limited, Graham et al (2018) found that informal relational interactions between educators and pupils are becoming increasingly egalitarian with increased intergenerational equality and dialogue, offering much in regard to creating the cultural conditions necessary for meaningful participation.

The benefits of student participation

Perhaps one of the key driving forces of the pupil voice agenda, both within policy and practice, are the significant benefits awaiting both students and schools through student participation. Pérez-Expósito (2015) document an extensive range of research projects that identify the value of student participation in the advancement of students':

> communication abilities, interpersonal and social skills, critical thinking, problem identification, problem solving, decision-making, creation and development of plans of action, supportive relationships with adults and peers, and a rising sense of tolerance and solidarity (Mager & Nowak, 2012; Mitra, 2004; Mitra & Serriere, 2012; Pérez Expósito, Ortiz Tirado, González, & Gordillo, 2012)
>
> (Pérez-Expósito, 2015, pp.1-2)

So too has student participation been identified for its affordances in supporting;

> academic achievement, increasing motivation (Goodenow, 1993; Ryan & Powelson, 1991), and the inclusion of different forms of diversity to the

[6] In Ireland 21% of primary schools and 99% of post-primary schools have student councils (Lifeskills Survey 2015, Department of Education and Skills, 2017, p.5)

> school community (Mitra & Serriere, 2012) [a] lower risk of dropping out of school (Jeremy D. Finn & Cox, 1992; Jeremy D Finn & Rock, 1997; Rumberger, 2001), and the reduction of school violence (Fierro, 2011)
>
> (Pérez-Expósito, 2015, p.2).

It is perhaps not surprising then, given these significant personal, academic and institutional rewards that student participation may be regarded as beneficial and desirable and is thus used as a 'tool' to serve the agendas of those in power. However, 'true' participation, argue Pearce and Wood (2019), is transformative and should challenge and disrupt existing hierarchies and distributions of power. Thus, tensions between neoliberal agendas and emancipatory ideologies underpinning student participation become evident. Furthermore, regardless of the academic and personal benefits of student voice, or the disruptive nature of meaningful student participation, children's right to participate is paramount. In exploring the literature, Pérez-Expósito (2015) categorised the arguments made by various authors for the promotion of student participation within the literature thus:

- Democracy and citizenship
- Children's Rights
- Individual academic achievement
- Personal development
- Service improvement (benefits for the school)

(Pérez-Expósito, 2015, pp.1-2)

Thus, citizenship and democracy, child rights and (neoliberal) performative discourses are all present within the student participation/voice agenda. Indeed many of the tensions within the field can be attributed to these diverse and often-times divergent, motivating factors.

School hierarchy, children's subordination and participation

Thornberg and Elvstrand (2012) argue that the subordinate positioning of children prevents lived democracy within the classroom and thus even within schools that promote democratic practice children's influence is limited. Within the school

context children's subordinate status and adult control is legitimized through developmental discourses and perspectives which construct children as lacking capacity (De Castro, 2012). Given the spatial and relational nature of participation, understanding the institutional intergenerational relationships between educators and pupils is key to examining participation within the school context. In examining the power-dynamics within student/educator relationships this research illustrates how student/educator relationship norms create and maintain a school's hierarchical structure and children's positioning within it. De Castro (2012) notes that deterministic constructions of children as immature and irresponsible in conjunction with constructions of adults as rational lead to non-reciprocal student/educator relationships wherein children but not adults have obligations in relation to behavioural modification and conformity. This results in intergenerational institutional relationships which lack trust and solidarity, with children's behaviour under constant monitoring (ibid). While research has demonstrated that children are capable of engaging with complex issues concerning their education (Gillett-Swan and Sargeant, 2017), educators' reluctance to facilitate children's decision-making in relation to their education is based on their concerns regarding children's capacity to do so (Sargeant, 2018). Research within the Irish context indicates that primary school teachers lack sufficient knowledge regarding their role as duty bearers in facilitating children's rights (Conneely, 2015; Waldron et al, 2011), and as such, problematic constructions of children as lacking the capacity to participate remain. MacNaughton et al (2007) note that young children have definite views on issues such as child friendly spaces, can articulate competently on issues such as playground designs, early childhood curriculum, race relations, children's rights and violence, and argue that international research supports the assertion that young children can and should be included in decisions that affect them. While issues of children's capacity have received significant consideration within the literature, the capacity of adult duty-bearers has not received such extensive deliberation (Moran-Ellis and Tisdall, 2019; Tisdall, 2018). Thus, developmentalism, and associated deterministic constructions of children, lies at the heart of school hierarchies, relational inequality (Winter, 2018), and the existing social order (De Castro, 2012) within schools, and as such is an

impediment to children's lived participation. The key role of adults in facilitating children's participation, and the barriers to participation created by adult assumptions regarding children lacking the ability to participate indicate the need for adults to possess the knowledge and skills needed to facilitate children's participation in line with the child's evolving capacity, and the development of knowledge regarding adults' capacity to act as effective duty bearers. Thus, it is to educators' obligations arising from the UNCRC that this review now turns.

Institutional obligations resulting from the UNCRC

Stamatović and Cicvarić (2018) posit that 'the education system has a great responsibility in creating the conditions conducive to the realisation of child rights defined under the Convention' (p.98). The vast majority of children spend a significant proportion of their day in school, thus, the school plays a key role with regards the obligations of States, under Article 4 of the UNCRC, to 'undertake all appropriate legislative, administrative, and other measures for the implementation of the rights recognized in the present Convention'. Article 29 states that a child's educational experience should enable the child to develop a respect for human rights (UNCRC 1989). Schools thus have an obligation under the UNCRC to inform children and educators about children's rights. In fulfilling this obligation children must be supported to both know about their rights and to 'live' these rights within their school lives (Stamatović and Cicvarić, 2018; Lundy and Cook-Sather, 2016). However, in one study Stamatović and Cicvarić (2018) found that most teachers did not recognise their duty, or the need, to inform children about their rights or to facilitate them in acquiring such knowledge, nor did they feel that they (the teachers) needed any extra information in relation to children's rights. Within the Irish context many educators are uninformed about their obligations to the facilitate children's understandings of, and enactment of their rights within school (Conneely, 2015; Waldron et al, 2011). Additionally, Lundy and Cook- Sather (2016) suggest that the Committee, in reviewing State Parties implementation of children's right to be heard within and through education (as enshrined within Articles 12 and 29) focus their feedback on children's involvement in school councils, thus, demonstrating a narrow conception of children's right to be heard. This highlights the dominance of western liberal interpretations of the UNCRC by the Committee, contributing to narrow voice-orientated institutionalised forms of

collective participation, and inadequate consideration and promotion of children's lived participation. Nonetheless, the UNCRC places on onus on educators to play an active role as duty bearers in the facilitation of children's rights within schools - a role that has been insufficiently filled. As discussed previously within the section: *Professionals' Role within Children's Participation,* adults play a key role in the facilitation/provision of the space, voice, audience and influence, required to achieve student participation. The concluding observations in response to the most recent report Ireland made to the Committee notes that Ireland must 'strengthen its efforts to provide adequate and systematic training and/or sensitization of professionals working with and for children' (UN, 2016, para 21).

The hijacking of child participation as a form of social order

Although there have been many initiatives to promote student voice over the past 30 years, student/educator power relations and children's subordinate status continue to be problematic (Charteris and Smardon, 2019). Graham et al (2018) suggests that the hesitancy of many schools to promote *meaningful* participation may be accounted for by the fact that 'genuinely and openly listening to students' (p.1031) results in radical social transformation that subverts current norms, structures and processes within schools. Engaging in the facilitation and promotion of student voice within schools requires a level of critical self-reflection by adult educators on their beliefs and practices - an activity which can destabilise existing adult/child power-dynamics (Lundy and Cook- Sather, 2016). Rather than serving to reinforce the existing status quo, meaningful student voice work is focused on the facilitation and promotion of children's opportunities to 'speak freely' (Herriot, 2013), and is thus concerned with dialogic interaction and institutional power-dynamics within the school context (Charteris and Smardon, 2019). A word of warning is provided by Lodge (2005) who asserts that students' perspectives can be influenced to 'speak adult messages' (p.133). In applying a poststructuralist lens, Pearce and Wood (2019), caution that because pupil voice is shaped by the contexts and relationships in which it is situated it most likely (but not inevitably) will 'reproduce relationships of power and domination' (p. 116). These factors have thus contributed to the failure of student participation to achieve the social change envisioned by its ideological foundations.

Pearce and Wood (2019) highlight the significant pressure educators are under to improve student outcomes in standardised assessments, and the displacement of teachers' identities and relationships with their students by such externally defined measures of quality:

> The effect is a narrowing of the taught curriculum in classrooms to a focus on measurable skills relevant to assessments, positioning students in passive and receptive roles relative to teachers and assessment tools, which become the primary legitimators of knowledge and understanding (Crocco & Costigan, 2007)
>
> (Pearce and Wood, 2019, p.115)

The pressure in relation to, and focus on children's individual performance and school achievement, driven by the neoliberal agenda, can limit the potential of student voice to achieve radical social transformation. Baroutsis et al (2016) note that 'throughout the global North, a neoliberal reframing of educational policies has given rise to an increasing focus on measurement and comparison-based outcomes for schooling [and, as a consequence] teachers have less power to change the context of their daily practices' (p.123). So too does Devine (2019) argue that the neoliberalism results in a 'narrowing of learning to core skills' (p.13) as well as increasing pressure on schools to preform competitively. In examining why pupil voice initiatives are not transformative Pearce and Wood (2019) note the following reasons identified in the literature:

> [S]chools do not approach the work [of student voice] with authentic intentions; teachers are subject to hegemonic and coercive forces to teach a narrow curriculum; teachers and students are concerned at the outcomes of overturning traditional power relations; or, students are more comfortable in passive roles (Kehoe, 2015; Lundy, 2007; Mitra, 2006; Robinson, 2011; Rudduck & Fielding, 2006).
>
> (Pearce and Wood, 2019, p.123)

Thus, tensions are apparent, both in regard to the perceived impact of participation on student identity and status, and corresponding intergenerational power-dynamics and social ordering, as well as tensions between the student voice agenda and neoliberal performative agendas.

Not only can neoliberalist performative agendas limit the transformative potential of student participation, so too can they contribute to the 'use' of participation to reinforce existing power structures and children's subordinate position. As discussed earlier, neoliberalism is one of the key driving forces of the student voice movement. Drawing on the work of Arnot ad Reay (2007) Charteris and Smardon note that pupil voice has indeed been used to legitimise 'neo-liberal marketisation of education' (2019, p.307). In highlighting the tensions between student participation and the neoliberal agenda, Taylor and Robinson (2009) propose that the alignment of student voice with performative and school improvement agendas has enabled student voice to 'be co-opted to produce 'surface compliance' rather than deeper modes of reflection and engagement' (p.163). As such student voice is used, not to achieve egalitarian power structures and relationships, but to further the aims of those in power. Charteris and Smardon (2019) argue that 'instrumentalist voice strategies' (p.306) underpinned by concerns with performativity and accountability serve 'as a device to govern students and teachers and promote systemic improvement over the right of students to democratic participation in schooling.' (ibid). Student voice pedagogies have been criticised for the manipulation and coercion of students (Baroutsis, et al, 2016). Cremin et al (2011) propose that while there are many discourses within student voice, political and public interest are most focused on issues of engagement and discipline, once more leading to a questioning of the purpose and validity of participation. Fielding (2012) questions whether student voice is truly emancipatory or simply a new mechanism for control, a sentiment echoed by De Castro (2012) who argues that participation has been hijacked as a form of social order. So too did a recent Irish study (Giannakaki et al, 2018) find that children's participation was used by educators as a form of social control to maintain the status quo. Drawing on the literature, Raby (2014) asserts that children's participatory initiatives foster 'children's deeper subjugation through self-governance (Bessant, 2003; Masschelein & Quaghebeur, 2005; Millei, 2010; Pongratz, 2007)' (p.77) resulting in 'the narrow production of self-governing subjectivities that resonate with neo-liberal individualism.' (Raby, 2014, p.86). A recent special Issue of the Journal of Ethical Educational Leadership (*Special Issue 1: Student Voice and School Leadership*, 2018) explores and promotes the role of

student voice in school leadership, citing 'highly turbulent political, economic, social, technological pressures […] affecting schools and children' (Brasof and Mansfield, p.5) as an impetus for the promotion of student voice. This special issue thus positions student voice as a beneficial counter movement to the neoliberal agenda, yet ironically, as noted, the neoliberal hijacking of student participation has been identified as a significant factor in the limitations in achieving meaningful social transformation encountered by the student voice movement. This points to the tensions, identified by Rudduck and Fielding (2006, cited in Taylor and Robinson, 2009) within student voice, between its ideological foundations and aims in relation to democracy and social transformation and the limitations inherent in student voice practice, resulting from 'the challenge to traditional power relations' constituted by student voice' (Taylor and Robinson, 2009, p.164).

The construction of the agentic child, as provided through childhood studies, is evident within both rights-based and performative-based student participation discourses. However, within contexts in which student participation is used to further individual's and schools' performance the children are constructed as agentic only to the degree to which it concerns their ability to participate in teaching and learning in order to achieve the desired goals of those in power. This may be because the neoliberal performative agenda fits comfortably with the developmentalist perspective held in many schools – the child is being moulded to become an autonomous consumer. A rights-based orientation does not inherently encompass such limits in relation to children's agency however the right-based agenda is not as significant a driving force as the neoliberal agenda within the student voice movement. The discussion later in this chapter (*The construction of student participation within Irish legislation and policy*) supports this assertion. The lack of social transformation and the subjugation of children through student voice suggest that, of the three factors that contributed to the birth of the participative child (childhood studies, neoliberalism, and children's rights), neoliberalism is perhaps the most significant driving force within the student voice movement.

While improvements in both teaching and learning may be the primary aim and motivating principle of the student voice agenda (Cremin et al, 2011), the aim of the children's rights agenda is to ensure that children are afforded their *right* to participate. Thus, while children's rights and student voice agendas overlap in many ways, they are two distinct agendas that intersect with pedagogy and curriculum in key yet nuanced ways. Core to the successful implementation of both of these movements is respect for the child (Lundy and Cook-Sather, 2016). While the student voice movement contains both rights-based and performative discourses, Sargeant (2018) argues that the student voice movement draws little from the UNCRC, noting that '[t]he burgeoning interest in voice appears distinctly separate to the participation rights agenda' (p.318). Much student voice research argues a moral rather than a legal case for pupil voice (Lundy and Cook-Sather 2016), thus lacking the rights-based recognition of children's *entitlement* to participation within their school lives. Thus, within the literature on children's participation within the school context there exists two conflicting narratives; one which visualises participation as an emancipatory tool, promoting children's rights and developing democratic practice, the other viewing participation/student voice as a means by which to develop the school environment in order to increase productivity and efficiency (Czerniawski, 2012). While, undoubtedly, improved teaching and learning are to the benefit of children, nonetheless, such an approach has adult agendas and adults' priorities at its core (Wyness, 2018a; De Castro, 2012), and as a consequence has not resulted in radical transformation. A rights-based perspective, which places *children's* priorities and agendas as central, has the potential to achieve such a social transformation. Generating knowledge to further children's participation within the school context from a rights-based perspective will ensure children's meaningful lived participation within every aspect of their school lives and avoid participation being used as a tool to subjugate children. It is thus to the policy and legislative context that this review now turns in order to examine the extent to which student participation is recognised and supported as a right by such statutory measures.

The construction and promotion of student participation within Irish legislation and policy

Kilkelly (2014) notes that there is a stark absence of children's rights within the Irish legal framework for education. The Education Act 1998 (Department of Education) notes that schools should establish boards whose purpose is to develop procedures 'for the purposes of informing students in a school of the activities of the school' (para 27.1) and that such procedures 'should facilitate the inclusion of students in the operation of the school, having regard to the age and experience of the students, in association with their parents and teachers.' (para 27.2). The phrase 'inclusion of students in the operation of the school' is both vague and lacking in recognition of the *right* of the child to participate. The Act does not refer to any need to ensure that children's perspectives are taken account of, or indeed make any reference to the obligation to promote children's rights (Kilkelly, 2014). The Act does make allowances for, and even advocates for the establishment of student councils (for *secondary-school* students), however, such councils are subject to the requirements and conditions of the school's board of management and are intended to 'promote the interests of the school and the involvement of students in the affairs of the school, in co-operation with the board, parents and teachers' (para 27.4). Such conditions deny student councils the power to pursue any activities or campaigns that challenge the status quo, and the interests and priorities of those in power. There is no provision within the Act for the establishment of student councils within primary schools. Furthermore, the Act makes no provisions for students' everyday participation within pedagogical processes, such as within choice of textbooks or curriculum content (Gilleece and Cosgrove, 2012). Analysis of this legislation identifies three key issues. Firstly, the very weak basis for promoting children's participation rights within education in Irish legislation – in spite of the State's obligations to do so in accordance with the UNCRC. Secondly, the conceptualising/privileging of formal performative participation, and thirdly, the exclusion of younger, primary-school children's participation. Thus, this Act constructs pupil participation as a peripheral performative activity for older children which must not challenge existing institutional power-structures. Children's broader participatory rights within their everyday informal school lives

(i.e. within pedagogical practice and student/educator relationships) is not recognised or supported by this Act.

In publishing *The National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making 2015-2020* (DCYA, 2015) Ireland became the first European country to develop a strategy of this kind (Horgan et al, 2017). The strategy aims 'to ensure that children and young people will have a voice in their *individual and collective everyday lives* across the five national outcome areas'[7] (DCYA, 2015, p.3) (my emphasis). These areas are: (1) Physical and mental wellbeing (2) Achieving in all areas of learning and development (3) Safe and protected from harm (4) Economic Security and Opportunity and (5) Connected, respected and contributing to their world (Government of Ireland, 2014). Drawing on Article 12 of the UNCRC and Article 24 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights the Strategy defines participation as: 'the process by which children and young people have active involvement and real influence in decision-making on matters affecting their lives, both directly and indirectly' (DCYA, 2015, p. 20). The Strategy presents a voice 'checklist' based on Lundy's Model of Participation (2007) titled *Lundy's Voice Model Checklist for Participation* (DCYA, 2015) (*see Figure 2 over*).

This checklist builds on Lundy's model (2007) discussed earlier in the previous chapter and highlights the relational dialogic nature of participation. Whilst this checklist for participation is suited to supporting and assessing *both* formal performative participation and informal everyday lived participation within decision-making contexts, it lends itself more readily to formal performative decision-based participatory events as indicated by questions such as: 'Do children know that they do not need to take part? Do the children know who their views are being communicated to? Have children and young people received feedback explaining the reasons for decisions taken?

[7] identified in *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, 2014-2020* (Government of Ireland, 2014)

Figure 2. Lundy's Voice Model Checklist for Participation (DCYA 2015, p. 22)

As such, this checklist illustrates that while the Strategy aims to promote both formal and informal participation, the dominant focus rests on formal 'performative' participation.[8] This assertion is supported by the focus on formal performative participation evident in the Strategy within the specific commitments made in relation to the promotion of children's participation within the school context (as discussed below).

With regard to the educational context the Strategy makes specific and comprehensive commitments in relation to facilitating children's formal representative/performative participation through consultative processes and

[8] Another more recent checklist based on Lundy's (2007) model developed by the Australian *Commission for Children and Young People* (2021) encompasses a greater focus on children's everyday informal lived participation within the culture of an organisation. Thus, illustrating how Lundy's Model can be utilised to support children's participation not just within formal performative participation but also as a tool to develop participatory organisational cultures that support children's everyday informal lived participation within decision-making contexts.

mechanisms to enable, for example, the facilitation of children's voices within policy and service provision[9]. Included in the actions identified in the Strategy is the encouragement of primary schools to establish student councils. However, no commitments are made in relation to developing informal everyday participation within educator/child relationships or within pedagogical processes. The Strategy's focus, as evident in the stated actions and commitments, on formal performative participation within decision-making contexts, and the lack of actions to address children's broader participatory rights are evident in this policy document. It should be noted, however, that one of the principles of participation identified within the Strategy is that '[c]hildren and young people who exercise their right to freely express their views must be protected from harm, including intimidation, reprisals, [and] victimisation' (DCYA, 2015, p.23). Thus, it is evident that while the Strategy lacks specific actions in relation to promoting informal everyday lived participation, the rhetoric within this key policy document indicates recognition of the need develop participatory cultures.

The *Mid-Term Review and Phase Two Action Plan of the National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making, 2015-2020* (DCYA, 2019) identifies the progress that has been made in meeting the policy's commitments. In the review a renewed emphasis is placed on supporting the development of effective student councils (in both primary and post-primary schools) and in furthering student voice. A key measure identified in this regard is the rollout of a Toolkit for student voice 'Our Voices Our Schools' developed by the Comhairle na nÓg Executive (2019). This toolkit provides information and recourses for educators on how to further student voice within a whole-school approach, in order to 'improve the participation of young people in decision-making in the school system' (Comhairle na nÓg, 2019). The promotion of this toolkit suggests a move towards the extension of student voice beyond the student council, and the recognition of children's right to be heard in decisions that affect them within the classroom context. Additionally, the Review (DCYA, 2019)

[9] see Appendix 12 for a list of commitments made within *The National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making 2015-2020* (DCYA, 2015) in relation to children's participation as relevant to the school context.

identifies as an objective the provision of guidance to schools, through the Inspectorate Student Voice Project, in relation to developing best practice with regard to listening to children. Nonetheless, whilst the *National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making 2015-2020* (DCYA, 2015) plays an important role in progressing children's participation within the school context, its emphasis is predominantly on the facilitation of children's participation within formal consultative processes and mechanisms. While the review of the Strategy (DCYA, 2019) does indicate a growing recognition of the need to extend children's participation within the school context beyond student councils, the dearth of specific commitments/actions within the Strategy to promote children's informal lived everyday participation within the school context, through the development of participatory school cultures, limits its potential for promoting children's meaningful informal everyday lived participation. The generation of knowledge with regard to the mechanisms structures and norms that enable or prohibit children's informal everyday lived participation within the school context (as indeed this study provides), is thus both timely and important in contributing to the development within policy of commitments and actions that will serve to further student voice within children's everyday lives through the development of participatory school cultures.

The conceptualisation of student participation as, and focus on, performative participation within the legislative and the policy context do not provide a strong statutory basis for the realisation of children's everyday informal lived participation rights within the school context. Thus, there is a need to (a) undertake the legislative measures necessary to fully implement children's participatory rights within the legal educational framework, and (b) generate knowledge that can contribute to the development of policy which supports and promotes whole-school approaches to developing and maintaining everyday informal lived participation within both decision-making and non-decision-making contexts. This current research provides the latter (b). Together, these measures could serve to enable the achievement of the radical cultural change needed within schools to achieve students' meaningful rights-based lived participation.

Moving forward

While research suggests that opportunities for students' participation are limited (Forde et al, 2018; Comhairle na nÓg, 2017), Graham et al (2018) have found, as noted, that relationships between educators and children are becoming increasingly egalitarian. Their study found that 'informal intergenerational conversation and relationship building' (p.1040) were identified by students and educators as both a key space for participation in itself, and as a key requisite for children's participation within school lives in general, in particular given its role in developing trust. Thus, Graham et al (2018) highlight the need to develop an understanding within schools of participation as an intergenerational relational dialogic process in order to develop the cultural conditions necessary for the realisation of participation within school contexts. Building on the work of Fielding (2012), Pearce and Wood (2019) use the concept of student voice as 'intergenerational learning as lived democracy' to examine the degree to which student voice enables 'socially transformative schooling practices' (Charteris and Smardon, 2019). Pearce and Wood (2009) suggest that pupil voice should be grounded in intergenerational dialogue, encompass all students and enable students to 'resist, escape or transform systems that promote inequality' (p.123). Developing a rights-based understanding of student participation as an intergenerational relational dialogic process will serve to develop the cultural conditions necessary for the realisation of participation within school contexts (Graham et al, 2018). Notably, however, while Graham et al (2018) found a general trend towards 'intergenerational equality' (p.1044) opportunities were of an ad-hoc nature. This, they argue, points to the need for policy that recognises and reflects participation as whole-school intergenerational dialogue and collaboration, that is, the conceptualisation of participation as an intergenerational dialogic process. Thus, a twofold solution is required:

1. Develop everyday lived student participation through a conceptualisation of participation as an intergenerational dialogic process
2. Develop statutory and policy requirements to promote students' right to participate in order to counter neoliberal pressures and influences.

As a requisite of the UNCRC, schools have a duty to promote student participation, however, at the same time neoliberal agendas concerning student and school performance and improvement are working against the development of authentic participation. Overcoming this impasse requires, amongst other measures, strengthening statutory requirements and developing meaningful policy measures to promote students' lived participation.

Conclusion

The literature indicates that children are frustrated with the limited and peripheral nature of opportunities for their participation within the school context. When participation is evident it is often driven by performative agendas as opposed to being grounded in children's rights. The use of participation as a form of social control and the achievement of academic goals undermines children's ability to challenge the status quo in relation to student/educator power-dynamics and traditional school hierarchies. A whole-school approach that is grounded in a rights-based perspective and encompasses both formal performative and informal everyday lived participation within both decision-making and non-decision making moments and contexts, is needed to progress children's participation rights within the school context. In exploring the beliefs and values underpinning pedagogical practice and student/educator relationships and in providing in-depth analysis with regard to the associated power-dynamics, this research builds on existing literature by providing key knowledge with regard to developing school cultures that enable children's informal everyday lived participation.

Chapter Four: A Rights-Based Participatory Methodology

This chapter outlines the rights-based participatory methodology adopted in this research, while also providing a rationale for it usage in the context of this study. Section one provides an overview of the research focus including the aim of the research, research questions, methods and the operationalisation of participation. Moving on section two addresses the philosophical assumptions which underpin the research and their significance to the qualitative methodological approach taken. Section three addresses issues in relation to rights-based participatory research, identifying and justifying the adoption of such an approach within this study. Section four discusses the methods employed and the nature of analysis utilised within the research process. Finally, section five addresses issues of quality and rigour within the research process including issues of reflexivity, positionality and ethical considerations.

The Research Focus

The aim of the research

As noted in *Chapter One: An Introduction*, the aim of this research is to *identify* the barriers and enablers of children's everyday informal lived participation within a primary school context, and *explore* how these elements/factors are created and recreated within the structured school space. To assist in meeting this aim and to guide the research the following three questions were devised:

1. What are the barriers and enablers of children's everyday informal lived participation within the primary school context?
2. What are the key factors influencing children's everyday informal lived participation in primary schools?
3. How are these barriers and enablers enacted in everyday norms and practices within student/educator interactions in primary schools?

Semi-structured interviews with adult participants, focus groups with child participants, and observations were chosen as the most suitable methods for generating data to answer the research question(s). The fieldwork was conducted in five primary schools. This approach enabled both the exploration of participants' perspectives and experiences, and the examination of adult/child relationships and practices.

Operationalising Participation

As discussed in Chapter Two*: Children and Young People's Participation - Origins, Development and Tensions,* and Chapter Three*: Children's participation within the School Context,* children's participation is conceptualised in a variety of ways. For the purposes of this research Article 12 plays a key role in how participation is conceptualised, however, so too is participation recognised as a situated intergenerational dialogic process in which children are enabled to exercise agency within and through student/educator encounters and relationships within both decision-making and non-decision-making 'moments'. Thus, a broader conceptualisation of participatory rights, that both includes and extends beyond the right to participate in decision-making contexts is applied. Within observations I used Lundy's (2007) conceptualisation of Article 12 to operationalise children's participation. As discussed in Chapter One: *An Introduction*, this study initially set out to explore the barriers and enablers of children's right to be heard as enshrined in Article 12, and this is reflected in the operationalisation of participation within the fieldwork. However, as the research progressed, in particular through the analysis of the data, a broader conceptualisation of children's everyday informal lived participatory rights that includes and extends beyond the rights contained in Article 12 emerged as: *the right to participate in intergenerational dialogic encounters within multiple social processes embedded in everyday contexts and interactions, and encompassing both decision-making and non-decision-making moments*. Nonetheless, as argued within Chapter Two: *Children and Young People's Participation - Origins, Development and Tensions,* the four elements of Lundy's model (space, voice, audience and influence) are still applicable to the examination of children

everyday lived participatory rights. Lundy's model lends itself most appropriately to the exploration of situated relational dialogic processes within both macro and micro, collective and individual contexts. Focusing predominantly on interactions between educators and children in which children experienced space, voice, audience and influence, within observations I endeavoured to document as many instances of participation as possible. I also documented the broader factors and elements that impacted on these four elements, for example; *Space* – was it a safe space that welcomed and encouraged children's perspectives? What made it so/not so? ; *Voice* - who spoke/did not speak and in what circumstances, and what did they speak about? Where there any other expressions of voice other than oral? ; *Audience* – were children listened to by someone with decision-making power? Did the decision-maker enter into a conversation with the child? What issues did the decision-makers (not) engage with? When where children most likely to be listened to? ; and *Influence* – What impact did the child sharing their perspectives have? What was the nature of this influence? In what circumstances did children's perspectives have an influence? What factors impacted on the children's perspectives of having an influence? Was the resulting impact communicated to the children? Were reasons for a lack of influence communicated to the children? Did children have an opportunity to engage with the rationales given?

The Research Paradigm

The theoretical and philosophical framework that guides and, indeed determines the research design is known as the research paradigm (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006), and comprises three components: Ontology, Epistemology and Methodology. In addressing each of these elements this research renders explicit the philosophical foundations of the research design, thus contributing to the integrity of this work. The research question is the key determinant when choosing the design for a research project (Bryman, 2012). This research seeks to understand factors relating to a social phenomenon, and thus, is concerned with socially constructed objects and practices. Social constructivism sees the world as socially constructed and is concerned with subjective meanings of experiences. As such, social constructivism is frequently categorised as interpretivism (Creswell, 2013) and said to require an interpretivist lens (O' Donoghue, 2007). Similarly, this

research recognises this construction of the world. In seeking to examine the facilitation of participation resulting from the co-specification of people and spaces, this research recognises and explores the mutually interdependent, relational nature of individuals and society. Given that an interpretivist lens recognises and seeks to examine the 'mutually interdependent' (O' Donoghue, 2007, p.16) nature of the individual and society, social constructivism is the paradigm that is deemed most suited to this research. The following discussions elucidates the philosophical assumptions inherent in a constructivist paradigm and provides a rationale for its appropriateness within this research.

Ontological Considerations

Ontology concerns beliefs regarding the nature of reality and social phenomenon (Creswell 2013). Articulating the ontological perspective of a piece of research is necessary, as doing so enables us to critically reflect on our substantive assumptions, and the knowledge foundations on which we base our judgments and generate new knowledge (Brabazon, 2017). The key 'objects' within this research are children/childhood, adults and participation. An ontological consideration of these three objects requires a statement concerning what they are, and indeed what they are not, in the eyes of this research. This research rejects essentialist constructions of children. It recognises the interconnected, relational and socially constructed nature of children and adults (Horgan, 2017; Alanen, 2014b; Tisdall and Punch, 2012). It views participation as a situated relational dialogic process and thus, emphasises participation as a social process. This research does not construct children being in control and exercising autonomy as participation's gold standard. Rather, it recognises that multiple realities and perspectives exist, and that the research objects within this study are socially constructed. It is for these reasons that this research employs a constructionist ontology.

Epistemological Considerations

Another philosophical position that must be articulated within research is epistemology. Epistemology is concerned with the theory of knowledge, and seeks to explore questions concerning what constitutes knowledge and how we judge the merit or weighting of evidence (Brabazon, 2017). As such, epistemology is a key component of research design and is intimately connected with the ontological

assumptions of the research approach. The constructionist ontological stance of this research recognises the socially constructed relational nature of the research objects. Intrinsically, to study these objects requires the generation and analysis of subjective knowledge. The sources of evidence considered legitimate, appropriate and thus, utilised in this study are both the perspectives and experiences of the children and educators who participate in this study and the observations, I, the researcher, documented during my time in each school. The subjective nature of the required data, therefore, requires interpretation. Thus, in order to glean and analyse the evidence deemed both necessary and legitimate in producing the knowledge needed to address the research question, this research employs an interpretivist epistemology. Within an interpretative framework, I recognise that not only is the data gathered of a subjective nature, so too is my positionality - a researcher who is an early-years educator passionate about children's participation - an influencing, and thus, relevant factor in relation to the knowledge. It is for this reason that a discussion on reflexivity and positionality is a necessary component included in this chapter.

Methodological Approach

While ontology and epistemology address the 'what' of research theory, methodology addresses the 'how' (Punch and Oancea, 2014). Qualitative research recognises the socially constructed nature of reality and thus, aligns with the constructionist ontological and interpretivist epistemological stances within the constructivist paradigm underpinning this research. Qualitative research allows for rich in-depth explorations (Pocock and Miyahara, 2017) such as is required by this research. Qualitative methods 'look beyond quantification of something and look instead to find the meaning, allowing for an in-depth analysis' (Kenneally, 2019, p.103). The qualitative research methods used within this study comprise interviews, focus groups and observations. While interviews and focus groups allow for an in-depth exploration of participants' perspectives, observations facilitate the examination of the social interactions and processes that emanate from, or contradict, participants' stated perspectives. The section 'Data Collection and Analysis' provides both a justification for, and an overview of these methods,

however, it is to the rights-based and participatory aspects of the research approach to which discussion now turns.

Rights-based Participatory Research Approach

There is a significant overlap between the fields of children's participatory research and children's rights-based research, however, so too are there differences in relation to conceptualisations and emphasis. In recognition of children's agency, the new sociology of children repositions children as research subjects rather than objects and promotes children's potential as research participants, a paradigm which has supported the increasing use of child-centred participatory methods (Lundy and McEvoy 2012a). Children's rights discourse moves beyond the recognition of children's *ability* to participate in research, promoting children's *right* to participate in research (Lundy and McEvoy 2012a), as enshrined within Article 12 of the UNCRC. Kellett (2010) argues that while discourse on children's research is becoming progressively anchored within a rights-based perspective, in practice children's voices are only given priority when they are in keeping with adult agendas. Tisdall (2015) notes that of the key aims of participatory practice, as identified in the literature, upholding children's rights and fulfilling legal responsibilities is the one least referred to. Nonetheless, the children's rights agenda, has without doubt, contributed significantly to the proliferation of participatory research and practice.

Defining participatory research

While child participatory methodologies are becoming increasingly prevalent and commonplace, so too are debates regarding what exactly participatory research is. Coad and Evans (2008) define participatory methodologies as methodologies that do not just ascertain the views of participants in the process of data collection, but also enable them to play an active role in all aspects of the research process. A participatory methodology is optimal, argue Coad and Evans, because it reduces the power imbalances within the researcher/researched relationship and attempts

to give children a greater level of control over the research process (ibid). In discussing approaches to participatory research Coad and Evans argue that there is no 'one size fits all' (2008, p.42), however Kellett (2010) states that 'a crucial distinction is that participatory research assists the process of knowledge production rather than data generating' (p.73). The active role of children in the generation and analysis of data is considered by many as central to participatory research (Bishop, 2014; Kellett, 2010, Coad and Evans, 2008). A concern with limiting power imbalances between adult and child researchers contributes to a conceptualisation of the 'gold standard' being one in which children have as much, if not more, decision-making power than adults. Such a view is consistent with hierarchical participatory models such as those developed by Shier's *Pathways to Participation* (2001) and, as unintentionally suggested, by Hart's *Participation Ladder* (1992). A move away from hierarchical constructions of participation (Hart, 2008; Lundy, 2007; Treseder, 1997) is also evident within the literature on child participatory research (Franks, 2011) and can be attributed to (a) the view that different levels of decision-making power are appropriate in different contexts and (b) that the complex generational power dynamic between adults and children renders 'pure' participation unachievable (Franks 2011). The difficulty, however, is that terms to describe children's involvement in participatory research, such as co-production, co-researchers, co-creation, collaboration, and consultation, are used both ambiguously and at times, interchangeably within the literature, leading to a lack of clarity in relation to the degree of involvement and decision-making power children have within various research projects (Bird et al, 2013). In a recent review of the literature concerning children's participatory research methods, Bradbury-Jones et al (2018) note that there is confusion regarding what participatory research is, or indeed, should be. This research concurs with Kellett (2010) in defining participatory research as research which entails children playing a role within the research process (i.e. outside of the generation of data) and through their participation, assisting in the process of knowledge production. Such involvement can range from contributing their perspectives and advice in relation to the research process, through to their playing a joint or lead role as co-researchers.

The challenges inherent in children's participatory research are plentiful and receive much consideration within the literature. Drawing on others, Collins et al (2020) note that children's active participation within the research process 'has provided new challenges and dilemmas, including questions about knowledge and scientific rigour, equitable partnerships, methodologies and working patterns, ethical responsibilities, and remuneration (Bradbury-Jones and Taylor, 2015; Cuevas-Parra and Tisdall, 2019' (2020, p. 2). Lundy et al (2011) highlight the significant insights children can provide as co-researchers within participatory research, however, so too do they acknowledge the limitations inherent in younger children's abilities and desire to engage meaningfully in adult-led research. In reflecting on one research project, Coad and Evans, (2008) identified the following key challenges: difficulties children face in relation to the concept of objectivity; the time-consuming nature of participatory research and the demands it makes on children's time; and the difficulties adult researchers face in relation to complying with academic expectations regarding rigour. In reviewing the literature, Thomas (2015) identified the following challenges in relation to child participatory research conducted *in collaboration with* or *led by* children: difficulty in obtaining ethical approval prior to children's involvement; the research not being taken seriously by decision makers such as adult policy makers; children's (in)ability to act as free agents; and the qualitatively different quality of child-led and adult-led research.

Another key challenge is the unequal power-dynamics inherent in adult-child relationships, and in particular, within participatory research (Horgan, 2017). As previously noted much of the discussion on typologies of collective participation centres on the level of decision-making children and young people experience within participatory structures and events. As mentioned, Franks (2011) argues that generational power-dynamics renders pure participation unachievable, thus, highlighting the tensions and limitations inherent in child participatory research due to adult/child power dynamics.

Tokenism is another key challenge identified in the literature on children's participation (Lundy, 2018; Tisdall 2015). Drawing on others Lundy highlights the following examples of tokenism as identified within the literature:

> [I]nstances where children are consulted after the decision has already been taken; allowed to speak to a limited number of less significant issues; too few in number; given insufficient time to engage meaningfully and/or patronized or dismissed (Perry-Hazan, 2016; Tisdall, 2015, cited in Lundy, 2018, p. 343)

The Committee defines tokenistic approaches to participation as those which 'limit children's expression of views, or which allow children to be heard, but fail to give their views due weight' (UN, 2009: para. 132, cited in Lundy 2018, p. 343). Lundy argues that '[t]he focus [in this definition] is on the actual breach of the obligation to give children's views *due weight on all matters affecting them* rather than the outcome or indeed the adults' intentions, benign or otherwise' (p. 343, emphasis in the original). Thus, to avoid tokenism, it must be shown that due weight was applied to the children's perspectives within the research process, rather than tokenism being judged on the basis of the extent to which children determined the outcomes of the participatory event. Lundy (2018) argues that the widely held view, that tokenistic collective participation is worse than having no participation at all, needs to be reassessed. Indeed, the classification of tokenism as non-participation, as deemed by Hart (1992), is challenged by Lundy (2018), who argues that no other right would be ignored on the basis that in endeavouring to facilitate the right it might not be upheld to its fullest. Thus, while tokenistic collective participation is not ideal, it is, argues Lundy, better than children's perspectives being excluded for fear of tokenism, and does count as a form of participation.

Another challenge identified in the literature (Southby, 2017; Klocker, 2012) and which emerged within this research was the unique challenge of conducting participatory research within a PhD study. This includes meeting the expectations and standards associated with research quality and rigour within a PhD thesis, in addition to, and perhaps most importantly, the need for the doctoral candidate to be the researcher and author of the thesis. Collins et al (2020, p. 2) note that:

> [I]nvolving children and youth deeply in research processes test 'traditional' adult research practices in numerous ways, including claims to knowledge and scientific rigour, legitimacy and credibility, authorship and ownership, and ethical regulation and standards.

A search for PhD doctoral dissertations that employ a child participatory methodology led me to the PhD theses of Shier (2016), Klocker (2012) and Conneely (2015). Shier's research explores children's perspectives on children's rights in school within Nicaragua. Shier notes that his research uses a 'children-as-researchers methodology' (2016, p.94). The methodology employed in this innovative research is not participatory in the traditional sense. Shier worked with the children to produce his thesis in the following way: a group of child researchers, facilitated by Shier and other adult facilitators, led and conducted a study on children's perspectives on children's rights in four schools, following which Shier utilised their data, analysis, recommendations and research process as the basis (i.e. data) of his own study. Thus, while this is clearly a unique and worthwhile piece of work that does engage in a research process in full collaboration with children, the design of the study does not fit with established constructions of participatory research, as the children did not participate in Shier's analysis of the children's research project. Shier himself refers to his methodology as 'an unusual hybrid' (2016, p.103).

Klocher's (2012) doctoral study examined child domestic workers in Tanzania. Klocher attained the academic expectations associated with PhD research by producing two outputs - a report that she co-authored with the child-researchers and her self-authored thesis. Like Shier, Klocher based her thesis, in part, on an examination of the participatory process employed to produce the report. Conneely's (2015) thesis, which examines children's right to be heard during whole-school evaluation in Irish primary schools, uses a CRAG to facilitate children's involvement as advisors within her research project. Conneely met with the CRAG three times during which the children provided their perspectives on the methods (first meeting), the initial data/findings (second meeting) and on the research findings (third meeting). However, while children thus, participated in the research process and contributed to the process of knowledge production

(Kellett, 2010), Conneely does not claim to use a participatory approach (she claims a rights-based approach) nor does she engage in any discussion about participatory methodologies. It is difficult to ascertain the impact the CRAG had on the research process, however, as noted by Lundy (2018) a rights-based assessment of children's participation in the research process should be based not on outcome, but on the degree to which children's perspectives were given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity. These three doctoral studies serve as examples of graduate researchers navigating the challenges inherent in meeting the academic requirements of a PhD whilst facilitating children to engage in knowledge production within the research process. The challenges inherent in children's participatory research, are significant, in particular in relation to meeting the academic standards required of doctoral research. Nonetheless, given the topic under investigation within this study (children's right to participate), it was imperative to facilitate children's participation within the research process. In navigating such challenges, a children's rights-based participatory approach provided a framework that ensured that children's participation within the research process was both meaningful and appropriate to the research design. The following section discusses key issues within a children's rights-based approach, while the subsequent section (*Reflecting on the rights-based participatory methodology*) discusses the challenges faced within this study and how there were reconciled.

Children's Rights Approach

Shier (2016) notes that there are two key strands of discourse within the literature on 'Children's Research'. These are: (1) the right to be properly researched (Ennew and Plateau, 2004) and (2) child-rights-based research as developed by Lundy and McEvoy (2012a and 2012b) and further advanced by Lundy (2018). This research seeks to uphold the requirements of both, so that the involvement of children within the research process respects children's right to have a voice in all matters that affect them, and, in their involvement with the research process, children are treated in a manner that is compliant with their rights. Lundy et al, (2011) argue that research employing a children's rights approach should ideally include the voice of the child in *all* stages of the research process, including setting

the research question. However, the extent to which children are empowered to set the research question is determined by several factors including the aim or the purpose of the research. Is the research solely an emancipatory exercise or does it also have a specific knowledge generating purpose that has been identified by researchers in response to a gap in our knowledge? Emancipatory research conducted with the aim of giving children a voice in what *they* determine to be relevant allows the possibility of children playing the leading role in setting the research question(s). Research that is conducted in order to learn how better to support children may require the generation of specific knowledge as determined by adult researchers. However, as noted by Lundy et al (2011) children should still get an opportunity to be involved in the discussion that leads to the research questions being set. Such a condition is challenging given funding and ethical requirements, in addition to admission procedures for PhD programmes. However, as was the case in this research, children can play a role in developing and refining the research question once their involvement has commenced. So too, argue Lundy and McEvoy (2012b), must the research question use a language of rights to explore breaches or otherwise of children's rights. In examining the barriers and enablers of children's participatory rights within a school context, this research adheres to such a requirement and frames the research in the context of 'entitlement and obligation' (ibid, p.80).

While Lundy et al (2011) advocate for children's participation in the research process in its entirety, so too do they acknowledge the limitations inherent in children's abilities and desire to engage meaningfully in *adult-led* research. Alderson (2012) argues that child rights-based research does not necessarily need to employ a participatory methodology, noting the difficulty of producing research that incorporates 'theoretical, statistical or systematic-synthetic analysis' (p. 237) using such a methodology. However, a participatory approach was deemed essential to the integrity of this research given the topic under investigation. Lundy and McEvoy (2012a) suggest that a rights-based approach should (a) serve to further children's rights, (b) guide all aspects of the process and (c) contribute to the ability of duty bearers to meet their obligations. Furthermore, Lundy and McEvoy (2012a) note that in addition to ensuring that Article 2 (non-

discrimination) and Article 19 (protection from harm) of the UNCRC are adhered to, so too must children be facilitated in developing their capacity not only to express their perspectives but also to form their opinions. Lundy (2018) builds on these requirements in suggesting that child rights-based research must also pay particular heed to providing children who participate in the research process with meaningful feedback on their involvement. This, she argues, is particularly important as a mechanism to limit tokenism and achieve more meaningful participation. Providing children with child-friendly feedback on the outcomes of the participatory project 'is the bare minimum that should happen as a matter of courtesy to the children involved' (Lundy, 2018, p.349) and is the 'moment' within which due weight to children's perspectives can be demonstrated (ibid). For such feedback to be an optimal dialogic event Lundy (2018) suggests that the feedback must be (1) full, (2) child friendly, (3) fast, and (4) followed up. Firstly, to be considered 'full' the feedback should engage with the substantive issues, respond to the children's perspectives, provide rationales for choices made and identify pathways for dissemination. Secondly, the feedback should be presented in a child-friendly manner that enables the children to understand fully both the results of the participatory 'event' and the extent to which their perspectives were seriously considered. Next, the feedback must be delivered in a timely manner. Finally, there must be an opportunity for children to respond to the feedback. Such an opportunity adds transparency to the process and can encourage adults to engage further in children's perspectives. These steps, argues Lundy, can help a project move from being tokenistic to encompassing 'respectful dialogue' (2018, p.350).

Capacity Building

Articles 13 and 17 (the right to information) and Article 5 (the right to adult guidance) are central to the facilitation of Article 12, (Lundy and McEvoy, 2012a), and thus a feature of rights-based children's participatory research that sets it apart from other research approaches is the need to build the capacity of children to form their views. Lundy and McEvoy (2012a) argue that capacity building not only gives children a better understanding of the substantive issues, thus enabling them to form a view, but it also gives them the confidence to share that view. To date,

capacity building in children's research projects has mostly focused on developing children's research competence, for example in methods such as gathering data. However, Lundy and McEvoy (2012a and 2012b) argue that such an approach assumes that children already have informed views, therefore any capacity building merely needs to help children to *express* those views. Lundy and McEvoy (2012a and 2012b) however, maintain that children, particularly young children, may need to build their capacity to actually form their views. With regards capacity building Lundy et al, (2011) note the scarcity of research that has been conducted with children under 8 years in this manner. However, they argue that through the UNCRC, the onus is on researchers to assist the children. While much of the discussion on capacity focuses on children's capacity, Coad and Evans (2008) highlight the need for capacity building for *both* adults and children. To support the child advisors to engage meaningfully within this research process, capacity building, in relation to both the substantive issues and the research process, was conducted within the CRAG sessions. Facilitating children's meaningful engagement within the research process can be a particular challenge for early career/graduate researchers who may be developing traditional research skills in addition to the unique skills needed for conducting research with children. Southby (2017) suggests that a majority of successful participatory projects are completed either by academics or practitioners who are experienced in participatory methodologies. Thus, capacity building is a key issue not just for the children but also for the adult researcher.

Formation of Child Research Advisory Groups (CRAGs) for this Research

In order to facilitate children's participation within the research process, two Child Research Advisory Groups (CRAGs) were established. An indicated, children within the CRAGs are not research subjects, but rather play a role as advisors to the researcher by providing their opinions and perspectives on the research process, the substantive issues and the findings. Such groups have been described in the literature as *CRAGs* (Giannakaki et al, 2018; Horgan, 2017; Conneely, 2015; Lundy and McEvoy, 2012), *Child and Youth Advisory Committees* (CYAC) (Collins et al, 2020), *Youth Advisory Councils* (YAC) (Arunkumaret al, 2019), and

Reference Groups (Jones et al, 2020; Moore et al, 2016). Child advisors provide valuable 'insider knowledge' which can serve to make the research process more effective (Jones et al, 2020; Collins et al, 2020; Moore et al, 2016). Sufficient detailed consideration of the processes involved in, and the nature of, child advisory research groups, in addition to critical reflection on the use and value of such groups, has been identified within the literature as lacking (Moore et al, 2016; McCarry, 2012), although, more recently, others have sought to address this in their work (Jones et al, 2020; Collins et al, 2020; Hogan, 2017). The use of CRAGs to ground research in children's contemporary lived experiences and to 'achieve deeper participation' (Horgan, 2017, p.250) is becoming more common (for examples see Giannakaki et al, 2018; Horgan, 2017; Conneely, 2015; Lundy and McEvoy 2012) and is identified as an effective mechanism for facilitating pockets of participation (Franks, 2011) within the research process (Merciea and Jones, 2018).

Children were recruited for the CRAGs through friends, colleagues and family members. Although convenience sampling was used, the diverse nature of friends, colleagues and family members resulted in the formation of CRAGs that had a high level of diversity in terms of gender, ethnicity, race, (dis)ability and socio-economic status. A disadvantage of convenience sampling is the potential for bias and inability to generalise the findings (Bryman, 2012), however, as the CRAGs were not research subjects no data was generated through their participation in the research. The recruitment process began by talking informally to friends, family members and colleagues with children in the age-range of 5 – 12 about the research and asking if their children might be interested in participating in a CRAG. Once parents indicated that their children might be interested I sent the children child-friendly information and consent letters by post with stamped addressed envelopes for them to send me their responses (See Appendix 1 for copy of information sheet/consent letter). The children were also informed of the aim and purpose of the study, and my expectations in relation to their role in the research were explained in person, at the beginning of the first CRAG meetings. An advantage of this approach was that good rapport was easily established within the groups as not only did the children know me, but each child also knew at least one other

child in their CRAG. However, a risk with such an approach is that children may feel an obligation to participate out of an increased desire to please an adult they know. With this in mind, I let the children know that I had plenty children I could ask to participate and stressed that I would have no problem establishing the advisory groups if they were not interested in participating[10]

The role of the CRAGs within the research was to provide children's perspectives on the research focus, process, and findings. The aim of their inclusion was to (a) ensure a rights-based approach to the research design and (b) increase the quality and validity of the research. In discussing their role with the CRAG members, I highlighted to them that I was doing the research to achieve my PhD. The CRAGs and I met twice prior to the commencement of fieldwork to conduct capacity building and to facilitate the CRAGS to contribute to the development of research tools. The aim of the first capacity building session was to develop the children's understandings of children's rights in general and in particular their right to be heard. The second session aimed to (i) ascertain the children's perspectives regarding the appropriateness of the proposed research tools for the focus groups - picture vignettes and puppets and (ii) identify what children considered to be important in relation to the research question. The third CRAG session took place following data collection within the pilot school. The aim of this session was to provide feedback to the children regarding the success, or otherwise, of the research tools, and to conduct further capacity building, this time in relation to data analyses using some preliminary data from the pilot school. Following the completion of the fieldwork and the data analysis the CRAGs were provided, via post, with a child-friendly overview of the key findings (see Appendix 9) and invited to contribute their feedback (see Appendix 5). There was a period of five years between the CRAG's third meeting and the CRAGs being provided with the key findings for their consideration. This lengthy time period was due to unavoidable personal and professional circumstances that necessitated significant leaves of absence during my candidature, and highlights a significant challenge in relation to conducting participatory research within unexpectedly protracted or

[10] See section *Ethical Considerations* later in this chapter for further discussion on obtaining children's informed consent.

part-time PhD candidatures. Of the original 10 children who participated in the two groups, five children indicated that they would be interested in remaining involved in the advisory groups. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, meeting as a group in person was not an option, so the children were given a choice with regard to how further engagement would occur. These choices included (a) online group meetings, (b) individual online engagement or (b) individual engagement through the post (See Appendix 5). Four of the five children opted to engage individually online and one chose to engage via the postal system. The low rate of reengagement (50%) and the reluctance to 'meet' virtually as a group is likely a consequence of the children losing interest over the lengthy time period and feeling shy about engaging in virtual meetings with a group they no longer felt they knew. It was intended that the feedback provided by the children on the research findings would be summarised and, in addition to identifying how their feedback contributed to the final thesis, sent to the children in the remaining CRAG. This was an important element of the rights-based participatory approach, as it demonstrates to the children that due weight was given to their perspectives (Lundy, 2018). However, no members of the CRAGs contributed their feedback on the research findings.

Within the CRAG sessions I encountered limitations and tensions in relation to facilitating the children's understanding of the substantive issues, in particular the children's ability to differentiate between a need and a right - an abstract task that indeed, many adults may struggle with. The second challenge I encountered was that the children considered all issues in relation to their own preferences and lived experiences, and struggled to consider, even when prompted, the issues from a more objective perspective. This was especially so in relation to the children's consideration of the research methods and the preliminary data analysis. A further, and connected, issue became apparent as I grappled with the level of decision-making power I would share with the CRAGs. A desire to ensure the children's meaningful involvement in all aspects of the research process was confounded by my (mis)understanding that the children should have decision-making power within all aspects of their involvement. This misunderstanding was, in part, a result of ambiguity within the literature regarding what is meant by the terms such as

‘co-researchers’ and also the prevalence of hierarchical models of participation. Through reflection and further engagement with the literature I came to the realisation that meaningful involvement requires the adult researcher to ensure that the children are provided a space to share their expert perspectives, that they are supported with information to do so, and that the researcher must listen to them and consider the children’s perspectives in accordance with their age and maturity. That children must have significant decision-making power is not a requirement of rights-based participatory research. The aim and purpose of the research must also be considered. As noted by Lundy et al (2011) a rights-informed approach allows for children’s views to have an impact only when to do so does not jeopardise the integrity of research that seeks to create meaningful knowledge about issues that affect their lives. To this end, Franks’ (2011) ‘pockets of participation’ provides a useful framework that affords children ‘participative ownership of specific parts of the research process’ (p.23), thus ensuring that their participation is both meaningful and appropriate.

The CRAGs have undoubtedly contributed positively to this research. In highlighting the many ways in which they do and can feel heard within the school context, the CRAGs contributed to a shift in the research focus from simply exploring the barriers to participation (as the research initially sought to do) to also incorporating the enablers. Discussion with the children in the CRAGs also served to deepen my understanding of children’s experiences and perspectives in relation to being heard or not within their school lives and as such influenced my decisions in relation to the research design and process. The CRAGs influence, however, was indirect and not, as initially envisioned, a direct consequence of the children’s recommendations or any decisions taken by the children. For example, it was the children’s engagement with the research tools rather than their recommendations in relation to them that influenced the choice of research tools used within the pilot school. As such, the lack of decision-making power bestowed on the advisory groups led to critical refection in relation to the role of the children within the CRAGs - researchers or advisors, and if, as advisors, the research could be considered as using a children’s rights-based participatory methodology. An analysis of relevant literature, discussed below, led me to the conclusion that the

methodology used within this study can be classified as rights-based participatory research.

Reflecting on the rights-based participatory methodology employed in this study

Given that this research employs a rights-based perspective, and in particular given this research's focus on Article 12, the need to include children's voices not only in the data generated, as research subjects, but also as advisors contributing to the production of knowledge within the research process, is fundamental to the integrity of this work. How this was envisioned at the beginning of the research process, however, is very different to the final research design. Given the lack of clarity within the literature with regard to what exactly participatory methodology entails (Bradbury-Jones, 2018; Bird et al, 2013), determining, as I have, that this research does indeed employ such a methodology required considerable reflection on the literature and the CRAG's involvement in the research process. Challenges associated with children's meaningful engagement within adult-led research, the capacity of both the children and the researcher, the need for the research design to be best suited to address the research problem, and the constraints and expectations associated with PhD research, all played a role in the extent of the CRAG's involvement within the research process. The children in the CRAGs played a minor yet significant role in the research process. They did not determine the initial research question, engage in data collection or in any in-depth data analysis. They did, however, provide 'insider knowledge' that contributed to my understanding of the issues that are of importance to children in relation to being heard within their school lives. Through drawing activities, role play and discussions the CRAGs contributed to the process of designing and deciding on the research materials to be used within the pilot school. They also, as noted previously, played a key role in the expansion of the research focus from exploring the barriers to participation to incorporate and appreciate more fully the enablers of participation. Finally, the children in the CRAGs made suggestions with regards the dissemination of the research. In facilitating children to have a voice within the research process through the CRAGs and in providing children within the CRAGs

with feedback on the impact of their engagement and on the research itself, this research meets the requirements of a rights-based participatory methodology. As noted, rights-based approach allows for children's views to have an impact only when to do so does not jeopardise the integrity of research that seeks to create meaningful knowledge about issues that affect their lives (Lundy et al, 2011). Franks' (2011) 'Pockets of Participation' offers a meaningful and ethical rights-based approach that enables the researcher to work with children when there is a genuine contribution to be made, whilst also contributing to transparency regarding the extent to which children are involved in the research process. Such clarity and transparency are needed not only to facilitate the development of best practice, but also to enable the appraisal of research that uses child participatory methodologies. As noted previously, a determination on rights-based methodologies is based not on outputs but on whether due weight is given to the voices of children within the research process. In regard to a determination on the participatory nature, or otherwise of the methodology, I refer to Southby (2017) who, drawing on Povee et al, (2014), notes that '[r]ather than being a dichotomy of 'participatory' and 'non-participatory', participatory approaches should instead be conceptualized as being on a continuum of varying degrees of involvement and control for participants' (Southby, 2017, p.130). Thus, I contend that this research methodology does indeed fall within the spectrum that is rights-based participatory methodology. In employing 'pockets of participation' (Franks, 2011) the methodology provided a space for children's voices to be heard and to influence the research as advisors rather than co-researchers, and thus, children participated in the research process and contributed to the generation of knowledge. Employing a rights-based participatory approach was best suited to addressing the research question, and upheld both children's right to be properly researched and to have a voice within the research.

Data collection

The following section documents and discusses the methods used to gather data within the research process. The discussion is centred on the following issues:

- Research Sites and Participants

- Observations
- Interviews
- Focus Groups
- Pilot study

Research Sites and Participants

The research question determines the site(s) and participants, thus this research required the data to be gathered in primary schools and include the perspectives of educators (principals and teachers) and students. The research sites consisted of five primary schools located in both urban and rural locations within Ireland. The criteria for inclusion of schools consisted of the school being a state recognised and funded primary school in Ireland, delivering the national primary school curriculum. While these criteria are quite broad, in choosing schools to invite I endeavoured to ensure that a diverse range of schools participated within the study. This was in order to ensure that a range of factors such as socio-economic factors, school ethos, gender, geographical location and school size would be represented and thus provide a diversity of perspectives and contexts. Thus, non-random purposive sampling (Bryman, 2012) was used in selecting schools for inclusion in the study. The knowledge gleaned within each of the five individual schools cannot be claimed to be representative of the types of school in question and is therefore not generalizable in that respect, however, it does provide significant insights into key factors that impact on children's participation within different primary school contexts.

Having identified several schools that met the criteria I contacted the principal of each school by post to provide information regarding the study and to invite them to participate (See Appendix 2). This letter was followed up by a phone call to ascertain if the principal/school was willing to participate in the study. Only one school that was contacted declined to participate. A brief overview of the five participating schools is provided in *Table 1* below.

Table 1. Overview of participating schools

	St Seáns[11]	St Reginas	Fairview E.T.	Gealscoil Áitéigin	Springrock
Socio-economic	DEIS Band 1	DEIS Band 2	Mixed socio-economic area	Middle class	Middle Class
Co-Ed	Boy's school	Mixed gender	Mixed gender	Mixed gender	Mixed gender
Ethos	Catholic Ethos	Catholic Ethos	Educate Together	Catholic Ethos	Holistic/spiritual Ethos[12]
Other diversity		Prevalence of migrant families		Irish Speaking	
Geographic setting	Urban	Urban	Suburban	Suburban	Rural

Overview of Participating Schools

St. Seáns National School[13]

There are 91 boys in this small Catholic school. Situated in an urban area of social and economic disadvantage, this school has a DEIS[14] band one status. According to the principal many of the children attending this school live with a lone parent, foster parents, have a parent in prison, or a parent with alcohol and/or drug issues. She also noted that many of the children have emotional and behavioural issues.

St. Reginas National School

This mixed gender Catholic primary school has 267 pupils and is located in a large urban centre. The school has a DEIS band two status as many of the children are living in areas of socio-economic disadvantage. Up to 80% of the children in any

[11] Participating school are given pseudonyms to protect their anonymity

[12] Given that there are so few of these types of schools in Ireland (currently five), providing more specific details with regards to the school ethos and the spiritual philosophy underpinning the ethos, could serve to compromise the anonymity of the school.

[13] Pseudonyms are used to protect the anonymity of the schools and participants

[14] DEIS stands for Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools and is a programme designed to tackle issues of educational disadvantage through increased government funded support and resources. There are two levels of DEIS status - band 1 and band 2. DEIS band 1 schools are afforded a greater level of support and resources than DEIS band 2 schools on the basis of a determination of greater need. The variables considered in the determination of the inclusion of a school in the DEIS programme include:% unemployment, % local authority accommodation, % lone parenthood, % Travellers, % large families (5 or more children), % pupils eligible for free books (Department of Education and Skills, 2020)

one class come from migrant backgrounds and many of these children have a language other than English as their first language.

Fairview Educate Together National School

There are over 350 pupils attending this mixed gender multi-denominational school which is located in a suburban area adjacent to a large urban centre. This is a relatively new school that grew very quickly and is located in a large new purpose-built school building. The children are identified as coming from a mixture of socio-economic backgrounds while the school is situated in a middle-class area.

Gaelscoil Áitéigin

The largest school in this study, Gaelscoil Áitéigin, has over 400 students. This mixed-gender Catholic school teaches through the medium of Irish and is located in an affluent suburban area within a large urban centre. Students predominantly come from advantaged socio-economic backgrounds and the school has a comparatively low number of students with special needs or from migrant backgrounds.

Spring Rock National School

This small mixed gender school has 105 children in attendance and is located in a rural setting. The majority of the pupils in the school are from a middle-class background. This relatively small 'alternative' school provides a holistic education with a focus on creativity and nature, and values experiential learning (school website). While not a religious school, the school's philosophy underpins a view of the child as a spiritual being. The school delivers the national school curriculum, however, the spiritually influenced pedagogical philosophy has a significant influence on both educators' constructions of the children, and the teaching and learning approach adopted by educators in meeting curriculum outcomes.

Overview of methods

I spent one week observing in each of the five participating schools. Half the week was spent in a junior classroom and half the week in a senior classroom. In total 125 hours were spent conducting observations. The following week I conducted interviews with principals and the teachers I had observed and focus groups comprising children from the classrooms I observed. In total 12 interviews and 9 focus groups were conducted. Each of these three methods are discussed below. Table 2 provides an overview of the fieldwork that was conducted in each school.

Table 2. Participant/Method overview

	St. Seáns	**St Reginas**	**Fairview Educate Together**	**Gaelscoil Áitéigin**	**Springrock**
Adult participants (Interviews)	6th class Teaching principal (female) 2nd class teacher (female) **2 in total**	Principal, (female) 1st class teacher (female) 4th class teacher (female) **3 in total**	Principal (female) 2nd class teacher (female) 6th class teacher (male) **3 in total**	Principal (male) 1st class teacher (female) 6th class teacher (female) **3 in total**	6th class Teaching principal (male) **1 in total**
Child participants within Focus groups	Younger group n=5 Older group n= 5 **10 participants in total**	Younger group n=5 Older group n= 5 **10 participants in total**	Younger group n=5 Older group n= 5 **10 participants in total**	Younger group n=5 Older group n= 5 **10 participants in total**	Older group n= 5[15] **5 participants in total**
Observation* *Observations also took	Three days in 2nd class (approx. 15 children)	Three days in 1st class (approx. 22 children)	Two days in 2nd class (approx. 21 children)	Two days in 1st class (approx. 27 children)	Five days in 6th class (approx. 24 children)

[15] The children in this school begin in 1st class and have a joint 1st and 2nd class. Given that the teacher in this class had only just recently commenced teaching, the principal decided that this class would not participate in the study.

place during yard time, and as the children gathered before school in the mornings, however, the number of children during these times was not counted.	*and* Two days in 6th class (approx. 9 children) **24 over 5 days in total (approx.)**	*and* Two days in 4th class (approx. 18 children) **40 over 5 days in total (approx..)**	*and* Three days in 6th class (approx. 28 children) **49 over 5 days in total (approx.)**	*and* Three days in 6th class (approx. 19 children) **46 over 5 days in total (approx..)**	**24 over 5 days in total (approx.)**
	April 2015	October 2015	January 2016	January 2016	April 2016

With regard to the research participants twelve educators participated in the study. The intention was that in each school the principal and two teachers would participate (one in a senior cycle class and one in a junior cycle class), thus having three adult participants in each school, however, this was not achieved in either St. Seáns or Springrock National School. In both of these schools the principal was also a participating teacher, while in Springrock the principal decided that they could not facilitate my request in relation to a younger class and their teacher participating (as explained in the footnote included in the previous page).

Observations

While observational methods are typically seen as a means to describe content rather than meaning, Tudge and Hogan (2005) highlight the key role of observations in understanding the interwoven dynamic dance between the individual and the context in which they are situated, as understood by ecological theories such as those developed by Bronfenbrenner and Vygotsky. The spatial/relational perspective and approach within this research, and deemed most suited to understanding the social phenomenon under investigation, demands that the researcher note the individual participants, the context in which they are situated and the interactive processes and relations within the context. Non-participant observations (Bryman, 2012) within the classroom were thus chosen as the method best suited to generate the relevant data regarding social processes, practices and interactions within the school setting.

As a non-participant observer I sought to strike a balance between being a benevolent presence in the classroom, and remaining detached in order to minimise the inevitable impact my being there had. Always sitting at the back of the class contributed to my efforts to be as 'invisible' as possible, however, my presence in the classrooms was noted and inevitably had an impact on the goings-on (Creswell, 2014). A disadvantage of sitting at the back of the classrooms was that it made it difficult to see and hear as well as I might have had I been sitting in a more prominent position. I took notes continuously throughout the observation periods. My training and experience in conducting child observations contributed to the notes being objective in their descriptions. For example, rather than write 'child x looks happy', I would write 'child x is smiling'. Each evening I read over my notes and wrote a more subjective interpretive reflection on the day's observation. Such notes, however, served as analysis, as it was the descriptive observation notes that constituted data. If thoughts occurred to me while in the field I wrote them in the margins so as to demarcate the more objective observation notes and my subjective reflections and interpretations. Pellegrini et al, (2012) note that deciding what, when and where to observe should be guided by the researcher's conceptualisation of the phenomena they seek to observe. While I had a conceptualisation of participation (as identified in Chapter Four: *Assembling a Theoretical Toolkit*), I did not know what factors would prove to be relevant in relation to supporting or enabling it. Thus, in the first school I visited, St. Seáns, I fervently endeavoured to record everything that occurred in addition to documenting the physical environment. Reflecting on the data I generated in St Seán's enabled me to refine my process in order to write less and watch more. Still, given the exploratory nature of the study I took a somewhat unstructured approach to documenting observations as the elements that would prove key were as yet unknown to me (Gobo, 2008). As the fieldwork progressed, while I still documented the physical spaces within each setting, I found myself increasingly focusing on adult/child interactions as I came to realise that, given adults' control of children, it was children's participation within educator/pupil relationships that I was most interested in.

Observation was the first of the three research methods to be conducted, as I wanted to observe practice prior to gleaning participants' perspectives. This also allowed me to ask participants specific questions within the interviews and focus groups based on things I had observed the previous week. Observation as a method was extremely effective for generating rich relevant data. In particular, it allowed me to document numerous examples of practices and behaviours which impact on the ability of children to participate.

Adult Interviews

Semi-structured interviews facilitate the exploration of participants' thoughts and feelings regarding a particular phenomenon and provide an account of their experiences (Jones et al, 2013; Punch and Oancea, 2014). Such interviews were conducted with adult participants in order to allow specific areas to be addressed while still allowing for the flexibility to explore any issues that presented within the interview (Bryman 2012). As noted, 12 interviews in total were conducted; 3 with principals, 2 with teaching principals and 7 with teachers. A limitation of interviews lies in the risk of interviewees' responses being filtered in order to present themselves in a favourable way (Creswell, 2014). The use of multiple methods serves to mediate this limitation by allowing data regarding participants' stated perspectives *and* their observed practices to be collected. A key benefit of semi-structured interviews as a method lies in the potential to further probe and explore issues of interest and relevance that arise within the interview (Bryman, 2012).

Adult participants (principals, teachers, and teaching-principals) were each interviewed for an average duration of about 50 minutes. The interviews took place in principals' offices and empty classrooms. An interview schedule was used to guide the interview (see Appendix 10). The schedule provided prompt questions under the following areas: General school ethos and culture; School priorities; Participation policies and practice; Constructions of children; Discipline; Challenging children; and the UNCRC. There was also a section titled Miscellaneous, within which specific questions arising out of the observation period were asked. In creating this guide consideration was given to (1) the research question(s) (2) key issues identified within the literature, and (3) the

comments made by the children in the CRAGs regarding their experiences and perspectives in relation to being heard within their schools. While semi-structured interviews enable the interviewer to address each question in any order they deem appropriate, in creating the guide, effort was made to structure the flow of the prompt questions in such a way as to facilitate a natural flow in the discussion. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.

Child Focus Groups

This research sought to determine the opinions and perspectives of children regarding being listened to and having their perspectives duly considered within the classroom. Focus groups were deemed to be the most suitable method to generate data to explore the substantive issues, given the qualitative nature of the information sought. Basch (1987) notes that '[f]ocus group interviews are particularly well suited to collecting in-depth, qualitative data about individuals' definitions of problems, opinions and feelings, and meanings associated with various phenomena' (p.434). Stewart and Shamdasanio (1990) highlight that the key to the successful use of focus groups is ensuring that their use is consistent with the research objectives. As my objective for this aspect of the research was to glean and explore the perspectives and experiences of children, focus groups were the ideal method to employ. Kellett (2010) notes that focus groups allow the generation of data through dialogue amongst participants. This is why focus groups were chosen over individual interviews as it is the discussion I had with the children that produced the data required. Additionally, they were chosen as a method to avoid children being intimidated by individual interviews. Hennessy and Heary (2005) advocate the suitability of focus groups for conducting research with children and reference the work of Mauthner (1997) in arguing that 'focus groups create a safe peer environment and replicate the type of small group settings that children are familiar with from their classroom work' (Hennessy and Heary, 2005, p.237). The similarity with classroom work, however, is also a disadvantage as it promotes power-dynamics between the children and the adult researcher that are similar to those which occur between teachers and students (Kellett, 2010). Nine focus groups were conducted in total – two in each school (one each with an older and younger class), except in Springrock, where access was only granted to

an older class because, as mentioned, the younger class teacher was new to the position.

As noted previously, the first school visited (St. Seáns) also served as a pilot school. The approach taken to the focus groups in this school differed from the other four schools. When initially designing this study, I wanted to use child-friendly creative methods within the focus groups and worked with the children in the advisory groups and with an artist to devise materials to do so. In St Seáns, the children in the focus groups were asked to discuss and rank a range of images, created both by an artist and the children from the advisory group. They were also given the opportunity to role-play or conduct a puppet show depicting one of the images or to create a rap about one of the images. Even though I have significant experience in working with children, my inexperience in conducting research with children became apparent during these two focus groups. The following is a discussion on the ethical and practical issues I encountered within the two pilot school focus groups.

Ethical Challenges within Focus Groups

As noted in the later section *Positionality and Schools as Research Sites* researchers must be cognisant of, and seek to mediate, unequal power-dynamics between adult researchers and child participants within the research process, and especially so within research sites such as schools wherein adult-child relationships are traditionally hierarchical and where 'structures of compliance' (Harcourt and Sargeant, 2011, p.429) exist. In noting the difficulties researchers may face in balancing children's protection and participation within research, Harcourt and Sargeant speak of protecting children *from* the unequal power dynamic between adults and children. My experience in the pilot focus group, however, was one in which I needed to exercise power and control *in order to* protect the children. Prior to entering the research field, I intended to adopt a 'least adult role' (Atkinson, 2019; Horgan, 2017; Mandell, 1988) to mediate the power-imbalance between the children and I. However, adopting such a role resulted in an inability on my part to create a safe environment for the children. My non-authoritative approach resulted in the children engaging in behaviours such as

speaking over me, rummaging through my bag of materials and running around the room. It felt as though they were testing me to see how far they could go. I proceeded with the focus group as well as I could, maintaining my non-authoritarian stance and endeavouring to reason with the children, while their behaviour became more and more unrestrained and unruly. About 15 minutes into the session one of the children ran across the room with a scissors in his hand at which point I realised that the safety of the children was the primary concern, not the research. I immediately changed my approach. I calmly but firmly, insisted that the children sit down and I *imposed* some rules, such as not shouting or running. The enforcement of familiar boundaries, and an adult who was clearly 'in charge' seemed to calm the children who, while still quite boisterous, engaged in the research activities with much enthusiasm. In reflecting on this experience, it occurred to me that the perceived absence of familiar boundaries and expected adult/child dynamic, may have unnerved the children who then 'acted out' in order to determine if indeed there were any boundaries. As a preschool teacher I often experienced children 'acting out' in response to feeling insecure or unsure of expectations. Kirby (2020) documents a similar experience, providing the following considered reflection which does not consider such behaviour to be an indication of dis-ease or insecurity:

> Unused to playing and making sounds in the classroom, my expectation that the children do so while also keeping focused on the research agenda is confusing; I have become positioned as a type of teacher/play worker with a low personal rule frame, offering an opportunity for children to be 'otherwise'. Through their everyday inventiveness, the children are engaged in what de Certeau (1984) might call 'tactical' manoeuvres, that 'accept the chance offerings of the moment' (p. 30), as a way of 'making do' in the classroom (Gallagher, 2008; Atkinson, 2019). Thinking with Ranciere (1991), we might add that their dissenting play and humour identifies their political knowingness: they challenge the perceptual and epistemic order of the classroom, acting in these moments with the presumption of equality to move, to play, to laugh and to talk at will (Kirby, 2020, p. 823).

Thus, while the literature, quite rightly, speaks to the need for adult researchers to attempt to mediate unequal power-dynamics within research with children, the 'practical, ethical and emotional complexities' (Atkinson 2019, p.186) inherent

within the adoption of 'least adult' role also require careful consideration. Whether it causes children uncertainty and insecurity, or gleeful opportunities to capitalise on the affordances presented when those who they perceive to be 'in charge' do not command the space, researchers must balance the interests of the research with children's best interest. In this research when the safety and wellbeing of the children was compromised it was ethically imperative that I abandon the role of least adult and assume a more authoritative role. However, in recognition of institutional power-dynamics and the need to both ensure the children's well-being and address the aims of the research, I adopted a 'least teacher' role for subsequent focus groups.

Practical Challenges and Solutions within the Focus Groups

As noted, the creative methods I provided as possibilities within the focus groups in St. Seáns consisted of drawing, ranking exercises, role play, puppets and rapping. The children seemed to enjoy these activities, with the older focus group putting considerable effort into writing and recording an impressive rap song. The difficulty with these methods, however, was that they resulted in much high-spirited hilarity with the children laughing and talking over each other for much of the sessions. While these two sessions did produce a limited amount of rich data, the audio recordings were incredibly difficult to decipher and the sessions generated little usable data in relation to the substantive issues.

Had I been a more experienced researcher I could perhaps have 'tweaked' this creative approach to produce a greater amount of discernible relevant data, however, the challenges I experienced with these focus groups led me to their redesign. The new approach to the focus groups within the other four schools was more structured, and focused on specific questions. This was to allow me to maintain a greater level of control in relation to the direction and nature of the group discussion, thus increasing the amount of relevant data generated, and to overcome the challenges I encountered in relation to children speaking over each other. Within this approach I endeavoured to strike a more effective and ethical balance in managing the group and empowering the children using a 'least teacher' (Dunne et al, 2005) rather than 'least adult' role in order to operate effectively within, while not taking advantage of, situated norms and expectations.

I devised a list of questions to generate data about the children's experiences and perspectives regarding their everyday school lives and participating within the school context, their constructions of self as students and the norms they associated with their situated identity, and their experiences and expectations in relation to their teachers. Like the adult interview guides, these questions were influenced by the research question(s), the literature, and the CRAGs. Using a flip chart to write down the children's responses, the children identified and discussed their responses to each of the following questions:

- What I like most about school….
- What I like least about school…
- It is important that teachers are…
- It is important that teachers are not…
- It is important that students do/are...
- It is important that students do/are not…..
- In school I can decide….
- In school I would like to decide…
- If I could change one thing about school it would be….

The children were given coloured pipe cleaners to play and fiddle with while we talked. This was effective in supporting the children to remain engaged with the discussion and to reduce any potential discomfort or reluctance a child may feel in contributing to the discussion. While certainly less creative as a method, this new approach provided a child-friendly way to generate pertinent data with the children. The data consisted of both the audio recordings and the completed flipcharts. The audio recordings were not transcribed in full, however, using NVivo, they were coded directly from the audio. The extremely difficult and time-consuming nature of transcribing children's focus groups and the capacity of NVivo to facilitate coding directly from audio files led me to this decision. Due regard was given to the disadvantages of such an approach, which include: secondary coding being more time consuming; difficulty in coding small segments of data, and the inability to conduct word searches and queries on audio files. To

counteract some of these factors all sections of the audio that were coded were transcribed.

While there is plethora of literature on conducting research with children and child-friendly research methods (see for example, Berson et al, 2019; Christensen and James, 2017; Kellett, 2010; Alderson 2008; Tisdall et al, 2009b; Greene and Hogan, 2005), and on developing children's capacity to engage both with the research process and the issues under investigation (Lundy and McEvoy, 2012a), there is a dearth of literature regarding *adult* researchers' capacity to conduct such research. The capacity of adult researchers, in particular novice researchers such as graduate students, to conduct research with children is a key factor in the generation of knowledge about children's lives. Bishop (2014) highlights a need for adult researchers to develop their skills and capacity in order to conduct research with children effectively, while Southby (2017) notes the increased difficulties regarding issues of researcher capacity faced by novice researchers conducting PhDs using participatory approaches and methods. The methods used in this study to facilitate the inclusion of children's perspectives and experiences were influenced by my evolving understanding and limited experience of conducting research with children. While the methods used generated rich data, and I am confident that the perspectives and experiences of children have been successfully incorporated into this study, so too can I see ways in which these methods could be improved upon.

Pilot Study

As noted, the first school in which research was conducted, St. Seáns, also served as a pilot school. This was to enable me to reflect on the effectiveness of the research tools and design, and to make any changes deemed necessary prior to re-entering the field. So too did this allow me to provide an overview of provisional findings from this school to the CRAGs and engage in preliminary data analysis with them, both as a capacity developing exercise and as a way to glean their perspectives on these tentative findings. The methods employed in this school differed in two ways from the subsequent research sites. Firstly, as noted the focus groups with children were more creative and were subsequently redesigned in order to provide a greater level of relevant data. Secondly, reflecting on the

observations conducted in this school resulted in the decision to 'write less and observe more' in order to ensure that a greater level of relevant elements and events was documented. While field notes generated during observations within the pilot school filled two whole A3 hardbound notebooks, in subsequent schools documented observations filled one A3 notebook per school.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis 'should be seen as a fundamental method for qualitative analysis' (Braun and Clark, 2006, p.78) and as such was chosen as the appropriate method of conducting analysis in keeping with this research's philosophical underpinnings. The use of an analytical framework or strategy to guide analysis facilitates rigour and quality within the research process. Approaches to qualitative thematic data analysis (Miles et al, 2014; Guest et al, 2012; Braun and Clarke, 2006) consist of conducting and moving through cycles or stages of analysis, yet frequently returning to previous stages as you move through the process. This iterative nature of the analysis process can make, what first appears like a clear and straightforward process, feel quite messy. I frequently returned to the raw data and the initial codes at later stages of the analysis process in order to ensure my interpretation and representation of the data was firmly grounded in the data, or to search for additional data pieces to support a theme that became more relevant as the analysis progressed. Having considered the analytical frameworks developed by the above authors, the procedure suggested by Braun and Clark (2006) provided the most clarity, and seemed to make the most sense in relation to my data.

Given the size of the data corpus I decided to use Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDA) software NVivo to help structure and manage my data. CAQDA does not assume the hermeneutic task of interpreting data, but rather provides tools to assist the researcher in their management and interpretation of data. My data corpus consisted of three distinct data sets: the transcripts from the adult interviews; the annotated audio files from the focus groups with children, and their answers written on flip charts within the focus groups; and the handwritten notes from the observations. To create an efficient database, I imported the primary data (audio and text files) into NVivo and organised the data into five folders - one for each school. Within each school folder I organised the

data into subfolders reflecting each method of data generation; focus groups, observations and interviews. While I used NVivo to conduct the initial coding (stage two of Braun and Clark's framework), I found it more effective to engage in the subsequent stages of data analysis (for all data sets) manually using pen, paper and scissors.

Utilising NVivo, I conducted the primary coding and developed the initial themes using data derived from the adult interviews only. Subsequently I analysed the data from the children's focus groups and the observations in relation to the original codes and the themes developed in phase 4 of the analysis process. In reflecting on the primarily inductive approach taken to the initial analysis of the interview data I was struck by the very lengthy nature, and the significant number of redundant codes generated through this approach. So too was I developing my understanding of the substantive issues from a theoretical perspective as I continued to engage with the literature throughout this time. Thus, I decided that in coding the remaining two data sets (derived from focus groups and observations) it would be better to use a more deductive approach, guided by the already established codes and themes, in addition to the theoretical framework and literature, while remaining open to the identification of unexpected codes. This allowed the remaining two data sets to be analysed far more efficiently using an iterative approach which drew on the data, the literature and key theoretical concepts. While no new significant codes were developed through this process, it did lead to certain elements gaining increased status. For example, while 'respect' was noted as a relatively minor code within the initial coding process, consideration of, and additional data supporting this code through the analysis of the focus groups and observations led to 'respect' becoming a significant sub-theme in itself. Thus, while Braun and Clark's (2006) framework was used as a guide to structure the process of analysis, so too was it adapted to best suit the research needs. While preliminary analysis of the data from the pilot school was conducted in order to facilitate the CRAG's engagement and consideration of the data, following the completion of the fieldwork, the data from the pilot school was analysed with, and in the same manner as, the other participating schools. The following table (Table 3) provides a summary of the process of analysis

undertaken, and in doing so contributes to transparency in how the findings were arrived at and thus, the dependability of the research (Guba and Lincoln, 1989).

Table 3. An overview of the process of analysis.

Phase 1: Becoming familiar with the data	While the formal analysis began once all the fieldwork had been completed, informal analysis occurred throughout the fieldwork period as I wrote many 'notes-to-self' in the margins of my observation notebooks and as annotations on my transcripts and within NVivo. Prior to engaging with the coding process, I familiarised myself with the data and the many 'notes to self' created throughout the data gathering stage.
Phase 2: Generating initial Codes	Using NVivo I engaged in what was predominantly inductive coding of the interview data, although having engaged with the literature what I 'saw' in the data was undoubtedly influenced by my understanding of the substantive issues, thus, this process entailed elements of both inductive and deductive analysis (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995). This process resulted in the generation of 110 codes.
Phase 3: Searching for themes	The codes were arranged into candidate themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Given the interconnected nature of the themes some codes sat within more than one theme. This predominantly inductive process resulted in the generation of 16 themes.
Phase 4: Reviewing and refining the themes	Data generated through observations and focus groups was analysed to identify further data pieces to support existing codes and themes, and to identify any additional potential codes/themes. The triangulating of the data supports the credibility of the research (Guba and Lincoln 1989). Following further consideration of these themes in relation to the research question and the theoretical framework, some themes were merged while others were discarded, resulting in three overarching themes encompassing 14 sub-themes. The overarching themes were: (1) School Culture, (2) Constructions of Self and Other, (3) Teaching and Learning. The collated data extracts within each of these themes were re-examined in order to ensure the presence of a coherent pattern. Summaries of both the overarching and the sub-themes were constructed to assist in my consideration of their validity, and to share with my supervisors thus, supporting credibility, dependability and confirmability (Guba and Lincoln, 1989) in the process of analysis.

Phase 5: Defining and naming themes	Initial attempts at structuring the findings chapters around the three themes identified in phase 4 proved challenging. To discuss each theme/sub-theme in isolation was ineffective as, given their interconnected nature, this led to significant repetition. Thus, as advised by Braun and Clarke, I considered each theme in isolation and in relation to the other themes, in order to develop the 'story' of the research (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This led to the following structure being born out of the need to present the findings in a manner that provided optimum clarity and depth whilst representing the data with accuracy: Beliefs and Values: ● Educators beliefs and values ● Children's perspectives Pedagogical Practice ● Teaching and Learning ● Discipline Relationships ● Children's desire to be listened to ● The personal in the professional ● Respect ● Hierarchy and power sharing For a visual representation of how the 3 themes identified in phase 4 relate to these three themes see Figure 3 below. Once more the collated data extracts within each theme and sub-theme were re-examined in order to ensure the presence of a coherent pattern.
Phase 6: Producing the report.	I created an analytical narrative supported by evidence to tell the 'complicated story' of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006) in order to fully address the research question and meet the aims of the research. Supporting data was used to demonstrate the accuracy of the findings, contributing to research creditability (Guba and Lincoln, 1989), while sufficient contextual data and rich descriptions were provided, supporting the transferability (ibid) of the research.

The following image (Figure 3) illustrates how the three key themes to emerge from the data, identified in phase 4 of the process of analysis (noted in Table 3

above), each feature in the three resulting findings chapters; Chapter Five: *Educational Paradigms: The beliefs and values that (up)set the stage for participatory practice*, Chapter Six: *Pedagogical Practice and Participation,* and Chapter Seven: *Relationships Between Educators and Children and their Impact on Participation*.

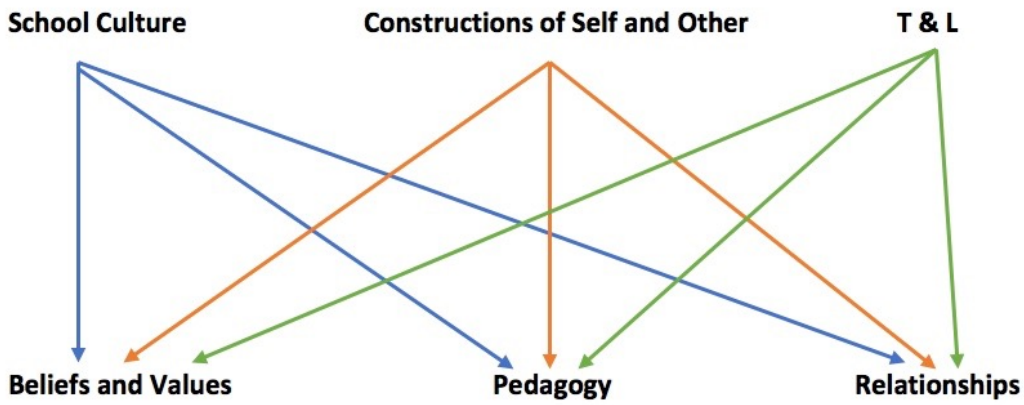


Figure 3. Situating the research themes within the presentation of findings

Quality and Rigour

Denzin and Lincoln note that researchers often 'deploy a wide range of interconnected interpretative practices' (2011, p.4) as a means of gaining a more in-depth understanding of the issue under investigation. The use of multiple practices requires quality criteria, and the literature has not failed in providing a range of checklists and recommendations concerning qualitative research, however, so too has the use of quality criteria checklists been criticised for failing to afford the flexibility needed and inherent within qualitative methodologies (Johnson et al, 2020). In particular, Johnson et al (2020) highlight the argument that 'a strict focus on using checklists of specific technical criteria may stifle the diversity and multiplicity of practices that are so much a part of achieving quality and rigor within the qualitative paradigm' (p.138). The following discussion addresses issues concerning quality and rigour in the framing of this research, within the research design and process, and within the conclusions of the research.

Quality and rigour within the Framing of the Research

Johnson et al, (2020) note that '[d]eveloping and refining a primary research question focused on both the phenomena of interest and the context in which it is situated is essential to research rigour and quality' (p.139). The iterative process of developing and refining a research question involves engaging with literature, theory and reflexivity in order to establish what is both known and unknown. The resulting question must be feasible, interesting, novel, ethical, and relevant (ibid).

This research demonstrates quality and rigour within the framing of the study in the following ways:

- I engaged in an iterative process that involved literature, theory and reflexivity and determined both the known and the unknown in relation to the research topic, in order to develop a research question that was feasible, interesting, novel, ethical, and relevant (Johnson et al, 2020).
- I considered the impact of my knowledge, experience and biases on the choice of research topic and design.
- An appropriate philosophical conceptual framework for the research was identified and justified.

Quality and Rigour within Research Design and Process

The methods used within this research (interviews, focus groups and observations) are recognised as highly appropriate in qualitative research. The use of best practice methods is critical to claims of rigour and trustworthiness of research results (Johnson et al, 2020). This research provides a clear rationale for the purposive sampling method used. The research also engages with, and addresses general ethical research concerns, in addition to ethical considerations in relation to conducting research with and about children (see section *Ethical Considerations* later in the chapter). Multiple methods of data collection were employed to glean data regarding both the perspectives of participants (through interviews and focus groups) *and* participants' practices and interactions (through observations), and thus, allowed for triangulation of the data, which contributed to

research rigour (Creswell, 2014). A systematic process of data analysis, guided by the Braun and Clarke (2006) model, and supported through the qualitative data analysis software application NVivo, enabled data saturation to be determined with confidence, in so much as it can be, given that the event under investigation – participation - continues indefinitely (Johnson et al, 2020). NVivo facilitates research rigour by providing transparency within the process of analysis (Silverman, 2010). Finally, data collection and analysis was underpinned by the philosophical stances on the nature of reality, knowledge and the research objects as laid out earlier in this chapter.

Guba and Lincoln (1989) suggest the following four criteria for assessing the trustworthiness of qualitative research; credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. This research addresses each of these criteria in the following ways:

> **Credibility**: In order to establish credibility in the findings and to ensure that the data is represented accurately; sufficient time was spent in the field to achieve an adequate understanding of, and data in relation to, the phenomena under investigation and the factors which influence it; 'persistent observation' (Guba and Lincoln, 1989) was used in order to identify and focus on the factors and elements most relevant to the research question(s); data from the interviews, focus groups and observations was triangulated; supporting data is used to demonstrate the accuracy of the findings.
>
> **Transferability**: The contextual information provided enables the reader to apply the findings to similar educational contexts. While the findings are not generalisable, the rich level of descriptions used both in relation to the findings themselves and the process of analysis that led to these findings enables others to consider the applicability of these findings to other sites.
>
> **Dependability:** The research process is clearly documented with sufficient detail as to enable the reader to determine the accuracy of the findings, and in so doing, this research demonstrates transparency in how the findings were arrived at.

Confirmability: The confirmability of the research is achieved through the use of a personal reflexive diary throughout the research process to reflect on both the research methods and my interpretation of the data. The process of supervision provided invaluable peer review and added to the confirmability, and also the dependability, of this study. Confirmability was also achieved through the achievement of credibility, transferability, and dependability.

Quality and Rigour within Research Conclusions

In order to ensure quality and rigour, research conclusions and recommendations must 'close the loop' (Jonson et al, 2020, p.144) by demonstrating the interconnected nature of the research question, design, data collection and analysis, results and conclusions. While the exploratory nature of the research necessitated a predominately inductive approach to the data analysis within the coding phase, the discussion and interpretation of the findings was guided by the bespoke theoretical framework identified in chapter four: *Assembling a Theoretical Toolkit*. The integration of the research findings with the theoretical framework is a key component of rigour in qualitative research (Johnson et al, 2020). The discussion on the limitations and challenges encountered and navigated within this research also serves to strengthen the quality of this study.

As suggested within this discussion on research quality, reflexivity is an integral aspect of research rigour both at the framing stage and throughout the research process (Johnson et al, 2020). The following discussion provides an important statement on the subjectivity of the researcher, the potential impact on the research, and the measures taken to remain cognisant of, and indeed mitigate such factors throughout the research process.

Reflexivity

No research is truly objective, as researchers are always influenced by their biases to some extent. Factors such as age, gender, life experiences and values, which shape our conscious and unconscious biases, have an impact on a researcher's

perspectives and judgements. Johnson et al, (2020) define researcher reflexivity as 'a researcher's insight into their own biases and rationale for decision-making as the study progresses' (p.138) arguing that reflexivity is 'critical to rigor' (ibid), while Etherington describes reflexivity as 'a tool whereby we can include our "selves" at any stage, making transparent the values and beliefs we hold that almost certainly influence the research process and its outcomes' (2007, p 601). This particular research would never have been undertaken had it not been for the perspectives, knowledge and interest I acquired through my personal and professional journey. My own and my children's experience of being powerless and voiceless at school, in addition to my professional pedagogical expertise, has led me to believe that children's right to be heard *must* be prioritised and facilitated within a school context. My professional background is within the area of early childhood care and education. I worked as a kindergarten teacher for several years, and have both a diploma in Steiner Early Childhood Education and an honours degree in Early Childhood Studies. The child-centred, emergent, rights-based pedagogical approach which I developed an understanding of through my studies and utilised as a practitioner, is inherently participatory and was in stark contrast to my own 1980s school experience. However, it was not until my own children experienced and expressed frustration at not being listened to, and of being afraid to question their teachers in school during the 2000s and 2010s, that I came to suspect the rights-based participatory pedagogical approach I was familiar with within an early-years context was perhaps lacking within a primary school environment. Aware of the differences with regard to pedagogical approach, curriculum requirements, educator/child ratios and physical environments between the early-years and primary school sectors, I came to wonder how, if at all, it could be possible to ensure the facilitation of children's right to be heard within a primary school context. This interest, in addition to a very real desire to see children's participation within primary schools becoming prevalent, led to the decision to explore this issue within my doctoral studies.

While this accounts for my personal and professional interest and expertise in relation to the research topic, it is also important to identify the potential impact of my subjectivity on the research process, and the measures I took to ensure that any

biases I had, be they conscious or unconscious, did not undermine the quality of the research. Furthermore, it is important to demonstrate reflexivity in relation to issues of power when conducting research within schools (see discussion in section *Positionality and Schools as Research Sites* later in this chapter). As noted previously, throughout the research process I kept a reflective journal. This enabled me to be reflexive in my critical reflections on the methods, the data generation and analysis, and in my interpretations of the findings. The following extract, taken from this diary quite early on in the research process is an example of such reflection:

> I must be careful not to be developmentalist in my perspective – I must not assume that children's characteristics are natural, for example, I now realise that in presuming that children have a need for security I am essentializing children. It could also be that they have internalised paternalism. I need to consider how I am constructing children and be aware of any assumptions I might be making as a result. I need to make sure that I make claims based on evidence and not on assumptions (13/8/2015).

This extract demonstrates not only the reflective approach I used within the research, but also documents the role of reflexivity in the development of my understanding in relation to both the research process and the substantive issues, and in relation to becoming conscious of any assumptions or biases arising from my positionality as an adult. In addition to using a reflective diary, (a) providing a rationale for decisions made within the research, and (b) providing supporting data and evidence within my interpretation of the findings and the arguments I make in developing the research conclusions, illustrate transparency within the research process, and served to limit the undue influence of personal biases, beliefs or values.

Positionality and Schools as Research Sites

The research site plays a fundamental role in enabling or constraining children's agency (Atkinson, 2019). Recognising the impact of the situated power relationships children's lives are embedded in, is key to ensuring ethical and effective research undertaken within school contexts. Kirby (2020) highlights the problems inherent in conducting research within schools, noting that schools:

> offer a very particular institutional context that emphasises children's conformity into existing social orders, in which they are expected to learn and comply with what has already been defined (by adults) as socially desirable to know, to do and to be (Kirby, 2020, p.812).

Within the school context children are subjected to 'bodily conformity' (ibid p.813) which requires them to engage in behaviours, such as sitting quietly and avoiding the expression of 'difficult feelings' (ibid), so as not to disrupt lessons. Such conditioning presents researchers with significant challenges in (a) obtaining children's meaningful consent and (b) eliciting children's genuine perspectives. Gallagher et al, (2010, p.475) note that within the school context 'children's relationships with their parents, teachers and peers are likely to have implications for whether consent is given or withheld', thus any consent given by children must be assessed in relation to the context in which it's given (ibid). Researchers must also demonstrate reflexivity in relation to their own positionality, in particular considering how the methods they use may 'contribute to producing conforming governable subjects' (Loveridge and Cornforth, 2014, cited in Kirby, 2020, p.814). Thus, a challenging balancing act exists between managing groups of children (e.g. focus groups) within a school context while striving for an egalitarian power-dynamic necessary to achieve meaningful consent and participation. Indeed, this was a significant issue both within the pilot focus groups and in obtaining children's meaningful consent for classroom observations – both of which are considered in detail within this chapter.

While many researchers adopt a 'least adult' role (Atkinson, 2019; Horgan, 2017; Mandell, 1988) when conducting research with child participants, within the school research sites I chose instead to adopt a 'least teacher' role (Kirby 2020; Dunne et al, 2005). This choice emerged in reflecting on the pilot school focus group (discussed previously) and through this the recognition that, within a school site, intergenerational *and* institutional power-dynamics are key influencing factors in the researcher/child relationship. A 'least teacher' role recognises and seeks to reduce social hierarchies within schools and empower children through a more egalitarian researcher/pupil relationship (Kirby, 2020). This approach entailed explaining to the children that they had the expertise and knowledge that

I sought, thus positioning myself as unknowing and the children as experts. So too did I reiterate that the children were under no obligation to participate in the focus group and that I was not a teacher. The focus groups were thus, significantly more informal than the classrooms. During observations my role as 'least teacher' included not intervening or showing any disapproval when the children engaged in behaviours that the teacher may not have approved of. On many occasions when the children engaged in such behaviour they would look at me to gauge my reaction, especially if no teacher was present, and I would remain neutral in my facial expression. Thus, they quickly realised that I was not going to police their behaviour and ceased to demonstrate concern towards my reaction. Luckily, at no point was I in a situation during observations that I had to intervene for the safety of the children. When children, on occasion, referred to me as 'Teacher' I would always respond that I was not a teacher and that they could call me Jane. While such measures are important, by virtue of being an adult I could never totally mitigate the status and associated power I held in relation to the children. In one classroom, as a child walked past me sitting at the back of the room, he smiled and nodded at my open notebook saying with a grin 'I'd say we're doing really well' (2nd class, St. Seáns). This comment illustrates that, whilst the children may have been comfortable with my presence, they continued to regard me as someone in a position of power with the authority to assess their behaviour, as indeed in a way I was. Thus, my subject position as a figure of authority, and indeed as an adult, can never fully be eradicated, and underpins the unequal power-dynamics between the children and I. As evidenced within this chapter, throughout the fieldwork I remained cognisant of the increased power disparity between the children and I resulting from schools being the research sites, frequently reflecting from an ethical and best practice perspective on how, where and why I exercised power and the impact this had on the children's consent and participation.

This discussion has demonstrated that issues of quality and rigour were addressed at all stages of the research process. A reflexive approach, a transparent detailing of the research process, and the provision of rationales for decisions taken within this process have been core elements in ensuring that this research meets the highest of academic standards. So too is the consideration of ethical issues a core

component of such a goal and this is addressed in detail in the following final section of this chapter.

Ethical considerations

All ethical research is guided by the three main principles: (1) minimising the risk of harm, (2) informed consent and (3) confidentiality and anonymity (DCYA, 2012b). Research involving children, however has further responsibilities, namely: adherence to child protection principles, legal requirements and policy commitments (such as the UNCRC, 1989) and finally the need to take a child-centred inclusive approach to the research (DCYA, 2012b). This research adheres stringently to each of these principles, details of which can be found in the discussion below. Initial and ongoing consideration of the potential and actual ethical issues within this research was supported by the work of a number of authors, however, the following ethical frameworks and guidance served as key touchstones: UCC's *Code of Research Conduct* (no date), the *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research* (British Educational Research Association (BERA) 2018), and, given the participation of children within the research process, *Guidance for Developing Ethical Research Projects Involving Children* (DCYA 2012b) This research was approved by the Social Research Ethics Committee (SREC) in UCC (see Appendix 8 for notification of approval, dated 1/10/2014).

Minimising the Risk of Harm

The nature of this study carried no obvious risk to child or adult participants given that it did not engage with sensitive issues. If any child displayed signs of discomfort immediate steps were taken to alleviate the discomfort. Examples of such measures included moving the conversation on to another topic or inviting another child to contribute their thoughts. Focusing on what hypothetical children might think/do/say rather than asking children directly what *they* would think/do/say also served to put children at their ease. Furthermore, the provision of coloured pipe cleaners during focus groups and advisory group meetings contributed to counter possible feelings of self-consciousness or anxiety the children may have experienced during discussions. Another source of possible discomfort anticipated in this study was children's reluctance to criticise or disagree with adults or indeed, to say anything which they feel may be considered

unacceptable by adults (Hutchfield and Coren 2011; Kellet and Ding, 2004). Conducting the focus groups within a classroom setting can increase such a risk, however, research such as this is constrained by its reliance on schools as gatekeepers. To counter this, every effort was taken to conduct the focus groups in a room other than a classroom, such as a general-purpose room. Teachers or other staff members were not permitted to be present for the duration of the focus group. Throughout the sessions I also frequently reminded the children that what they said would not be repeated back to their teachers. These issues did not apply to the CRAG as the group meetings were conducted in a local community centre. Two ethical implications need to be considered when conducting focus groups, and indeed advisory groups, with children; (a) disclosures are made to the whole group not just to the researcher and (b) intense group discussions may lead to stress being experienced by a child (Hennessy and Heary, 2005, p. 239). In being mindful of the children's level of demonstrated comfort, guiding the discussion with both the research objectives and the children's wellbeing in mind and watching for signs of dissent, I remained cognisant of both these possibilities throughout the focus groups/advisory group sessions. Finally, ground rules in relation to issues of confidentiality, trust, respect and creating a safe space were discussed and decided upon with the children at the beginning of each session.

Child Protection and Well-being

The UNCRC (1989), the *National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making* (DCYA, 2015) and *Children First: The National Guidelines for the protection and guidance of children* (DCYA, 2011) form the legal and policy framework for this study. Given that this research explores participatory *rights*, the integrity of the research demands that it is conducted using a rights-based approach informed by the UNCRC. With regard to child protection and well-being, this study adheres to *Children First*: *National Guidance for the Protection and Wellbeing of Children* (DCYA, 2011). The children were informed that any disclosures they might make of past harm or potential risk would be notified to the school's child protection officer (in the case of the focus groups) or directly to the child protection officer within the HSE – in

the case of children within the advisory groups. No such disclosures were made. To ensure child protection and well-being the following steps were taken:

- An assistant was recruited from the Degree programme in Early Childhood Studies in UCC to attend both the CRAG meetings and the focus groups in a passive role in order to meet optimal adult-child ratios for best practice in relation to child protection (TUSLA, 2017).
- The assistant and I were both Garda vetted[16].
- Both the primary researcher and the assistant undertook training on *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children* (DCYA, 2011) through the degree in Early Childhood Studies, UCC – completed by the primary researcher in 2012 and in 2014 by the research assistant respectively.

The overriding guiding principle of this research was that all decisions were made in the best interests of the child. This study was particularly sensitive to the vulnerability of children within the hierarchical power structure of schools and I endeavoured not to use this power structure to my advantage. For example, I was always sensitive to children feeling obliged to answer adults' questions (Kellett and Ding 2004). Thus, I frequently reminded the children that they were under no obligation to answer any question that they did not want to. I was especially careful when asking specific children direct questions not to place them under any undue pressure.

Informed Consent

A key requisite of ethical research is that research participants are informed as to the nature and purpose of the research project, and, having been made aware of these factors, have freely consented to participate (Alderson and Morrow, 2020; BERA, 2018; Bryman, 2012). Factors that were of particular note given the participation of children in this research, both as advisors and as participants were:

[16] *Garda Vetting* is a background check conducted by the national police force in Ireland (An Garda Síochána) to ascertain if an individual has a criminal record. The 'clearance' that this process facilitates is a mandatory requirement for any individuals who work with children and/or vulnerable adults.

(1) that the information and consent provided were age-appropriate in order to ensure children's understanding, (2) as with all aspects of research ethics, ensuring meaningful consent is not a once off event occurring at the beginning of the research process, but rather is an on-going negotiated process throughout the children's involvement (Kirby, 2020; Rodgers and Ludhra, 2012; Kellett, 2010). In light of the unequal power-dynamic between adults and children consent was sought both overtly, through the consent form and asking children at the beginning of the focus groups and CRAG sessions if they still wanted to be involved, and also more tacitly, by considering and responding to the level of children's enthusiasm within their engagement, and by being cognizant of children's non-verbal behaviour, in particular looking for signs of dissent such as blushing, wringing of hands, squirming in their seats or failing to make eye-contact (Bourke and Loveridge, 2014), thus ensuring 'process consent' (Heath et al, 2007, p.409). The challenging behaviour exhibited by the children within the pilot focus groups (discussed previously) could be described as *playful dissent* (Kirby, 2020) whereby children indicate that they want to be a part of the research, but act in a manner that is contrary to the behaviour required for their involvement. Such dissent illustrates the non-binary nature of consent/dissent and the challenges inherent in the 'liminal spaces' (ibid, p.823) created through the absence of traditional/expected norms of behaviour and adult/child power-dynamics in research conducted in school spaces. It also highlights the challenges for the researcher in 'navigating between dissent where children redefine the boundaries of their research participation […] and dissent that signals a withdrawal of consent to participate' (ibid, p.825). The information sheets provided participants with information on the nature and purpose of the research, expectations regarding the participants' involvement, the right to withdraw, and information regarding the anonymisation of the data and how it would be used. Providing such information is vital given that consent is only valid if the person providing their consent is fully and meaningfully informed of the implications of such consent (BERA, 2018).

Informed Consent of Child participants.

The child participants consisted of two groups; the children in the focus groups and the children within the school spaces in which I conducted observations. Both are discussed below.

Focus Groups

Towards the end of the observation period in each classroom the children were informed about the next stage of the research process, the focus groups, and invited to express an interest in participating. It was made clear to the children at this point that only five children would be permitted to be in each class group. Several children in each class expressed an interest in participating and were provided with age-appropriate information/consent forms for themselves and their parents (see Appendix 3 and 4). At the beginning of each focus group I reiterated the information provided, stressing in particular, that children had the right to withdraw at any point without incurring any negative consequences, and thus obtained both oral and written consent from the children.

Observations

While it was my desire to obtain consent from the children and their parents in the classes I observed, each of the principals denied my request to do so. They noted that, while it was permissible to request consent from children and their parents participating in the focus groups, it was impractical, inconvenient (for them) and, given the blanket consent parents provide at the beginning of each year for all school related visits and activities, unnecessary to seek such consent from all the children and their parents/guardians. Alderson and Morrow (2020) have highlighted the difficulties faced by researchers who rely on the goodwill of schools and educators, when educators refuse, on the very grounds I experienced, requests for parental consent. The observations were a key method of data collection, integral to the research design. The level of risk and indeed involvement of the children participating in this study through classroom observations is minimal. Unlike the children in the focus groups, these children were not required to 'do' anything that they would not already be doing. The consent required was

for the researcher to observe and document the daily activities and events occurring within the classroom. Within the field notes no identifying or personal data was gathered, while the level of sensitivity of the data was of a low level. In light of these factors the decision was taken to accept the principals' consent in *loco parentis* in order to conduct the observations. Alderson and Morrow (2020) have noted that if the level of risk involved is small enough then parental consent is considered by some as unnecessary.

In addition to these challenges in obtaining parental consent for classroom observations, so too is achieving children's *meaningful* assent significantly problematic within such a context. At the beginning of each observation period within a new classroom I introduced myself to the class and explained why I was there and what I was doing, providing information about the study, what I was writing down and what I would use this for, noting that I would maintain the children's anonymity within my notes and in the final thesis. In most classes children asked me some questions which I answered before thanking them for "letting me" observe for a few days. While this fulfilled my obligation to inform the children about the research (BERA, 2018), given intergenerational institutionalised power relations and the subsequent challenges inherent in schools as research sites (discussed earlier in this chapter), the children had an extremely limited opportunity to express 'informed dissent' (Bourke and Loveridge, 2014). The absence of dissent should not be taken as voluntary consent (Ahsan, 2009). Best practice (DCYA, 2012b) and an ethical imperative (McPherson et al, 2020) require children's consent in addition to parents/guardians' consent, *especially* in a rights-based study exploring children's right to participate. McPherson et al (2020, p. 731) note that 'assent in research is understood as a means of protecting the rights of children as well as acknowledging their ability to exercise these rights'. Due to its reliance on adult gatekeepers for access, and the power such gatekeepers had in relation to the nature of such access, this research was not successful in meaningfully meeting this ethical ideal. Gallagher et al (2010) highlight such challenges noting that '[c]hildren may be considered competent to consent, but legal requirements and *organisational hierarchies in schools* mean that parents and professionals still act as 'gatekeepers' (p.478, my emphasis). This

challenge is particularly significant when using observations as a research method in schools, necessitating whole-school or whole-class consent. While offering little by way of solutions, this research highlights the extremely problematic nature of obtaining children's, and indeed parent's consent for classroom/whole-school observations.

Advisory groups

While the children who participated in the CRAGs were not research subjects, the ethical principles outlined above were also applied to their participation as advisors. Before approaching these children, I contacted their parents to provide information about the study and ascertained if the children might be interested in participating. The children who expressed an interest were sent age appropriate information and consent forms (see Appendix 1), as where their parents. Following the lengthy period between the CRAG's involvement at the beginning of the research process (2015) and their subsequent re-involvement towards the end of the research process (2020), consent was formally requested of the children in the CRAGs in both 2015, and in 2020 (see Appendix 1 and 5).

Informed Consent of Adult Participants

The educators who participated in the study were provided with information and consent forms several days before the interviews. At the beginning of each interview I ascertained that the participant had read the information provided, signed the consent form and where happy to proceed. See Appendix 6 for a copy of the information/consent form provided to teachers, and Appendix 7 for information/consent form provided to school principals.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

With regard to confidentiality and anonymity the following measures were applied. Minimum personal information was gathered. For the children in the focus groups this included each child's name, age and gender. The teacher's name and gender were also identified. In order to preserve the anonymity of the data, pseudonyms were used for both the participants and the schools, while all direct

identifiers were removed. All raw data was stored securely on my password protected personal computer and on an external hard drive. Field notes were kept in a locked filing cabinet. On completion of the study the anonymised data gathered from adult participants will be archived, with their permission, with the Irish Qualitative Data Archive (IQDA). This archive is a valuable tool for both the research community and the public record. Furthermore, given that this study is funded by the Irish Research Council there is an onus on the researcher to make the data generated available for the public good. Adult participants' information sheets detail the purpose of the IQDA while adult consent forms request specific permission to archive the anonymised data generated by the adult participants. Given concern regarding children's ability to give consent to the future ownership of data, data collected from the child participants will not be archived but will be kept securely by the researcher and destroyed seven years after the study is completed. Children were informed that all the information that they shared would be kept confidential except in the case of a child protection concern. Participants were informed that they could choose to withdraw their participation up to two weeks after data has been gathered from their participation. Finally, preliminary data shared with the CRAGs was anonymised in order to maintain the anonymity of the schools and the research participants.

Concluding Comments

This chapter has documented and justified the methodological decisions concerning all aspects of the research design, process and ethical considerations. While the aim of the research, to identify and explore the barriers and enablers of children's lived everyday participation within the formal school structure, was a constant, this chapter documents the journey taken within this research in achieving this goal. Like all journeys it was filled with unexpected turns and events. In particular the evolution and refinement of both the participatory methodological approach, through the work with the CRAGs, and the methods of generating data within the focus groups are documented in this chapter. The rationale for employing, and indeed the assertion that this research employs a rights-based participatory methodology is supported by an in-depth consideration

of the literature. Issues of research quality and rigour are carefully considered providing transparency to the research design and process and supporting the validity of the research findings. The challenges encountered within the research process are identified and through their discussion facilitate a deeper engagement with the relevant issues. The three chapters, Chapter Six: *Educational Paradigms: The beliefs and values that (up)set the stage for participatory practice*, Chapter Seven: *Pedagogical Practice and Participation*, and Chapter Eight: *Relationships between educators and children and their Impact on Participation,* detail the research findings generated through the methods identified in this chapter.

Chapter Five: Assembling a Theoretical Toolkit

Introduction

Participation occurs through interactions between people that take place within specific contexts (spaces). The question therefore is, *where* and *with/for/through whom* is participation made possible. To answer these questions, one needs to understand the affordances, in relation to participation, of specific people and spaces and how these are created and recreated, in addition to examining the interplay between these two fundamental elements. As noted by Percy-Smith, participation is 'a spatial practice involving the socio-spatial interplay of people and settings' (Kesby et al, 2007, cited in Percy-Smith, 2015, p.7). What then are the relevant characteristics of people and spaces which contribute to the facilitation or prevention of participation, and how do these come into being? People and spaces are in a constant process of co-specification[17] with the resulting specifications (of people and spaces) serving to either facilitate or prevent participation (Mannion, 2007). It is necessary, therefore, to analyse this process and the factors that influence the creation of particular specifications. To do this, this research uses the concepts of *Educational Paradigms* and *Power*, illustrating that paradigms shape the process of co-specification while power drives this process.

Paradigms are cultural forms (O'Sullivan, 2005) which shape the co-specification of people and spaces. An educational paradigm is made up of the beliefs, values and practices of members of a particular educational community – in this case the school and/or classroom community - and gives meaning to cultural objects such as the curriculum or classroom rules. Educational paradigms, through the process of co-specification, create specific cultural contexts (spaces) and situated identities (people). While the educational paradigm shapes this process, it is power that drives it. Additionally, educational paradigms and power-dynamics shape and create the barriers and enablers inherent in the mechanism, structures and norms

[17] Co-specification is a term used by Mannion (2007), and adopted in this research, to describe how people and the spaces they occupy shape and construct each other through their ongoing interactions and associated meanings.

which result from particular specifications of people and spaces. The following diagram (*Figure 4*) identifies the conceptual tools, and their application, used to address the aim of the research – to identify and explore the barriers and enablers of children's lived participation and the factors that contribute to their creation. Thus, the individual components of the theoretical framework developed for this study are: (A) a spatial/relational lens, (B) a four-dimensional view of power, and (C) educational paradigms, pedagogy and curriculum. This chapter provides discussion on both the conceptual 'tools' themselves, and the manner in which they are utilized to analyse the data and generate original knowledge.

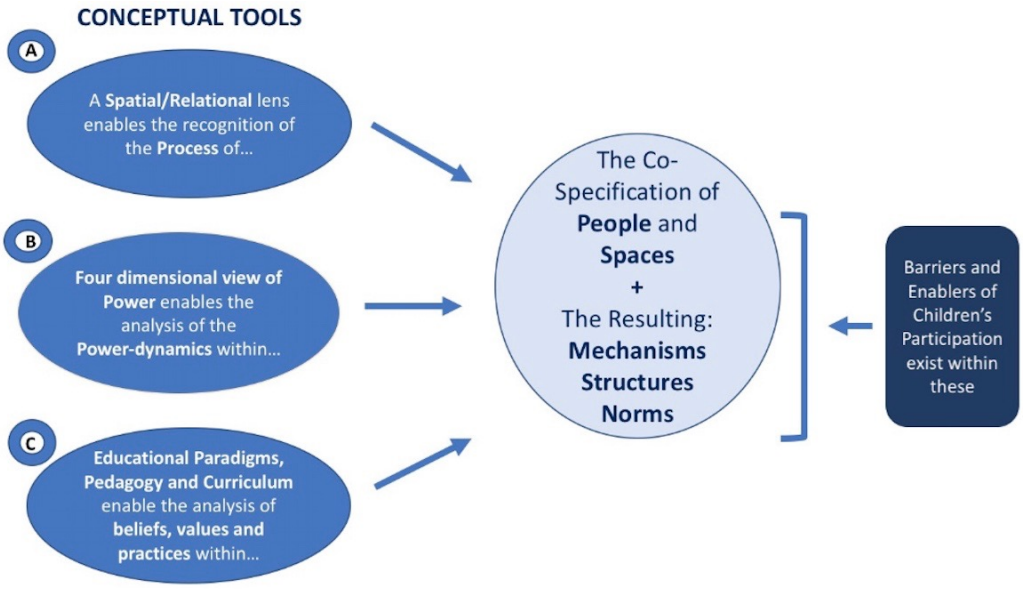


Figure 4. Conceptual Tools and their Application

A relational/spatial approach to the research problem

A relational perspective must include the foregrounding of space given the inextricably interwoven nature of spatial and relational perspectives. The co-specification of people and spaces is evident when one considers that identities (people) are constitutive of and constituted by space. Space is not static but fluid and negotiable, in a constant state of becoming, as relationships between people's actions and perspectives and the non-human, material world produce and reproduce the spaces they inhabit (Hackett et al, 2015). As Mannion reminds us 'the identifications of children and adults and the spaces they inhabit are

undergoing a continuous co-specification' (2007, p.406), while Hackett et al (2015) highlight that this process occurs through 'emplaced social interactions, tacit knowledge, imagination and ideology' (p.5). Space, therefore, plays a key role in child/adult identities and relations. A particular space is not just a geographical location, it intersects with socio-cultural expectations (Tisdall, 2015) and thus plays a role in power relations (Smith and Barker, 2000). How children act within a particular space is mediated by their own and adults' expectations regarding the role of the context/space, how children are conceptualized/conceptualize themselves within a particular space and expectations around normative behaviours within spaces. Seymour (2015) argues that a spatial focus can provide a useful hermeneutic lens to study children's worlds, and in particular can serve to examine children's agency. She argues that to explore the extent to which children exercise spatial agency, that is, their contribution to and involvement in the construction and reconstruction of space, one must explore both the resources available to them and their human relationships, once more highlighting the interwoven nature of space and relations.

In exploring the school context, Devine (2001) notes that school is both shaped by and shapes the discourse on children and childhood - a discourse that focuses on children's needs as determined by adults, and in doing so 'others' children by positioning them as needing to be normalised into adulthood. Devine's study found that children interpreted their experience within schools in terms of subservience and conformity, reflecting the impact of both space and the relations within it on children's lived realities and identity. Drawing on the example of out-of-school clubs, Smith and Barker (2000) note that the meanings children attribute to a space are bound up in the way that they use the space, which in turn, is influenced by how they define the space and the forms of behaviour they deem acceptable within it. Furthermore, the effect of being observed or perceived to be under observation within a space plays a significant role in power-dynamics, leading to the 'internalization of the gaze' (Smith and Baker, 2000, p.322) resulting in children monitoring and controlling their behaviour. These examples illustrate how space, in this case school, impacts on children's agency, identity formation, behaviour, adults' expectations of children and relationships between adults and children.

Thus, a spatial/relational lens enables an analysis of the impact of the school space(s) on children's identities, agency and on relationships with educators.

Applying a Spatial/Relational lens

The conceptualisation of the process of co-specification and its impact on participation, developed within this research (see *Figure 6*, p.*132*), is predicated on a spatial/relational perspective. A spatial/relational lens is therefore applied within the analysis to make visible the process of co-specification – that is, the process by which particular specifications of people and spaces are created. This lens facilitates recognition of the process itself, as well as the factors that influence this process, and thus, in turn, influence the resulting specifications of people and spaces which serve to limit or support children's participation. A spatial/relational lens is also used to provide analysis regarding the impact of pedagogical practices, and student/educator relationships, as aspects of the process of co-specification, on children's agency and situated identities. A spatial/relational lens forefronts the co-specification of people and spaces. Traditionally research exploring children's participation from a spatial perspective explored the marginalisation of children, the efforts of children to mediate limitations resulting from their marginalisation and children's agency in creating their own spaces (Mannion, 2007). However, Mannion maintains that the focus should not rest within 'child spaces' but within 'child-adult spaces' given that even spaces that are considered exclusively as children-only spaces are constructed and maintained within and through adult-child relations. Drawing on his previous research on children's participation, Mannion (2010) argues that spaces and identities are co-produced, and that both adults and children are 'becomings' as they are engaged in a constant process of co-specification in their cohabitation of mutual spaces. Not only are the self and space co-constructing each other but relations, in this case adult-child relations, are also engaged in a co-emergent process both affecting and being affected by the spaces in which the occur (Mannion 2010). 'Children and Young People's participation is always unfolding as an intergenerational performance wherein identifications, spaces and power struggles are key' (Mannion, 2010, p.339).

Thus, in addition to the need to apply a spatial/relational lens, the conceptualization of children's participation as a situated dialogic process, between (spatially and relationally) co-constructed actors, also requires an examination of the power-dynamics inherent in relationships between adults and children within the spaces they occupy, and the beliefs and values that underpin such power-dynamics. The following two sections (*Educational Paradigms, Pedagogy and Curriculum* and *Power*) illustrate not only the role of these elements in the process of co-specification (and thus, in the constructions of particular people and spaces), but also their utility in analysing the mechanisms, structures and norms within schools, resulting from particular specifications of, and interplay between, people and spaces.

Educational Paradigms, Pedagogy and Curriculum

As noted in the Chapter Two: *Children and Young People's Participation: Origins, Tensions and Development*, culture, and the values held within a culture are pivotal to the facilitation of children's participation (Twun-Danso, 2010). Defining the term culture has been recognised as being both difficult and contested (O' Sullivan, 2005, Surber, 1998) given the wide range of meanings attached to culture within fields as diverse as agriculture, biology, sociology and psychology. Even within the field of sociology the term culture as a conceptual apparatus can be sub-divided into several domains as demonstrated by Jenk's (1993) typology of culture[18]. At its most basic level, within the social sciences, culture is understood as 'the way in which people live their lives' (O' Sullivan, 2005 p.6), comprising of the values, norms and behaviours held by a particular social group as well as material and non-material objects.

Within the literature the terms 'school culture and 'school ethos' are often used interchangeably (Keon, 2020; Bragg and Manchester, 2017). Ethos has been defined as 'the distinctive range of values and beliefs, which define the philosophy

[18] 1. Culture as a cerebral cognitive category.
2. Culture as an embodied collective category.
3. Culture as a descriptive and concrete category.
4. Culture as a social category. (Jenks, 1993, cited in Lumby and Foskett, 2011, p.451)

or atmosphere of an organisation' (Donnelly, 2000, p134). The official ethos of a school is articulated and promoted in school documents such as the school website, however, practices and interactions within schools can depart significantly from the beliefs and values pronounced within the official school ethos (ibid). Bragg and Manchester (2017) employ a 'lived' conceptualisation in describing school ethos as the 'sociomaterial aspects of school life […] including schools' everyday practices, embodied processes and social relationships (p.867). While 'school ethos and school culture are nebulous concepts' (Keon, 2020, p.162) which can overlap in their definitions, in this study the term 'school culture' is used to denote the 'felt realities' (Fielding, 2007 cited in Bragg and Manchester, 2017, p.875) of schools. The term ethos is used to denote the philosophical and ideological values as articulated through school documents and by participating educators.

In exploring the barriers and enablers of children's lived participation inherent in the various school cultures of the participating schools, this research utilises the conceptualisation of cultural objects and cultural forms as described by O'Sullivan (2005). Cultural objects include both material and non-material objects (Taylor et al, 2019). Within the social context of a school, cultural objects include, for example, uniforms, the curriculum, classrooms, rules, pedagogy, and books, while cultural form denotes the structuring processes that give meaning to cultural objects. Wang and Degol (2016) use the term 'School Climate' in much the same way as school culture, as described above. Like school culture, school climate is recognised for its structuring effect. First coined by Perry in 1908 and developed by Halpin and Croft (1963), school climate 'shapes the quality of the interactions of all students, teachers, parents, and school personnel, and reflects the norms, values, and goals that represent the broader educational and social missions of the school' (Wang and Degol, 2016, p.315*)*.

In order to identify the barriers and enablers to participation created by and through cultural objects it is necessary to examine the cultural forms that give meaning to such material and non-material cultural objects. For example, a key cultural object that requires consideration in relation to the research question is the curriculum. The meanings attributed to, and practices in relation to the curriculum

(as a cultural object), are determined by the overarching cultural form. Thus, in identifying and exploring the barriers and enablers to participation produced by or through the curriculum, an examination of the cultural form that gives meaning (within a particular setting) to the curriculum is necessary. Examining the cultural form that shapes the cultural objects within a context is key to understanding practices and interactions between actors. Within a school context the educational paradigm is a key cultural form.

Defining a paradigm as the 'beliefs, values and techniques and so on shared by the members of the community' (O' Sullivan, 2005, p.12) and constituting a cultural form, O'Sullivan argues that cultural forms and objects shape how education is understood and how teaching and learning is practiced. 'Paradigms, as cultural forms, operate as structuring principles within culture' (O' Sullivan, 2005, p.19). Within the social sciences the term paradigm is associated with the work of Thomas Kuhn (1962). Kuhn, in his study of scientific revolutions argued that scientific theories must be understood in the context of the concepts, assumptions and methods that held sway within the period from which the theory emerged. According to Kuhn, scientific revolutions occurred when scientific anomalies resulted in scientists being forced to move beyond the prevailing assumptions, concepts and methods (i.e. paradigms) in order to develop novel theories. As such, a paradigmatic crisis causes a paradigmatic shift which leads to scientific revolutions. While Kuhn's focus was in relation to physical science, this current work utilises the term paradigm as an analytical tool to conceptualise the structuring forces that give meaning to key cultural objects (material and non-material school objects) and situated identities (such as 'teacher' and 'student'). As such the term educational paradigm is used within this study to denote the beliefs, values and practices (techniques) that prevail within educational contexts, and create the school and/or classroom culture.

Other studies on student participation have used the term 'school culture' (e.g Giannakaki et al, 2018) or 'school climate' (e.g. Wang and Degol, 2016) to denote the values, norms and behaviours/practices within a school. However, in this study the concept of 'educational paradigms' is used as it provides a more focused lens

through which to consider the influencing factors in relation to the target phenomenon of analysis – children's participation. The concept of educational paradigms forefronts the primacy of the cultural form, that is, the beliefs, values and practices within a context, and therefore enables focused consideration of the structuring force that shapes how the research 'objects' (participation, children, education) are understood and valued within that context. It is important to differentiate between *cultural forms* and *cultural objects* in order to make visible the influence of the former on the latter. The concept of educational paradigms therefore provides greater affordances in considering the structuring force that shapes how student participation is understood and valued, and facilitates the analysis of the factors that create the culture within a particular context. As such, the concept of educational paradigms is more helpful than the more general terms 'school culture' or 'school climate', as it allows greater clarity in considering the structuring forces that shape (a) school culture/climate and (b) how student participation is understood and valued within a school.

Each school and indeed classroom has its own micro-culture that is determined by a particular educational paradigm. This paradigm is both constituted by, while also shaping beliefs, values and practices within the educational space. Understanding and recognising the structuring effect of educational paradigms as a cultural form, and their impact on the meanings attributed to cultural objects enables the analysis of the key factors that shape meaning and subsequent practices within spaces and relationships. The centrality of school culture to all interactions that occur, or can occur, within a classroom is clear. Thus, the potential for children's participation, is predicated on the affordances or limitations provided through the prevailing school culture as determined by the prevailing educational paradigm.

Applying the concept of Educational Paradigms

The concept of the educational paradigm is applied in this research to add further analytical insight with regards the factors at play in the creation of barriers and enablers of children's lived participation, in addition to the identification of the barriers and enablers themselves. In particular the concept is applied to identify and explore the beliefs and values that influence practices, and shape the process

of co-specification, and thus, the resulting specifications of people and spaces. However, while it is the paradigm that shapes meaning, and thus shapes the process of co-specification, it is power that, through social relations and structures drives the process. Thus, the concept of educational paradigms is used together with the four-dimensional conceptualisation of power discussed further in this chapter, to analyse (a) the process of co-specification and the resulting specifications and (b) the mechanisms, structures and norms resulting from such specifications of people and spaces. Such analysis provides key insights into both the creation of barriers and enablers of lived participation and the factors that influence their creation.

Two key cultural objects that are shaped by the educational paradigm are *pedagogy* and *curriculum*. Approaches to pedagogy and curriculum, known as Pedagogical Modes and Curriculum Models, and are based on beliefs and values, and enacted through practices. Analysis of the power-dynamics within pedagogy and curriculum in the participating schools reveals their role in (a) barriers and enablers of children's lived participation and (b) the co-specification of people and spaces. Together, the concepts of Educational Paradigms, Power and Pedagogical Modes and Curriculum Models reveal the pedagogical mechanisms, structures and norms that construct and shape the barriers and enablers to children's lived participation within teaching and learning spaces and student/educator relationships. The following section provides an in-depth discussion on the concepts of Pedagogical Modes and Curriculum Models and their application as analytical tools within the research.

Pedagogy and Curriculum

Curriculum and pedagogy are cultural objects, given meaning by the cultural form that is the educational paradigm. They are sets of social relations shaped by the beliefs and values inherent within a prevailing paradigm, and as such are key mechanism through which the process of co-specification occurs. As aspects *and* products of the educational paradigm they shape how teaching and learning is understood and enacted. The following section presents a discussion on pedagogy and curriculum, in order to provide an analytical framework for identifying and

exploring the barriers and enablers of children's lived participation, and the factors that contribute to their creation, within both the teaching and learning spaces and student/educator relationships.

It is important to begin by defining curriculum and pedagogy, highlighting both their perceived differences and overlapping natures. For Bernstein (1971) curriculum is conceptualised as valid knowledge, and pedagogy as the valid transmission of such knowledge. Drawing on Alexander (2004) Simpson suggests that 'pedagogy has been made 'subsidiary to curriculum' suggesting that 'what' is taught has been seen as more important than 'how'' (2018, p.5). Lundy and Cook-Sather (2016) describe curriculum and pedagogy respectively as 'the medium and the mode of student and teacher participation in learning processes' (p.266). Kelly (2000) argues that a definition of curriculum:

> must embrace at least four major dimensions of educational planning and practice: the intention of the planners, the procedures adopted for the implementation of those intentions, the actual experience of pupils resulting from the teachers' direct attempts to carry out their or the planners' intentions, and the 'hidden' learning that occurs as a by-product of the organisation of the curriculum and, indeed, of the school (pp.7-8)

Thus, Kelly (2000) highlights a conceptual overlap between curriculum and pedagogy, given the inclusion of how the curriculum is enacted by the educator within this definition. Nonetheless, for the purposes of clarity within the analysis, this research, while recognising their interconnected nature, chooses to separate these two concepts and draws on Lundy and Cook-Sather's (2016) view of curriculum as medium and pedagogy as mode.

While pedagogy is primarily concerned with teaching and learning, Devine (2003) highlights the central role of discipline within pedagogy. She notes that discipline is not only concerned with maintaining children's focus for their learning but also, and indeed even more so, is a method of social control. In arguing that discipline is a mechanism of power that regulates the thoughts and behaviours of individuals at a discrete level, Foucault's (1979, 1980) view of power, in this instance, is congruent with Lukes' (2005) assertion that power in its most insidious form can be used to influence perspectives and preferences and therefore, construct

particular identities. Discipline works by organising social actors' space, time and everyday activities, each of which are heavily regulated within a school context (Devine, 2003). Exploring the power-dynamic within issues of discipline, therefore, is of particular importance in relation to examining how power, through the mechanisms of teaching and learning, produces (a) particular situated identities and (b) barriers and enablers of participation.

The central role of educators' beliefs and values in conceptualisations of curriculum and pedagogy cannot be overstated. Wyse et al, (2016) define pedagogy as an 'intervention in the development of an individual: through teaching that is informed by history, values and ideas of the culture in which the teaching is enacted' (p. 3). The relationship between culture and practice is evident in this conceptualisation of pedagogy, drawing attention, once more, to the key role, beliefs and values play in educators' practice. Freire (1972, p. 21) argues that 'every educational practice implies a concept of man [sic] and the world', while Grundy (1987, p.7) states that 'if we scratch the surface of educational practice […] we find, not universal laws, but beliefs and values'. Beliefs and values are thus central to concepts and enactments of curriculum and pedagogy, and as such highlight the role of the prevailing educational paradigm within teaching and learning. Beliefs and values regarding children, in particular, play a central role in how pedagogy and curriculum is conceptualised and enacted. Mirroring the evolution of how children are constructed more generally, constructions of children within pedagogical approaches have evolved from a deterministic view of children as the passive recipients of knowledge (as is the case in relation to traditional transmissive/didactic pedagogical approaches), to the recognition of children's agency within their learning (as evident within emergent, child centred pedagogies).

Beliefs and values regarding the role of education also influence conceptualisations and enactments of curriculum and pedagogy. Dewey's (1916) perspective on education identified the need to create a 'distinction between merely training pupils to integrate as parts of the existing social order and educating them through communication and shared experiences as citizens who

are able to critically reconstruct the social order' (cited in Tammi, 2013, p75). Tyler (1949) also highlighted two contrasting conceptualisations of the role of the curriculum in asking '[s]hould the schools develop young people to fit into present society as it is, or does the school have a revolutionary mission to develop young people who will seek to improve the society?' (p.35). This question highlights the diverse beliefs and values inherent in contrasting perspectives on the role of the curriculum and indeed in defining curriculum. Application of the educational paradigm as an analytical tool forefronts an analysis of the beliefs and values that underpin educators' pedagogical practice, and thus, within the barriers and enablers of participation inherent in and created through educators' practice.

Pedagogical modes

Formosinho and Oliveria-Formosinho (2016) identify two contrasting pedagogical modes – the transmissive mode and the participatory mode. Transmissive pedagogy is the traditional mainstream pedagogical approach (ibid) within which educators predominately 'select strategies that are reliant on the hierarchical maintenance of control and power' (Sargeant and Gillett-Swan, 2015 p.188). Formosinho and Oliveria-Formosinho propose participatory pedagogy as an alternative that enables the realisation of children's participation within teaching and learning. Simpson (2018) describes participatory pedagogy as 'a theory of a pedagogical approach or environmental condition of democratic teaching that potentially represents the ideal of democratic society envisaged by Freire and Dewey: engendering a shift of power, a revising of the hierarchy within schools and the notional view of 'the child' (pp.7-8). Niemi et al, (2015) identify participatory pedagogy as having three elements:

1. It supports children to develop agency and their ability to engage in democratic process, and become active members of society, through effective participation.
2. Recognises learning as a social process and focuses on the development of critical thinking skills rather than knowledge acquisition.
3. Students are involved in the process of (self and peer) evaluation and assessment of the learning.

Greater equality with regard to the power-dynamic between students and educators is, therefore, a central aspect of participatory pedagogy. The following table (Table 4) is adapted from a table by Formosinho and Oliveria-Formosinho (2016) and illustrates some of the key conceptual differences between participatory and transmissive pedagogical modes.

Table 4. Participatory and Transmissive Pedagogical Modes: Conceptual differences

	Transmissive pedagogy	**Participatory Pedagogy**
The main goal of education	• Transmission of knowledge for the next generation. • Rigorous provision of structured knowledge in academic format.	• Involving students in their own learning • Developing responsible persons and civic citizens • Social reform and cultural transformation
Image of the learner	• Passive role of repeating the transmitted content (memorising and reproducing)	• Active role of participation in the process of learning

In contrast to the prevailing mainstream transmissive mode, participatory pedagogy 'reduces the gap between school life and social life, since it takes into account the needs, interests and projects of the students and their life outside the school' (Formosinho and Oliveria-Formosinho, 2016, n.p). In particular, participatory pedagogy recognises and celebrates diversity, and places children's individual lives and contexts as central to their learning experiences, unlike transmissive pedagogy which has a homogeneous view of the learner (ibid). Therefore, participatory pedagogy is congruent with the UNCRC's assertion that teaching and learning must draw on children's lived experiences and perspectives in co-constructing knowledge with educators (Article 29, UNCRC, 1989).

Curriculum models

There are many different, and at times overlapping, conceptualisations of curriculum within the field of curriculum studies including: child-centred, emergent, content, product, process, praxis and hidden, however, for the purposes of this research, two contrasting curriculum models will be used to frame the analysis – the product curriculum model and process curriculum model. This decision was taken on foot of the data revealing two contrasting relationships educators had to the curriculum that most fitted these two curriculum models. Furthermore, these two curriculum models align most closely with the two distinct pedagogical modes evident in the data, transmissive pedagogy and participatory pedagogy.

As the name suggests, a key feature of the *product curriculum* model is the achievement of a predetermined end-product. Behavioural objectives, in particular, form the basis for the product model and include the acquisition of predetermined knowledge, skills and competencies, and 'appropriate' attitudes and values (Sheehan, 1986). The conceptualisation of the curriculum as a body of specific knowledge and skills that must be taught, can thus be seen within the product model, as can the compatibility of the product mode of curriculum with transmissive pedagogy. Devine argues that the pressure to achieve pre-determined curriculum milestones inherently set within this model impacts negatively on children's citizenship (2002). The *process curriculum* model, however, is more concerned with the process of learning rather than the achievement of a specific end-product. Outcomes in relation to the process model include the development of potentials, which are not pre-determined, in relation to thinking, feeling and acting, and which serve the purposes of the learner (Sheehan, 1986). Kelly (2000) notes that the process model 'allows for the interactive nature of the educational relationship in a way that other [curriculum] models cannot' (p.99). Therefore, while within the product model, children are more passive within the teacher student relationship, within the process model children are positioned as active participants within the educational relationship – thus highlighting the dialogic nature of the process model and the view of the child as an active agent in the co-construction of knowledge. As such, one can see the natural alignment of the process model of curriculum with participatory pedagogy. The following diagram,

developed for this research, illustrates how transmissive pedagogy aligns with a view of curriculum as product, while a participatory pedagogy aligns with a view of curriculum as process.

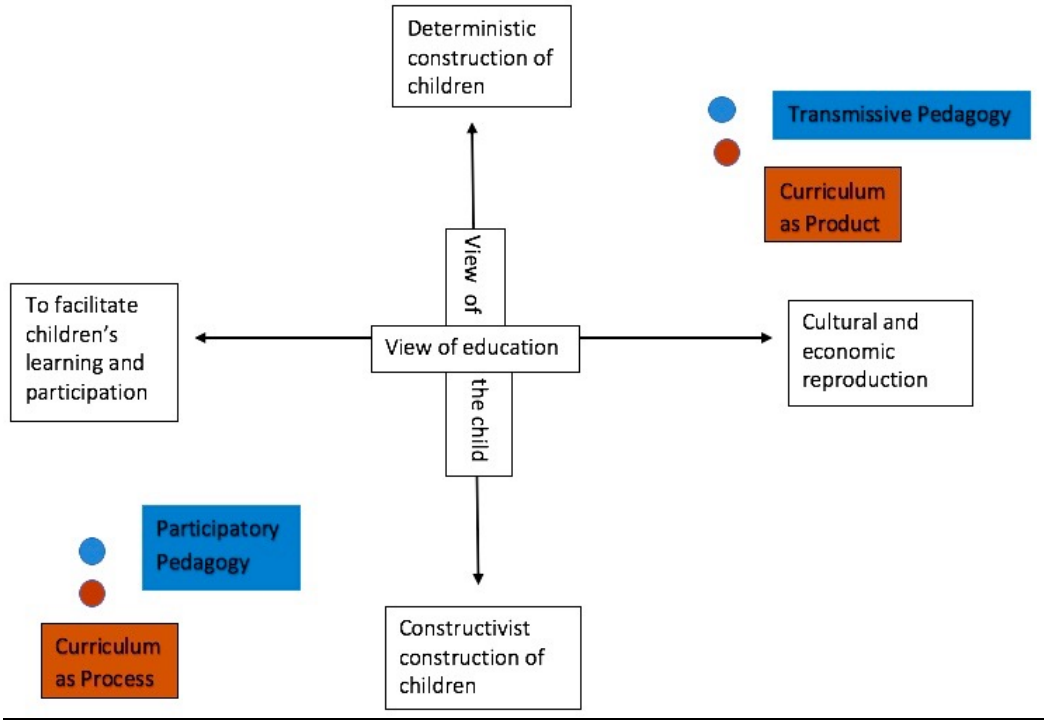


Figure 5. The alignment of curriculum models and pedagogical modes

The application of the theoretical concepts of curriculum models and pedagogical modes

The theoretical concepts of curriculum models and pedagogical modes are applied in this research to analyse the factors that create, and influence the creation of barriers and enablers of children's participation within the teaching and learning space, including in and through student/educator relationships. Together with the four-dimensional concept of power (discussed below), these conceptual tools provide a framework for analysing both the process of co-specification itself, and the beliefs, values and practices inherent in, and constituting, the educational paradigm, that, through the process of co-specification produce particular situated identities and spaces.

Power

Sargeant notes that '[i]n many settings, the voice of students is firmly dependent on the philosophy of the leadership' (2018, p. 321), highlighting the key role of educators' beliefs and values and their power to determine norms and behaviours within a school context. Power gives dominance to particular beliefs and values and enables the resulting practices. Recognising that the 'powerful are those whom we judge or can hold to be responsible for significant outcomes' (Lukes 2005, p. 66*)* we recognise the power exercised by adults in their control of educational paradigms.

The control of a paradigm is a significant form of power (O' Sullivan, 2005). Power plays a key role, not only in the process of participation (Jupp Kina, 2012), but also in the factors that influence this process. Analysing the power-dynamics within the cultural contexts of schools and classrooms is key to identifying the (creation of) barriers and enablers of participation. Barriers and enablers of participation are products of particular specifications of people and spaces resulting from the process of co-specification. The process of co-specification is a situated relational process which takes place within and through, while also determining, situated mechanisms, structures and norms. Consequently, the outcomes of this process are shaped by educational paradigms, while the process is driven by situated power-dynamics. In addition to power driving the process of co-specification and determining the prevailing educational paradigm, so too does the paradigm shape the power-dynamics within social relations. Power is thus a key element in the creation of barriers and enablers to participation. Figure 6 (next page), developed for this research, provides a visual representation of the conceptualisation of co-specification as the process by which barriers and enablers are created.

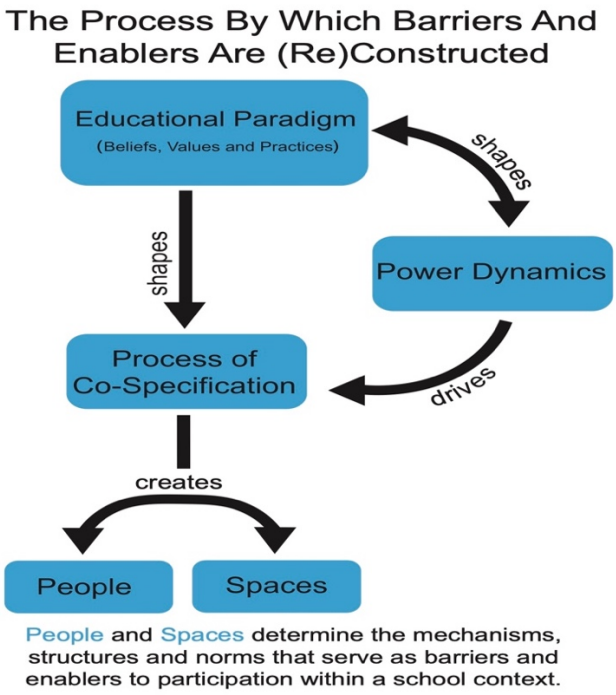


Figure 6. A conceptualisation of the process of co-specification and its impact on the barriers and enablers of participation

Conceptualising power within this research

There are many theories regarding and conceptualisations of power, each providing valuable insights to the inquiring researcher. Having considered the affordances of various theories of power in relation to the data gathered within this study, a four-dimensional view of power, based on the work of Lukes, (1974, 2005) and Foucault (1978) provides the most useful and appropriate lens for analysing the power-dynamics at play in the co-specification of people and spaces, and within the resulting mechanisms, structures and norms. In claiming that there are three distinct 'faces' of power, Lukes's three-dimensional view of power builds on the work of Dahl (1961), Schattschneider (1960) and Bachrach and Baratz (1963). In the classic study that explored power titled 'Who Governs?' Dahl (1961) explored observable behaviours in relation to decision-making power. Dahl's view of power focuses on behaviour in relation to decision-making, with decisions involving observable conflict. Lukes (1974) regarded this understanding of power as one dimensional. To reveal one dimensional power (Lukes, 1974), that is, the power 'A has over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do' (Dahl, 1957, p.202–203), requires 'careful examination

of a series of concrete decisions' (Adu-Gyamfi 2013, p.1768) and the overt and covert behaviour of those in power. The power debate evolved to recognise that power is not just about who makes the decisions but also to recognise the importance of examining which decisions are actually allowed to enter into the decision-making arena in the first place. Schattschneider (1960, p.71) conceptualised 'the process by which some issues are organised into politics while others are organised out' as the mobilisation of bias. It is important, therefore, not only to examine how power is exercised within decision-making (as Dahl explored) but also to examine the power-dynamics inherent in which decisions are made available (Bachrach and Baratz, 1963) as 'power can be exercised by confining the scope of decision-making' (O' Sullivan, 2005, p.17). A two-dimensional view of power focuses on the power of an actor to control the decision-making arena, by determining which issues can be brought into consideration in the first place; what is on the agenda/available for discussion. Barhrach and Baratz (1970) describe such power as preventing a 'challenge to the values and interests of the decision maker' (p. 44) through non-decision-making. They further note that 'when a person or group can consciously or unconsciously create or reinforce barriers to the airing of issues that person or group has power' (Barhrach and Baratz, 1970, p.8). In other words, A's power to prevent B from challenging A's interest by controlling what is open to negotiation. Lukes (1974) regarded this as a two-dimensional view of power.

Within both a one-dimensional and two-dimensional conceptualisation of power the focus remains on behaviours (both action and inaction) in relation to *decisions* – the power to make decisions and the power to determine which decisions are considered. Lukes (1974), however, argued that these two dimensions or 'faces' of power were only partially successful in understanding power-dynamics, given that they do not make visible the prevention of grievances from arising in the first place. In other words, they do not make visible the subtle ways in which power is exercised over individuals by shaping individuals' perspectives and preferences. In initially defining power as 'A exercising power over B when A affects B in a manner contrary to B's interests' (1974, p. 34) Lukes asks:

> Is it not the supreme and most insidious exercise of power to prevent people, to whatever degree, from having grievances by shaping their perceptions, cognitions and preferences in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things, either because they can see or imagine no alternative to it, or because they see it as natural and unchangeable, or because they see it as divinely ordained and beneficial?
>
> (Lukes, 1974, p. 24)

So, for Lukes the conceptualisations of power presented by Dahl (1961) and Bachrach and Baratz (1963) are not enough to illuminate all the power-dynamics at play as they do not take into consideration the ability of individuals and/or groups to influence actors' preferences and thus, identities. Lukes (1974) builds upon these two perspectives on power in proposing a third dimension of power; the power to shape what individuals' view as being in their own interest. In this three-dimensional view of power Lukes (1974) describes the need to examine, not the observable (as must occur in the first two dimensions of power), but the unobservable. In other words, instead of studying behaviour (be it overt or covert), the researcher must study something that does not happen. Specifically, the researcher must study latent conflict, that is, conflict that does not come to bear on account of B's perspectives and preferences being shaped by A to prevent a challenge to the status quo. The methodological problems inherent in Lukes three-dimensional view of power, specifically the need to study and explain what does not happen (latent conflict), were highlighted (Mokken and Stokman, 1976) and subsequently acknowledged in the 2nd edition of Lukes's book on power in 2005. However, in this book, methodological difficulties notwithstanding, Lukes defended his three-dimensional view of power as the ability to shape people's perceptions and perspectives in order to maintain the status quo (Adu-Gyamfi, 2013).

Building on the work of Lukes, Digeser (1992) suggests that a fourth dimension of power is revealed through the work of Foucault. A four-dimensional view of power conceptualises power as a force that produces subjects, irrespective of objective interests. As argued by Adu-Gyamfi, (2013) the productive potential of power, evident in the 'normalisation' of children through the institution of school, illustrates this fourth dimension of power. While Lukes's three-dimensional view

sees power as a coercive force used to dominate, Foucault saw power as productive and ambivalent, embedded and inherent in any and all social processes, practices and interactions. In his work Foucault sought to uncover and understand 'how compliance of willing subjects is secured' (Adu-Gyamfi, 2013, p.1769), and how 'power can be used in a way that causes people to discipline themselves without coercion from others' (ibid). 'Foucault's vision was of power as a diverse, ambivalent web of relations, rather than a unidirectional force of domination' (Gallagher, 2008, p.144). While there is much that overlaps between Lukes' and Foucault's conceptualisation of power, the differences between the 3rd and 4th conceptualisations, or dimensions of power are as follows; a three-dimensional view sees power as a force that is exercised coercively to shape people's perceptions and perspectives in order to maintain the status quo. Thus, B's preferences and perspectives (aspects of his identity) are shaped to serve A's agenda. A four-dimensional conceptualisation of power sees power as an ambivalent productive force that does not necessarily conflict with B's interests. While both conceptualisations recognise the role of power in producing B as a subject, a three-dimensional view of power sees power employed in such a way as to dominate B in order to serve A's interests, while a four-dimensional view sees power as an ambivalent force, present in every interaction and social process, irrespective of A's interests or goals. Thus, a three-dimensional view of power focuses on the 'power' of those in control to maintain control, and the means by which children's agency is limited. A four-dimensional view enables a focus on children's agency and the 'production' of both silenced and/or agentic children. Writing from a feminist perspective Cooper (1994) suggests that to conceptualise power as a process of domination, and not recognise the productive and relational nature of power prevents theories of power that allow us to theorise possibilities for radical social transformation. Thus, all four faces of power are utilized within this study as such an approach affords a more thorough examination of the power dynamics at play within the creation of the barriers *and* enablers of children's participation. The following section provides details of how this four-dimensional conceptualisation of power is applied to address the research question(s).

Applying the four faces of power to addressing the aim of this research

This study draws on all four 'faces' of power to analyse both the barriers and enablers of participation, and the processes by which they are (re)created. Within the school context the first face of power can be seen in the overt power educators and educational structures exercise over children's time, behaviour and resources. Quite simply, children must do what they are told by their teachers. Pearce and Wood (2019) state that 'in traditional, hierarchical classrooms, power is not shared evenly, not just because teachers exert coercive power, but also because teachers exert hegemonic power through being positioned as experts and authorities by educational institutions and the evaluative discourses of school' (p.119), highlighting the hegemonic power at play within the first face of power in school contexts. The second face of power can be seen in examining what children feel they can/cannot say to their teachers, and/or the role children play within agenda setting in relation to school issues. Identifying the preferences and grievances of children and the institutional mechanisms and structures that prevent these from being articulated/resolved to the children's satisfaction will serve to illuminate the two-dimensional view of power within the school context. It is the application of the third face of power that provides the greatest challenge – the power of individuals and social forces/institutional practices to influence children's perspectives and interests in the first instance. Lukes posits that in order to explore this power dynamic one must consider what B would do had their perspective not been shaped by A. What would a child believe was in their best interests, or what would their grievances be in relation to the status quo, had they not been influenced otherwise? This requires the exploration of the counterfactual – that which B (the child) would have done had A (the teacher/the school) not exercised their power and shaped B's preference. To identify the counterfactual Lukes argues that:

> [W]e must provide other, indirect, grounds for asserting that if *A* had not acted (or failed to act) in a certain way – and, in the case of operative power, if other sufficient conditions had not been operative – then *B* would have thought and acted differently from the way he does actually think and act. In brief, we need to justify our expectation that *B* would have thought or acted differently; and we also need to specify the means or mechanisms by which *A* has prevented, or else acted (or abstained from acting) in a manner sufficient to prevent, *B* from doing so (Lukes, 1974, pp.41-42).

The role of the researcher, therefore, is to identify the mechanisms used by A to shape B's preferences, and also to provide a compelling argument in relation to how we believe B might have thought or acted had they not been influenced by A (Lukes 1974). How might a child act, had their preferences not been shaped by the educators? An assumption inherent in Lukes thesis is B's status as a competent adult. Someone who, had their preferences not been shaped to serve A's interest, would be able to identify what it is that serves their own interest. The example discussed by Lukes (Dahl's 1961 study of anti-pollution legislation) suggests an assumption that what B would determine as being in their own interest would also be in their *best* interest. In relation to many decisions regarding a child, in particular within a school context, it is the adult who determines what is in the child's best interest, not the child. However, a constructionist perspective recognises the role children play in determining their own best interests, as does the 'the Committee' (UN, 2009), who note that one cannot establish what is in a child's best interest, as defined by Article 3, without ensuring that Article 12 has been adhered to. In other words, we cannot know what is in a child's best interest without knowing what the child thinks about the matter in question. In noting that B must determine what is in their interest with 'relative autonomy' (1975, p.33) Lukes perhaps recognises the relational, interconnected and interdependent nature of *all* people - no one is, or can be, truly autonomous. The relational perspective underpinning this research, recognises limitations in regards autonomy for both adults and children. Nonetheless, identifying the counterfactual in regard to children as opposed to adults entails an additional layer of complexity. Illuminating the tacit power-dynamics at play, a three-dimensional view of power illustrates the role of power in shaping children's identities *in such a way as to prohibit a challenge to the status quo*. Applying the third face of power reveals that children alone cannot challenge the status quo – the challenge must also come from the adults, because for children to challenge the status quo a change in their identity is required – changing their preferences/uncovering their 'real interests', means changing how they perceive themselves. Thus, adults are needed to instigate this identity shift. Such an endeavour requires a paradigmatic shift, given that children's situated identities are shaped by the prevailing educational

paradigm, a paradigm created predominantly by the beliefs and values of educators.

The affordances of the first three 'faces' of power as conceptual tools in the analysis of the barriers and enablers of children's participation are thus, significant. However, as the first three faces primarily facilitate the examination of the use of power to dominate and subjugate children, they are limited in their potential to recognise the ways in which agentic children are 'produced'. In fore fronting the relational and productive nature of power, the fourth face of power is the lens needed to move beyond the limitations of the first three faces and recognise the enablers of participation and the ways in which children are afforded agency. Thus, each of the four faces of power is utilised within this research to analyse (a) the process by which particular specifications of people and spaces are made possible, and (b) the mechanisms, structures and norms resulting from these specifications that serve as barriers and/or enablers of participation, and which in turn, (re)create the overarching educational paradigm.

This discussion has sought to illustrate and unpack the interwoven nature of paradigms and power in order to highlight their role in the process of the co-specification of people and spaces, and the (creation of) barriers and enablers of children's lived participation. In keeping with a relational/spatial approach, this conceptual apparatus provides the tools necessary to analyse the data to reveal the barriers and enablers of participation made possible through particular specifications of people and spaces. In particular, the concepts of educational paradigms and power facilitate the analysis of key social practises pertaining to teaching and learning (as revealed through the lens of pedagogical modes and curriculum models), including issues of discipline, and educator/student relationships.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented and illustrated the affordances of the conceptual and theoretical tools that have been employed to both frame the research 'problem'

and provide the most effective lenses through which to interrogate the data. Within the discussion, the overlapping and interconnected nature of the theoretical tools was made evident. A spatial/relational ontological approach allows the researcher to identify and to analyse the barriers and enablers to children's everyday lived participation within specific contexts, recognising the dialogical context-dependent nature of participation. A spatial/relational lens underpins the concept of the process of co-specification. Through this process the educational paradigm shapes both people and spaces, while situated relational power-dynamics drives the process. Thus, the concept of 'Educational Paradigms' facilitates an analysis of the impact of beliefs and values on specifications of people and spaces, while the lens of 'Power' facilitates an analysis of the practices resulting from beliefs and values. Examining the power dynamics within schools and classrooms and within student/educator relationships uncovers *how* barriers and enablers of participation are constructed and reconstructed. Applying a four-dimensional conceptualisation of power facilitates the identification and analysis of the factors that create, contribute to, and serve as barriers and enablers of children's lived participation. This analysis reveals both the mechanisms through which children are subjugated or empowered/afforded agency, in addition to the process by which barriers and enablers are produced.

As highlighted in *Figure 6,* (p.132) particular specifications of people and spaces, resulting from the process of co-specification, determine the mechanisms, structures and norms that serve as barriers and enablers of children's participation. The role of 'Educational Paradigms' and 'Power' in the process of co-specification is illustrated within this figure. The bespoke theoretical framework designed for this study provides the tools needed to generate the knowledge required to address the two key areas of enquiry within the research question(s); (a) to identify the barriers and enablers and (b) to analyse the factors that contribute to/influence their creation.

Firstly, the conceptualisation of the process of co-specification, and the associated concepts of 'Power', and 'Educational Paradigms', in addition to the concepts of 'Pedagogical Modes and Curriculum Modes' as aspects of the Educational

Paradigm, facilitates the identification and analysis of the factors that influence the particular specifications of people and spaces within particular contexts. Thus, revealing *the process by which barriers and enablers are produced*. Secondly these conceptual tools enable the analysis of the barriers and enablers created through particular specifications of people and spaces, and associated mechanisms, structures and norms, that serve to enable or restrict children's everyday participation within a school context. Thus, enabling *an analysis of the barriers and enablers themselves*. Together these two areas of analysis enable not only the identification and exploration of the barriers and the enablers to children's lived participation within the school context, but also the factors that contribute to, and enable, their creation.

Chapter Six: Educational Paradigms: The beliefs and values that (up)set the stage for participatory practice

The following three chapters (*'Educational Paradigms: The Beliefs and Values that (Up)Set the Stage for Participatory Practice'*, *'Pedagogical Practice and Participation'* and *'Relationships Between Educators and Children and their Impact on Participation'*) present the findings derived from interviews, focus groups and observations. While this chapter examines beliefs and values inherent within educational paradigms, the following findings chapters focuses on resulting pedagogical practices and relationships between educators and children. This approach facilitates the examination of both social and academic spaces within school contexts and the blurred boundaries between the two. The manner in which the findings chapters are structured provides a clear evidence base for analytical discussion within the subsequent discussion chapter. Drawing on the conceptual framework previously identified, the discussion chapter will illustrate and analyse the barriers and enablers of participation that result from particular specifications of people and spaces that result from the co-specification of people and spaces. In order do so, the educational paradigm and situated power dynamics that drives the process of co-specification within each school are clearly presented within the findings chapters. The key themes in relation to the beliefs and values inherent in educational paradigms presented in this chapter are:

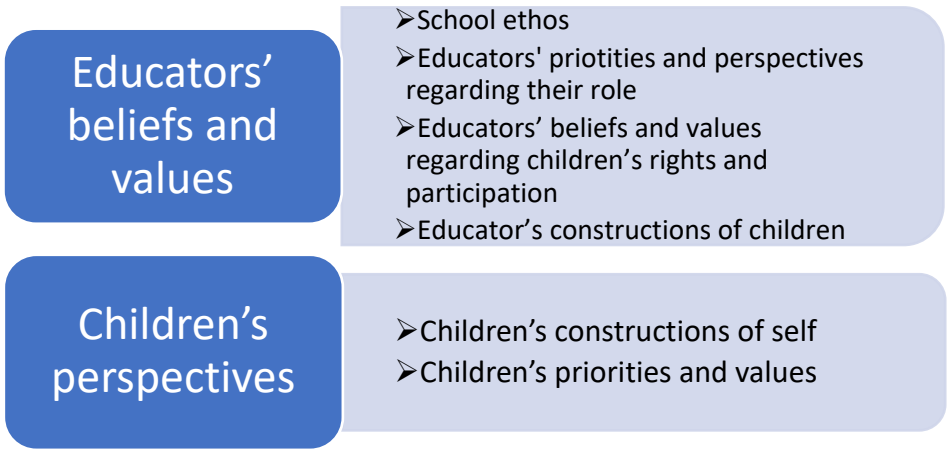


Figure 7. Key themes in relation to the beliefs and values inherent in educational paradigms

The chapter begins by presenting findings in relation to the beliefs and values held by educators, which underpin practice and interactions, and as such, shape the process of co-specification, following which the findings in relation to children's situated identities and priorities are presented. In doing so the disjoint between educators' and children's priorities is highlighted. So too is the impact of the prevailing educational paradigm on children's situated identities illuminated.

Educators' Beliefs and Values

While in all schools the educators interviewed described their school as a happy and positive place, it was clear that each school was a distinct and unique cultural context, where a specific educational paradigm held sway, which impacted on and was impacted by the level of participation open to children within the setting. Furthermore, while within each school a particular paradigm held sway, individual classrooms contained sub-cultures that, while heavily influenced by the overarching school paradigm, could also differ as a result of the individual teacher's own beliefs, values and practices. The following diagram (*Figure 8*) identifies educators' key beliefs and values, relevant to the research question, which emerged from the data, and illustrates their interconnected nature - each impacting on and impacted by the others.

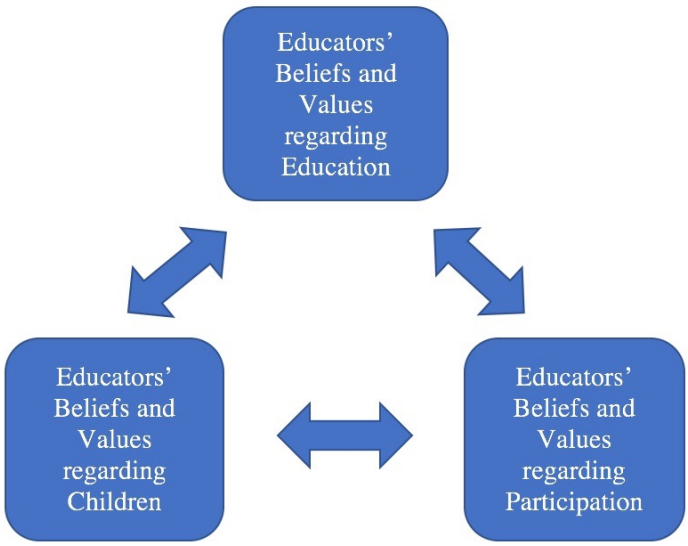


Figure 8. Educators' key beliefs and values as relevant to the research question

While a diagram can identify at a glance the interconnected nature of each theme, the challenge lies in discussing each theme within a linear narrative, as is necessary in order to present the findings, while at the same time providing analysis of the findings in question, given that each theme is inextricably connected to the others.

With regard to the overarching theme 'Educators' Beliefs and Values' three key areas emerged from the data: (1) school ethos, and educators' priorities/beliefs and values regarding their role as teachers; (2) educators' beliefs and values regarding children's rights and participation and; (3) constructions of children. Beginning with themes 'School Ethos' and 'Educators' Priorities' the findings illustrate that in schools where participation was an integral aspect of school culture it was prioritised and valued. The converse was also evident. In relation to 'Educators' Beliefs and Values Regarding their Role as a Teacher' the data suggests that protection and provision, and not participation, underpin many educators' perspectives in relation to their role as teacher. Data concerning educators' beliefs and values regarding children's rights and participation also revealed discourses of protection and provision, in addition to a lack of knowledge regarding the UNCRC, and a lack of recognition of children as rights holders and adults' obligations as duty bearers. In relation to educators' beliefs and values regarding children it was found that educators who held deterministic constructions of children were less likely to facilitate, or value, participation. Educators who recognised children's agency within their constructivist constructions of children were significantly more likely to value participation and seek to embed it in within their teaching and learning.

School Ethos

As also documented within the literature (Donnelly, 2000), a disconnect between the 'official' ethos and the lived observable ethos was evident in this study, as illustrated in the comment below.

> It's very multicultural as you can see, so I mean it is, obviously, overhead the door it is a Catholic based school but obviously that had to change over time because, I suppose, there's a lot of different cultures and different religions and things like that, so things have, kind of, altered, so it really, really has changed from that perspective (4th class teacher, St. Reginas).

The extent to which a school's ethos was identified and/or discussed by educators as being an influencing factor on the school culture varied. In Fairview ET, where participation was embedded into all aspects of school life, both social and academic, the principal identified the centrality of the concept of participation to the school ethos. 'The ethos is very inclusive, right down to, the children are always included in everything …[including] decision making' (Principal, Fairview E.T.). This principal demonstrated a high level of awareness regarding the connection between the school ethos and the culture within the school. This sentiment is also evident from comments made by her teachers. '[I]t's very much democratically run. Educate Together schools are meant to be. But this genuinely is.' (6th class teacher, Fairview E.T.). On the other hand, in two of the Catholic schools, St. Seáns and Gaelscoil Áirtéigin, the educators did not identify the official school ethos as an influencing factor when discussing the school's priorities or the culture within the school. In St. Reginas, however, the principal indicated that the school's Catholic ethos promotes the inclusion of children from marginalised backgrounds.

> The ethos is caring and all-embracing and we welcome students of all denominations and all socio-economic backgrounds, but being a [name of religious order who are the school trustees] school I suppose we do aim to look after the marginalised probably a little more than anybody else (Principal, St. Regina).

The extent to which the official school ethos was identified as impacting on educators' practice varied however what is clear is that the ethos of a school (both in terms of the official ethos and the lived ethos) is value laden. The values inherent within the ethos are based to a large degree, on particular constructions of children. For example, inherent in the ethos within St. Reginas (as evidenced in the above quote) is a deterministic construction of children as vulnerable, while in Fairview a construction of children as agentic is evident within an ethos that values participation and democratic decision-making. In the three schools with a traditional Catholic ethos (St. Seáns, St. Reginas and Gaelscoil Áitéigin) participation was not a feature of the school ethos, while in Fairview E.T and Springrock it was. Unlike the educators in the three Catholic schools, educators in

Fairview E.T and Springrock spoke at length about the influence of the school's ethos on their practice.

Educators' Priorities

The following section identifies educators' priorities and perspectives, the values and beliefs inherent in these priorities, and the impact of such priorities, values and beliefs on participation. That the children are happy and safe, and that each individual child is supported to reach their full potential were common priorities that were identified in each of the five schools. Analysis of the data, however, revealed some key differences in relation to educators' priorities which had an impact on children's participation. In particular, as evidenced below, priorities held by educators in St. Reginas, St. Seáns and Gaelscoil Áitéigin fall within the realm of protection and provision, while in Fairview E.T. and Springrock educators' priorities sat within discourses of participation.

In St. Seáns, it was evident that the children's disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds had a significant impact on the educators' priorities and, thus, in turn, on the school culture. As noted, St. Seáns is a DEIS Band One school located in an area of socio-economic disadvantage with many of the children attending the school experiencing difficult home circumstances. As noted by one teacher: 'some of the things you're listening to you're thinking, 'Oh God', you know?' (2nd/3rd class teacher, St. Seáns). The school, in response, values and prioritises creating a safe and stable space for the children that is supportive and positive.

> I say to them "it's my job to keep you safe while you're here. You need to be with me, you need to be"… and it's not to kind of cage them in but it's about trying to, kind of, say 'it's not safe for you to be running around' (2nd/3rd class teacher, St. Seán).
>
> The main thing is that the kids are happy […] the priority, I suppose, always would be that they can feel safe, […]. that they can kind of have a security with it. Because sometimes they lack that in their lives, the bit of stability (6th class teacher/ Principal, St. Seán).

Inherent in this priority is the construction of children as vulnerable and the belief that the children need security and stability above all else, as well as an assumption

that their home environments do not offer this. These beliefs and values contributed to practice that aimed to protect the children and created a school space that did not, as a matter of routine, facilitate children's empowerment through their participation, but rather controlled children's behaviour.

In this school the children are also identified by educators as being prone to jealously, often leading to conflict, therefore emphasis is also put on encouraging the children to develop a caring environment. 'The inclination, at times, between them is to snipe at each other […] so you have to really work around that caring environment with them' (6th class teacher/ Principal, St. Seáns). The prioritising of care causes the educators to make a greater effort to connect with the children on a personal level, resulting in a high level of familiarity between the children and the educators and the development of personal connections that facilitate spaces for dialogue. In particular, the educators in St. Seáns believe that their relationships with the children play an even more important role in the lives of the children than it would in other non-DEIS schools:

> Some of them don't have secure relationships outside of, you know, school. Some of them have very difficult home backgrounds so you're saying "look, in school…" you know, we'd often say it here, you know, well, like, "I'm your mom in school, so if something happens in school, you come up and you tell me and we will sort it". (2nd/3rd class teacher, St. Seáns)

While a paternalistic perspective can prohibit children's agency the above quote illustrates that so too can it provide individualised spaces in which children can be heard.

Academic expectations in St. Seáns are also influenced by educators' beliefs and values regarding the children's disadvantaged backgrounds.

> Our emphasis would obviously be on English and Maths. Being in a disadvantaged area, we are more focused on, kind of, making sure everyone can read and write. (2nd/3rd class teacher, St. Seáns)

> With the children that we have, you do have to look at different ways of achieving and maybe sometimes different achievements. (6th class teacher/ Principal, St. Seán)

Inherent in these quotes lies educators' valuing of basic academic achievement, reading and writing, and a belief that many of the children's potential lies outside of such basic achievements. Thus, with regard to school priorities, the educators in St. Seáns placed a strong focus on care, stability, and positive behaviour. Second to care, educators' teaching and learning priorities focused on ensuring that the children attained at least a basic level of literacy and numeracy. These priorities, arising from educators' deterministic constructions of, and their resulting beliefs about the children's needs, resulted in a somewhat paternalistic context in which educators endeavoured to provide for and protect the children, but did not necessarily support/value their participation, or recognise their agency. However, the value placed on positive relationships, and the high level of personal dialogic encounters between educators and children which resulted, provided spaces for children to be heard that might not otherwise have existed.

Educators' priorities in St. Reginas focused on the care and education of the children. As noted by the principal the school priorities are 'simple, we mind them and we educate them' (Principal, St. Regina). Within this school a very high focus on teaching and learning, and a fast-paced and industrious atmosphere was observed but with a student body which was without voice. As noted during observations:

> The general atmosphere within the class seams relaxed and upbeat, yet focused and very controlled (Diary entry, 4th class, St. Regina, Day One).

As exemplified in the following quote, the key issue in relation to the educators' priorates, as identified by the teachers in St. Reginas, was meeting the individual educational needs of a diverse group of children.

> Researcher < What are your priorities as a teacher with regards to children?
> 1st Class Teacher < I suppose being able to teach all of them, you know there's a huge level inside in the class so maybe, to get around individually, teach them at some stage or d'you know, to cater to all of them because it's really hard to differentiate constantly (1st class teacher, St. Reginas).

Thus, ensuring the children's academic success was a key priority within this school. Observations revealed that an academic focus was maintained at all times, while the children were discouraged from questioning or speaking without being invited to do so. The 'hands up' rule was strictly enforced and the teachers used the reward point system much more frequently than was observed in any other school. The work moved along at a very quick pace in this school. Time seemed to be a very precious commodity and to waste it was regarded by the teachers as a significant transgression. Teachers frequently told the children to hurry up with their work and, as evidenced by the following observation data, behaviours that were seen to waste time were dealt with quickly and punitively:

> [Male child] has been fiddling with his water bottle for several minutes and has been asked twice by the teacher to put it away. The teacher tells him sternly for a third time to put it away, stating that he is wasting time and that they might not be allowed out at break time if they waste all the time (Diary entry, 4th class, St. Regina, Day one).

St. Regina's high focus on completing school work left little time for anything that was not seen as central to this endeavour. As can be seen from the following extract, a perceived lack of time was identified as a significant barrier to the facilitation of children's participation in this school:

> Researcher < Can you think of any specific challenges that you'd have in the classroom with regards to facilitating this right [to be heard]?
> 1st class teacher, St. Regina < I suppose the time and I suppose, making the children, like, making sure they're on task so then I can get something done, like, if they're not staying on task then I'll find it hard to, like, the moment I talk to one child there's another three out of their place, so I suppose ideally, in the perfect class where they all sit and be quiet, it would be great and you probably could, but I suppose, it's kind of, hard to keep them on task and get around to everyone (1st class teacher, St. Reginas).

Thus, a lack of time and the need to keep children focused on their school work, both of which resulting from the prioritisation of meeting predetermined educational golas, prohibit the facilitation of children's participation in this school. It is clear that academic work, achieved through a high level of control, is prioritised in St. Reginas, while participation is seen as an activity that could

detract from this. In addition, the above quote suggests that this educator sees quiet children who are sitting still as the ideal, however, participation requires active discussion and as such is a challenge to this sort of work environment. Thus, data from this school revealed that the focused academic work of the children is valued while participation, believed to detract from this, is not.

Educators in Gaelscoil Áitéigin also identified education as a key priority. The following quotes illustrate a view of education as being to prepare children for their future academic journey, whether that is the next class up or, ultimately, for second level education.

> Well my priority is that in Rang a haon [first class], which I am teaching this year, is that they are happy coming in […]. But I suppose after that then it is the academic side of things that they will know the things that they are expected to know in Rang a haon, so that would be the priority. Then after that would be, that there is development and that there is progression and you can see progression from last year and that they are ready to go into the next class. That would be my priority I suppose (1st class teacher, Gaelscoil Áitéigin).

> Researcher< What do you feel are your priorities for the children within the school?
> Principal, Gaelscoil Áitéigin < I suppose the priority of the school really is that they [students] realize their full potential. You know? That we prepare them well for second level education (Principal, Gaelscoil Áitéigin).

In relation to the relationship between this school's priorities and participation, the following quote illustrates a perception that facilitating children's participation within the educational process may be problematic given that such an approach is seen as a slower process which could compromise a teachers' ability to cover the material deemed necessary for the children to be adequately prepared for their future academic journey. Participation is also seen as problematic in regard to a perception that this approach could also lead to conflict.

> Researcher < What do you feel are the particular challenges within a classroom context to facilitating children's voices?
> 6th Class teacher, Gaelscoil Áitéigin < I suppose it's a slower process. It's definitely a slower process rather than saying this is the way it's going to be. […] I suppose it sometimes brings up conflict if you might end up with

> a debate if you bring something to the floor. And again, that would take more time (Principal, Gaelscoil Áitéigin).

This quote suggests a view that a participatory approach may detract from preparing the children for second level education – an aim that has been identified as a priority by educators within this school. It is clear, therefore, that as with St. Reginas, educators in Gaelscoil Áitéigin prioritise the provision of education, while viewing participation as an activity that can detract from this goal. So too did educators in St. Séans prioritise the provision of a basic level of educational attainment, however the priority in this school was the provision of a safe and secure space.

In Fairview E.T. each of the educators interviewed identified inclusion as the chief priority within the school. As is evident in the following quotes, educators prioritised and valued the celebration of diversity and enabling of each child, regardless of their circumstances or abilities, to participate in school life.

> I think the inclusivity is massive in the school. I know coming from the top down, like from the principal, that would be the number one so, you always have to, kind of, try and make sure that no one gets excluded or that, that everyone can be included, or to perform in some way or to be involved in some way (6th class teacher, Fairview E.T.).

> [C]reating an environment and an atmosphere where the children feel valued and they feel that they are able to succeed. I suppose that would be the main priority. […] And difference is something that's celebrated (2nd class teacher, Fairview E.T.).

A key feature of an inclusive educational approach is the recognition and celebration of all aspects of children's identity, and the need to ensure each child's participation (DCYA, 2016). As such, the connection between educators' priorities and how they construct the children and perceive their needs is evident. In prioritising their inclusion, children are recognised not just as students, but as individuals with a need to be included, in other words a need to participate in their school lives. Therefore, unlike the prioritisation of children's protection and provision inherent within educators' priorities within the previous three schools, educators in this school identify priorities that centre on inclusion and participation.

Recognition that the identity of the child goes beyond their student identity is also inherent in the priorities identified in Springrock. In this school the principal identified his priority as the facilitation of children's participation. While the following quote is lengthy it merits inclusion as it encapsulates how the facilitation of children's participation is fundamentally intrinsic to the school's philosophical and pedagogical approach and is thus prioritised and highly valued.

> [As an educator] you need to remove any obstacle that is in a child's way to fully participate, and one of the obstacles can be yourself… [the] idea that the children are on this kind of journey, they need to get somewhere, they need to be facilitated, they need to participate fully in the world. And in their full participation they will find out what it is they need to do in the world… So then, for example, the children are not here to learn a curriculum. You use curriculum, or curricula, in different ways to try to get this child to fire on all four cylinders. So you're using mathematics, or you're using grammar, or you're using this thing called curriculum in a way that opens up this child, because there's no child born to fulfil the primary school curriculum... It's a journey they're on. So, I think that if you have a picture of this intelligent, let's call it spiritual being that's in front of you, on a journey… To think that they're there to fulfil somebody else's wish, be it an institution or whatever, I think is [shakes his head]. So that might inform our priorities. How creative is your space? How involved are these children? (5th/6th class teacher/ Principal, Springrock).

And so, while educators in Fairview E.T and Springrock are both coming from different perspectives, Fiarview E.T. from a place of inclusion and Springrock from a more spiritual perspective, both schools prioritise children's participation and see it as intrinsic to not only their education but to their whole experience within school.

The priorities in each school, as noted by the educators, contain assumptions, beliefs and values regarding the children and their needs, and also values and beliefs regarding the role of education and indeed participation. In St. Reginas, St. Seáns and Gaelscoil Áitéigin the educators' priorities, namely caring for and educating the children, concern two of the three pillars of the UNCRC: protection and provision. The third pillar, participation, was lacking within these school's priorities,. In Fairview E.T. and Springrock, however, participation was central to

educators' priorities. A distinction is therefore evident in that, in the schools where participation was not identified as a priority, participation was viewed as an activity that sat outside of the core teaching and learning, and indeed, as an activity that could detract from effective teaching and learning, while in the two schools where participation was prioritised, participation was highly valued and considered central to the education and wellbeing of the children. The educators' priorities determine their practice and as such (re)constructs cultural spaces which impact on opportunities for children to participate. For example, in St Sean's the prioritising of care and behavioural modification, derived from deterministic constructions of the children as vulnerable and deviant, resulted in both barriers and enablers to children's participation. In this school the children's agency was not recognised or supported, thus creating barriers, while the paternalistic nature of student/educator relationships enabled participation outside of the academic space, through the high value placed on dialogic encounters of a personal nature.

The key findings in relation to the theme 'Educators Priorities' reveal that in order for participation to be an integral aspect of school culture it must be prioritised. So too do the findings reveal that educators' priorities are based on particular constructions of children and their perceived needs, as well as educators' beliefs with regard to the role of the school, and therefore, inherently the role of education.

Educators' Beliefs and Values Regarding their Role as a Teacher

While there is undoubtedly an overlap between educators' priorities and their beliefs and values regarding their role as teachers, so too are there differences that offer important insights. Analysing educators' priorities provides insights into that which the educator, as part of the school establishment, seeks to achieve. Questions concerning how each individual educator views their role as an educator, however, provide insights in relation to the role teachers' feel they play in achieving such goals and the beliefs and values inherent in such perspectives. In particular, the data regarding educators' beliefs and values regarding their role as teachers encompasses two key areas: (1) the perception of a dual role; to care and to educate, and (2) the dominance of protection and provision in educators' beliefs and values regarding their role.

In keeping with their stated priorities, many educators saw ensuring children's well-being and the provision of education as their primary role as educators. "I suppose to try and make it a happy experience for them, as well as getting the curriculum covered" (1st class teacher, St. Regina). However, while educators identified these two components (children's well-being and education) as priorities, the discussion on priorities focused primarily on the educational aspect. A view of well-being, in particular happiness and safety, and learning as being inextricably interlinked, was evident in many responses to questions regarding how educators saw their role. Thus, the provision of both care and education played a key role in how educators constructed their role as an educator. Many educators identified children's happiness and safety as being prerequisites to children's ability to learn, and were thus motivated to ensure children's well-being in order to ensure academic success. As noted by one teacher; 'I think if someone's not happy to be in school… they are never going to learn anything' (2nd/3rd class teacher, St. Seán). Several educators, however, saw children's well-being as fundamental in its own right. 'I just think happiness is so much more important than being able to add or subtract or write an essay. So, my main priority is that they come in here and they have a bit of fun.' (2nd class teacher, Fairview E.T.). However, tension was expressed by some educators between the caring and educational elements of their role. Educators often spoke of trying to strike a balance between what they saw as their primary role – to educate the child, and their role in supporting children's well-being. As noted by one teacher:

> Obviously the curriculum is the main thing, but …you can't focus just on the academics anymore because a lot of children have a lot of social and emotional behavioural issues and needs… a lot of children have special needs as well, so you really have to look at the person (1st class teacher, St. Regina).

Many teachers thus, identified their role as having a dual element, seeing themselves both as an educator and as a parent-like carer. 'You're not just there to teach them things. You're also there as kind of another parent' (2nd class teacher, Fairview E.T.). 'You're like a Mammy, because Mammy's not here' (1st class teacher, Gaelscoil Áitéigin). Notably, some educators, in particular the teachers of

younger classes, saw their role as encompassing a more personal paternalistic element based on a need to care for and protect the children. An in-depth exploration of the impact of a personal/caring element in student/educator relationships is presented in the chapter *'Relationships Between Educators and Children and their Impact on Participation'*.

The children's safety was identified by most educators in relation to their role.

> The priority I suppose always would be that they can feel safe (6th class teacher/Principal, St. Seáns)
>
> Making sure that they're safe when they're in school, they are somebody else's child after all (4th class teacher, St. Regina)
>
> My priority would be first of all, they do have to be kind of happy and safe. (6th class teacher, Fairview E.T.)
>
> First, I suppose that the kids would be safe. That's my big thing. I want the kids to all go home safe. (Principal, Gaelscoil Áitéigin)

This concern with children's safety contributed to many educators endeavouring to control the space by maintaining power, in other words creating a safe space by staying in-control. There was a belief that if educators were not controlling and structuring the space then it could become unsafe. 'The more unstructured times are the times I find things can kick off behaviour wise' (6th class teacher/Principal, St. Seáns). However, in schools where participation was valued, the same concern with safety could also be seen to provide opportunities for children to participate - as illustrated in the following quote:

> If someone gets hit in the head with a basketball, we ask them if they are ok and "what do you think we should do here?" And the last thing they want is to lose the privilege of the skipping rope and the basketballs so we say "oh, come up with an idea". … it's always back on to them so "Ok, can you think of something that's safer?" (Principal, Fairview E.T.).

This quote highlights how children can be facilitated to participate in constructing spaces, in this case creating a safe space. A view of the children as agentic is evident in this extract, however, so too do we see participation being used to

further adults' agendas, in this case the adults' goal of creating a safe space. In utilising participation to create spaces that fit with adult agendas, educators are using participation as a form of social order. While all educators identified that a key aspect of their role was ensuring children's safety how they approached this was influenced by their perspectives on the value of participation as well as their construction of the children and, consequently, a concern with safety resulted in either a barrier or an enabler of participation.

Most educators saw their role as being responsible for creating, managing, and determining the school/classroom space, and the practices within the space. For example, one teacher described their role as 'creating a happy space where they are happy and comfortable and content' (2nd/3rd class teacher, St. Seáns), while another teacher stated that their role was 'to create a nice atmosphere for them..' (1st class teacher, Gaelscoil Áitéigin). The role, or agency of the children in constructing school spaces and practices was often not acknowledged or as can be seen from the following quote, considered inappropriate:

> Recently we updated our mobile phone policy and banned mobile phones […] The children were not consulted about that because we didn't feel it was appropriate. I suppose we feel that we know better than [them]. (Principal, St. Reginas)

This quote reveals deterministic constructions of children, and developmental discourses underpinning educators' beliefs with regard to their role in controlling and determining the school space(s). One teacher's perspective, however, differed in that he saw his role as a teacher as a leader whose job it is to enable the children to take the lead themselves:

> We do festivals in the end of term …. [the children] put together a piece for the parents. They selected which pieces were going in, […] they decided how they wanted to order them and who was going to introduce it and I, [pause] for me the ideal scenario is when the class put on their piece and I can actually go to [the local town]. And like the day I can do that, the day I am not needed is when I have got my job done right. Get out of the way. (6th class teacher/Principal, Springrock).

While most educators saw their role as needing to maintain control and be 'in charge', this educator viewed his role as being to facilitate the children to take the lead. Two of the three pillars of children's rights; protection and provision, formed the basis of most teachers' discussion regarding their role as teachers, however, for the teaching principal in Springrock the third pillar, participation also featured in his discussion regarding his role as a teacher. While this suggests that protection and provision are the main elements underpinning how educators' view their role, further data discussed in the subsequent findings chapters concerning pedagogical practice and student/educator relationships, illustrates that educators in *both* Springrock and Fairview E.T. promoted and facilitated the participation of their students through their interactions and practice. Nonetheless, facilitating participation was not discussed by the educators of Fairview E.T. when discussing their role as teachers - although it was identified in relation to their priorities. This suggests that even within a school in which participation is highly valued, protection and provision, and not necessarily participation, are to the fore in relation to educators' perspectives in relation to their role as teachers. Notably, an analysis of educators' perspectives in relation to how they perceive their role reveals the belief, held by most educators, that teachers must control the space in order to ensure children's protection and the provision of learning.

Educators' Beliefs and Values Regarding Children's Rights and Participation

Educators' knowledge and perspectives on children's rights, as well as their perspectives on participation, were found to have a significant bearing on the facilitation of voice. The following two sections; 'Children's Rights' and 'Perspectives on Participation', illustrate that educators with a greater knowledge of children's rights, and in particular children's right to participate, as well as the benefits of participation, placed more value on participation and endeavoured to facilitate participation within their practice. Conversely, educators who did not value participation had little knowledge of children's rights or of participation. In these instances, participation was often seen as an inappropriate activity for primary school pupils, and as having the potential to detract from teaching and learning.

Children's rights

Educators' beliefs and values and subsequent priorities concerning participation were found to be impacted by the level of knowledge and understanding they had of children's right to participate and indeed children's rights in general. Knowledge of the UNCRC and educators' perspectives on participation varied considerably and had a significant impact on the level and quality of participation afforded to children. The majority of educators had a limited, if any, knowledge and understanding of the UNCRC, and when pressed on what children's rights concerned, identified issues relevant to protection and provision but not participation.

> [I'm] very unaware of what [the UNCRC] is, what's involved. (6th Class teacher, Gaelscoil Áitéigin)

> Researcher< So when you hear the term "children's rights" what comes to mind? What's your initial response?
> 2nd/3rd class teacher, St. Seáns < [pause] Yeah… I… I suppose it; you're looking at it from different… I mean, what are human rights? What would be specific then to a child? You know, I suppose again, I would always be hopping back to, like, safety, safe environment, having a home, having a…, you know. It's, kind of, like, your basic human rights, I suppose, really, you know (2nd/3rd class teacher, St. Seáns).

Thus, educators had limited knowledge of children's rights, and in particular limited understandings of children as rights-holders and teachers as duty-bearers. A lack of understanding is also evident in the following quote, and speaks to the confusion evident between children's rights and child protection:

> I'm not [familiar with the UNCRC], well, that being said, we do have, we'd say, how will I put it now, in the school we have a, you know, a DLP [Designated Liaison Person[19]] and an assistant DPL … who would be aware of the steps to take, we'd say if, you know, something, if somebody had a concern (Principal, Gaelscoil Aitéigin).

[19] A Designated Liaison Person is the designated person within an organisation that provides services for children, tasked with children's safe guarding in relation to issues of child protection. A DLP ensures that reporting procedures as required by Children First: The National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children (DCYA, 2017) and the Children First Act 2015, are adhered to.

In addition to associating children's rights with issues of child protection, one educator's comments illustrate a perception that children's rights are an issue that is only relevant to children from disadvantaged communities, thus, highlighting once more the conceptualization of children's rights as being concerned with provision and protection but not participation.

> [C]hildren's rights aren't really something that I see in my daily job here, maybe because of where I am and the [middleclass] background of all the children here. It's not something that would be an issue, maybe, as such, but I know that in certain countries or else, certain areas of this country, that it would be an issue alright, but I suppose, it depends on where you are working maybe, yeah, children's rights. (1st class teacher, Gaelscoil Áitéigin)

Significantly, this educator did not see the relevance of children's rights to her own teaching practice. While other educators did indicate that children's rights were inherently relevant to their practice, these educators stressed that the UNCRC was not something that they were familiar with, and that children's rights were not an issue they considered overtly:

> [I] don't have time to be sitting down really, reading it [the UNCRC], but I presume the essence of it permeates down to what's happening on the ground, I would assume. (Principal, St. Regina)

> When I hear children's rights, I suppose I'm waiting for someone to elaborate. No, because you just presume such a thing. Like, a lot of these things nowadays, you know, when you hear them, there's a big title, but it's something that you do anyway, and that you would always have believed. (6th class teacher/Principal, St. Seáns)

Educators from Fairview E.T. and Springrock where more familiar with the UNCRC than those in St. Seáns, St. Reginas and Gaelscoil Áitéigin, however, by their own admission their knowledge was limited:

> We do teach them [the children] about this [the UNCRC] every year and then like, at that stage when I'm teaching it and I've kind of brushed up beforehand, then I know a lot but now it's like, I haven't done it since last May [laughter] so I don't really remember. But I know that like you know, the right to play is one I think and the right to like, school and education. And the right to, like I know that, I know I should know more, but I probably don't know as much as I should (2nd class teacher, Fairview E.T.).

> We would be [familiar with the UNCRC]. We would always have taught it, and I was in an Educate Together school before this one as well, so I've always taught it (Principal, Fairview E.T.).

> Well, I am not very familiar with [the UNCRC] but I was part of the Alliance for Childhood, which was a group that used to meet uhm, like last time we met was in Brussels. There would be people from all over the world arriving, not just from the particular schools that I would work in, and it was very much anchored in the rights of the child. Well the Convention would be one that would be quoted quite a bit (Principal Springrock).

The limited knowledge these educators had in relation to the UNCRC suggests that the high value placed on children's participation within these two schools was not primarily the result of a rights-based perspective. The data does show, however, a connection between educators' knowledge of the UNCRC, the value placed on participation, and the levels of participation afforded the children. A greater level of knowledge of the UNCRC was congruent with educators placing a higher value on participation, and the children within such spaces enjoying a significantly greater level of participation.

These findings also indicate once more a dominant focus on protection and provision in relation to educators' discussion concerning children's rights and a failure to conceptualise children's rights in relation to participation. A dominant focus on provision and protection rights highlights a deterministic construction of children. The construction of the child as an active agent is fundamental to the facilitation of children's participation.

Perspectives on Participation

Perhaps unsurprisingly given educators' poor knowledge of the UNCRC, there was also some confusion regarding the meaning of the word 'participation' with some educators equating it with contributing to the work of the class rather than participating in decisions and in being heard:

> Researcher < With regards to student participation is there any kind of official policy with regards to student participation in this school?

> Principal, St. Seáns < No official policy, no nothing written down. You expect student participation, you know. You mean, like participation in class of certain activities? (6th class teacher/Principal, St. Seáns).

During interviews, when necessary, I would further explain what was meant by participation by identifying it as children's right to be heard and to contribute to decisions affecting them. This is reflective of the initial focus within the research on children's right to be heard as enshrined in Article 12 alone. However, as noted, in analysing the data a broader conceptualisation of participation, which included but also transcended decision-making moments, was adopted.

> The right that I am looking at specifically is Article 12, I think the exact wording is that children have the right to voice their opinion on any matter that concerns them and to have their opinion duly considered in accordance with their age and maturity. (Researcher, in interview with the principal in Gaelscoil Áitéigin)

With regard to the perceived benefits of participation, educators identified benefits for both adults and children. Benefits for adults, noted by the educators, included gaining understanding, knowledge and ideas from the children,

> If I want to go and talk to them there's no problem, somebody will come along that will tell you what you want to know (Principal, St. Regina).

> [While discussing children's ideas for fundraising events] It was just great fun. And that was their idea. I would never have thought of bingo (Principal Fairview E.T).

The benefits of participation for children, also as noted by the adults, included the development of confidence and oral language, as well as the 'real learning' (2nd class teacher, Gaelscoil Áitéigin) that comes from speaking and listening to each other. The following quote by a teacher in Fairview E.T. illustrates how educators can commandeer participatory mechanisms, such as school committees, to support children's learning and development.

> There are a lot of little committees that children can get on to. […] in practice the teachers that are running [the committee] might come to me and say "what do you think, who maybe would benefit?" Often, it's like

> who would benefit from being on this committee as opposed to who would be really good on this committee (6th class teacher, Fairview E.T.).

The principal of Springrock believed participation was of immense benefit to teachers' personal, professional and spiritual development, seeing participation as the mechanism through which teachers can know what and how to teach:

> So, it's not just that you want to hear the child because it's good for the human being, any human being to 'A' have the practice of speaking and 'B' have the experience of being listened to. You know, the wisdom of the world can speak to you through children. And if you see your job, as a teacher, you know, this is a journey across the Earth that I have to make, and teaching is part of it, in there you have the possibility of hearing voices from a very intelligent part of the Cosmos or whatever you want to call it. And that's the voice of the child, so not alone is it healthy for the child and, you know, in their own development, but they, the child, will tell you what it is you need to do in the class (Principal, Springrock).

The spiritual foundation underpinning this educator's pedagogical philosophy is evident in this quote. In seeing people as spiritual beings he views what children say as offering insights into his own and children's journey in life and the karmic obstacles faced along the way. In listening to the children, he believes, he is guided in his teaching.

While many educators identified increased confidence as a benefit associated with children's participation, no educator identified the empowerment of children or drew on children's rights discourses. As such the benefits identified both in relation to benefits for children and for educators relate to improved teaching and learning.

While many educators, when questioned on their perspectives in relation to children's participation, noted that theoretically participation can benefit teaching and learning, as noted previously, many educators expressed concern that facilitating children's voices may impede effective teaching and learning. In particular, the 6th class teacher in Gaelscoil Áitéigin was concerned that facilitating children's participation could serve to challenge educators' authority, while the

principal in St. Reginas felt that eliciting children's views would give children an unrealistic expectation that their opinions would have any influence.

> I suppose, there's always the worry too [if you seek children's perspectives] that they'd have a sense of entitlement … if you ask someone for their opinion you're, more or less, saying that I will take your opinion or there's the expectation given that your opinion will be taken into consideration (Principal, St. Regina).

This quote offers a valuable insight into the significant power imbalance between educators and children within this school, and into why the children in this school enjoy little, if any, opportunities to participate within adult-child relationships (as documented in observations). This principal did not want children to think that their opinions and perspectives were worthy of consideration by the educators within their school and thus, in her practice prevented children from entering into the decision-making arena. This perspective, held by the most powerful individual in the school, plays a significant role in determining the values and practices that constitute the school culture, in particular the creation /prevention of participatory opportunities.

When asked to identify spaces for children to participate in decision-making one teacher identified the yard and then proceeded to problematise participation:

> Well in the yard I suppose [children can contribute to decisions]. That's the first one that comes into my head. In the yard they really are, not that they're on their own but like that's where a lot of problems will come from based on the decisions that they're making (4th class teacher, St. Reginas).

This quote also suggests that this educator views children's decision-making as an activity that occurs outside of any pedagogical activity – that yard time is free-time for the children, therefore they can engage in decision-making, however, within teaching and learning it is the adult's role to make any decisions necessary.

Another teacher who problematised participation saw it as something that led to children being upset or disappointed:

> I suppose we dictate a lot, we dictate where they sit, we dictate what they read we dictate what they write so, small things like on a Friday […] if they had let's say, a treat or something on Friday I suppose to allow them to choose that […] [W]hen you do that [give children choices] there's always someone disappointed, there's always someone who wants to do the other thing, so d'you know that's hard, so I suppose as a teacher you kind of give them one thing; 'there, that's what you're doing', and don't give an option because [pause] and we probably shouldn't, we should probably give them a lot more choice in things, yea, it's hard! (1st class teacher, St. Regina).

Not only does this quote illustrate how the children are constructed as unable to cope with participating in decision-making, but it also highlights the misconception that participation is about giving children choices rather than giving them the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes with the adult. So too does it indicate an awareness that perhaps children should be afforded more opportunities to be part of decision-making, however, whether this comment is a consequence of the teacher sensing what the 'correct' answer might be in the eyes of the researcher, or whether this teacher holds this view irrespective of the line of questioning is difficult to know.

That children are too immature to participate in decisions and that educators, not children, know what is in children's best interests was a perspective held by several educators. This is evident in the following quote:

> It's not that they don't have opinions, but they are still quite immature, and at this age, up to twelve, they do have opinions alright but maybe, I don't know, are we as their teachers not the best people to decide, to make the decisions? (1st class teacher, Gaelscoil Áitéigin).

Within the three schools in which participation was not valued or supported this view was common. Many educators in these schools felt that it is their role to make decisions on behalf of children. Most educators believed that the younger the child, the more limited their capacity to participate, and, while the principal in the Educate Together school felt this simply meant giving younger children more support, other educators suggested that younger children cannot and therefore should not contribute to decisions that affect them. Findings in relation to educators' perspectives on children's capacity to participate is discussed in greater

depth in the section '*Educators' Constructions of Children'*. Suffice to say at this juncture that educators' concerns regarding children's participation are intrinsically linked to educators' construction of children and the impact of these constructions on approaches to teaching and learning.

None of the schools had a specific school policy on participation, suggesting a failure by *all* schools to enshrine children's right to be heard within official school policy. With regard to perspectives on appropriate levels or types of participation, responses from educators can be categorised as follows:

1. Participation is appropriate in all contexts and situations
2. Participation is only appropriate in certain contexts
3. Only informal participation is appropriate so that adults can know the views of children when they need them.

Educators in two schools, Fairview E.T. and Springrock, held the view that participation is appropriate in all contexts and situations. Educators in Fairview gave numerous examples of formal and informal participation within the school, from school policy development to individual children's *ad hoc* suggestions being implemented. This school has numerous mechanisms established within the school which serve to ensure that all children are facilitated to be heard both on an individual level and within school structures and policies. While a culture of participation was also valued and supported within Springrock, with participation serving as a foundation to the approach taken to teaching and learning, no formal mechanisms for the facilitation of children's participation within school-wide policy and decision-making structures were identified.

Educators in St. Seáns held the view that participation is appropriate only in certain contexts and gave examples of children's participation in both formal policy development and classroom rules.

> They are involved [in making decisions], it depends on what it is. For example, if we were doing the green flag and you have a committee, the committee is made up of the community and the school, parents, and then

> you have some children as well. You know, the same with policy making, depending on the policy. And, I mean uhm, so, like, we could say something, behaviour policy, they would be involved or healthy food, something like that. If it was another thing, like a more specific policy, like a policy on absconding or a child running away, you mightn't get them involved (6th class teacher/Principal, St. Seáns).

This quote suggests that in St. Seáns children's participation in policy-making was used as a strategy for eliciting compliance rather than for empowerment, or in recognition of children's right to participate.

Educators in St. Reginas and Gaelscoil Áitéigin held the view that it was inappropriate for children to participate in formal school policy development or to be formally consulted on matters affecting them. Examples of participation identified by educators in these two schools included development of classroom rules, informal conversations with children and within some curriculum subjects/areas, for example Aistear or SPHE (social, personal and health education).

While most educators, at least theoretically, acknowledged the promotion of children's right to be heard as an important and positive endeavour, they also identified potential challenges with its facilitation, in particular; a lack of time, the possibility of conflict resulting from the promotion of children's participation and the need to maintain children's focus on classwork:

> Yea, it's time of course, overloaded curriculum, time, I suppose, conflicting interests, you know, you might have one child who wants one thing and the other one wanting something else (Principal, St. Reginas).

> There's that time constraint, there's the kind of constraints of keeping the force of the lesson moving along and not losing the rest of the class. Because you're not in control then when that child is talking. Like I kind of lose control a bit. And I can lose the focus of the class (6th class teacher, Fairview, E.T).

What is most noteworthy in regard to adults' perspectives on participation is the dearth of knowledge most educators had regarding children's rights in general, and children's right to participate in particular, which, as noted, has been identified in

the literature as a significant barrier to participation. This research also finds that a greater level of knowledge on issues of children's rights and participation were evident in schools with a greater level of value on participation. The two schools that were most knowledgeable in regard to children's rights, Fairview E.T and Springrock, both placed a significant value on participation which, as discussed in the section on priorities, contributed to a culture that facilitated the children's participation. The concerns raised by the educators regarding participation; lack of children's capacity and a threat to teachers' authority, illustrate the prevalence and relevance of a deterministic construction of children and a traditional hierarchical view of teacher-pupil relationships. The benefits of participation noted by educators were drawn from an educational performative perspective, with the focus being on how participation can support children's learning and development, yet, ironically, many educators expressed concern that facilitating children's voices would be detrimental to teaching and learning. A lack of recognition on the part of educators of children as rights-holders and adults as duty-bearers was a key finding in relation to barriers to participation. It is thus to educators' constructions of children that this chapter must now turn in order to illustrate the full impact of particular constructions on the (re)construction of children's situated identities and how this intersects with opportunities for children's participation.

Constructions of Children

The following section presents findings on educators' constructions of children and illustrates the impact of such constructions on participation. Table 5 comprises of words used by educators when asked to describe the children in their class, in the case of teachers, or school in the case of principals:

Table 5. Words used by educators to describe the children in their class

St. Seán	St. Regina	Fairview E.T.	Gaelscoil Áitéigin	Springrock
DEIS Band 1 **Boy's school**	**DEIS Band 2** **Mixed gender**	**Mixed socio-economic area**	**Middle-class** **Mixed gender**	**Middleclass** **Mixed gender**

Catholic **Ethos** **Urban**	**Catholic Ethos Prevalence of migrant families** **Urban**	**Mixed gender** **Educate Together Ethos** **Suburban**	**Catholic Ethos** **Irish Speaking** **Suburban**	**Ethos based on a particular spiritual philosophy** **Rural**
Friendly (3) Open (2) Small (1) Low Self-Esteem (1) Dependent (1) Sensitive (1) Vocal (1) Lively (1) Physical (1)	Happy (5) Different (4) Nice (3) Independent (3) Good (2) Lovely (2) Gentle (1) Respectful (1) Accepting (1) Inclusive (1)	Open (4) Fantastic (2) Respectful (2) Enthusiastic (2) Responsible (1) Positive (1) Good negotiators (1) Curious (1) Vibrant (1) Genial (1) Good-humoured (1)	Nice (1) Confident (1) Eager to cooperate (1) Eager to please (1) Ambitious (1) Well behaved (1) Cooperative (1) Good attitude (1) Hard working (1) Dedicated (1) Driven (1) Respectful (1) Loving (1) Lovely (1) Nice (1) Polite (1) Happy (1)	Talented (1) Gifted (1) Committed (1) Involved (1) Warm (1) Soft (1) Playful (1)

(Numbers indicate the number of times words were used by educators to describe the children during interviews)

As is evident from the above table, educators generally used very positive terms to describe the children, depicting them as both vulnerable and dependent as well as agentic and happy. However, their discussion of the children yielded data that revealed a more complex picture. While the children are described in very positive terms, a deterministic view of children is inherent and they become problematised when they are discussed by many of the educators. As discussed in Chapter One: *An Introduction*, James and James (2004) have highlighted the mismatch between the rhetoric regarding children's agency and the traditional deterministic constructions of children inherent in adults' practice with children. It was important, therefore, to analyse both the words educators used when asked to

describe the children as well as the constructions of children inherent in how the educators spoke about them during discussion and in how they were observed engaging with children.

As will become evident throughout this section, broadly speaking educators in Fairview E.T. and Springrock held predominately constructivist perspectives of the children, whereas the educators in St. Seáns, St. Reginas and Gaelscoil Áitéigin were far more deterministic is their views regarding the children. Furthermore, the area in which educators in these latter schools saw children as being particularly lacking was in relation to their capacity to participate. The following section presents findings in relation to the relevant data from each school in isolation, as doing so allows for a thorough examination of context specific constructions resulting from and contributing to the educational paradigm within each school. The impact of the constructions of children on their participation within the individual schools is also made evident. The impact of educators' constructions of children on their practices in relation to both teaching and learning and relationships are discussed in depth in the following chapters. This chapter, however, is concerned not with practice and interactions, but in presenting findings in relation to the beliefs and values within the educational paradigms within each school. The following analysis focuses on the direct links between constructions of children and participation.

St. Seáns

Within St. Seáns children were described most frequently as friendly and open yet constructed within discussion as vulnerable, less able and deviant, with many of the children's characteristics attributed to their disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds.

> I would find that a lot of children's self-esteem is so low and that's why they end up arguing and fighting and tearing up work when they go wrong (6th class teacher/ Principal, St. Seáns).

> I suppose a lot of our concerns can be around behaviour…. I suppose there would be some more extreme behaviour than I would have seen previously [in other schools] (2nd/3rd class teacher, St. Seáns).

> Because sometimes they lack that [security] in their lives, that bit of stability. And they like stability (6th class teacher/ Principal, St. Seáns).

Educators in this school were concerned that the children lacked the capacity to participate and that to do so might even be detrimental to their wellbeing.

> I think sometimes it can be difficult to have huge amounts of class participation because it's very hard to maintain a long… it's just attention span if nothing else (2nd/3rd class teacher, St. Seáns).

> You don't want them to take on more emotional things that they may not need to at the time, when it's participating in something (Principal, St. Seáns).

Thus, a deterministic construction of the children as lacking and vulnerable is evident within these quotes. Such a construction creates a barrier to these children's participation given the resulting focus on provision and protection. As noted previously, educators' priorities in this school centred on issues of safety, security, behaviour, and stability.

St. Regina's

The children in St. Reginas were also described in very positive terms, with 'happy' being the word used most frequently to describe the children. However, once more, during interviews educators predominately constructed the children as vulnerable and less able. However, unlike St. Seáns, in St. Reginas the perceived deficit was attributed to the children's largely migrant status (80% migrant student cohort), which also resulted in constructions of the children as 'other'. In fact, one of the words used most often by educators to describe the children in this school was 'different':

> I think, em, they have needs, [pause], language wise and socially they're, [pause] I think quite different to your average primary school or any primary school I worked in anyway. They're quite different and their parents are quite different (Principal, St. Reginas).

> Lots of them would have English as a second language so language would be a huge difficulty, reading, writing, oral communication like it's, let's say a lot lower than other schools where everyone would be an Irish child (1st class teacher, St. Regina).

As can be seen from the above quotes regarding the children is St. Reginas, the construction of children as 'other' or different is perceived as a deficit with regard their abilities. The children's individual additional funds of knowledge, for example their bilingual abilities and their multi-cultural knowledge, are not acknowledged.

Other common words used by educators to describe the children in St. Regina, such as: 'Nice', 'Gentle', 'Accepting', 'Lovely' and 'Respectful', while positive, suggest a certain passivity in how children are perceived.

> [W]e have a lot of Asians, Indians from India and they are lovely gentle people and the parents are lovely and gentle and very respectful (Principal, St. Reginas).

Even the agentic words used to describe these children, such as 'independent', were used in describing how the children were accepting of their positions/situations, again suggesting a construction of the children as passive:

> I suppose the kids themselves when you take the needs out of it, they're good, like they're happy, they're not [pause], they're very accepting of their [pause], I mean if I was thrown into a country and the language and everything you know you'd imagine that you'd have a complete meltdown but they're very, they're very independent (4th class teacher, St. Reginas).

As in St. Seáns, educators in St. Reginas suggested that participation may not be developmentally appropriate for the students.

> You don't want to give them [too many decisions], especially the smaller children, you don't want to throw it open and have too much, because they're not capable of making too many decisions, you know, themselves, especially when it comes to academic stuff (4th class teacher, St. Reginas).

> I don't see it [participation] as being hugely important in a primary school I suppose because we start with four year olds (Principal, St. Reginas).

The argument in the above quotes, that the children are incapable of contributing to decisions, thus making participation an unsuitable or inappropriate endeavour,

exemplifies the silencing of children through deficient deterministic constructions of children. Thus, as is the case in St. Seáns, predominantly deterministic constructions of children prevail in St. Reginas.

Gaelscoil Áitéigin

Overall, the children in Gaelscoil Áitéigin were constructed as well-behaved and academically able, however, when it came to participation educators were still of the view that contributing to decisions was not developmentally appropriate, highlighting a significant contradiction. The children were constructed as being able in relation to that which the school required of them but lacking in regard to their ability to participate in decisions that affected them. This highlights how educators' view of children is deeply connected to that which is considered appropriate for children/what children need.

The construction of the children in Gaelscoil Áitéigin as academically able, ambitious and hard-working is evident in the following quotes:

> They [the students] are eager to please, they are eager to cooperate. They are enthusiastic to learn... they are ambitious to get on (Principal, Gaelscoil Áitéigin).
>
> They are definitely hard working and dedicated, and driven (6th class teacher, Gaelscoil Áitéigin).

The children in this school are attributed agency, but only in their pursuit of academic scholarship. The ('good') students were described as; 'Eager to cooperate', 'Hard-working', 'Dedicated', 'Driven' and 'Well-behaved'. However, when it came to discussion on the children's capacity to participate, educators viewed the children as incapable and less able. For example, in relation to children participating in school decisions and policy it was stated that:

> I'm not trying to undermine them now or to devalue them in any way, you know a five-year-old, you know? You kind of [pause] I'm not saying that they're not [pause] yet how can they input, you know what I'm saying? (Principal, Gaelscoil Áitéigin).

Here, once more, we see the view that educators are the ones best positioned to make decisions on behalf of children. In conversation during fieldwork one teacher described the children in her class as a lovely group and then evidenced this by saying 'whenever you ask them to do something they just do it straight away quietly' (6th Class teacher, Gaelscoil Áitéigin, Day 4). This suggests a view of the 'good student' as one who follows commands without question and does what is required of them. Such a perspective may view children questioning and challenging, common features of participation, as contrary to 'good' behaviour. Unlike the previous two schools, the children in Gaelscoil Áitéigin were constructed as academically able yet, ironically, still viewed as incapable of meaningful participation. While seen as hard-working and ambitious, the children were viewed as lacking with regard to having perspectives worth considering, or the ability to contribute positively to decisions-making. Thus, ultimately a predominately deterministic construction of children prevailed.

Springrock

Unlike the aforementioned schools (St. Seáns, St. Reginas and Gaelscoil Áitéigin) the principal of Springrock described the children as expert and agentic in all areas.

> They [the students] are very, very talented. Very, very gifted (Principal, Springrock).

In particular, this educator saw children as being active and involved:

> How would I describe the children in the school? [pause] I would say they are sort of uhm, committed and involved and warm and soft and uhm, playful (6th class teacher/Principal, Springrock).

As noted previously this teaching principal placed a significant value on participation and believed that supporting children to participate was a core element of his role. He highlighted the need for children to practice both the art of speaking and of listening in order to participate effectively.

> I'd say all of [the children in this school] are used to being at a kitchen table where people speak. They practice speaking. Because it's hard to hear a child who has had no practice of speaking…If they've never practiced communicating or speaking in the sense that you use there, it may not

> happen. And if you've never practiced listening it may not happen (6th class teacher/Principal, Springrock).

Thus, while recognising that children need to be supported to develop the capacities necessary for participation, this educator's construction of the children was constructivist.

Fairview Educate Together

As in Springrock, the educators in Fairview E.T. also held predominately constructivist constructions of the children, recognising both their evolving capacities and their agency.

> They're very good negotiators. They are really good. They do all sorts of barter or "I'll do this" or "what about we do this" and "if we do less of this, can we do that?" (Principal, Fairview E.T.).

> They are comfortable in their learning. They are comfortable with us. And uhm, I think that's kind of, they are kind of vibrant, I would say, would be the words I would use to describe them (2nd class teacher, Fairview E.T.).

Educators in Fairview E.T. did not see children's level of competence as a barrier to their participation. Rather, educators in this school identified the need to provide guidance and space for children to practice participation. The following extract from the observation diary, and data from an interview, illustrate how educators provided guidance and support to the children within the process of decision-making.

> The children are debating which novel to choose for English. As they do so the teacher rearticulates many of the children's comments in order to clarify the point they are seeking to make. Following the discussion, the children vote on which book to study next (Diary entry, 6th class, Fairview E.T., Day Three).

> We're bombarded by charities looking for money so we say 'ok, we want the children to decide what [charity to fundraise for]' and we tell any company that comes to me, that the children decide what we do. We [the educators] don't decide what we fundraise for. Now we have encouraged them [students] to fundraise for cancer awareness where two of the children lost their parents through cancer, so we said 'look, I think this would be a good thing'. You know maybe steer the children that direction.

> We would often kind of steer them say 'what do you think?' […] But very often if you leave it completely up to the children you might get [pause] they fundraise for dogs and cats and donkeys, but they won't want to fundraise for anything else (Principal, Fairview E.T.).

These extracts illustrate that the children are encouraged to participate and are supported in developing the skills needed to be able to do so, however, the second extract also illustrates how educators can direct the children's choices and use their influence to sway the outcome of these choices, thus highlighting the use of participation to serve adult agendas rather than for children's empowerment. Such steering of children's choices can limit the children's influence. This not only highlights the collaborative nature of participation, but also the increased level of power adults have over children within the process, as well as adults' power in controlling the decision-making arena.

While educators in Fairview E.T. and Springrock recognised children's developing capacities, rather than this limiting children's opportunities to participate, as it did in the other schools, the additional recognition of children as ultimately able and agentic, as well as a high value being placed by educators on participation, resulted in children in these two schools being supported to develop the skills necessary for participation. Ironically it is therefore the children who are most able to participate who enjoy greater opportunities to participate and to further develop their participatory skills, while children viewed as lacking the necessary capacity to participate (as was the case in St. Seáns, St. Reginas and Gaelscoil Áitéigin) were more likely to have significantly fewer opportunities to develop these skills. It is apparent, therefore, that how educators construct children, and from such constructions what educators believe is appropriate for children, and what children are perceived to need, has a significant impact on the opportunities children are afforded by adults to participate within their school lives. In particular, recognition of both children's agency and their developing capacities play an integral role in the facilitation of meaningful participation by educators, as do educators' perspectives on the appropriateness of participation for children. Deterministic constructions of children as lacking capacity on account of their age serve as a key barrier to children's participation within St. Seáns, St.

Reginas and Gaelscoil Áitéigin. As was the case in relation to educators' perspectives regarding children's rights, protection and provision feature dominantly in all educators' constructions of the children, however, once more, only in Springrock and Fairview E.T. was participation also evident in discussion regarding the children.

To conclude this analysis of educators' constructions of children, there are two issues that have been brought to light. Firstly, within schools in which participation was not valued or prioritised educators held a predominantly deterministic construction of children, whilst within the schools in which participation is valued and supported a constructivist construction of children prevailed. Educators who held predominantly constructivist constructions of children saw participation as an integral element of their practice. This finding illustrates that educators' beliefs and values regarding children and participation are intimately linked and influence educators' practice. Secondly, this analysis finds that valuing participation and deterministic constructions of children are not compatible. Educators who held deterministic constructions of children saw participation as a potential threat to that which they sought to achieve – to protect and provide for the children. These educators viewed participation as a peripheral activity that has the potential to be detrimental to effective teaching and learning and ultimately unsuited to primary school-aged children. The following chapter '*Pedagogical Practice and Participation'* provides further insights into the impact of these beliefs and values on educators' practice.

Children's Perspectives

The following section presents an analysis of the findings in relation to children's construction of self, as evidenced through their beliefs and values in relation to students, and their own priorities. Findings of note include the influence of the educational paradigm on children's situated identities and a lack of congruence between educators' and children's priorities.

Children's Constructions of Self

The educational paradigm influences, and is influenced by, educators' constructions of children. So too are children's perspectives in relation to their own role/identity as students influenced by the prevailing paradigm. Two questions asked within the focus groups, which focused on what students should or should not do or be, provided valuable data regarding the children's situated identity and the values they held. The influence of the prevailing educational paradigm on the children's situated identities is evident in the answers to these questions. Overwhelmingly, the children construct students (themselves) as needing to comply with accepted social and academic behavioural norms. Responses to the questions 'children should/should not…' primarily focused on behaviour, in particular social behaviour. Thirty-four out of forty-two (81%) of the older children's responses, and twenty-six out of thirty-six (72%) of the younger children's responses, to these two questions focus on 'acceptable' behaviour (in relation to the social dimension/ not including school work). Responses to the question 'it is important that students…', such as: 'Don't poop in [their] pants'(Younger focus group, St. Reginas), 'Stay in their seats' (Younger focus group, Gaelscoil Áitéigin), 'Do what they're told' (Older focus group, St. Reginas) illustrate the construction of a student as one who must behave in a certain way and, thus, the need for the children to regulate their behaviour. This can also be seen in the responses to the question 'It is important that students do not…' for example; 'Say bad words to the teacher' (Younger focus group, Fairview E.T.) and 'don't be bold' (Younger focus group, St. Reginas). Children's policing of their behaviour to comply with situated expectations illustrates children's role in complying with such expectations. What is of particular interest is the differences that were evident in regard to children's constructions of students as a consequence of their internalizing the particular beliefs, values and practices inherent in the educational paradigm in their own school. For example, the children from Fairview E.T. demonstrate a higher focus on tolerance and respect in their responses:

> **It is important that students:**
> 'Tolerate difference' (Fairview E.T. Older Focus Group)

> ‘Respect each other and be patient with each other’ (Fairview E.T. Older Focus Group)
>
> **In school I can decide:**
> ‘To include people’ (Fairview E.T. Younger Focus Group)

The need to be tolerant is in line with the values and beliefs inherent in the educational paradigm within this school, discussed earlier in this chapter. Children from Gaelscoil Áitéigin, however, indicated a high value on education, thus demonstrating the internalizing of school values particular to Gaelscoil Áitéigin, in this case high academic achievement:

> **It is important that students:**
> ‘appreciate their education’ (Older Focus Group, Gaelsocil Áitéigin)
> ‘recognise that school is a privilege’ (Older Focus Group, Gaelsocil Áitéigin)

The high value placed on participation in Springrock can also be seen in the children’s constructions of students. The following responses suggest the construction of a student as one who is happy and confident in their participation within school life.

> **It is important that students:**
> ‘engage’
> ‘have fun’
> ‘are relaxed and comfortable in their own skin’ (Focus Group, Springrock)

Thus, the reflection of a particular school’s ethos and priorities and the educators’ beliefs and values, within children’s construction of students, illustrates the impact of the prevailing educational paradigm on children’s situated identities. In addition to all of the participating children being conscious of the need to police their behaviour in order to be a ‘good student’, differences in individual school values and ethos were also evident in children’s constructions of the ‘good student’. Children’s participation is thus supported or restricted by their situated identities and children’s constructions of what a ‘good student’ does or does not do.

Children's priorities and values

While educators' priorities concern education and enabling children to realise their potential, the findings revealed that the children were more concerned with the social aspect of school life. As is evident by children's responses to the statements 'what I like most/least about school…', 'in school I would like to decide…' and, 'if I could change one thing about school it would be…', children's responses indicated that they value and prioritise friends, playing, engaging in enjoyable activities and having positive, stress-free relationships. The elements of school that children identified as liking the most centred on friends, playing, breaktime, particular subjects and particular teachers. However, teachers also featured in the elements of school that children liked least, for example:

> **Things I like least about school:**
>
> 'teachers' taking it out on kids' (Gaelscoil Áitéigin, Older Focus Group)
> 'when teachers get angry and shout' (St. Reginas, Younger Focus Group)
> 'The handwork teacher, she can by annoying' (Springrock, Focus Group)

Given the significant influence that teachers have on children's everyday school experiences it is not surprising that they feature both in the 'like most' and 'like least' categories. In particular, the children's focus is on the manner in which the teachers treat the children. Children subjected to 'cross' teachers who shout at them, are the least well positioned to challenge teachers' behaviour, as to do so leaves the child at risk of the teacher's anger. This illustrates the lack of power and agency children have to impact change in relation to an issue that is central to them.

In response to the question 'in school I would like to decide…' children's responses centred on making decisions regarding what to do and when to do it:

> 'when to do certain subjects' (Fairview E.T., Older Focus Group)
> 'what order the lessons are in' (Springrock, Focus Group)
> 'to do other sports if you want' (Gaelscoil Áitéigin, Older Focus Group)
> 'make a new subject – like cooking' (Fairview E.T., Younger Focus Group)
> 'have no homework' (St. Reginas, Younger Focus Group)

These responses illustrate the lack of choice children feel they have within decisions concerning their learning experience, and their desire to have an influence on such decisions. So too did the question 'if I could change something about school it would be ….' reveal children's desire to make choices regarding how to spend their time/what activities to engage in. As evidenced by the subsequent data, children's desire to have access to particular resources (including food) and their desire to not be exposed to bullying and/or disagreeable or threatening teachers was also evident in their responses to this question.

Children's desire to make choices regarding how to spend their time/what activities to engage in:

If I could change something about school it would be to ….

'[Have] one hour of football everyday'; 'Zumba everyday'; 'Art every day, and drama' (Fairview E.T., Younger Focus Group)

'No station teaching'; 'get rid of homework' (St. Regina, Older Focus Group)

'Let kids do homework in school'; 'more reading or drawing time in school' (Gaelscoil Áitéigin, Older Focus Group)

Children's desire to have access to particular resources:

If I could change something about school it would be to….

'[Have] student rooms with couches – chill out rooms' (Fairview E.T., Older Focus Group)

'[I would change] the girls' bathroom' (Springrock, Focus Group)

'[Have] lovely pictures in the corridor' and 'get a bigger playground' (St. Reginas, Younger Focus Group)

'Have/use computers' (St. Regina, Older Focus Group)

'Access to paper' (Gaelscoil Áitéigin, Older Focus Group)

'Turn yard into a cafeteria to go to when you want' (St. Regina, Older Focus Group)

'Cafeteria with sweets and fast-food and a vending Machine' (Fairview E.T., Older Focus Group)

Children's desire to not be exposed to bullying and/or disagreeable or threatening teachers

If I could change something about school it would be ….

'Make teachers be kind'; 'No teacher bullies'; 'No bad teachers' (St. Regina, Younger Focus Group)

'That there are no bullies' (Gaelscoil Áitéigin, Younger Focus Group)

'[I would change] the teachers - so they're not rude'; 'get rid of angry teachers' (St. Regina, Older Focus Group)

Having an element of choice, access to materials, enjoyment, being with friends and an environment that is free from threat are all valued and prioritised by children. A discrepancy between educators' and children's priorities and values is thus evident. The fact that educators' educational-focused priorities take precedence over children's more socially orientated priorities illustrates the unequal power-dynamic between educators and children. As noted previously, adults have the power to determine what children do while in school, when they do it and what materials and resources they can access in doing so, while the children expressed a desire to be able to participate in such decisions. Finally, children's desire to have teachers who do not subject them to negative emotional behaviours, such as shouting, is a key issue in relation to children's priorities and values.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated the interconnected, congruous nature of educators' beliefs and values, which both result from and create a school's overarching educational paradigm and impact on opportunities for children's participation within a school context. As was evident in Gaelscoil Áitéigin, St. Reginas and St. Seáns, a deterministic view of children was found to be consistent with a dominant focus on protection and provision in relation to educators' priorities and a lack of value on participation. In Springrock and Fairview educators' constructivist construction of children was consistent with a value on participation, while provision, protection *and* participation all featured in educators' priorities as

educators. This chapter illustrated that educators' beliefs and values shape cultural norms, expectations and behaviours and indeed children's situated identity. While educators' priorities focus predominantly on children's educational engagement and attainment, children are more concerned with the social interactions in the here and now. In particular, children want to experience a greater amount of agency within a risk-free environment. Children's participation/agency is supported or curtailed not just by educators' beliefs and values, but also by children's situated identities and policing of their own behaviours. The data revealed how children's situated identities are influenced by the prevailing paradigm. Following on from the beliefs and values concerning education, children and participation inherent within a school's educational paradigm, the next chapter presents findings in relation to the pedagogical practices that constitute/emanate from the educational paradigm as determined by educators' beliefs and values, and illuminates the impact of such practices on children's participation.

Chapter Seven: Pedagogical Practice and Participation

This chapter presents the findings both in relation to teaching and learning and the disciplinary aspects of pedagogy, and does so in such a way as to reveal the power-dynamic at play within pedagogical practice and its impact on participation. The themes to emerge from the data in relation to pedagogical practice and participation are as follows; (1) Conceptualising the Curriculum, (2) Power and Pedagogy and (3) Power and Discipline.

Conceptualising the Curriculum

The data revealed that educators' perspectives on, and subsequent relationship to the curriculum had implications for their pedagogical approach. Most educators identified the overloaded nature of the curriculum as one of the most significant challenges facing teachers today.

> [The biggest challenge is the] overloaded curriculum, oh my goodness it's terrifying the amount you have to get through in a day (Principal, St. Reginas).

> I'd say [the biggest challenge is] probably the load on the curriculum. It's a very, very overly, like, the time constraints and the load of things you are expected to do and achieve in the curriculum (6th class teacher, Fairview E.T.).

The continuous introduction of new initiatives, as well as the integration of children with additional learning needs were identified as putting considerable strain on teachers who are already delivering what they feel is an overloaded curriculum. The reality of this was evident while conducting fieldwork. In one school visited the teachers were implementing two different initiatives: 'Food Dudes' and the 'Green Schools – Travel Theme'. As part of the 'Food Dudes' healthy eating initiative the teachers needed to monitor and document what, if any, fruit and vegetables the children had brought in for lunch, while the 'Green Schools – Travel Theme' required that the teachers monitor how the children travelled to school each morning. Some educators argued that schools are all too

often charged with tackling societal issues through new initiatives, such as the healthy eating policy to combat childhood obesity or road safety initiatives. 'Anytime any new initiative comes along they say 'oh the schools will deal with that'' (Principal, Fairview E.T.). Educators suggested that policy makers do not appreciate the reality of what can be achieved within the time constraints teacher face.

> But all these things [initiatives] are labour intensive and you have no labour. So you have to try your best to do it but you couldn't possibly […] I would imagine most people who come up with these ideas have no idea what it's like to be in a school or work in a classroom (6th class teacher/Principal, St. Seáns).

> Every second thing you hear in the news, there'd be some initiative for something and it's just "oh primary children could be taught this" and you're kind of like "well what am I not teaching to be able to teach this"? Because you know, there are only a certain number of hours in the day. You can't, you literally can't teach everything (6th class teacher, Fairview E.T.).

This frustration at the frequent introduction of new initiatives may have a negative impact on teachers' motivation to develop practice that is more participatory in nature, as efforts to promote children's right to be heard can be seen as yet another initiative that will impact negatively on their workload. This could serve as a key influencer in relation to educators' priorities. In particular this can be problematic wherein educators view participation as an activity that sits outside of the curriculum. Such a view is supported by the following quote in which the educator suggests that she does not have time for reading about children's rights:

> [I] don't have time to be sitting down really reading [the UNCRC] but I presume the essence of it permeates down to what's happening on the ground, I would assume (Principal, St. Regina).

A consequence of the overloaded nature of the curriculum and the resulting perceived lack of time was the very fast pace of work in some classrooms visited. For example, in fourth class in St. Reginas the teacher frequently tells the children to hurry up and rewards children who do things quickly. Observation notes note

that '[t]he pace of the work is moving along very quickly' (Diary entry, 4th class, St. Reginas, Day one). Transmissive pedagogy places considerable pressure on educators to deliver specific content within pre-determined units of time, thus it is not surprising that educators whose practice is more aligned with the transmissive mode (as was the case in this school) share this concern. Given that educators feel they are under considerable time pressure and are weary of new initiatives placing further burdens on their time, educators' constructions of participation and the curriculum take on a new significance as they provide a key insight into the beliefs and values that influence the (non)participation culture of the school.

While there was a general consensus with regard to the overloaded nature of the curriculum, as illustrated in the following section, educators held differing constructions of the curriculum. These constructions impacted on educators' relationship to the curriculum and as a consequence influenced their pedagogical approach. Some educators used the term curriculum to denote the traditional core academic subjects of maths, English and Irish, while viewing other subjects such as SPHE (Social, Personal and Health Education) as peripheral to the core curriculum and also more accommodating to the provision of choices for children. 'You have the curriculum but you also have social and personal education' (Principal, St. Regina). 'You are under academic pressure and you are trying to do Irish, English and Maths every day, and you know there's a curriculum to be followed' (1st class teacher, Gaelscoil Áitéigin). Such a product orientated view of the curriculum tended to align with the construction of participation as an activity that sits outside of the core academic work of the school:

> I suppose where the teachers are concerned really, they have a curriculum to teach and they are trying to teach it and maybe the umbrella of SPHE or something like that [children] might have choices in that particular area, but like I suppose, to be fair to the children and the staff, they are fairly overloaded in terms of the academics they are supposed to teach (Principal, Gaelscoil Áitéigin).
>
> I suppose some of the curricular subjects and how we teach them allow [participation], for example Aistear, I don't know if you've been to the Aistear room but they have quite a lot of choice there in how they wish to

> work with a particular topic, that would be one. I suppose otherwise they don't really [have opportunities to participate] (Principal, St. Regina).

In both of the above quotes it is evident that these educators view student participation as something that could be accommodated within some, but not all curriculum areas. Curriculum areas such as SPHE and Aistear can be viewed as outside the 'core' academic areas and as such offer increased opportunities for participation. Such a perspective suggests a view of participation as incompatible with subjects such as maths, Irish and English. Indeed, this may well be the case within transmissive pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning, however, a participatory pedagogical approach incorporates opportunities to participate regardless of the subject area. As noted previously, curriculum demands and a view of participation as an 'external initiative' could serve to prohibit some educators from incorporating participation within the classroom.

Other educators were more flexible in how they engaged with the curriculum in meeting the children's learning needs and curriculum objectives:

> You have to manage it [the curriculum] by being more creative, where you'd say like, you do a Geography lesson but it's included in your oral English. Or like Art, you know, so you kind of have to combine them together. So I suppose within the practicalities of teaching and trying to keep it all linked back to the curriculum you try and give [children] as much as a chance to speak as you can (6th class teacher, Fairview E.T.).

This quote supports the argument previously made that a participatory pedagogical approach supports participation within all subject areas. It also exemplifies a process orientated view of the curriculum, wherein it is seen as a tool which offers a degree of flexibility in the pursuit of learning goals. Another teacher who took a more flexible process orientated approach to the curriculum was the 6th class teaching-principal in Springrock. This teacher viewed the curriculum, not as a body of knowledge/set of skills that needed to be transmitted to the children but as a tool to aid his facilitation of the children's learning, noting that, 'you are using this thing called curriculum in a way that opens up this child because there is no child born to fulfil the primary school curriculum' (6th class teacher/Principal,

Springrock). These two different approaches to the curriculum identified within the data, curriculum as product and curriculum as process, had significant implications for the level of participation afforded the children and reflected a fundamental difference in educators' pedagogical approach. A product-orientated view of the curriculum as a body of knowledge/set of objectives that must be transmitted/achieved resulted in a pedagogical approach which was transmissive in character. A view of the curriculum as a tool to aid or guide teaching and learning (curriculum as process), however, was congruent with a participatory pedagogical approach. The following section builds on the findings concerning educators' construction of, and relationship to the curriculum, presenting data that illuminates the resulting pedagogical practices, and their impact on participation.

Power and Pedagogical Approach

The following discussion explores key pedagogical techniques and practices, as deemed relevant to the facilitation or prevention of participation, which emerged from the data. The findings and analysis reveal two distinct pedagogical modes evident within the participating schools: transmissive pedagogy and participatory pedagogy. This section illustrates the strategies used by educators that align with a participatory pedagogical approach, and in doing so elucidates how such strategies positioned students as partners and are congruent with the facilitation of participation. So too are the ways in which a transmissive pedagogical approach undermines children's participation within a school context made visible. In particular, the power-dynamic within pedagogical techniques is revealed. Understanding the role of power and its use as a mechanism within a school context is essential in understanding not only how barriers and enablers are created but also in creating knowledge that will enable barriers to be challenged and enablers to be further developed. Observations revealed that a key characteristic of the teaching and learning within a more participatory pedagogical approach was the 'sharing' of power while within classrooms that utilised a more transmissive pedagogical approach, children exercised very little power. As argued within the theoretical chapter, within intergenerational institutionalised teacher/student relationships adults always hold the reigns in terms of power, nonetheless the power-dynamic between educators and children within the classrooms varied

significantly from school to school and reflected the wider educational paradigm within the school. The data revealed the following factors as key features of teaching and learning contexts that aligned with participatory pedagogy:

- Children supported to take leadership positions
- Self and peer-assessment of the work
- Co-construction of knowledge (children contributing to choices in relation to work, negotiations occurring, children given information and rationales, interactive/ discursive engagement with material).
- Teachers presenting as non-expert
- Children taking initiative

As is evident from the findings presented in the following discussion these factors enabled children to exercise agency within their classroom environments and served to create opportunities for children's participation.

Children in leadership positions

While only employed by one teacher during observations, positioning the children in leadership positions within the teaching and learning environment was a powerful participatory pedagogical strategy. The 6th class teacher in Springrock positioned the children thus several times throughout each day. The following extracts provides three such examples:

> *(Having come in from their lunch break)* The teacher informs the class that Mark is going to speak to them. Mark goes to the top of the classroom and begins to recount how the class faired the previous week playing a game that they had made up for PE class. He also reminds the children of what the rules of the game are. A few children correct him on a couple of the rules to which Mark responds "Oh, I'm not really sure of the rules so does someone else want to come up and take over from me?" Ciara says yes and goes to the top of the class while Mark sits back down. The teacher looks on but does not interfere. With Ciara now leading the class the children spend several minutes discussing the rules of their game (Diary entry, 6th class, Springrock, Day One).

> (*Irish class*) The teacher allocates a role to each child (customer or shop keeper) before asking Kate to assess each couples' conversation. He then tells the class to find a space with their partner and practice the conversation they previously discussed in Irish. Kate walks around the class listening to and providing feedback to each couple in turn. She stops to listen to a couple standing close to me and when they pause she advises them, saying "try standing facing each other when you speak." They do so and continue their dialogue (Diary entry, 6th class, Springrock, Day Two).
>
> (*Maths class: Having drawn two lines of differing length and colour on the blackboard the teacher asks the children to work in pairs to pen statements about the lines.)* After about ten minutes the teacher asks Sam to ring the bell and check the work. Sam rings the bell with gusto and when the children are all listening she says in a loud, clear and confident voice that she is going to ask each pair to read out their best and most interesting statement. She then calls on each pair to share their chosen statement. Sam comes across with confident authority, and seems to take her role as teacher very seriously (Diary entry, 6th class, Springrock, Day Two).

These extracts provide not only examples of children in positions of leadership within teaching and learning but are also prime examples of participation. In each example the children enjoy space, voice, audience and influence (Lundy, 2007). Furthermore, through their experiences the children are developing the skills and attitudes needed to be heard. Of particular note is the fact that two of the extracts concern subjects other educators identified as being incompatible with participation – maths and Irish. An analysis of the power dynamic within these examples reveals that in empowering the children the educator is not disempowered, his authority is not threatened by the children's empowerment. This is interesting to consider in light of the 'transmissive educators'' fear that they would not be able to teach if the children had more power. '[H]ow is the teacher supposed to control and educate the children if they have more power?' (1st class teacher, St. Reginas). As previously noted, greater equality with regard to the power dynamic between pupils and educators is a central aspect of participatory pedagogy.

Self and Peer-assessment

This strategy was only observed within a couple of classrooms however encouraging and supporting the children to assess their own work, the work of others and the work of the class as a whole served to empower the children and facilitate their participation in their own learning. Some of the following examples also highlight the overlap between self and peer-assessment and children taking a leadership role – this time in assessment:

> The children start reciting the poem a second time. Mat comes into the room and sits down at his table. The teacher approaches him and nudges him gently on the arm saying "let's listen together". They listen to the class and after they finish the teacher turns to Mat, raises his eyebrows and says "Ehh?" Mat nods approvingly and says "Yea, good, especially the last line" (Diary entry, 6th class, Springrock, Day Three).
>
> *(The children are engaged in form-drawing, Laura approaches the teacher and shows him her drawing)*
> Teacher looks at it and says to Laura "What do you think?"
> Laura < "It's ok"
> Teacher < "It's more than ok"
> Laura < "It's more than ok"
> Teacher < "It's a bit more than ok – it's good!"
> Laura (smiling slightly) < "It's good"
> Laura returns to her seat to finish her drawing and at the end of the class she presents it once more to the teacher. The teacher holds it up for all the class to see and says "this is Laura's picture and she says it's a little bit more than ok, and I say it's….."
> Laura < "Spectacular!"
> Teacher < "Spectacular! I'll go with that"
> Laura is smiling broadly.
> Teacher < "Now can you go and put your spectacular name on it?"
> Laura < "I can do that" (her tone of voice is upbeat and confident)
> (Diary entry, 6th class, Springrock, Day Two).
>
> *(Maths: the children are marking each other's maths work as the teacher calls out the answers)* For one of the questions there are two possible correct answers. One answer is more obviously correct and most of the children have this answer. The other answer is less obviously correct. The teacher asks the class if they should accept the second answer. A discussion ensues with the teacher providing points of clarity, in particular regarding

> why the second answer could be considered correct. Together they decide to accept both answers (Diary entry, 6th class, Fairview E.T. Day Three).

It is evident in these extracts that the children exercise power and agency within the pedagogical process through their assessment and decision-making. Peer and self-assessment also impacts on children's identity as confident and competent learners playing an active role in their own and others' learning. Once more the skills and attitudes needed to participate effectively are fostered through this strategy. The children learn that what they think matters, that it is good to voice their perspectives, they practice articulating their perspectives and listening to the perspectives of others, and they learn that their perspectives have the power to influence.

The Co-construction of knowledge

The co-construction of knowledge was another feature of a participatory pedagogical approach that empowered the children within their own learning. While the educators may have had predetermined learning goals, they provided space for the children to construct knowledge, and guided them within the process. This differs from teachers simply asking children questions about material that has been presented, as the children exercise agency in determining the direction of the learning and/or in the construction of knowledge.

> The teacher has been teaching the children about schools in times past and has arranged for her grandmother to come in to speak to the children about her time in school. The children are preparing for the visit. The teacher asks the children to decide on five questions to ask her grandmother. She guides the discussion and the children decide on four questions. The teacher writes the questions on the whiteboard and asks the children to take them down in their copy books (Diary entry, 2nd class, Fairview E.T., Day One).

> *(The class are engaged in solving problems from the text book)*. The teacher asks the class "has anyone figured out how to do number eight? It's a bit tricky". No one has, so the teacher says "I'll give two points to anyone who can figure it out", and then admits to the children that he is also having difficulty figuring it out. Tara suggests a solution and the teacher replies that he was also thinking along those lines but that it's a very complicated

> method and he thinks there must be a simpler way. Tom suggests another way which, while not correct, helps the teacher to realise a correct simpler way. He acknowledges this and gives Tom the two points for helping them to solve the problem (Diary entry, 6th class, Fairview E.T. Day Four).

> The children have been asked to create and share statements regarding two lines of contrasting colour and length on the board. During the discussion that ensues the teacher sometimes clarifies what the children say and occasionally asks probing questions, however, he does not tell them anything about the lines. The teacher guides the discussion so that the children make connections between their statements and their knowledge on fractions (Diary entry, 6th class, Springrock, Day One).

While these observational extracts provide very overt examples of knowledge being co-constructed, the two previous strategies - children in leadership and self/peer-assessment - can also be recognised as facilitating the co-construction of knowledge. In each strategy the children are actively participating and collaborating within the pedagogical process. The children are afforded agency in this manner. Other practices which were observed that contributed to the co-construction of knowledge within the teaching and learning included: children contributing to choices in relation to the work, negotiations occurring, children being given information and rationales for requests and decisions, and interactive/ discursive engagement with material. These practices were only evident within the pedagogical process in Springrock and Fairview E.T.

Teacher as a non-expert

As can be gleaned from the above extracts, a common feature of the co-construction of knowledge within the classroom is the positioning of the teacher as non-expert. Their role is as a facilitator and guide to the learning process, a role that does not necessitate that they have all the answers. Educators whose approach to teaching and learning encompassed a participatory pedagogical approach frequently acknowledged that they did not know all the answers, or demonstrated their lack of knowledge by looking up answers with the children.

> A child asks the teacher what the euro is worth in relation to the Lei [Romanian unit of currency]. The teacher responds “I haven’t a clue, let’s

> check online" and together they Google it to find out (Diary entry, 6th class, Fairview E.T. Day Four).
>
> The children are working quietly constructing an essay about ancient Irish monasteries. Anne approaches the teacher and asks him a question (I cannot hear what they say). The teacher takes a book from a shelf and together they look through it stopping at a page and discussing what they read. Anne then takes a dictionary from the shelf and once more together they read something from it and then continue their discussion. Anne then returns to her seat and resumes her writing (Diary entry, 6th class, Springrock, Day 1).

In Fairview E.T. the 6th class teacher notes, when interviewed, that he is open to children questioning what he says because his aim is to teach children to learn rather than to teach them a body of knowledge. He believes that presenting as a non-expert supports this approach and makes it easier for the children to approach him:

> We don't try to be 'all-knowing' because we are trying to, I suppose, model that knowledge is changing a small bit in that, you know, it's not a just a body of knowledge that you attain and that's you then. You're like this vessel that has all this information that you can tap in to. Rather it's more of a process so, you learn how to learn, almost. (6th Class Teacher, Fairview E.T.)

Educators positioning themselves as non-experts who do not necessarily have all the answers supports the co-construction of knowledge, it empowers children, and it challenges traditional school hierarchy, contributing to a more equal power-dynamic.

Children taking initiative

Examples of the children being enabled to exercise initiative were only observed within the older classrooms in Fairview E.T. and Springrock. As is evident from the following observational extracts, the examples of initiative observed tended to be of a minor nature:

> During a maths lesson, as the teacher writes math problems on the white board a child goes up to the board and writes something on the corner of it before returning to his seat. I can't read what he wrote – it's too small. The

> teacher does not comment on the child's actions but continues to write on the board himself (Diary entry, 6th Class, Fairview E.T. Day Three).

> Tilly chooses a very light-coloured crayon. The teacher has already advised the children not to choose yellow or any other pale colours as it will be too hard to see against the white paper. He notices Tilly's choice and says 'you can try it but you might struggle with it'. Tilly smiles and returns to her seat with the light-coloured crayon (Diary entry, 6th class, Springrock, Day Three).

While minor in nature, through these examples we can see power sharing between adults and children. In relinquishing some of their control of the situation, the educators enable the children to enact agency. Within St. Seáns, St. Reginas and Gaelscoil Áitéigin in the few instances that children were observed demonstrating initiative they were promptly curbed by the educator – as evidenced in the following two extracts:

> One of the boys hands out the maths text books. Adam opens his and is looking at a page. After a moment or two when all the books have been handed out the teacher says: "Does everyone have their book?" She looks around and spots Adam reading his and says in a loud and very stern tone of voice: "Adam! Did I ask you to open your book? Close it now and everyone look up at me" (Diary entry, 2nd/3rd class, St. Seán, Day One).

> (*P.E. class – in the school hall*) The children are playing a game which involves running around and picking up coloured plastic saucers. The team with the most saucers at the end will win. The teacher blows the whistle to indicate the end of the game and the children return to the wall. One child begins to count the saucers aloud pointing to them as she walks towards the wall. The teacher calls out "Excuse me! Did I ask you to start counting?" She sounds annoyed. The child ceases counting and returns promptly to the wall (Diary entry, 4th class, St. Reginas, Day One).

The overall scarcity of examples of children demonstrating initiative illustrates that it is adults who control and determine what children do, when they do it, and in what why they do it, within the classroom. The fact that children in Springrock and Fairview E.T. on occasion use their initiative, and that this is not met with resistance, speaks to educators' valuing of children's perspectives and agency. So too does it demonstrate children's desire to exercise agency. As noted previously

children expressed a desire to exercise more agency in making and contributing to decisions within their school lives. The power 'sharing' between educators and children evident in children using initiative and in educators' responding positively to such instances aligns with the more equal power-dynamic underpinning participatory pedagogy. Educators responding negatively to children's initiative corresponds with beliefs regarding the need to control the context in order to enable teaching and learning to occur, as well as deterministic constructions of children. As such, a punitive response to children's initiative aligns with a transmissive pedagogical approach.

Transmissive Mode

While within Springrock and Fairview E.T, there were many examples of practice that aligned with a participatory pedagogical approach, within the remaining three schools, St. Seáns, St. Reginas and Gaelscoil Áitéigin, few if any such examples were observed. The format of lessons in these schools followed a more traditional didactic approach whereby the teacher relayed information, tested the children on their understanding of this information, and then the children engaged in written exercises based on this knowledge. Knowledge is not co-constructed through such an approach. This differed from participatory modes of teaching wherein the teacher facilitated a discussion or an activity on a topic that resulted in the co-construction of knowledge, following which the children engaged in written exercises based on the knowledge constructed. Activities such as art, station teaching and physical education sat outside these typical lesson-based formats. Observations within St. Seáns, St. Reginas and Gaelscoil Áitéigin revealed few to no examples of children taking the lead within the teaching and learning, and any instances that were observed were superficial. For example, in one class (2nd/ 3rd class, St. Seáns) the teacher led a quiz game in which the child who answered a question correctly had the power to pick the next child to be questioned. The children seemed to take great delight in standing at the top of the classroom and picking someone from all the children eagerly waving their hands in the air in the hopes of being picked. No examples of children self or peer-assessing their work were observed. The teachers performed this task, thus the 'power' to evaluate work remained firmly with the educators. While pedagogical practices that encompass

a greater level of power sharing within Springrock and Fairview E.T. supported children's initiative, in St. Seáns, St. Reginas and Gaelscoil Áitéigin, the teaching and learning was predicated on the educators maintaining control. Any instances of initiative demonstrated by the children were discouraged in order to maintain the status quo. A key characteristic of teaching and learning within these three schools was that the children had significantly fewer opportunities to exercise power than children in classrooms were a participatory approach was observed. As such, the pedagogical practices observed, and indeed those that that were conspicuous in their absence within St. Seáns, St. Reginas and Gaelscoil Áitéigin, indicate a predominantly transmissive pedagogical mode within these three schools.

Power and Discipline

There were two aspects to discipline observed within this study: maintaining classroom order (responding to infractions and conflict) and maintaining the children's focus on the work, both of which concern influencing and directing the children's behaviour. This study found that issues of discipline were a significant feature of interactions within many classrooms. In a reflective note written on the evening of the first day spent observing in the very first school I wrote: 'It's difficult not to focus my observations on discipline and maintaining classroom order because the whole day seems to centre around this' (reflections from 14/4/15 on that day's observation notes). As the research progressed and my understanding of the issues developed, I came to see the relevance of discipline to participation, given its centrality to children's everyday lived experiences and the inextricably interwoven nature of discipline and power. Millei and Raby (2010) describes classroom discipline as 'a technology of the school to deliver social training and to regulate the student population' (p.28). While the nature of educator/student relationships, in particular the level of respect shown to the child had a bearing on approaches to discipline, findings from this study found a relationship between the dominant pedagogical mode (participatory/transmissive) and children's motivation to focus on their work and comply with classroom rules and expected norms of behaviour. In contexts where participatory pedagogical practices prevailed educators used strategies that encouraged intrinsic motivation, while in

transmissive pedagogical contexts educators were more likely to use techniques and strategies that resulted in the children being extrinsically motivated to comply. Furthermore, the level of social control and indeed resistance was significantly higher in transmissive pedagogical contexts, while in participatory pedagogical contexts a more equal power-dynamic existed between educators and children and very few instances of children's resistance were observed.

The findings from the observation data relating to discipline are presented below in Table 6 (*Approaches to eliciting compliance)* and categorised according to the manner in which they elicit children's compliance.

Table 6. Approaches to eliciting compliance

	Practice elements observed which promotes intrinsic motivation	**Practice elements observed which promotes extrinsic motivation**
Maintaining Children's Focus	• Teachers work to inspire and interest the children in order to maintain classroom order and focus • Reward/punishment system used infrequently	• Teachers work to maintain children's focus and classroom order by exercising power often using shame and sarcasm to maintain order and focus • Reward/punishment system frequently used
Maintaining Classroom Order	• Reward/punishment system used infrequently • Punitive responses infrequent if used at all • Children provided with information and rationale for decisions/requests • Collaborative approach to conflict resolution • Meaningful collaborative approach to rules	• Reward/punishment system used frequently • Punitive response to infractions the norm (use of shame and sarcasm) • Lack of information/rationale for educators' decisions/requests • Teacher resolves conflict • Tokenistic collaborative approach to rules

Given that an orderly classroom supports children to focus on their work, there is an overlap between these two factors, however, it is useful to differentiate these

two areas given educators' use of control in one instance to enable learning and in the other to achieve social control.

In most classrooms where a transmissive pedagogical approach was evident teachers tended to rely more heavily on extrinsic motivation as the basis for compliance through punitive measures. In classrooms where participatory pedagogy was more evident educators harnessed children's intrinsic motivation through other means, in particular by inspiring the children to act in particular ways and maintaining their focus by inspiring the children and creating interest in the work.

Maintaining Classroom Order

As noted in Table 6, the following factors concerning the theme 'maintaining classroom order' were evident in the data and are presented below:

- Approach to developing and maintaining classroom rules
- Reward/punishment system
- Responses to infractions
- Resolving conflict
- Providing information/rationale for decisions/requests

Approach to developing and maintaining classroom rules

Within interviews several educators identified children's involvement in the creation of classroom rules as a participatory event. However, as can be seen from the data below this collaboration was often tokenistic and served as a tool for discipline. A teacher in St. Seáns indicated that developing rules collaboratively, and then having the children sign the rules allowed her to remind the children that they signed the *Class Rules' Contract* and that this was effective in promoting the children's compliance: 'I would have gotten them to sign a contract … [changing tone of voice to indicate speaking to the class] "and these are our golden rules, we've all signed it". And it is good to remind them, "oh but you signed that'" (2nd class teacher, St. Seáns). While this teacher felt that the children had ownership of the rules because they participated in their development her emphasis was on reminding the children that they had agreed to these rules by signing them and so

they had to comply, thus using power-sharing as a form of control. She would tell the children that "that's very important when you sign your name to something" (2nd class teacher, St. Seáns). Another educator's focus in developing the rules in collaboration with the children was on having the children identify what the rules should be, based on what was expected of the children: 'I asked them what we expect in school' (1st class teacher, St. Reginas). Here we see that children are asked to identify that which is expected of them within the classroom context as opposed to a truly participatory construction of classroom rules that incorporates the children's beliefs and values. This contrasts with educators in Fairview E.T. and Springrock wherein the focus of the collaboration was to encourage the children to think about what was important to them: 'I had no active part in it. I just said "so we're going to be here together for the year. What would you like to happen?" [...] So, they, kind of, set out the standards of the year, what they want the classroom to be like.' (2nd class teacher, Fairview E.T.). Like the teachers in Fairview E.T., the principal in Springrock believed that to ensure the children have ownership of the rules requires the children to understand that, like the rules of a game, class rules aim to facilitate the children to achieve what they themselves want. Seeing learning as a creative deed that belonged to the children, this educator sought to establish the view to the children that the rules were theirs not the institution's: 'So, if the activity is already theirs and the creative deed is theirs … then the rules are to facilitate that. Well, then the ownership of the rules is an awful lot closer. It's not the institution'. (6th class teacher/Principal, Springrock). Thus, a fundamental difference can be seen in educators' perspectives in relation to the establishment and enforcement of classroom rules. While both approaches, through the children's participation in their development, seek to promote the children's ownership (and thus compliance) of the rules, one does so in a tokenistic manner, while the other does so in a more meaningful and authentic way. None the less, ultimately the rules are made for the institution to work and the role of the institution is to educate the students in line with the national curriculum. To borrow from one teacher's analogy, what if the children are so busy devising the rules of chess, they do not stop to realise that they would rather be playing a different game altogether? This highlights the tensions inherent in balancing children's interests and institutional educational goals within a participatory approach in a school

context. So too does children's situated identity and constructions of the 'good' student impact on children's choices and perspectives in relation to classroom rules. Data from the focus groups revealed children's desire to have teachers who are kind, and who do not get cross or shout, yet in no school were there rules concerning teachers' behaviour. As such beliefs and values inherent within the prevailing educational paradigm influence children's perspectives and voices in relation to class rules and who they relate to. In particular, the belief that it is children, and not adults, whose behaviour must be policed and modified within the classroom. Thus, while the data revealed varying degrees of children's participation within the creation of school rules, so do does this data reveal participation being utilized as a technique for maintaining control.

Reward/Punishment system

Each school used reward/punishment systems such as a star system, red/yellow card system, and a sanction system, to control the children's behaviour. In classrooms in which participatory pedagogical techniques were most prevalent, the system was used rarely, if at all, during the observation period. However, in classrooms in which transmissive pedagogical techniques were most evident, reward/punishment systems were used very frequently throughout the day. The points system was one such system, and was used most frequently for rewarding desired behaviour, however, as can be seen from the following extract it was also utilised in a roundabout way for punishing the children:

> Teacher < Why is there still noise coming from the green table? I'm going to have to give points to all the other tables
> The teacher adds a point to each of the other groups. (Diary entry, 4th class, St. Reginas, Day One)

Of all schools, St. Seáns, St. Reginas and Gaelscoil Áitéigin utilised a punishment/reward system the most frequently, while in Fairview E.T. and Springrock such a system was observed being used very infrequently, if at all. These reward/punishment systems serve to promote children's extrinsic motivation both in relation to maintaining their focus on the work and in relation to adhering to the rules and the expected norms of behaviour. In contexts in which

they were more frequently utilised, educators sought to maintain a high level of control and a more traditional hierarchical power-dynamic prevailed. This was in keeping with the beliefs and values identified within the overarching educational paradigm within these contexts, in particular the beliefs and values that underpin the view that educators must maintain control in order for effective teaching and learning to take place.

Educators' responses to infractions

In addition to the use of reward/punishment systems of control, educators responded to the children's infractions/resistance in a variety of ways that, once more, reflected core beliefs and values inherent within the educational paradigm. 'Getting cross' or even the threat of the teacher being cross was a powerful technique used by some educators to control children's behaviour. The following quote highlights normative assumptions about the use of such techniques:

> I do have to get cross every now and then but that's normal too […] the children have gotten to know me. They know when I get cross; they know when I'm happy (1st class teacher, Gaelscoil Áitéigin).

The use of intimidating verbal reprimands (or 'giving out') was a key tool used by certain teachers to control the children's behaviour and served to reinforce children's subordinate status. This approach was only evident in classrooms where extrinsic motivation dominated, a transmissive approach was taken to teaching and learning, and where mutual respect was not a feature of teacher/pupil relationships. Shame and sarcasm were often core aspects of 'giving out'. Shame is inherent in the experience of being reprimanded publicly and was an extremely powerful mechanism used by some educators to maintain control. Many children were observed blushing when being chastised, in particular when sarcasm was also used by the teacher within the 'telling-off'. While some teachers always treated the children with the upmost of respect and, therefore, never used such methods of behaviour modification, others frequently employed such tactics and thus, constantly reinforced a very unequal power-dynamic between adults and children. The following are examples of educators using shame to control children's behaviour:

Seán often seems distracted and fiddles with his possessions. He is frequently reprimanded by the teacher. Twice, while reprimanding him, she loudly asks the children who sit next to him, if Seán is annoying them, and if they wanted to sit somewhere else instead, before glaring at Seán. On both occasions Seán blushes when his classmates are asked if Seán was bothering them (Diary entry, 1st class, Gaelscoil Áitéigin, Day Two).

The teacher says to a child in a sarcastic tone of voice: "Well Joe, what did Mum say? Was she happy you had extra homework?". She then stares at him sternly for several seconds while the other children look on. Joe begins to blush (Diary entry, 2nd/3rd class teacher, St. Seán, Day one).

The following extracts, documented in relation to the same child/issue over two days, demonstrate very clearly the uneven power-dynamic between the teacher and the children, within the use of shame in silencing children.

9:20am Monday
The teacher announces that Tina now has glasses to see the board. She asks if any of the other children have difficulty seeing the board and if anyone needs to sit up at the front. Tina looks up when she hears her name mentioned but does not speak (Diary entry, 6th class Gaelscoil Áitéigin, Day Four).

9:25am Monday
The teacher calls out the children's names and points at specific seats. The children go and sit in the new seats. The teacher counts down from ten to hurry them up. There is much commotion and dropping of books but no talking as the children set up in their new work stations. Tina and the teacher are speaking. I can't hear all of what Tina says but I get the impression that she is concerned that she won't be able to see the board from her new seat. The teacher tells her that her new glasses will sort that out. The teacher sounds annoyed with Tina and I hear her say "why do you think I was checking with you earlier about your glasses?". Tina settles in her new seat (Diary entry, 6th class, Gaelscoil Áitéigin, Day Four).

9:10am Tuesday
Teacher < Tina "can you see the board?"
Tina < "I can't see it at all"
Teacher (sounding annoyed) < "That's the reason I asked you yesterday. You'll have to just listen."
The teacher does not move Tina closer to the board. The children are instructed to write something down from the board.
Tina < Teacher "I can't see it."
Teacher < Tina "You'll have to move so."
Tina < "where will I go?"

> Teacher < Tina (in a sarcastic tone of voice) "Somewhere where you can see the board".
> Tina blushes and moves to a seat closer to the board
> (Diary entry, 6th class Gaelscoil Áitéigin, Day Five).

These three extracts, taken over two days illustrate how an assumption was made about a child, in this case in her being able to see the board now that she has new glasses, the child's concerns were not considered, and when it finally became clear that the child could not see the board the teacher reacted negatively to the child in a manner that suggested that the child was somehow at fault for the situation. The child was not given a space to voice her perspective (first extract), when she did voice her concern it was not considered (second extract) and then finally when the teacher is forced to hear the child, the child suffers a negative response from the teacher and is publicly shamed. A key feature of these interactions is the lack of respect shown to Tina by her teacher and serves as an example of the disrespect shown by this teacher to the children on a daily basis. Such disrespect silences children and reinforces their subordinate positioning as 'less than' and as such shapes children's situated identities. Observations documented several instances wherein children did not voice objections when treated unfairly and shamed. The following extract illustrates one such instance:

> The teacher steps out of the room for a couple of minutes. While she is gone a boy who was out of the room, having his photograph taken by the school photographer, arrives back to the room and sits at his desk. A second or two later the teacher returns. The boy is looking around at what the other children are doing. He looks unsure. The teacher looks at the boy and asks him in a stern tone of voice what he is doing sitting at his desk without any books open. The boy holds up his hands and says "I don't know what to do". The teacher then gives out to him saying that it is not ok to just sit there doing nothing and that he needs to find out from the other children what they are doing and get on with it. The teacher's tone of voice is stern and she sounds annoyed. The boy looks at her with an open mouth, blushing, and a worried expression on his face, but he does not defend himself by telling her that he had only just returned to the classroom a moment before her (Diary entry, 6th Class, Gaelscoil Áitéigin, Day Four).

As can be seen from the above extracts, sarcasm and being publicly 'given-out to' was a common feature of shaming techniques used to control the children's

behaviour, including to silence them. As noted previously, children expressed significant dissatisfaction with teachers who 'gave out' to them in such a manner.

Teachers who maintained more positive, respectful relationships with the children were never observed using shame as a disciplinary tool, but rather, as evident in the following quote, addressed children's unwanted behaviour discreetly:

> Two girls are drawing while they should be listening as children ask questions in Irish. The teacher approaches them calmly and whispers something to them. The girls stop colouring and begin listening to the child who is speaking (Diary entry, 6th class, Springrock, Day One).

This approach did not publicly shame or embarrass the children into compliance and submission. Respectful unemotional responses to infractions such as this were a feature of positive teacher/pupil relationships and were most evident within classrooms where a participatory pedagogical approach was observable. While respectful approaches to moderating children's behaviour was evident within *all* participatory pedagogical classrooms, a deeply respectful approach was also evident in one transmissive pedagogical context - 6th class, St. Seáns. The educator in this class held a deterministic view of the children and took a transmissive pedagogical approach, however, respect for the child served as the foundation to her relationships, and as such, had a significant impact on her approach to issues of discipline. Given the differences in relation to beliefs and values regarding children and education within the two pedagogically differing contexts this points to the role of respect as a key factor in relation to approaches to discipline. The role of respect in relationships between educators and children is discussed in detail in the following findings chapter.

As noted, within classrooms in which a participatory pedagogical approach was evident a more respectful, non-punitive approach was predominantly utilised in response to infractions, however, as can be seen from the third extract, punishments did occur on occasion:

> A female child is chewing gum. The teacher gestures to her to take it out and put it in the bin. He smiles as he gestures (Diary entry, 6th class, Springrock, Day Three).
>
> The teacher asks a question and a boy blurts out the answer without being called upon. The teacher looks at him with a surprised but pleasant facial expression and then calls on a child who had their hand up to answer the question (Diary entry, 2nd class, Fairview E.T., Day Two).
>
> During the break several of the children were playing with their tin whistles. It is very loud and the children are not all playing them in unison. The teacher asks the children to stop playing and put their whistles away. A couple of children continue to play so the teacher says "Now, the next person who blows their whistle gets a sanction" After a brief pause a child blows. The teacher looks at him and tells him that he is getting a written warning. His tone of voice is calm and matter-of-fact (Diary entry, 6th class, Fairview E.T., Day Three).

While in the third extract a punitive response ensued, the manner in which this transpires is calm and respectful and without the teacher 'getting cross'. Thus, while a punitive consequence results, the dignity of the child is not undermined as the child is treated with respect.

As noted, within participatory pedagogical contexts educators demonstrated respect to the children at all times and were not observed 'getting cross' with the children, however, within transmissive contexts only one educator (6th class, St. Seáns) could be categorised thus. The respectful and non-emotional approach to infractions and non-compliance within participatory pedagogical contexts is congruent with the beliefs and values regarding children, education and participation, inherent within the overarching educational paradigms in these schools, and the resulting power-dynamic within situated practices and interactions. Disrespectful practices in relation to issues of discipline serve to reinforce more unequal power-dynamics and traditional hierarchical structures which serve as barriers to participation both in relation to the spaces and the people that result. The lack of power sharing evident in transmissive teaching and learning contexts was also evident in educators' responses to infractions within these contexts, although the level of respect towards children, and the quality of

teacher/pupil relationships varied and this impacted on educators' approaches to discipline.

Conflict resolution

Not only was the approach to discipline found to impact on the levels of participation afforded the children but the level of participation afforded the children had an impact on the level of discipline required. A lack of discipline issues was evident during my time observing in both Springrock and Fairview E.T. The principal in Fairview E.T. attributed the positive behaviour in the school to the fact that the children were actively involved in every aspect of the rules including resolving any breaches in collaboration with the staff, in addition to the prioritising and fostering of positive relationships within the school. As illustrated in the following quotes, educators in this school approached conflict and unwanted behaviour by engaging in dialogue with the children to resolve any issues collaboratively.

> What I usually do is, I'll try to very calmly listen to both sides. It's rarely clear-cut. It's very, very rare that there's one villain and one victim. It's usually more complicated. So I'll usually listen to them together, I'll listen to them separately, I'll ask who else heard it, and I'll try to reason it out. Talk to them." (2nd class teacher, Fairview E.T.).

> We don't really have discipline problems, because the children are involved. The same with their discipline as well. Very often if there's an issue with discipline and if there's children that have been involved in an argument or a fight. The first thing I would do, if they were calm enough, is say 'would you like to just go over there and discuss it and come back to me when you're finished'. They would come in here then and they would have the discussion, they would say well 'I did this, and she did that and we were both wrong. We both should take the wrath for this' and they very often come up with the solution to the problem. Which is much better than me saying 'well you're in detention, and you did this and you're not in detention because you didn't' (Principal, Fairview E.T.).

This school also used tools such as a 'problem solving frog' (see images below) to support children to develop conflict resolution skills and encouraged the children to resolve conflicts independently of the teacher's input.

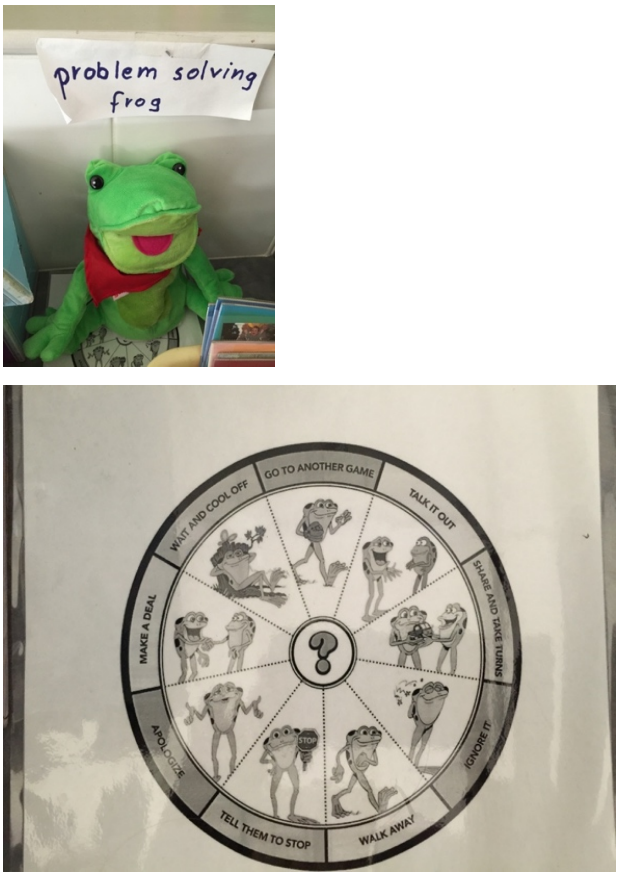


Figure 9. The 'Problem Solving Frog' - used to support children to resolve conflict

A collaborative approach to conflict resolution provides a valuable opportunity to empower children and facilitate their participation. Perhaps unsurprisingly, in classrooms where educators used participatory pedagogical approaches, both in regard to teaching and learning *and* discipline, educators endeavoured to resolve issues using a conflict resolution approach. In the two schools (Springrock and Fairview E.T.) where participation was identified as being central to the school ethos, and the teachers noted that the children were supported to engage in conflict resolution, no instances of conflict between children was observed during the fieldwork period. So too was the level of conflict between children and their teachers (infractions) extremely low in these two schools. In schools and classrooms with more traditional hierarchies and less equal power-dynamics between educators and children, conflict between children was more evident and was swiftly resolved by the teacher with children being, for the most part, silenced within the process. This is evidenced in the following extracts:

> *(The teacher is checking the children's homework individually while the class colour in a picture)*. Two boys seem to be arguing over colouring pencils. The teacher spots them and asks "What's wrong with you boys?". One of the boys starts to explain the problem, but the teacher interrupts him telling them that they have plenty pencils. The children resume their colouring with both of them looking annoyed (Diary entry, 2nd/3rd class, St. Seán, Day Two).

> The children are entering the classroom first thing in the morning. The teacher notices that a child is looking sad and asks him what the matter is. He responds saying that Tim was calling him a name. The teacher looks at Tim and says loudly and sternly 'Stop!' (Diary entry, 4th class, St. Regina, Day Two).

The above extracts exemplify how issues are resolved very quickly by the teachers. No time is given to engage in a process of conflict resolution. Such a process requires that each child concerned voice their perspectives on the issue in question and then together identify a mutually agreeable solution to resolve the issue. This can be a lengthy process and, as already noted, time is a valuable commodity, particularly within a transmissive context in which a curriculum-as-product model prevails. Maintaining control in order to transmit as much of the curriculum content as possible is the educators' priority, not enabling or facilitating the children's participation as is the case in participatory pedagogical contexts. The power sharing that is characteristic of participatory pedagogical contexts is evident in educators' approach to supporting children to resolve conflict, while the lack of power sharing in transmissive pedagogical contexts is once more a feature of such educators' approaches to issues of discipline. Engaging in conflict resolution supports children to develop and practice the skills needed to participate effectively, whilst also contributing to children's self-identification as an active agent whose perspectives carry value. Supporting and enabling children to engage in conflict resolution contributes to the creation of spaces that and people who are conducive to participation.

Sharing/withholding Information

Withholding information was another technique used to control the children's behaviour. The provision of information (Article 13, UNCRC, 1989) is an integral

component of children's right to participate (Lundy, 2007). The withholding of information can create barriers to children exercising their right to be heard. As can be seen from the following extract, ignoring children's requests for knowledge, or not answering the child with appropriate honesty, can serve to silence a child into submission:

> *(The children are learning a song in preparation for their first communion ceremony)* A teacher comes into the classroom and names nine children to go somewhere with her. Mat (who was not chosen) asks her several times where they are going but she does not acknowledge his questions and leaves with the nine children. Mat then approaches his own teacher and asks her where the children have gone. She tells him that she does not know (Diary entry, 2nd/3rd class, St. Seán, Day Two).

By withholding information, the teacher controls what is permitted to be discussed, while the child's subordinate positioning and the impact of this on the child's situated identity are reinforced, thus, limiting any future acts of resistance. Conversely, in classrooms where intrinsic motivation was promoted educators provided information in order to influence the children's behaviour. This approach is fundamentally more respectful and empowering of children and consistent with children's rights. The following extracts are examples of educators providing information which aimed to influence the children's behaviour:

> The noise level is raising as the children are writing. The teacher rings the bell and says "there are two types of chat going on. One type related to the work can be quite helpful while the other type is not". The noise level decreases significantly (Diary entry, 6th class, Springrock, Day Three).

> One of the children asks the teacher if they have to go out in the yard [it's raining softly]. The teacher responds "Do you not want to go out today? I'm afraid you have to because I've no one to cover ye [in the classroom during break]." (Diary entry, 5th/6th class, St. Seán, Day Three).

In these examples, the children are provided with information that contributes to their understanding of the educator's perspective and reasoning in relation to the issues in question. This provides a space for children to enter into dialogue with the educator should they disagree, or, in consideration of the information provided to comply with the behaviour implicitly requested, and thus become intrinsically

motivated to comply. Another technique used in the promotion of intrinsic motivation employed by several educators was providing a rationale for their decisions and requests:

> The children are engaged in free-hand Celtic form-drawing. One of the children is using a ruler. The teacher spots him and says "Did I see a ruler? The monks would turn in their graves!" He then looks at the child who was using the ruler and shakes his head while smiling before explaining that the purpose of this exercise is to train their eyes to gauge distance which is why it is not ok to use a ruler (Diary entry, 5th/6th class, Springrock, Day Two).
>
> A boy is standing up at his seat. The teacher says "will you please sit down. The children behind you can't see the board when you stand" (Diary entry, 2nd class, Fairview E.T., Day One).
>
> A child asks the teacher if they can play their tin whistles during indoor break time. The teacher replies "no way, because the person on corridor duty today is me and I couldn't bear the noise" (Diary entry, 6th class, Fairview E.T., Day Five).

Once more this approach is fundamentally respectful. It opens up a space for dialogue should the children have any issue with the request, and empowers children to make decisions rather than having to comply with the will of the teacher without any legitimate opportunity to resist. This creates a more equal student/educator power-dynamic. Thus, providing information and/or a rationale to the children serves to challenge hierarchical power structures, provides a legitimate space for resistance and promotes children's intrinsic motivation. Conversely, withholding information and not providing any rationale for requests reinforces a more unequal power-dynamic, it denies children entry to the decision-making arena, and it reinforces children's internalisation of their subordinate position, a position which requires them to comply without question.

Maintaining the children's focus

The prevailing pedagogical mode had a significant impact on the children's level of focus and engagement in school work. A high level of engagement was evident in all participatory pedagogical classrooms. The (inter)active participatory nature

of this pedagogical approach undoubtedly contributes to the high level of engagement found within these contexts. Within transmissive pedagogical contexts varying levels of engagement were evident, from high levels of engagement observed in St. Reginas and 1st class in Gaelscoil Áitéigin, to low levels observed in St. Seáns and in 6th class in Gaelscoil Áitéigin. The variety in the children's level of engagement within these predominantly transmissive contexts could be attributed to a range of factors including the level of control exerted by educators and individual teaching style. A discussion on the impact of pedagogical approach on children's level of engagement would be of use where there a neo-liberal, performative agenda underpinning the focus of this study - which there is not. However, what *is* of interest is the relationship between educators' pedagogical approach and opportunities for children's right to participate within a school context. In particular, educators' power sharing practices are key to understanding the co-specification of people and spaces that are conducive to participation. It is, therefore, the techniques that educators use to maintain the children's focus that are of interest, not the resulting level of engagement achieved. Strategies that strive to elicit intrinsic motivation are inherently more conducive to participation given their more egalitarian nature. Such strategies do not rely on overt control, reward systems and punitive practices, but rather seek to empower children within the pedagogical process. Inspiring children to do their best is one such example and was a cornerstone of this particular teacher's practice:

> The class finish their discussion regarding what they will write about. The teacher asks all the children to stand around the room and then calls on the children one at a time to go to their seat to begin the writing task. As each child does so, the teacher narrates their journey in an approving manner that promotes the children to become conscious of their actions. For example, he says of one child "Watch as Brendan goes to his seat, he takes up his pen, maybe looks up at the board for a prompt". This tactic results in the children beginning their writing with considerable concentration and they remain very focused for the duration (Diary entry, 5th/6th class, Springrock, Day Two).
>
> (*the children are running laps during P.E.)* Several children slow to a walk after just one lap. The teacher jogs over to them and jogs on the spot next

> to them with an animated expectant smiling facial expression. The children smile back at him and begin to jog once more (Diary entry, 5th/6th class, Springrock, Day Three).

These extracts illustrate how the teacher is not overtly controlling the children's behaviour but rather is creating the conditions for the children to engage in the task at hand with enthusiasm and commitment. The children in this teacher's class noted that this teacher, and in particular how this teacher teaches, were aspects of school that they liked most, with one child stating 'I wasn't always in a […] school, so definitely my favourite thing [here] would be the style of which they teach' (Male Child, Older Focus Group, Springrock). Such an approach was characteristic within participatory pedagogical contexts. Broadly speaking, educators in participatory contexts put considerable energy into generating interest and enthusiasm for the work, while educators within transmissive contexts put considerable energy into controlling the children. One educator within a participatory pedagogical context illustrated his awareness of the need to create interest when he noted that 'as a teacher you have to spend your time almost like an entertainer, where you have to stay engaging, you have to keep the lesson going' (6th class teacher, Fairview E.T.). This quote illustrates how the educator seeks to engage rather than to control the child, in order to maintain focus on the work. This is a fundamentally different, and more equal power-dynamic than is evident when educators seek to maintain the children's focus through control.

Control and participation

Children noted that their teachers were more likely to listen to them when they were behaving as required by the teacher.

> Researcher < When do you think would [teachers] listen, when wouldn't they?
> Child < If you do your work
> Researcher < If you do your work they'd listen?
> Child < yea, but if there's people messing in class they won't listen (St. Seáns, younger focus group).

Thus, not only is the 'good student' more likely to be heard, but in classrooms where children are focused on their work educators are more likely to listen to the

children. The degree to which a teacher feels that they are in control of the environment can also impact on the extent to which they are willing to engage in dialogue with the children. The following quotes illustrate that the extent to which this teacher will permit the children to question him (evidenced in the first quote below) and the extent to which he will allow the children to engage in dialogue within the teaching and learning (evidenced in the second quote) are determined by the degree to which the educator can maintain the children's focus on the work.

> [*Stated in response to being asked about the children questioning him*] So if I say 'this is the way we do it' or whatever method of doing a sum, 'this is how it's done' and they'd say to me 'no, no Tom, that's not how it's done. It's done this way, my mom showed me this way', which does come up. I'd say 'this is a different method'. And you would always no matter what the class, you would always go 'come up to the class, let's see how you do it' and often they are right. … you have to kind of judge it off the class and off the individual, as to what you allow and not allow. I suppose it kind of comes down to what's your definition of authority or what's your definition of effective authority, you know. Like for me if it's affective and I can manage the class, then I'm happy with it you know. If I start to lose control of the class and I can't do what I want to do, then I need to change (6th class teacher, Fiarview E.T.).

> Each class almost has its own personality and so if you have a class that are very kind of mature and very you know, know how to listen to each other, and can give and take talk, then you can open up more and become more [pause] there can be more dialogue there. In other classes it would descend into like argument, people lose focus a lot faster and so unfortunately you do probably close it down a bit more in those classes (6th class teacher, Fiarview E.T.).

Educators thus have power over the decision-making arena, and as evidenced by the above quotes, can base decisions in relation to permitting dialogue on the children's adherence to educators' expectations of appropriate behaviour, and the level of control held by the educator in relation to keeping the children focused on the school work. And so, the 'good student' and the 'good class', who are focused on school work enjoy greater opportunities for participation. This highlights once more, the challenge educators face in balancing provision, protection and participation within the classroom.

Power and Discipline - Conclusion

While all educators sought to maintain order and ensure that effective learning was taking place, the level of control and the approach to achieving this varied. Within participatory pedagogical contexts maintaining classroom order and the children's focus was achieved by educators supporting and facilitating the children's interest in the work, and inspiring them to do their best, with punitive strategies being utilised very rarely. Thus, in participatory contexts intrinsic motivation serves as the foundation in relation to issues of discipline. Strategies result in children being intrinsically motivated are grounded in respect and power-sharing between educators and children. Within all but one transmissive classroom educators were found to rely to a far greater extent on reward/punishment strategies, and techniques that use shame to control the children, resulting in children being extrinsically motivated to adhere to classroom rules and to focus on the work at hand. High levels of control and the absence of power-sharing practices, evident in transmissive contexts, are characteristic of strategies that elicit extrinsic motivation. Educators' beliefs and values with regard to effective teaching and learning, the children, and participation, underpin the approach to discipline within particular settings. Approaches to discipline have significant consequences for student participation, both directly, with regard to the opportunities for participation or the silencing of children within issues of discipline, and indirectly through the impact discipline techniques have on children's situated identities. Children's attitudes and perspectives are impacted by their internalization of the messages inherent within approaches to discipline, while their skills are also impacted by the opportunities provided, or not provided as the case may be, within issues of discipline. Thus, discipline is a key mechanism in the process of co-specification, producing people and spaces that serve either as barriers or enablers of participation.

Conclusion

This chapter has identified the pedagogical practices, both in relation to teaching and learning and in relation to discipline, that result from educators' beliefs and values regarding children, education and participation. The direct and indirect

impact of such practices on opportunities for participation are revealed through the analysis of student/educator power-dynamics. Participatory pedagogical practices, and approaches to discipline that elicit intrinsic motivation serve to empower children, and contribute to the creation of spaces and identities that are congruent with children's participation. Transmissive pedagogical practice, and approaches to discipline that elicit extrinsic motivation restrict children's agency, and contribute to the creation of spaces and identities that limit children's participation. This thesis now turns to exploring student/educator relationships, illustrating the role of educators' beliefs and values on the nature and boundaries of such relationships, and the impact of resulting relationship norms on children's participation.

Chapter Eight: Relationships Between Educators and Children and their Impact on Participation

Relationships between educators and children are both a product of, and a productive factor in a school's educational paradigm. The interconnected beliefs and values discussed in the Chapter Six: *Educational Paradigms: The beliefs and values that (up)set the stage for participatory practice,* that are embedded within educational paradigms underpin the nature of relationships between children and educators. Relationships play a key role in children's participatory rights, while educators, as a result of intergenerational institutional power-dynamics, play a dominant role in determining the boundaries and nature of relationships between educators and children. The data revealed particular themes relating to relationships that are key to understanding the impact/role of student/educator relationships on the facilitation and realisation of children's participation. These themes are: listening to children, a professional/personal divide; respect; hierarchy/power structure. Practices in regards to these key factors are not unrelated but are underpinned by the interconnected beliefs and values regarding children, education and participation previously discussed. Each of these factors impacts on, and is impacted by, the existing educational paradigm, creating and recreating spaces and people that either enable or inhibit children's participation. In examining the power-dynamics inherent within student/teacher relationships this chapter unpacks the barriers and enablers to children's participation constructed by, and through, these key elements.

The nature of student/educator relationships was a key factor with regard to a school's culture, as well as being one of the most notable elements in relation to the facilitation of children's right to be heard. This research found that through dialogue, positive relationships between adults and children create the first three components necessary for participation; space, voice and audience, however, the fourth element, impact, was not always present in relation to decision-making contexts. Individual conversations between children and adults of a personal nature provided spaces for children to share their views and in such contexts

children had an expectation that they would be listened to, however, the likelihood of the children's views having any impact varied considerably. The children within the study revealed a strong desire to have positive relationships with their teachers, specifically to have 'nice' teachers, defining such as those who listen to them. As is demonstrated through the findings that follow, in schools and classrooms were children experienced fewer opportunities to participate a common feature was the teachers' desire to maintain a professional distance from the children by not sharing or seeking personal information or engaging in dialogue of a personal nature. Mutual respect was found to be a key feature of positive relationships, whilst a lack of respect resulted in spaces that were unsympathetic to children's voices, constrained children's agency and played a central role in children's subordination. The more subordinate children's positioning, the greater the obstacles to their participation that existed within the culture of the school.

Children's desire to be listened to within teacher/pupil relationships

Overwhelmingly, the children identified the importance of teachers being nice, kind, fair and respectful in their relationships with the children. As is evident in the following extract, children's constructions and narratives of kind/nice teachers were bound up in the concepts of respect and of being herd.

> Researcher < So you were saying that a couple of teachers were more likely to listen to you…
> Child A < [their teacher's name]
> Child B < some are very mean
> Researcher < Some teachers are very mean and that's something that stops the teachers from listening to you?
> [slight pause] Child B < yea
> Researcher < Describe the kind of teacher who listens. Like what is it that [interrupted]
> Child B < [their teacher's name]
> Child A < [another teacher's name]
> Child C <yea
> Researcher < And what is it about them that makes them listen do you think?
> Child B < Em, they're kind
> Child A < They're kind
> Child C< They're kind and then where you respect them back [interrupted]

Child B < If you respect them they'll respect us
(Older Focus Group, St. Seáns).

When asked what it is important that teachers are, the children responded with characteristics such as:

Respectful; fair; not scary (Older Focus Group, St. Reginas)

Super nice; kind (Younger Focus Group, St. Reginas)

Helpful; kind; understanding (Older Focus Group, Fairview E.T.)

Very, very, very, nice; kind; friendly; listening to you (Younger Focus Group, Fairview E.T.)

Fair; listen to kids; be warm and approachable; listen to kids; understand children's perspectives and remember what it's like to be a kid (Older Focus Group, Gaelscoil Áitéigin)

Kind; funny (Younger Focus Group, Gaelscoil Áitéigin)

Maintain order without getting cross (Older Focus Group, Springrock)

In response to being asked what it is important that teachers are not, children provided answers such as:

Angry; cross; bad (Younger Focus Group, St Reginas)

Angry; aggressive; bullying you; whipping or slapping you (Younger Focus Group, Fairview E.T.)

Not speaking rudely; not hurting children's feelings (Younger Focus Group, Gaelscoil Áitéigin)

Rude; not fair (Older Focus Group, St Regina)

Mean; shouting; like Miss Trunchbull[20] (Older Focus Group, Fairview E.T.)

[20] A character from a children's book by Rolald Dalh, who was a school principal and would subject children to physical and emotional abuse.

While the children did identify other characteristics, in particular characteristics relating to effective teaching, the children were primarily concerned with the nature of the educator's personal demeanour and the manner in which they treated children. Children want to be listened to with kindness and warmth and to be treated fairly. The dominant focus on these characteristics are perhaps unsurprising given that the intergenerational power disparity between adults and children, and the obligatory nature of school, renders children vulnerable to the will and the temperament of their teacher. Undoubtedly, children play a significant role in shaping the nature of their relationships with others, however, it is educators who have the power to set the parameters for educator/student relationships. The 6th class teacher in Fairview E.T. illustrates this when he discussed how he adjusts the boundaries of what is acceptable behaviour when he feels that teaching and learning are suffering as a consequence of overfamiliarity within the educator/pupil relationship. In discussing the friendly personal nature of his relationship with the children he noted: 'If I start to lose control of the class and I can't do what I want to do, then I need to change' (The 6th class teacher in Fairview E.T.).

The children felt that it was important that teachers are aware of, and consider, their perspectives. The following quotes illustrate children's desire for their teacher to listen to them and to understand their perspectives.

> [It is important that teachers] understand children's perspectives and remember what it's like to be a child (Older Focus Group, Gaelscoil Áitéigin).
>
> [It is important that teachers are] listening to you (Younger Focus Group, Fairview E.T.).
>
> [if I could decide something to change for today I would] make teachers be kids for a day (Younger Focus Group, St Reginas).

The children in St. Reginas younger focus group wanted for their teachers to experience a day as a child, and thus experience/remember what it is like to be a child, however, so too did they indicate their willing acceptance of teachers' dominant position. These same children would also choose, if they could make

any decision, to 'make the teachers be the King and Queen' (Younger Focus Group, St. Reginas). The evidence thus reveals that children do not necessarily have any difficulty in the general intergenerational teacher/pupil power structure – they want their teachers to be in charge, to be benevolent leaders, to be good at teaching children, but so too do they want their teachers to listen to and consider children's perspectives and be open to making changes in response to children's perspectives. When asked to identify the characteristics of their teacher, whom they had identified as a much-loved teacher, the children in Fairview E.T. noted that this teacher is: funny; calm; he listens and compromises; he negotiates; he doesn't shout (Older Focus Group, Fairview E.T.). When asked which of these characteristics was the most important to them they said the fact that he negotiates with them was. The message from children was clear. They want to feel safe and secure within relationships with educators in which they are treated with kindness and respect and above all listened to.

The role of the personal in supporting positive relationships and enabling participation

The nature of the relationships between educators and children differed within the various schools, and even between the various classrooms within specific schools. The most notable difference being the level of the 'personal' within the, ultimately, professional relationship between the educators and the children. While some educators went to lengths to discourage a personal dimension to the student/teacher relationship, others used personal encounters and dialogue to foster more caring and enabling relationships with the children. In St. Reginas the 4th class teacher believed that maintaining a professional distance was extremely important. Noting that children do try to transcend the boundary between the professional and the personal, this teacher believed it to be in the child's best educational interest to ensure that a professional distance be maintained.

> Oh yea, I always try to keep that line in place because, you know, I always, kind of, refer back to the teachers I had when I was in school and I always remember one - she was extremely [pause], she was tough, but now I can see how fair she was, I think you have to be fair and consistent and they will come up to you and they will be, you know, trying to hug you and all

> that sort of thing. I, kind of, limit that as much as I can because I want them to be able to come in and focus on what they're doing as well, do you know what I mean? So, I am very aware of that but I suppose, it's hard, like, you know, it's hard to not cross those lines. (4th class teacher, St Regina's)

The determination on the part of this teacher, not to, as she said, 'cross those lines' into the personal was also observed during data collection:

> As the teacher is praising a child for some work that was well done, she moves to place her hand on the top of his head but then stops herself just before her hand makes contact (Diary entry, 4th Class, St. Reginas, Day Two).

These quotes illustrate how this educator is quite consciously endeavouring to control her emotional expression (and discourage the personal) in order to maintain the power-dynamic that, in her eyes, enablers her to teach effectively. In keeping with the transmissive pedagogical approach utilized, in this class children were permitted to ask and answer questions in relation to the school work, but where prohibited from engaging in dialogue with their teacher on a personal level. Very few spaces for children's participation were observed throughout the observation period within this school. At no point were children's opinions solicited (other than to answer questions), nor did children offer up their perspectives voluntarily. Providing data to support this is problematic as observation notes document what did occur rather than what did not. However, reflective notes taken during the observation period note the lack of participatory 'moments' within this school. Whilst in the 1st class teacher in this school did listen to non-work-related comments made by the children, she did not necessarily respond to what they said. In the 4th class room the children did not have any opportunity to voice their opinions. As can be seen from the following extracts, unsolicited remarks in this classroom were often met with a punitive response, while opportunities for children to voice their opinions were usually denied:

> Male Child < Teacher 'I'm done'
> Teacher< Male Child 'I don't need to hear that I can see it myself'
> (Diary entry, 4th Class, St. Reginas, Day One).

> A child is looking at the teacher with a frustrated, unhappy expression on his face. The teacher says to a child in a slightly impatient tone of voice "What's wrong with you? Why are you making a face? Don't be making a face." The teacher does not wait for an explanation or answer but continues with the lesson (Diary entry, 4th Class, St. Reginas, Day One).

In this second quote it is clear that the child was feeling frustrated or upset about something. When this was expressed (voiced) through his facial expression, rather than providing a space for him to articulate his concern, the teacher's response was to ridicule him into silence. These quotes illustrate how the teachers have the power to control the space and the dialogue that can occur within the space, thus setting the agenda for what can and cannot be discussed.

By maintaining a professional distance, not only can teachers control the nature of the dialogue that may occur within particular spaces, so too can they control if any adult-child dialogue at all occurs within a particular space, and the nature of the dialogue that does occur (ie. dialogue of a professional or personal nature). This highlights the power of educators to shape cultural norms and practices that are relevant to the facilitation of participation within a school. Time spent eating lunch together before going out to the yard, and 'Golden time' provided a valuable space in which the teacher and children in some classes/schools engaged in informal friendly dialogue. However, as evidenced in the following extracts, in St. Reginas, the 4th class teacher did not encourage dialogic encounters with the children in the little time they spent together when the children were eating their snack before going out to the yard.

> [It is lunchtime.] The children eat in their seats. The teacher sits at her own desk and is busy reading/marking homework (Diary entry, 4th class, St. Regina, Day One).

> [It is lunchtime.] The children sit, eat and talk. A couple of children are out of their seats looking at one boy's match attack cards. The teacher is working at her desk. After a couple of minutes a bell rings, the teacher looks up and says "Ok, time" and the children go outside (Diary entry, 4th class, St. Regina, Day Two).

The lack of dialogue outside of school work sustained the professionally distant nature of the relationship between this teacher and the children, as it prohibited

informal personal conversations. As a consequence, the vast majority of the interactions this teacher had with her pupils were of an academic/disciplinary nature, thus the academic context in which she engaged with the children led her to relating to the child as 'student' and not the child as a whole. Furthermore, in ensuring that the teacher/pupil relationships remain firmly within the professional academic realm the educator maintains the traditional hierarchical school power structure that enables her to teach and maintain control of the children in a traditional transmissive manner, an approach which does not require or facilitate children's participation.

In contrast, a key element of positive relationships between educators and children was the sharing of personal information, and frequent dialogue between educators and children, concerning issues outside of the academic work, being the norm. This was particularly evident in the context of the relationship between the teaching-principal of St. Seáns and the children in this school. A feature of these very positive relationships was the regular sharing of personal information. The children's eagerness to share news with this educator was evident throughout my observations in this school, an example of which can be seen in the following extract:

> The children have just arrived into their classroom and have sat down. They are chatting with their teacher as she is organising her materials for the lesson. From his seat a boy starts to tell the teacher about his decision regarding which of his two local GAA clubs to join. He explains his decision for the club he has decided to join. The teacher acknowledges his reasons, agrees with his choice and adds her own thoughts on the matter. Another child then says 'Miss, can I tell a joke?' to which she replies 'Go on so'. The child tells the joke and, following some laughter, the teacher begins the lesson (Diary entry, 6th Class, St. Seáns, Day Three).

This principal demonstrated a high level of familiarity with the children's personal lives while also sharing details of her own personal life with the children, and even involving them in it, as can be seen form the following extracts from observational notes:

> The principal tells the boys that her sister sent her a photo to thank the children for the card they sent to congratulate her on the birth of her son.

> She informs me that the children were there when she received the call announcing the birth a couple of weeks prior and they had decided to make and send a card (Diary entry, 6th Class, St. Seáns, Day Three).

> In a discussion about generations the principal says to a child "what about your Mam's mother 'Teresa'?" (Diary entry, 6th Class, St. Seáns, Day Four).

These quotes illustrate the personal knowledge shared between this educator and the children. It was evident that this educator was very familiar with, and had relationships with the children's families. This 6th class teaching principal (St Seáns) often stayed with the children during their eating breaks and when she did, she used the time to engage in both individual and class discussions with the children. This created a regular space in which children were invited to engage in personal conversations that support positive relationships. One other educator, the principal of Springrock, also created a social communal lunch space by eating his lunch with the children and engaging in dialogue with the children as they ate together. In other schools and classrooms, the teachers either left the children to eat alone (with the door open and the teacher on duty checking in periodically), or sat at their desks and engaged in paper work without engaging with the children. As this space provided a valuable opportunity to develop positive relationships through informal dialogue between educators and children, it was unfortunate that so few teachers availed of the opportunity this space created. The following conversation, which took place during lunch time while the children and the principal of St. Seáns were inside eating lunch together before yard time, illustrates how such spaces can be used to facilitate children to express their opinions and for their opinions to be given due weight:

> The principal says to the class 'I want to talk to you about next week's yard'. She begins to explain new rules that will be introduced next week regarding which classes should occupy which areas of the yard. Following her explanation of the new rules and the reasons for their introduction (child safety) they have a discussion focusing on what the children think about the new rules. Some of the children express reservations about the new situation as they feel it will impact negatively on their time in the yard. The principal actively seeks out the children's opinions and listens attentively. She brings the conversation to a conclusion saying 'We'll give it a chance and see how it goes. If it doesn't, if there are problems I'll listen to you." (Diary entry, 6th class St. Seáns, Day Three).

While in this instance the children do not change the outcome of the decision - the new yard rules will still be implemented as is for now, their concerns have been listened to, considered and the reasons for the decisions shared with the children. As it is agreed that the issue of the new rules will be returned to and readdressed should the children experience the difficulties they anticipate, the children's voices have had an impact, albeit a limited one in this instance. Thus, all four elements of participation, space, voice, audience and influence (Lundy's, 2007) are present. Allowing the children to discuss issues of a more personal nature and utilizing spaces in which such dialogue can take place are features of student/educator relationships that contain a personal dimension. Both of these factors contribute positively to children's opportunities to participate by creating safe spaces and relationship norms that are conducive to participation. Relationships that did not have a personal nature lacked such affordances.

Like lunch-time, golden-time[21] also provided a valuable space for developing positive relationships between educators and children which had a personal element to them. Within St. Seán's 'Golden time', is a reward period at the end of each day in which the children could, if the teacher felt that the day's behaviour warranted it, play with board games of their choosing. This space is also used by the principal of this school as an opportunity to engage with the children, by playing games with them and having conversations with them. Her engagement with the children, therefore, goes beyond academic work and, as can be seen in the following extract, the children seem to seek out and enjoy her company:

> During PE a behavioural management teacher is facilitating a game of ball with the 6th class children in the hall. The principal/6th class teacher sits at the side and watches the game. Occasionally she calls out encouraging remarks. Two children from another class walk through the hall and when they see the principal they come over and sit with her on the bench. The two children and principal become deeply engaged in a conversation with lots of smiling and nodding occurring (Diary entry, St. Seáns, Day Three).

[21] Golden-time is a period of free play where the children can choose a play-based activity to engage in. In most schools golden-time is usually held at the end of the day on a Friday. In St. Seáns, however, there was a half hour of golden time at the end of every school day.

Choosing to sit with and engage in conversation with this educator reflects the very positive relationships between these children and their teacher/principal. These relationships have been developed and maintained by utilising spaces throughout the day for informal conversations of a personal nature. Conversations which took place between this teacher and the children during lunch and golden-time had an informal quality and created spaces, not unlike a family dinner table, in which the children seemed free to express their perspectives. As noted, the only other educator who shared lunch with the children and created such a family-like space was the principal in Springrock. The following observational extract illustrates the informal, friendly and often personal nature of conversations which took place within this context:

> The children take out their lunches and begin to eat. The teacher, after fetching me a cup of tea, sits at his desk and, taking out his sandwiches, asks the children if they have jokes or stories for him. A girl starts to tell the class about a funny YouTube video she saw, following which other children share stories and jokes. As they do so the teacher gives them his full attention and participates in the discussion, for example one girl announces that she will be moving house soon and the teacher asks her if this is a sad or joyful thought for her. The atmosphere is relaxed and friendly (Diary entry, 6th Class, Springrock, Day One).

This extract illustrates that the relationship between the educator and the students transcends the professional academic realm, and the importance of dialogue concerning the personal realm in positive adult child relationships. So too does it highlight the active role the educator plays in facilitating such dialogue and creating spaces for it. While educators in Fairview E.T. were not observed utilizing lunch or golden-time as spaces for personal conversations, the data revealed that within this school positive student/teacher relationships were highly valued, evident and encompassed a personal dimension. Even though this is quite a large school, one educator noted that:

> [T]he principal knows all the children by name. And everyone is given time, so if you have a story, people listen to your story and, like, [the principal] listens to it. She knows what's happening with different children. She knows what's happening at home. I suppose that's, kind of, it comes through (6th class teacher, Fairview E.T.).

Care was a factor that motivated some teachers to transcend the academic realm into the personal. Indeed, the construction of children as vulnerable and the need to provide secure adult/child relationships for them based on this construction was particularly evident in St. Seáns. The data revealed that when teachers view themselves as carers they are more open to personal dialogue and hearing children's voices. Teachers of younger classes, in particular, were more likely to emphasise the caring element of their role and to have relationships that contained a personal element. In Gealscoil Áitéigin the 1st class teacher noted that she felt it was important that the children see her as more than a teacher - that they see her as a person with a life outside the classroom and that they consider her a friend and are fond of her. This, she believes, serves to make the children more comfortable.

> I think it's very important for them to feel that I'm a friend. I am someone that they can talk to, someone they can confide in. Someone they can approach, we all like somebody who is approachable (1st class teacher, Gealscoil Áitéigin).

> I tell them a lot about myself […] I think it's important for them too to see that I'm not just this machine who is cross. I'm a person, I have my own family and I go home and I, you know, that sort of thing. So, they get that from me quite often […] to make them feel more comfortable and at ease in the class (1st class teacher Gealscoil Áitéigin).

Observation notes indicate that this teacher permitted the children to instigate personal conversations with her on a regular basis, however, such moments were oftentimes more monologic than dialogic in nature, and did not necessarily encompass any decision-making. The following examples illustrate the manner in which the children had little 'chats' with their teacher throughout the day, enjoying space, voice and audience but not necessarily influencing any decisions:

> The children are writing in their copy books. Every now and then a child leaves their seat and goes up to the teacher to quietly tell her something. She smiles and nods, sometimes responding with a word or two (Diary entry, 1st class, Gaelscoil Áitéigin, Day One).

> The children begin their drawing. The teacher is sitting at her desk. There is a near constant flow of children going up to her to ask her questions and to tell her things. The teacher listens to each child nodding and smiling

> before they return to their seats (Diary entry, 1st class, Gaelscoil Áitéigin, Day Two).

In simply sharing information and being listened to, what the children said may not have had any direct influence on decisions that concern them, however, as noted previously, having a 'nice' teacher who will listen to you is of significant value to the children. It is evident that a focus on the holistic needs and wellbeing of children led educators to be more open to dialogue of a personal nature and to hearing children's voices. This provided children with instances of space, voice and audience. With regard to influence, while the children may not have had any direct influence on decision-making, being listened to has a positive influence on the children's lived experience.

The extent to which children feel comfortable and free to engage in conversations with adults is determined by the quality of the student/educator relationship and plays a crucial role in the facilitation of children's right to participate. This section has demonstrated that a key aspect of positive relationships between educators and children which enable children to be heard is dialogic encounters that encompass the personal realm. Some teachers sought to avoid such personal encounters with the children, and in doing so failed to create spaces in which children have opportunities to express themselves and be heard. The data revealed that positive relationships between educators and children encompassed a personal dimension, and that such relationships enabled participation. However, while positive relationships enabled children to express their perspectives, educators did not always give the children's perspectives due weight. Deterministic constructions of children resulted in some educators permitting such personal dialogue out of a duty of care rather than a desire to support or facilitate the children's participation. In addition to the personal dimension evident in positive student/educator relationships, the data also revealed that respect was a key factor which impacted on the nature of student/educator relationships and on children's participation.

Respect: A Mechanism of Both Liberation and Oppression

The findings in relation to issues of respect and discipline, discussed in the previous chapter, revealed how respect can be utilised within pedagogical

processes as a mechanism for liberation or oppression. Building on these findings, this chapter presents further data and analysis in relation to norms and practices concerning respect, this time in relation to student/educator relationships. Such norms and practices were a significant influencing factor in the quality and nature of student/educator relationships. The level of respect shown to children by educators varied considerably and had a strong relationship to the opportunities created for the children's participation, and to the hierarchical structuring within each school. The previous chapter demonstrated that in regard to matters of discipline, within transmissive contexts all but one educator (6th class teacher/principal St. Seáns) used shame and sarcasm as behaviour modification techniques, while in participatory pedagogical contexts children were always treated with dignity and respect. So too did the chapter argue that disrespectful punitive techniques reinforced unequal hierarchical power structures. Mutual respect was found to be a key feature of positive relationships, that facilitated participation, between educators and children. However, in contexts in which children enjoyed fewer opportunities to participate, there was often a discrepancy between the relatively low level of respect shown by educators to children, and the high level of respect children were expected to show the educators. Both educators and children were more conscious of the need for children to be respectful, than for teachers to be so.

The children's understanding of the need to demonstrate respect, in particular in order to be heard, was evident within discussions with the children. For example, as illustrated below, in discussing the various picture vignettes within the focus group in St. Seáns, the children focused on who or what was (dis)respectful. For example:

> Researcher < In this picture a little girl puts her hand up to answer the teacher's question and the teacher is saying "yes Katie." So I think what the child who drew this was trying to describe in this picture was the fact that in the class when we want to say something, sometimes you have to put your hand up
> Child A < yea
> Child C < yea
> Researcher < what do you think about that?
> Child A < it shows respect

Child B < it shows respect to the teacher cause if the teacher's talking to someone else and you call out like something it's kind of disrespectful to say that (Older Focus Group, St. Seáns).

Figure 10. Picture created by child in CRAG discussed in pilot school (St. Seáns) focus groups

While children clearly saw the relationship between demonstrating respect and being heard, discussion regarding respect focused predominantly on the need for children, rather than adults, to be respectful. Furthermore, while four of the five older focus groups identified the need for children to be respectful, only one out of the five groups stated that it is important that teachers are respectful. However, while not overtly using the word respect, all of the focus groups, both older and younger, did identify characteristics that teachers should / should not have which are related to respect. For example:

It is important that teachers…

'Are warm and approachable' (Older Focus Group, Gaelscoil Áitéigin)

'Maintain order without getting cross' (Older Focus Group, Springrock)

'Are very, very nice' (Younger Focus Group, Fairview E.T.)

It is important that teachers are not…

'Speaking rudely' (Younger Focus Group, Springrock)

'Aggressive' (Younger Focus Group, Fairview E.T.)

'Rude' (Older Focus Group, St Reginas)

Thus, while the children are very conscious of their role as students requiring them to be respectful, they were less likely to overtly acknowledge that the same onus is on teachers. Nonetheless the children identified a desire to be treated in a respectful manner, and the belief that it is important that educators do so. The children, particularly the younger children, may have less overtly identified their expectations regarding educators need to be respectful, however, in identifying that it's important that teachers are 'not bad' (Younger Focus Group, St. Reginas) and 'not speaking rudely to children' (Younger Focus Group, Gaelscoil Áitéigin) it is clear that children want the teachers to act in a respectful manner towards them.

Within the adult data set, it was evident that the majority of educators framed respect as an important attribute relating to children. The concept of mutual respect was less prevalent in educators' comments. This is also reflected in the children's data, as so too were the children more conscious of their need to be respectful, than they were of the need for educators to be so.

In both Gealscoil Áitéigin and St. Reginas educators spoke about children (and their parents) being respectful but did not discuss the need for educators to respect the children. For example, in St. Reginas respect for others is one of the three class rules in 4th class, and is, thus, considered to be an important virtue, however, none of the educators interviewed in this school discussed the role, or the importance, of respect within their interviews. Similarly, respect was not an issue that featured significantly within the interviews with the educators in Gaelscoil Áitéigin, however, when mentioned it was in relation to children respecting each other, or being respectful to the educators. There was no mention of teachers respecting children. Furthermore, the educators' comments in this school indicate the view that for children to question educators is disrespectful, while the children's

acceptance of their subordinate positioning is seen as respectful. Such a perspective is highlighted in the following quote:

> Realistically if the children start complaining or trying to come up with their own rules and things, it does border on the whole respect thing (6th class teacher, Gealscoil Áitéigin).

In contrast educators within Fairview E.T. placed significant value on mutual respect and encouraged children to question and to challenge. When respect is perceived by the educators as children being 'nice' and doing what they are told, children are limited in their ability to be heard as their views can be constructed as a challenge to the educators' authority and thus, disrespectful. In settings that valued and demonstrated mutual respect children's participation was supported, as children's views and opinions were respected and not seen as a threat. Expectations, norms and practices concerning respect are thus, a key aspect of student/teacher relationships that serve to silence children or to support their participation.

In Fairview E.T. respect is highly valued as an integral aspect of the school culture, in particular in regard to the relationships within the school.

> Even the children, junior and senior infants are taught the word respect. We say 'we must respect each other […] We always are respectful to each other so then once they see that our relationships are good and again with the parents as well, our relations with the parents are very, very good […] And we teach the children about being respectful to each other (Principal, Fairview E.T.).

In discussing respect, this principal highlights the need for educators to respect children, *as well as* children respecting adults and other children. In this school the traditional hierarchy often found in schools is replaced by a more egalitarian culture whereby each member of the community is afforded respect regardless of their hierarchical position, and their role and contribution are valued. Mutual respect and a more egalitarian hierarchy are noted by educators as being intrinsic to this school's culture and something which sets them apart from many other schools.

> I have done teaching practices in other schools and I would have done subbing in other schools. And, I think that because of the [Educate Together] ethos of the school and because of where we're coming from, there's more of just like, in other schools my understanding would be there's the teacher and there's the children [makes hand gestures to indicate that the teachers are above the students] and there's kind of like a gap. And it's a respect thing and I understand, like, because I would have gone to schools and that would have been the way that it was when I student myself. And I had no problem with it because I didn't know any different but I think that, not that we're more laid back, or relaxed about things because obviously you have to, like, maintain some level of discipline and decorum inside here, but it's more about a mutual respect situation that, like, they don't do things because I'm telling them to do it. I'd like to think they're doing it because they respect me and they want to do as I ask. And if they ask, like, if they tell me a story I listen to them so if I tell them something, they listen to me. So I think it's more of a balance, like, a, we're on a same level situation. Then in other schools there's more of a kind of hierarchy, if you understand what I mean. (2nd class teacher, Fairview E.T.)

Thus, in Fairview E.T. respect is a core facet of the school ethos and intrinsically linked to the hierarchical structure within the school. While educators in this school noted a more tenuous hierarchical structure, and indeed this was observed during fieldwork, it is important to note that the structural positioning of all children in relation to adults, will always result in adults occupying positions of power in relation to children. None the less, the value on mutual respect within this school's paradigm creates a more egalitarian power-dynamic than might be seen in other schools.

The same high value on respect was also evident within the observational data within Springrock, and, while the teaching-principal here did not overtly speak of respect within his interview, his discussion, as evidenced by the following quote, suggested a deep respect and even reverence for the children.

> So, if you see yourself going into the [class] room as someone who really needs these children in order for my life to move on, that's a totally different dynamic in the relationship. And maybe the way you speak or the way you think and feel about them (Principal, Springrock).

This educator's respect was clearly evident within his interactions with the children, as exemplified in the following observational extracts:

> Before the children enter the classroom in the morning the teacher stands at the door to greet and shake hands with each child individually. At the end of the day the children once more, each shake hands with their teacher saying Slán [goodbye] before leaving for the day. These exchanges seem warm and respectful (Diary entry, 6th class, Springrock, Day One).

> The children are working on a complicated Celtic form-drawing task. They are very engaged in their work. The teacher says 'Can I interrupt everybody, and can I get you all to stand here? I know that's frustrating'. The children gather around the teacher who demonstrates a technique that will assist them in their form-drawing (Diary entry, 6th class, Springrock, Day Two).

In acknowledging the frustration that comes from being interrupted while engaged in a task, this quote demonstrates the educator's respect for both the children and their work. At no point during the observational period did this teacher demonstrate any behaviour that was even slightly disrespectful towards the children.

Thus, the high value placed on mutual respect by the educators in Springview and Fairview E.T. is congruent with other key beliefs and values embedded within the overarching educational paradigm that are supportive of children's participation, such as a constructivist construction of children and a high value on participation. So too does the value on mutual respect serve to create spaces in which children have the possibility of voicing their opinions without fear of retribution.

In the other three schools (St. Seáns, St. Reginas and Gaelscoil Áitéigin), where mutual respect was not a key aspect of the overarching educational paradigm the level of respect shown to children varied from classroom to classroom, with many educators displaying disrespectful behaviour towards the children (as evidenced in the previous chapter's discussion on discipline), thus highlighting the differences that can occur between a school's overarching paradigm and culture and the paradigm and culture within the context of a specific classroom. The two participating educators in St Seán's both highlighted the two-way nature of

respect. However, while mutually respectful relationships were evident within interactions observed between the the 6th class teaching-principal and the children, mutual demonstration of respect was not always evident in relation to the 2nd class teacher. As evidenced by the quote below, the 2nd class teacher believed that mutual respect was necessary in order to enable her to work effectively with the children:

> If you can gain their respect and their trust, then you're on… then you can teach. […] but you have to earn, it's almost like you have to earn their respect. You know you're not going to just get their respect automatically […] But once you have it, everything, there is a totally free flowing (2nd/3rd class teacher, St. Seáns).

Thus, this teacher's motivation to demonstrate respect was in contrast to the ideological value placed on respect in and of itself by the educators in Springrock and Fairview E.T. While this educator expressed the need to earn the children's respect, in practice she often treated the children in a disrespectful manner. Observations within this classroom revealed that the children who demonstrated the most challenging behaviour were often treated with a higher level of respect than the 'typical' less confrontational children, seemingly in an effort to avoid confrontation with the children with behavioural issues. This assertion is supported by the above quote, which illustrates this educator's motivation for gaining the children's respect. In using sarcasm as a tool for discipline, raising her voice in anger, and in responding to children's questions in a dismissive manner, this educator's practice was often at odds with her stated values. As evidenced by the following two observational extracts, other teachers in St Seáns were also observed engaging with the children in a dominating manner that lacked respect:

> As I wait on my own in a classroom I can overhear a teacher in the room next door. She is speaking to the children with a raised voice and she sounds annoyed. I hear her say at the top of her voice "Nathen, I don't want to hear your voice, there should be no talking" (Diary entry, St. Seáns, Day Five).

> As I walk down a corridor during class time I hear a man's voice shouting from a classroom; "I told you to do your work!" (Diary entry, St. Seáns, Day One).

As evidenced by the following data, educators within St. Reginas and Gaelscoil Áitéigin also demonstrated disrespectful behaviour to the children:

> The teacher asks a child to go and get a photocopy for her in the main office. She does not say please. A few minutes later the child returns with the photocopies and stands at the teacher's desk for a moment. The teacher does not acknowledge him so he puts the papers on her desk. She does not say thank you. The child returns to his seat (Diary entry, Gaelscoil Áitéigin, 6th class, Day Five).
>
> Teacher < child 'Bring me up your work [name]'
> Child (looking surprised and worried) < teacher 'Why?'
> Teacher (sounding annoyed) < 'If I wanted a back-answer I would have told you' The child goes to the teacher's table and hands her his copy. The teacher does not thank him but proceeds to read what he has written. She finishes reading and hands back the copy book without speaking or making eye contact. The child returns with his book back to his seat (Diary entry, 4th class, St. Reginas, Day One).

In the second extract we see, once more, the power of the educator to set the agenda in regard to what can or cannot be voiced by the child. In particular, for the child to question the teacher's request, a request made without showing the child respect by saying please, is, ironically, perceived by the teacher as disrespectful. As such, this quote exemplifies the double standard in relation to expectations regarding respect held by many educators, and the unequal power-dynamic between the educator and the child. These extracts illustrate behaviour that is disrespectful to the dignity of the child. While they may not be examples of overt disrespect of a significant manner, such instances of disrespect are micro-aggressions which serve to reinforce children's position as less, and are internalised by the children. Observation notes document numerous instances of such disrespectful micro-aggressions within Gealscoil Áitéigin, (6th class) St. Seán's (2nd class) and St Reginas (4th class). The level of respect demonstrated to children within student/educator relationships played a key role in children's positioning within the school hierarchy.

Hierarchy and Power Sharing

As noted, an emphasis on children, rather than adults showing respect contributes to a traditional hierarchical culture within a school, while an emphasis on mutual respect contributes to a more egalitarian culture where all voices are seen to carry

value. This research found that the extent to which children were positioned as subservient within the hierarchical power structure varied from school to school. While, ultimately, adults hold the preponderance of power in all schools and within all adult child relationships, the level of power sharing between educators and children varied considerably from school to school, and was not the result of chance, but was actively fostered by educators. While children had a limited influence on the level of power they were enabled to exercise within student/educator relationships, children's agency in this regard was mediated by the extent to which they conformed to expected norms and constructions of appropriate behaviour within particular contexts. In schools with a less hierarchical power structure, empowering children through participation was seen by educators as a positive endeavour and actively facilitated by educators. Conversely, in schools with strongly established traditional school hierarchical power structures, educators resisted children's decision-making.

The following extract from observation notes demonstrates the active subordination of children through adult power. In this extract the child is punished for not submitting to the teacher's request without question. His humours remark is seen by the teacher as cheeky and insubordinate.

> The children are in the yard playing during lunch break. Two second class boys are playing tug-a-war with a jumper. The teacher on yard duty calls out "Stop! You're going to tear that jumper and it belongs to somebody" One of the two boys responds with a big grin calling out "it belongs to me!". The teacher reacts by making the child stand by the wall as punishment for his response. She then turns to the teacher beside her and says (out of the children's earshot) "Why can't he just learn to say sorry and not be cheeky?" (Diary entry, St. Seáns, Day Two).

This child was punished for refusing to act in accordance to the expected educator/student relationship norms associated with the educator's hierarchical status, by apologising when reprimanded and adapting his behaviour to the will of the teacher without question. In responding to the child's retort punitively the educator reinforces her position of power. While instances of children resisting educators' power and authority (such as in the example above) were evident both within the observation data and the children's data, such cases and examples of

resistance were of a minor nature and did not disrupt the teacher/pupil power relationship or the overarching power structure. The previously discussed example regarding the jumper illustrates the punitive response taken when the child challenged his teacher's authority by humorously questioning the rationale for her demand. In schools were perceived challenges to the hierarchical status quo were met punitively by educators, the children were aware that to make such challenges was both dangerous and futile. The following extract from the older focus group in St Seáns illustrates that children may be reluctant to challenge their teachers, as they recognise that to do so may have negative consequences for them.

Figure 11. Image used in pilot school (St. Seáns) focus groups

Researcher < So, can you see what's going on in this picture?
Child < They're having lunch
Child A < She's eating
Child C < Crisps
Child B < crisps and all sweets and he's [pointing to a child in the picture] angry because she's eating'um
Child B < he's angry
Researcher < and they're eating…?
Child A < They're eating healthy
Researcher < so what do you think is the problem here?
Child C < the teacher
Child D< the teacher
Child B < the teacher shouldn't be allowed do it
Child A < the teacher shouldn't be doing that in front of, especially in front of the children
Child D < That's teasing

> Child C < That's teasing'um
> Researcher < and is that something that you could say something about in the class to the teacher?
> Child B < yea yea yea
> Child C < yea
> Child D< yea
> Researcher < and what could you say there do you think?
> Child B < I'd say 'Miss how come we're not allowed have [interrupted]
> Child A < sweets and all that
> Researcher < and what do you think the teacher will say, how do you think the teacher might react if you said that?
> Child B < she'd send you standing outside the door
> Researcher < really? You think she'd send you outside the door. Why would she send you outside the door?
> Child D < she's say [interrupted]
> Child A < "I'm the teacher"
> Child B < "I'm the teacher I can do what I want"

To challenge a teacher, therefore, is seen as both futile and risky and is not congruent with constructions of the 'good pupil'. The narrative of the good pupil 'doing what they are told' has been highlighted previously in these findings. Such narratives reinforce the hierarchical power structure evident in schools and create barriers to the facilitation of children's right to be heard.

As in St. Reginas, views expressed in Gaelscoil Áitéigin also indicated that educators believed that power-sharing with children was a potential threat. For example, one teacher, in discussing student councils, expressed concern about "what I'd get myself into" (6th class teacher, Gealscoil Áitéigin). When asked to elaborate on these worries she identified the potential of student councils to undermine the status quo;

> Researcher < And in terms of your worry about what you might get in to, can you elaborate on that?
> 6th class teacher (Gealscoil Áitéigin) < Making it difficult, I suppose, for the principal or for just the systems and structures that are in place.

In contrast, the educators in Fairview E.T. identified power-sharing as a part of the daily life within the school; "[I]t's very much democratically run. Educate Together schools are meant to be. But this genuinely is" (6th class teacher, Fairview E.T.). As previously noted, mutual respect and the absence of a traditional

hierarchy were also noted by educators in Fairview E.T as being intrinsic to the school culture and something which sets them apart from many other schools. Furthermore, as documented in the previous chapter, significant power-sharing pedagogical practices were evident within both Fairview E.T and Springrock.

How members of the school community addressed each other was a key indicator of one's position within the hierarchical power structure in a school, and revealed much about the nature of relationships within the school. In the two schools where a higher degree of participation was evident (Fairview E.T. and Springrock) children called their teachers by their first names. The children of Spingrock were themselves aware of the deeper implications of such naming practices, with one child noting 'I like the way we don't call the teachers by their surnames […] it creates a mutual respect'' (Male Child, Older Focus Group, Springrock). In the other three schools (Gaelscoil Áitéigin, St. Seáns and St. Reginas) the children either referred to their teachers formally by their surname or as Muinteoir[22]/Teacher. In these schools, traditional notions of respecting authority, traditional deterministic constructions of children, and hierarchical power-dynamics were evident in the fact that educators addressed children by their first names while children were required to address the educators formally by using their surname or title. In St. Reginas the fact that both the SNAs and children were referred to by their first names, while the teachers were referred to by their surnames names evidenced a strongly established traditional hierarchy in which people were positioned (and valued) according to their level of power, with SNAs viewed as 'less than' teachers. Interestingly, in Gaelscoil Áitéigin children were permitted to refer to their teachers by their first names with the prefix of muinteoir, for example Muinteoir Máire, however, in my time within the school I never heard a child refer to a teacher directly by including their first name, they chose instead to refer to them simply as muinteoir. And so, while this school was perhaps endeavouring to promote equality through titles, the prevailing hierarchical culture dominated, rendering the naming practice tokenistic. As the practice was at odds with the beliefs and values inherent within the educational paradigm within the school, it did not become a feature of the school culture. This supports the assertion

[22] The Irish word for teacher

that beliefs and values must be challenged if meaningful participatory practice is to be facilitated.

Whether or not children could speak freely with their teachers was another indicator of the power structure within particular schools. In Fairview E.T., where power-sharing and a less pronounced hierarchy was evident, the children were observed speaking quite openly with their educators.

> A child asks the teacher the meaning of the word 'feeble'. The teacher explains the word to which the child replies
> Child (frowning) < "well why not just use 'weak? Why always have more difficult words?". The teacher smiles and < "I'm trying to extend your vocabulary [name]".
> Child (Smiling) < Ya well, I'll forget it by tomorrow
> Teacher (smiling) < I bet you won't
> (Diary entry, 6th Class, Fairview E.T. Day Five)

This same teacher described in an interview how, unlike in other schools, if he, for example, wore a hat that looked silly, the children would be quick to comment on it, while in other schools, he believed, the teacher would be encouraged to deter this sort of behaviour.

> You know, if I came in with a funny hat, they'll let me know that I look stupid in my hat or something, you know. Whereas in certain schools […] if a principal or a senior teacher saw that happen they would come over and have a little word and say, you know 'oh I wouldn't let them get away with that there now'. Whereas here you wouldn't. And I think that's good (6th class teacher, Fairview E.T.).

This quote highlights this educator's belief that there is greater freedom in Fairview E.T. for children to speak openly, and even playfully poke fun at the educators, then there would be in other schools. This speaks to the increased equality of status within the hierarchy in this school. It is worth noting, however, that it is the expectations of appropriate behaviour that are different in this school, rather than the children being in a greater position to speak openly about issues that are outside of what is deemed appropriate by the adults. The children still remain subordinate from a hierarchical perspective within this more egalitarian relationship, as to step outside the adult determined boundaries of what is considered appropriate is not permitted. As previously noted, this teacher stated

that he curtails such liberties if he feels his authority is not sufficiently effective. Thus, this educator returns to a more traditional power structure by re-establishing his authority when the children are, ultimately, not doing that which the educator requires of them. This illustrates the limitations in relation to children's agency within even the most positive and egalitarian of student/teacher relationships. Children whose behaviour fits within the educator's expectations regarding what is appropriate benefit from increased power to operate within these educator-defined boundaries. Ultimately, it is the will of the educator, be it to 'share' power or to exert their authority, that always prevails. The power-dynamic between adults and children can never be equal, but neither does it not need to be in order for children's participation to be enabled. If it is educators' will to facilitate and promote participation then they have the power to do so. Having said that, in instances where participation occurs children have a greater level of power within the student/teacher relationship than they would otherwise have.

A desire on the part of educators to achieve a greater degree of power-sharing with the children, in order to empower children, was not evident in Gaelscoil Áitéigin, St. Reginas or St. Seáns, but was apparent in Springrock and Fairview E.T. In recounting his first time working in a school with a similar ethos to his current school, the principal of Springrock noted that a power sharing approach is not the traditional power-dynamic in most schools:

> Between you being on one side of the fence and the pupils being on the other side of the fence, when I went in to the [school with similar ethos] school, I went over to England and I trained and I worked there for years, there was no fence. And that hit me. I wasn't expecting that. I didn't know anything about it, but there was no fence. So, it's a different space and it's threatening and it's this and it's that. And it's amazingly enlightening (6th class teacher/Principal, Springrock)

This principal spoke of how the lack of 'a fence' or a clear hierarchical division between educators and children impacts on the nature and quality of the teaching and learning relationship, suggesting that such a dynamic is both challenging and rewarding.

> I think if it's ['the fence/line'] not there, that will force the teacher into that space, whether they want to go there or not. Because it's actually very invasive. [....] So, I think if that line isn't there you have this kind of [pause], they [teachers] feel whatever will-force of the child comes washing into where you are. You're going to be forced to, kind of, start living in there and functioning there as a teacher. And I just think it's a great place to be because the other bit is an awful lot easier then (6th class teacher/Principal, Spring Rock).

Here the educator speaks of how the lack of a hierarchical 'line' affords children a greater level of agency and power; the 'will-force of the child comes washing into where you are' and this forces the teacher to engage with the child, and indeed with the act of teaching in a different way. This, he says, is both challenging ('invasive' and 'threatening') and positive ('enlightening') for the teacher, 'because the other bit is an awful lot easier then'. The 'other bit' refers to the impact the teaching is having on the children's deep leaning; 'how did it make them feel' (6th class teacher/Principal, Spring Rock), rather than simply covering curriculum learning outcomes. The pedagogical philosophy of this school/educator was unique in this study, yet it offers valuable insights into the research question and highlights the impact of the hierarchical power-dynamic between educators and children on the nature of the (teaching) relationship between the two.

To conclude this section on power and hierarchy, the following is emphasized. It is the educators who, based on their beliefs and values, determine student/educator relationship norms. The nature and quality of such relationships is a key element in a school's educational paradigm, and play a central role in shaping a school's hierarchical power structure. Schools with a greater the level of power-sharing and less traditional hierarchies facilitated a greater degree of participation than schools that were more traditionally hierarchical in nature.

Conclusion

Given the dialogic nature of participation and the crucial role adults play in facilitating children's participation, relationships between educators and children are perhaps the most important element to examine in relation to identifying and exploring the barriers and enablers of children's participation. Educators' beliefs

and values underpin the nature of relationships between educators and children, and how relationships are practiced. While children's agency within student/educator relationships is both recognised and acknowledged, this research finds that, due to intergenerational power-dynamics and the hierarchical nature of schools as an institution, it is the beliefs, values and (resulting) practices of adults that are the dominant factors in determining the nature and boundaries of student/educator relationships. Findings reveal that a more egalitarian hierarchy, power-sharing practices, a respectful and therefore risk free environment, and a personal dimension to student/educator relationships are key relationship factors that enable participation.

While a positive relationship between educators and children was found to be a key requisite in the facilitation of participation, in and of itself, a positive relationship does not necessarily ensure children's participation within decision-making. A positive relationship enables three of the four elements needed for participation – space, voice and audience (Lundy, 2007). For the fourth element, influence, to be present within decision-making contexts, children's perspectives must be duly considered. Educators' beliefs and values regarding children, participation and education, and their resulting practices determine whether or not such consideration occurs. However, positive relationships did enable children to exercise their right to express themselves (Article 13), and thus permitted children's participation within non-decision-making moments.

The findings revealed that children do not necessarily have any difficulty with adults being in positions of power. Their concern centres on the quality of their relationships with their teachers. Ultimately, the children want teachers who listen to them, and to be treated with dignity and respect in their relationships with their teachers. Relationship norms and practices concerning: (1) respect, (2) personal/professional divide and (3) power/hierarchy, are key elements that impact on children's participation. Beliefs and values identified in Chapter Six: *Educational Paradigms: The beliefs and values that (up)set the stage for participatory practice*, concerning education, children and participation, determine these three key relationship elements.

Chapter Nine: Participation through pedagogical spaces and student/educator relationships - a whole-school paradigm

Introduction

This chapter interprets and discusses the findings as laid out in Chapter Six: *Educational Paradigms: The beliefs and values that (up)set the stage for participatory practice,* Chapter Seven: *Pedagogical Practice and Participation,* and Chapter Eight: *Relationships between educators and children and their Impact on Participation*. In doing so, the discussion draws on the conceptual and theoretical tools identified in Chapter Four: *Assembling a Theoretical Toolkit*. The chapter is structured around two key overarching themes: pedagogical practice and student/educator relationships, and illustrates how the overarching educational paradigm and associated power-dynamics create barriers and enablers of children's lived participation through the 'production' of the silent or the participative child, and (pedagogical/relationship) spaces that either prohibit or enable children's lived participation. The findings reveal that beliefs and values regarding *children*, *education* and *participation*, and associated practices, are paramount in determining the cultural context in relation to children's opportunities to participate. This chapter argues that lived participation necessitates a whole-school paradigmatic shift that is underpinned by a rights-based perspective.

Educational Paradigms

The following section begins by highlighting macro factors which influence the educational paradigm, and subsequently the educators' role as duty-bearers. This discussion notes findings in relation to the influence of neoliberal-driven performative discourses, and the absence of rights-based discourse, on the educational paradigm. The section then discusses the ways in which children's agency is enabled or constrained within pedagogical practice. In arguing the need for a whole-school approach to developing children's lived participation, the

discussion highlights the interconnected nature of beliefs and values, concerning children, education and participation, underpinning pedagogical practice. Finally, an in-depth analysis of the power-dynamics within pedagogical practice is presented. In doing so, both the barriers and enablers of children's participation within pedagogical relationships and spaces, *and* the factors that create such barriers and enablers are revealed. The argument is made that educational paradigms (a) are the result of interconnected beliefs, values and practices regarding children, education and participation, and (b) shape pedagogical practice which, through associated student/educator power-dynamics, 'produces' particular specifications of people and spaces which serve as either barriers or enablers of children's participation.

Macro Structural Influences on the Educational Paradigm

In considering the factors that influence educational paradigms, and as such educators' beliefs and values relating to children's participation, it is import to consider the influence of two key factors – neoliberalist performance-orientated agendas and perspectives, and children's rights. The research findings revealed that while educators' prioritised meeting curriculum goals and preparing children for their future academic success, they did not indicate experiencing any pressure or duty to achieve rights-based outcomes. As noted, most educators' priorities centred on children's well-being and academic success, while a lack of time as a consequence of an overloaded curriculum, was identified by most educators as one of the biggest challenges they faced in their practice. Participation was viewed by many educators within transmissive contexts as something that was not only developmentally inappropriate, but also a threat to their ability to maintain the high level of control they felt they needed to teach effectively, and as an enterprise that would place further demands on the limited time they had to achieve academic goals. In discussing the potential benefits of participation, educators drew predominantly on developmental and academic achievement discourses, identifying benefits related to improved teaching and learning. Such benefits, as identified by educators, included increased confidence and oral language development for children, and the ability to better meet the children's learning needs as a result of the knowledge and ideas provided by the children. Educators

also drew on such discourses in discussing both their role and priorities as educators. Right-based discourses were lacking in educators' discussions on such issues. In fact, the findings revealed that the majority of educators had limited, if any, knowledge and understanding of the UNCRC, identifying issues relevant to protection and provision but not participation. In particular, as with previous studies (e.g. Conneely, 2015; Waldron et al, 2011), educators had little knowledge with regard to children's participation rights and revealed a lack of awareness as to their own role as 'duty bearers' (Lundy and McEvoy, 2012b) in the facilitation of such rights. A greater level of knowledge of the UNCRC was evident in Springrock and Fairveiw E.T., the two schools in which participation was a feature of the pedagogical approach, thus highlighting the link between awareness of children's rights and the facilitation of such rights. Existing literature notes that the capacity of adult duty-bearers has not received the extensive deliberation that children's capacity has been subject to (Moran-Ellis and Tisdall, 2019; Tisdall, 2018). However, it is not educators' capacity that requires most urgent attention but rather their inclination to facilitate children's participation. This research reveals that educators have little inclination to act as duty-bearers in relation to children's right to participate, in part as a result of their beliefs regarding participation, children and education, but also as a consequence of a lack of any external motivating influence.

As discussed within chapter two: *Children and Young People's Participation: Origins, Tensions and Development*, externally defined measures of quality, driven by a neoliberal reframing of educational policies (Baroutsis et al, 2016), place significant pressure on educators to improve student outcomes in standardised assessments (Pearce and Wood, 2019), while the legislative and policy context places little pressure on educators to adopt a rights-based approach to teaching practice. The findings in this study support this argument. Indeed, even in the two schools in which participation featured within the pedagogical approach, in discussing the benefits of participation, educators drew on performative as opposed to rights-based discourses. An awareness of children's *right* to participate, and educators' *duty* to facilitate the realisation of children's rights within their school lives were not evident in educators' comments. As argued previously, in

order to avoid student participation from being 'hijacked' by neoliberal performance goals (Charteris and Smardon, 2019; De Castro, 2012), and thus, achieve transformational social change, the promotion of student participation must be underpinned by rights-based discourse and goals. The achievement of such a goal is predicated on the development and enactment of legislation and policy that supports children's right to participate within their school lives as enshrined in the UNCRC, both collectively and individually, and within both decision-making and non-decision-making contexts and moments. As previously noted, the *National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making 2015-2020* (DCYA, 2015) places limited obligations on schools to develop children's everyday lived participation. The construction of children as rights-holders, and educators as duty-bearers, must become an aspect of educational paradigms, and as such influence beliefs, values and practices concerning children, education and participation.

Pedagogical Practice: a means to enable or constrain children's agency and participation

The findings revealed that pedagogical practice was a key mechanism by, and through which, children's agency was enabled or constrained. As noted, two key pedagogical approaches were evident within the study – transmissive and participatory. This research does not claim to provide any definitive classification, or assessment, of each school's pedagogical mode. However, as evidenced by the data, within Fairview E.T. and Springrock participatory pedagogical techniques and practices were the predominant mode of teaching and learning, while in St. Seáns, St. Reginas and Gaelscoil Áitéigin a transmissive pedagogical approach was most evident. A fundamental difference between the two pedagogical approaches observed in this study, is the power-dynamic between educators and students. Formosinho and Oliveria-Formosinho, (2016) also note such a contrast between student/educator power-dynamics within participatory and transmissive pedagogical modes. A key objective of this study is to understand the ways in which children are afforded agency within their school lives. The participatory pedagogical strategies identified in this study supported children's participation through educators exercising power to enable children to exercise power.

Conversely, the transmissive teaching and learning strategies documented, constrain children's participation in a number of ways. Pedagogical strategies serve to enable or prevent children's agency and participation, and it is *through* these strategies that the teaching and learning space becomes one which contains multiple and overlapping elements, that support/limit children's agency within the school/classroom space. These spatial/relational elements are documented below in Table 7.

Table 7. Spatial/relational elements that serve as barriers or enablers to children's participation/agency within pedagogical practice

Spatial/relational elements that serve as barriers or enablers to children's participation/agency within pedagogical practice:	
Spatial/relational elements that *support and enable* children's participation within pedagogical practice (Enablers)	Spatial/relational elements that *limit and prevent* children's participation within pedagogical practice (Barriers)
The participatory opportunities within the pedagogical space (for example, opportunities for children to lead or assess the learning, and to construct knowledge).	**The lack of participatory opportunities within the pedagogical space** (for example, the teacher controlling the construction of knowledge, and she alone assessing the quality of the children's work).
Norms of practice within the space (such as, children questioning the teacher's knowledge, or using their initiative, and approaches to discipline that respect the dignity of the child).	**Norms of practice within the space** (such as, children being prohibited from using their initiative, and disrespectful treatment of children, in particular, within approaches to discipline).
The skills, attitudes and identities children develop within such spaces (for example, the ability of children to articulate their perspective, and the	**The skills, attitudes and identities children develop within such spaces** (for example, the lack of opportunity for children to practice the skills needed to participate effectively in

expectation of that perspective carrying weight).	decision-making, and children's reluctance to question those in authority as a result of their subordinate positioning (the 'good' student does what they are told).
The beliefs and values shaping the pedagogical space (for example, the belief that a teacher's role is to enable children to participate fully in their educational experiences, or that children have ideas that are worth listening to).	**The beliefs and values shaping the pedagogical space** (for example, the belief that a teacher's role is to teach the curriculum in order to prepare children for their future educational success, or the belief that adults are best positioned to make decision on behalf of children).

Thus, the culture within the classroom, as it pertains to children's participation, is significantly influenced by the pedagogical approach taken by the educator, which in turn is both influenced by, and a contributing factor to, the educational paradigm within a school. The following section '*Beliefs and Values Underpinning Pedagogical Practice and Associated Power-Dynamics*' considers the beliefs and values underpinning pedagogical practice and thus determining school culture.

Beliefs and Values Underpinning Pedagogical Practice and Associated Power-Dynamics

A product of the educational paradigm, the pedagogical approach taken within a school is predicated on particular beliefs and values regarding *children* and *education*, with perspectives on, and practice concerning, children's *participation* being a direct consequence of such beliefs and values. Having considered the impact of pedagogical practice on children's participation within the pedagogical space, it is important to also examine the beliefs and values that underpin such practices. This is important as, in order to promote participatory pedagogy, we need to understand the foundations underpinning it. Based on the findings presented in Chapter Six: *Educational Paradigms: The beliefs and values that*

(up)set the stage for participatory practice, the following table highlights the key beliefs and values that constitute an educational paradigm and determine the pedagogical approach, both as identified by the educators, and inherent in their practice as observed during fieldwork.

Table 8. Key Beliefs and Values within Pedagogical Approach

Key beliefs and values		
	Participatory Pedagogy	**Transmissive Pedagogy**
Children	Constructivist constructions of children as competent meaning-makers	Deterministic constructions of children as recipients of knowledge
Education	Protection, provision *and* participation underpin beliefs, values and practices concerning education Curriculum as process The need for educators **and** students to shape the teaching and learning space/process	Protection and provision underpin beliefs, values and practices concerning education Curriculum as product The need for educators to shape (control) the teaching and learning process/space
Participation	Participation, as a key value, to be integrated into all aspects of school life	Participation is not held as a key value and is considered an 'add-on' activity.

These key beliefs, regarding children, education and participation, constitute the prevailing educational paradigm, as relevant to children's participation, within schools, and shape pedagogical practice. The educational paradigm shapes the process of co-specification which occurs within school spaces, with the resulting specifications of *people* and *spaces* serving as either barriers to, or enablers of, participation. For example, as illustrated later in this chapter, the children's situated identity is shaped by the educational paradigm in such a way as to serve as an enabler or a barrier. With regard to specifications of space, as illustrated in Table 7 (*Spatial/relational elements that serve as barriers or enablers to*

children's participation/agency within pedagogical practice), resulting specifications of pedagogical spaces can be laden with, or devoid of, opportunities for children's participation.

The beliefs and values constituting an educational paradigm are not arbitrary – they are inextricably interlinked. Deterministic constructions of children are central to transmissive pedagogical approaches, within which curriculum is constructed as product, and encompass discourses of protection and provision. Furthermore, deterministic constructions of children, and in particular children's perceived lack of capacity to participate, legitimize educators' beliefs regarding the need for adults to control pedagogical spaces and processes, thus resulting in the use of transmissive pedagogy. In asking 'they are still quite immature [...] are we as their teachers not the best people to decide, to make the decisions?' (1st class teacher, Gaelscoil Áitéigin), the teacher draws on developmental/protectionist discourses of children as lacking the capacity to contribute to decisions that are in their own best interest as a result of their immaturity. Transmissive pedagogy is predicated on educators maintaining control, and requires the subordinate positioning of children. In the contexts where educators held deterministic constructions of children, teachers believed that they needed to maintain control in order for effective teaching and learning to occur. As noted by one teacher; 'How is the teacher supposed to control and educate the children if [children] have more power?' (1st class teacher, St Reginas). Traditional school hierarchical power structures are developed and maintained by educators through pedagogical practice and student/educator relationships, and serve to maintain the control perceived to be needed within transmissive contexts. Constructing the children as lacking in capacity in relation to participation is key to adults maintaining power. It is easy to dismiss the merit of children's perspectives when such a view of children prevails. Findings revealed beliefs amongst educators within transmissive contexts that facilitating children's participation within the educational process could be problematic. Adult participants felt that such an approach could compromise a teacher's ability to cover the material deemed necessary for the children to be adequately prepared for their future academic journey as a result of (a) being a more time-consuming process, (b) its potential to lead to conflict and

(c) the challenge it poses to educators' authority. Such beliefs are based on deterministic constructions of children, a product orientated view of the curriculum, and the (perceived) requirement of a traditional hierarchical structure to enact effective teaching and learning.

Participatory pedagogical practices, however, are predicated on constructivist constructions of children and, as evidenced by the findings, encompass educational discourses concerning protection, provision *and* participation. Constructivist views of children recognise and value children's agency within all aspects of their lives, and underpin the perceived need for children to play an active role in their own learning, and in the construction of knowledge. As such, constructivist constructions of children result in educators valuing children's perspectives and participation, including, and in particular, within the pedagogical process. As a consequence of such beliefs and values regarding children and education, participating educators within Fairview E.T. and Springrock sought to facilitate children's participation within teaching and learning processes, through the participatory pedagogical strategies documented. They also endeavoured to eliminate, or at least lessen, the hierarchical divide between students and educators to allow the 'will force of the child' (5th /6th class teacher/principal, Springrock) to penetrate the pedagogical process, in the belief that such an approach was necessary for effective teaching and learning to occur. As such, in these schools, educators did not base their practice on children's subordination, but rather valued a more egalitarian student/educator power-dynamic, viewing it as central to their pedagogical approach.

The findings of this research support the assertion within literature (detailed below) that educators' constructions of children underpin teaching practice. In a review of research carried out in Brazil, exploring young children's participation within teaching and learning, Cruz (2019) found that transmissive pedagogical approaches were predicated on deterministic constructions of children, and argued for 'an urgent need for participatory professional development that will allow educators to reconstruct the child' image, their own role and the educational environment so that they embrace and respond to the needs and rights of children

and their competence.' (Cruz, 2019, p.409). Also positioning educators' beliefs and values as central to the facilitation of children's participation within teaching and learning, Simpson (2018) proposes that for educators to learn how to engage effectively in participatory pedagogy, it is necessary that they learn to unlearn many assumptions and beliefs upon which their teaching practice has been built. Additionally, Sargeant (2018) argue that a 'cultural and attitudinal shift' (p. 321) is necessary for 'voice inclusive practice' (Sargeant and Gillett-Swan, 2015) to be embraced. Finally, Giannakaki et al (2018) have found that educators' beliefs about children shape the student/educator power-dynamic underpinning their approach to pedagogical practice.

This research adds to this body of knowledge by providing further insights into the intersections between constructions of children and the beliefs and values concerning education and participation underpinning pedagogical practice. This knowledge can contribute to the development of pedagogical practice as advocated for by Cruz (2019) and Sargeant (2018). In particular, this research illustrates that beliefs and values concerning children inherent within transmissive pedagogy are incompatible with the beliefs and values required for developing participatory school cultures and associated pedagogy. Children's participation fundamentally undermines the unequal student/educator power-dynamic intrinsic to transmissive pedagogy, and the traditional hierarchy and deterministic constructions of children on which this pedagogy is built. This study concurs with previous research (Thornberg and Elvstrand, 2012) which has argued that children's subordinate positioning within the school context impedes their participation. It argues that a whole-school approach to the facilitation of children's lived participation must include the development of constructivist constructions of children within the educational paradigm, in order to challenge children's subordinate hierarchical positioning and associated teaching practices. This research provides key insights into the fundamental role of children's subordination within transmissive pedagogy, and argues that, given the interwoven nature of beliefs and values concerning children, education and participation that constitute the educational paradigm, a paradigmatic shift is required in order to challenge such positioning and associated pedagogy. The need for whole-school approaches to participation

has been identified in the literature (Graham et al, 2018; Stamatović and Cicvarić, 2018). This research concurs with such an assessment, and provides key insights into the role of the educational paradigm in shaping pedagogical practice and thus school culture. In doing so, this thesis contributes original knowledge regarding the factors that must be addressed in order to achieve children's participation through a whole-school approach. In addition to beliefs and values inherent within the educational paradigm, another key factor that must be addressed is student/educator power-dynamics. Student/educator power-dynamics are shaped by the interconnected beliefs and values as discussed above.

Pedagogical Power-Dynamics

The analysis of the findings concerning pedagogical practice, through the lens of power, reveals the manner through which children's participation is constrained or supported by educators and the educational institution. Within the school space, it is adults who control what children do, when they do it and the resources they have access to. While it is important not to ignore or disregard the agency that children practice every day within their school lives, it is clear that hierarchical, institutional and generational structures place decision-making power, and thus control, firmly in the hands of adults. This study found that the extent to which adults choose to 'share' this power with children within teaching and learning varied significantly and formed the basis for the classification of pedagogical modes. When it comes to power-dynamics between students and educators, generational and institutional structures serve as mechanisms of power which legitimise educators' authority to make decisions, giving them observable decision-making power - adults set the agendas. In examining a series of concrete decisions, the behaviours of educators in maintaining and exercising this first 'face' of power (Lukes, 1974, 2005) are observable, for example, when they develop behaviour policies; when they enforce the school rules; when they set the day's work; when they organise the resources present in the room and the level of access children have to these; when they afford or deny children agency within teaching and learning; and when they discipline a child.

Educators can exercise power to afford children opportunities to exercise power within the pedagogical process. While children within *transmissive* contexts exercised very little if any control or decision-making power within pedagogical spaces, educators within *participatory* pedagogical contexts exercised power to enable children's agency. Through the participatory pedagogical strategies identified in the findings, children in these contexts exercised power within the pedagogical process – albeit at the discretion of the educator. This can be seen, for example, when educators position children in leadership roles. The teacher exercises power in establishing situations which place the children in leadership positions, which the children comply with, and, subsequently, in their leadership roles the children exercise power in eliciting the other children's compliance in carrying out their requests. Thus, while both the educator and the children can be seen to exercise one dimensional power, it is educators who have control when it comes to 'power-sharing[23]' practices. They have the power to create spaces which contain possibilities for children's participation in decision-making and in knowledge construction, and it is through their relationship with their teacher that the children are afforded this agency to participate. Thus, while 'A' can exercise power over 'B' to get them to do something they would not otherwise have done, (Dahl, 1957) this can include 'A' exercising power over 'B' to enable 'B' to exercise power themselves. An examination of one-dimensional power thus reveals that (a) adults have decision-making power in relation to children, and importantly (b) adults can exercise this form of power to enable children's agency. This highlights the relational nature of children's participation within pedagogical practice, and the key role adults play in creating participatory pedagogical spaces.

Educators used a range of strategies to prevent children from airing grievances. With regard to the second-dimension of power, this study found a divergence of attitudes and practices amongst educators' in relation to areas of decision-making that children should be, or were, facilitated to participate in. The findings revealed that both overt and covert behaviours were exhibited by educators within

[23]Power is not conceptualised within this study as a resource. While the term 'power sharing' may suggest such a view, the term is used purely for linguistic convenience. 'Power-sharing' in this context refers to adults' ability to exercise power in order to enable children to exercise power within adult/child relationships and interactions.

pedagogical practice, to create barriers to children airing their grievances, and prevent children from joining, or seeking to join, the decision-making arena. These include:

- The prevention of dialogue concerning issues unrelated to class work
- Children 'receiving' rather than 'constructing' knowledge within teaching and learning
- Not including children in decisions regarding the classwork
- Shutting down unsolicited conversation
- Responding negatively to children taking initiative
- The use of a reward system to direct children's behaviour
- The use of shaming as a disciplinary tool
- Constructing the challenging or questioning of teachers as children being 'cheeky' and disrespectful.

While all of these factors were found to be evident in transmissive contexts, the use of a reward system was evident, albeit used to a lesser extent, in participatory pedagogical contexts. As evident in the findings, it was primarily the educators within transmissive contexts who strove to prevent children from entering into decision-making spaces.

Data from the children revealed the effectiveness of such mechanisms in silencing children and, in doing so, preventing them from challenging the teachers' decision-making power. In particular, a discrepancy between what children felt they *could* say and what they *would* say in response to perceived injustices was identified by several children. Furthermore, observations documented several occasions, within transmissive contexts, in which children did not speak to defend themselves when they were treated unfairly - for example, the boy in 6th class in Gaelscoil Áitéigin who, having only just returned to the classroom, was publicly reprimanded for not knowing what work he should be doing. Drawing on Bachrach and Baratz (1970), Adu-Gyamfi notes that '[i]n the two-dimensional view power is identified by studying the interests (both observable preferences and grievances) of all actors to determine the means through which the potential demands for change have been

denied' (2013, p.1768). Within this study data revealed that the children's desire for teachers to be benevolent leaders who are fair, and who listen to them, was a priority to them. That the children did not, or were not in a position to air their grievances with their teachers when they did not live up to this desired ideal illustrates the power of the educators in controlling the decision-making arena and preventing any challenge to their interests and values.

The second dimension of power can also be seen within transmissive pedagogy wherein educators control the knowledge, thus denying children any opportunity to participate in the construction of knowledge and/or meaning making. Listening to see if the child understood the knowledge transferred by the teacher, rather than listening in order to hear children's perspectives on the knowledge, was the usual practice observed within transmissive contexts. Such an approach prevents the co-construction of knowledge through dialogue, and, argues Murris (2013, cited in Barrow, 2015, p.77) amounts to 'epistemic injustice'. As such 'listening for' rather than 'listening to' fails to recognise children as active meaning makers and positions them as passive recipients of knowledge. Thus, through educators exercising this second dimension of power, children are prevented from entering into the pedagogical decision-making space, and as such from participating in the pedagogical process. Conversely, educators' control of knowledge is reduced through the dialogic processes inherent within participatory pedagogy (Barrow, 2015). This was evident, for example, when the 6th class children in Fairview E.T. decided, through a whole-class discussion, which novel to study next. The application of a two-dimensional lens to the analysis of the data thus, reveals how educators exercise power to prevent challenges to their own and the school's values and interests, by preventing children's grievances (a) overtly by controlling the decision-making arena and (b) tacitly through the positioning of children as passive recipients of knowledge.

An analysis of the data, through the lens of power's third dimension, reveals how transmissive pedagogical practice serves to sustain the status quo in relation to children's subordinate position, by shaping children's situated identity. Children internalise the messages they receive through their relationship to the teaching and

learning space. Devine (2003) highlights the impact of the power relations between educators and children on the view children have of themselves within the school context, in particular children's 'perception of themselves as persons with a right to exercise their voice on matters which directly affect them and have their views taken seriously and treated with respect' (Devine 2003, p.2). Transmissive pedagogical techniques contribute to children seeing themselves as recipients of knowledge whose perspectives carry little value, while participatory pedagogical techniques contribute to children identifying as active co-constructors of knowledge. By controlling and legitimising knowledge through transmissive pedagogical strategies, educators contribute to children being less likely to think critically, as their role is not to construct, but to retain knowledge. As such, transmissive pedagogical techniques contribute to children being less likely to challenge the status quo, as their role is not to question, but to be told. Thus, the third face of power is evident in the influence transmissive pedagogical practice has on shaping children's identity in such a way as to prevent them from developing grievances in relation to their subordinate and passive positioning. Such situated identities serve as a significant barrier to children's participation, as participation requires children to believe that their perspectives are of value and have the potential for effecting change. Participatory pedagogical techniques do not influence children's identities in such a way as to prevent them from challenging the status quo – in fact quite the opposite.

The findings reveal that, in addition to pedagogical practices related to teaching and learning, educators also used mechanisms of discipline to subordinate or empower children. Educators' approaches to discipline can be categorised as leading to children being either intrinsically or extrinsically motivated to comply with adult agendas. Approaches leading to children's extrinsic motivation were characterised by children's subordination, and were more prevalent in transmissive contexts, while approaches to intrinsic motivation were characterised by the empowerment of children, and were more prevalent in participatory contexts. All three 'faces' of power are evident in educators' use of power to achieve children's compliance with required behaviours, through techniques of discipline that resulted in *extrinsic motivation*. Educators drew on their

generational/institutional power in determining the requirements for children's behaviours and in demanding compliance – thus, using the first 'face' of power to set the agenda; the disciplinary techniques educators used denied children access to the decision-making arenas both overtly, by using shame-based techniques that create risky spaces, and more tacitly through the use of positive and negative regard – thus, using the second 'face' of power to limit the airing of grievances; and, finally the third 'face' of power is evident in the impact of such techniques on children's situated identities, through children's internalisation of their subordinate hierarchical positioning, and children's constructions of the 'good' student.

Within contexts in which educators exercised power to enable and support children's agency, educators used discipline strategies that resulted in children being *intrinsically* motivated to police their behaviour (for example, by providing rationales for requests). While techniques that elicited intrinsic motivation also served to control, so too did they provide spaces for children's participation. Within contexts in which discipline strategies supported children's intrinsic motivation, the first face of power is once more evident in educators having the status and power to control the requirements and parameters of children's behaviour. However, as with participatory pedagogical techniques, educators were seen to use power to empower children to engage proactively and meaningfully with issues of discipline (for example, using conflict resolution and negotiating with the children), thus affording children agency within the context of discipline. The respectful and participatory nature of such an approach does not exclude children to the same degree as techniques that result in extrinsic motivation, from airing their grievances and entering into decision-making spaces. Thus, two-dimensional power was not used by educators in contexts where children were intrinsically motivated to comply with required behaviours, to silence children or to exclude them from decision-making spaces. However, it must still be noted that while the educators may not have exercised power overtly to prevent children from airing their grievances, generational and institutional structures inherently do so. Nonetheless, the tacit messages that children received, and internalised, within a respectful and participatory approach to discipline, did not serve to shape

children's identities in such a way as to prevent challenges to the status quo, but rather served to reinforce children's situated identities as active partners. Thus, the third 'face' of power was not evident in the approach to discipline that elicited children's intrinsic motivation to comply with expected and required behaviours.

Analysis of the findings concerning pedagogy, including both teaching and learning, and discipline, using a multi-dimensional view of power, reveals the *practices* by which educators support or constrain children's participation, and provides key insights into the 'production' of spaces and situated identities (people), that serve as barriers or enablers to children's lived participation. A transmissive pedagogical approach, and disciplinary techniques that elicit children's extrinsic motivation to comply, are inherently incompatible with children's lived participation, as they are predicated on, and reinforce, the subordination of children and unequal hierarchical student/educator power-dynamics. In contrast, participatory pedagogical practice, including participatory approaches to discipline, has as its foundation the participation of children in the pedagogical process. This is enabled through the 'sharing' of power, resulting in a more egalitarian student/educator power-dynamic, and a less traditional hierarchy which positions students and educators as partners in the co-construction of knowledge. The application of the first three dimensions of power illuminates how, and when, educators exercise power to support or constrain children's participation within and through pedagogical practices.

Student/Educator Relationships: setting the tone and positioning children

As noted within Chapter Three, *Children's Participation within the School Context,* understanding the institutional intergenerational relationships between educators and students is key to examining student participation. Findings revealed that a personal dimension to student/educator relationships plays a key role in creating either barriers or enablers to children's lived participation, as do relationship norms in relation to issues of respect.

A personal dimension to professional relationships

The findings revealed that children value and prioritise positive relationships with their teachers, and having 'nice' teachers who listen to them. A personal dimension to the student/educator relationship was a key feature of positive student/educator relationships, and resulted in spaces in which children had opportunities to engage in dialogue of a personal nature with their teachers. As a result of institutional and intergenerational power-dynamics, it is educators who control the nature and parameters of student/educator relationships. The data revealed that several educators within transmissive contexts endeavoured to discourage a personal dimension, as they believed that such a relationship would detract from successful teaching and learning. Given that participation is a dialogic process, the nature and quality of that which can be, or is, discussed between educators and students is key to understanding opportunities for children's participation. Restricting discussion to the academic realm, and the avoidance of personal dialogic encounters serves to limit participatory 'moments', and exemplifies the second face of power (Lukes, 2005) - exercising power to control the decision-making arena. Kirby and Gibbs highlight the role of the personal in dialogue when noting that '[g]enuine dialogue requires adults to share something of themselves with children' (2006, p.215). A lack of dialogue outside of the school-work was observed in classes where teachers sought to maintain a professional distance, a traditional hierarchy prevailed, and where children had little if any opportunities for participation.

Maintaining such a professional divide is a mechanism that reinforces a very traditional hierarchal structure. Educators who sought to prevent a personal dimension to the student/teacher relationship from developing, were found to employ transmissive pedagogical techniques, and as such, base their teaching approach on the premise that they need to maintain strict control by positioning the children as subordinate, in order for effective teaching and learning to occur. As previously discussed, such an approach relies on a distinct hierarchical divide between educators and children, so that it is the educators who exercise power/control the spaces and not children. Anything that is *perceived* to lessen that control, be it 'power-sharing', participation, or personal dialogue, is seen as a threat. However, as highlighted by Jupp Kina (2012), the literature notes that rather

than power being a 'zero-sum' concept (power as a limited recourse, that if given to children must be taken from adults), participation can enable 'mutually beneficial outcomes in which both [children and adults] increase their power' (Prout and Tisdall 2006, p. 245, cited in Jupp Kina, 2012, p.212). An analysis of the participatory pedagogical techniques observed revealed that exercising power in order to enable the children to also do so, did not reduce educators' ability to teach effectively. On the contrary, such techniques enabled children's active learning and the co-construction of knowledge. Additionally, this research reveals that educators' fears that permitting the student/educator relationship to seep into the personal would detract from effective teaching and learning are unfounded. A personal dimension to student/teacher relationships was a feature of participatory pedagogical classrooms, and served to promote positive relationships, which in turn supported more effective teaching and learning. This finding concurs with research (Marsh, 2012; Vitto, 2003) which found that positive student/educator relationships, which encompass the personal, act as 'a complement to academic performance rather than as a competitor with academic goals' (Marsh, 2012, p.163). However, given that transmissive pedagogy is built on unequal power-dynamics and a traditional hierarchy, a teacher employing this pedagogical approach may feel justified in their resistance to encompassing the personal. By maintaining a professional distance, teachers exercise power to prevent children from airing their grievances and entering into the decision-making arena, through (a) controlling whether student/educator dialogue occurs within a particular space and (b) the nature of the dialogue that may occur within a particular space. In ensuring that the student/teacher relationship remains firmly within the professional academic realm, the educator maintains the traditional hierarchical school power structure that enables them to teach and maintain control of the children in a traditional transmissive manner, an approach which does not require, value or facilitate children's participation.

A duty of care and a concern for children's well-being contributed to some educators engaging in personal student/educator relationships of a paternalistic nature. Such relationships facilitated spaces in which the children could voice their perspectives and express themselves more freely than in spaces/relationships that

did not encompass the personal. This was particularly evident in the younger classes. Observation within these classes documented numerous instances in which the children shared personal, oftentimes random information with their teachers throughout the day. So too were the teachers in younger classes more likely to identify, within interviews, the need to take a caring paternalistic approach in their role as an educator. Moments in which children share unsolicited information with their teacher demonstrates space, voice, audience - but did not necessarily influence decision-making, as such dialogues often did not centre on any decisions. These instances were more about allowing children to say what they needed/wanted to say and not necessarily episodes of children contributing to decisions within a dialogic encounter. The children most often just wanted to show something to their teacher or to tell them something personal that happened to them at home. Thus, while a positive relationship encompassing a personal dimension is a prerequisite for participation, it does not in itself guarantee participation as defined by interpretations of the UNCRC that conceptualise participation solely as decision-making events. However, given the influence such encounters have on children's wellbeing, and in enabling children to exercise agency within student/educator relationships, being heard within such non-decision related 'moments' does have an influence. As noted, findings in this research revealed that, above all else, children valued and wanted 'nice teachers' who listen to them. Thus, such spaces, developed through personal encounters with their teachers, are of significant value given (a) children's priorities are recognised and (b) the positive influence such encounters have on the children's lived experience, and their role in enabling children to express themselves (Article 13, UNCRC). To be known personally, and respected, by their teachers has a significant impact on children's wellbeing (Thomas et al, 2016). So too are such instances indicative of, and contribute to, a culture in which children can and do express their perspectives - a culture in which children's (participatory) right to express themselves (Article 13) is evident. Whilst the monologic nature of some such moments limit the influence of such encounters, the more dialogic nature of encounters some educators facilitated, particularly as was seen during lunch time and 'Golden Time', are optimum in relation to facilitating children's lived participatory rights. Mascadri et al (2021) note that listening to children within

dialogic exchanges, rather than the monologic exchanges that they found are mostly the case in student/educator exchanges, is both more respectful and facilitative of children's participatory rights. Nonetheless, when children are permitted to express themselves in conversation with their educators, either within mologic or dialogic exchanges, children's participatory rights are facilitated – albeit to greater or lesser extents. A conceptualisation of participation as multiple social processes embedded in children's everyday lives and interactions (Horgan, 2017; Percy-Smith, 2010) recognises such encounters as 'participatory moments'. As argued previously, that which is considered participatory practice should more closely align with the social and personal relationships and practices that children themselves experience as meaningful (Twum-Danso Imoh and Okyere, 2020). Children associate participation with a sense of belonging (John-Akinola et al, 2014). Applying Lundy's model to non-decision-making participatory moments, reveals that such participatory 'moments' do indeed encompass space, voice, audience and influence. There is a safe space in which children are free to share their perspectives, the children express themselves freely, the educator listens and perhaps responds, and thus the children's act of expression influences both the child's lived experience in a positive way, supporting their sense of belonging (John-Akinola et al, 2014), as well as having an influence by contributing to the student/educator relationship. Thus, ironically, while some educators in this research expressed the view that participation is an activity more suited to older children, in practice the more caring paternalistic relationships between educators and younger children created spaces that enabled participatory 'moments' that did not concern decisions.

While such moments of participation are to be recognised and valued, they do not negate children's right to also participate in decision-making contexts. A personal dimension to the student/educator relationship can support children's participation in non-decision-making contexts, and is of significant value given that children value and prioritise being listened to by their teachers. However, when a personal dimension is evident, but educators still maintain a deterministic construction of children, such a relationship does not necessarily promote, or support, increased opportunities for children to participate in decision-making contexts. Thus, while

it is important that educators develop positive relationships with children that encompass a personal dimension, so too must they learn to recognise children as agentic rights-bearers. This research concurs with Graham et al (2018), who note that informal relational encounters between educators and students provide the 'cultural preconditions' (p.1029) necessary for participation to become a feature of all aspects of school life. This current study adds to this knowledge by revealing that while such encounters do support participation within non-decision-making contexts, in order for participation within decision-making moments to become a feature of a school culture, educators must also develop constructivist constructions of children.

Respect: a mechanism to oppress or to liberate

The findings reveal that within student/educator relationships, expectations and norms concerning respect play a significant role in establishing and reinforcing the hierarchical structure within a school, and children's position within it. The level of respect shown to children by educators varied considerably from school to school, and even from classroom to classroom, and had a strong relation to the level of participation inherent within the classroom/school culture, and to the hierarchical structure within each school. Mutual respect was found to be a key feature of positive relationships between educators and children, that facilitated participation and resulted in a more egalitarian school hierarchy. In contexts in which children enjoyed fewer opportunities to participate there was often a discrepancy between the relatively low level of respect shown by educators to children and the high level of respect expected of the children to be shown to educators. Most educators and children placed a greater, and more overt, focus on children, as opposed to adults, demonstrating respect, however, the children did indicate their belief that teachers should demonstrate behaviour and possess characteristics that contribute to respectful interactions. Such a discrepancy, i.e. an overt focus on children demonstrating respect, and a more tacit focus on educators doing so, illustrates the dominance of adults' beliefs and values within the educational paradigm, as while both teachers and children believed that respect should be shown to them by the other, it is adults' beliefs that dominate. The extent to which this discrepancy manifests in practice, determines the extent to which

children are positioned as lesser within the school hierarchy. A greater onus on children being respectful was most evident within traditional less-egalitarian school hierarchies.

In relation to expectations regarding children's behaviour, many educators equated respect with children doing what they are told without objection, and conversely, disrespect as the challenging or questioning of educators and the status quo. Constructing a child who questions the teacher as 'cheeky' and deviant reinforces the child's position as 'lesser' within the hierarchy, in addition to limiting children's ability to question such positioning. This perspective, and resulting practices, serves as a mechanism to silence children and prevent them from airing their grievances, and is thus, a key example of educators use of two-dimensional power to control decision-making arenas. Children's subjugation, through beliefs and expectations regarding respectful behaviour, is then compounded by educators' own disrespectful behaviour towards children. Educators not saying please or thank you to the children, making demands without providing reasons, and using disrespectful discipline techniques that shame, construct and position children as 'less' than adults. Being treated disrespectfully impacts negatively on children's wellbeing (Thomas et al, 2016), reinforces children's subordinate positioning, and creates a space in which children are at risk of being subjected to disrespectful resistance as a consequence of airing their grievances. Such a high-risk space is not conducive to children's participation. Additionally, as previously discussed, children's hierarchical positioning impacts on their situated identity, influencing children's ability and inclination to voice their perspectives, and therefore, impacting on both the elements of space and voice, as conceptualised within Lundy's (2007) model. With regards the elements of 'audience' and 'influence' (ibid), if an educator does not respect children's perspectives, or their right to voice their opinions then the child experiences neither an audience or influence. This was evident in the examples of: the child who could not see the board; the teacher who silenced the child when he tried to explain the issue regarding the colouring pencils; and the child who was reprimanded for 'back-answering' when he asked why the teacher wanted him to bring her his book. Czerniawski (2012) argues that, for pupil voice to be effective, all professional

relationships that occur within the school must be based on authentic trust and all language/symbolic systems must be non-threatening. Thus, while previous research has already established that respectful relationships are a prerequisite and a feature of participation (Thomas et al, 2016; Czerniawski, 2012), this research builds on this knowledge by providing key insights in relation to the impact of (dis)respectful relationships on the four elements of participation as conceptualised within Lundy's model, in addition to the role of norms and beliefs regarding respect in children's hierarchical positioning.

In contexts in which children were shown respect, the findings revealed that children enjoyed more egalitarian power-dynamics and a more equal school hierarchal structure, and, as a consequence, greater opportunities to participate. Mutually respectful student/educator relationships enabled children to be heard, and promoted relational practices and interactions in which children were enabled to exercise agency. Such relationships contributed to children being positioned as partners as opposed to 'lesser' within school hierarchies. Treating children with respect, for example, by listening to and considering their perspectives; by maintaining the dignity of the child within mechanisms of discipline; by providing rationales for requests and information that enables children to exercise agency, (a) contribute to creating 'safe' spaces that are conducive to participation and (b) impact on children's situated identity in a manner that affords them agency.

Norms and practices in relation to respect are both a product of, and a constitute element of, the overarching educational paradigm. They are the result of beliefs and values concerning children, education and participation. Practices concerning respect serve as key mechanisms within the process of co-specification 'producing' specifications of people and spaces. In seeking to explore the ways in which children are afforded or denied agency within student/educator relationships, consideration of the beliefs and norms concerning respect, and the associated power-dynamics, has much to offer. The second face of power (Lukes, 2005) is evident in educators reinforcing an unequal hierarchy and silencing children through disrespectful practices. Through these practices educators control the decision-making arena. An application of the third face of power (Lukes, 2005)

reveals that children internalise the messages inherent in disrespectful practices and their subsequent positioning as lesser within traditional school hierarchies, and through such internalisation, children's situated identities are impacted in such a way as to accept their position as lesser thus, preventing challenges to the status quo (the 'good' student does what they are told without question). Finally, the application of the fourth face of power reveals that beliefs, norms and practices concerning respect act as an aspect of the process of co-specification, shaped by the overarching paradigm and driven by power-dynamics to 'produce' agentic or silenced children, and spaces that are either safe or risk-filled in relation to children's participation. This analysis reveals the impact of the situated educational paradigm in shaping, and power in driving, the process of co-specification, and the 'production' of spaces and people – the particular specifications of which serving either as barriers or enablers to participation. Of particular note is the role disrespectful practices play in establishing and maintaining the unequal hierarchical structure, which serves as the foundation to transmissive pedagogy.

Forde et al (2018) argue that of the three realms that children occupy; home, school and community, children feel that school is not only the context in which they have least voice, but also the site in which mutual respect is least evident. Conceptualising respect as recognition and disrespect as misrecognition, Thomas et al (2016) argue that dialogue is the vehicle through which both respect and participation occurs, and note that cultural and structural conditions determine the facilitation (or otherwise) of dialogue. This research builds on this knowledge by highlighting the beliefs, values and practices concerning children, education and participation that create cultural and structural conditions through which respect/participation occurs, and the role of disrespectful practices and unequal expectations concerning respect in maintaining the traditional hierarchy upon which transmissive pedagogy is based. Giannakaki et al (2018) argue that, within oppressive contexts being respectful denotes submission. This research supports such an assertation and builds on this knowledge by highlighting the manner in which 'respect' is used by educators to oppress children, as well as the 'need' to position children as subordinate within transmissive contexts.

The Role of Student/Educator Relationships in (Re)Constructing a School's Hierarchical Structure.

An analysis of student/educator relationships reveals, once more, the interconnected nature of the key beliefs, values and practices concerning children, education and participation within the educational paradigm and the role of associated educator/student power-dynamics play in creating the cultural and structural conditions necessary for the realisation of children's lived participation. Hierarchies are constructed and maintained relationally. The student/educator relationship dynamic contributes to the (re)establishment of the school hierarchical structure and children's position within this structure. Norms and attitudes concerning respect, and the level of personal in the professional educator/pupil relationship, are key aspects of relationships in this regard. As discussed in the previous section concerning pedagogy, the hierarchical-dynamic between educators and students impacts on the nature of pedagogical practice. This study concurs with other research which found that '[e]mbedded hierarchical relationships between children and adults constrain children's voice' (Kirby and Gibbs, 2006, p.209). In a context within which children are viewed as needing to be subservient and obedient, improving the relationship between adults and children helps to promote better participation (Twum-Danso 2010). The findings revealed that care was a factor that enabled a personal dimension to student/educator relationships, and as a consequence, supported positive relationships. Such relationships support children's participation within non-decision-making moments, however, in order to also support children's participation within decision-making contexts, educators must also have a constructivist view of children. De Castro (2012) questions the extent to which a school can ever truly become a democratic space given their hierarchical structures, which render students fearful of challenging the status quo as to do so goes outside the role of the 'good pupil', thus highlighting the need to develop relational equality between educators and children. This study illustrates how key processes and mechanisms within educator/child relationships (re)construct and determine the nature of school hierarchies and determine children's position within such hierarchies. In doing so, key insights are provided into factors that must be

addressed when seeking to create educator/student relational equality, and thus promote children's participation within their school lives. In particular (a) the role of the educational paradigm and associated power-dynamics within student/educator relationships, and (b) the role of respect and a personal element to student/educator relationships in determining children's hierarchical positioning.

Findings in relation to student/educator relationships reveal that a more equal hierarchy, a respectful and therefore risk-free environment, and a personal dimension to educator/child relationships are key relationship factors that enable participation. Educational paradigms underpin the nature of relationships between educators and children, and how relationships are practiced. This analysis of the barriers and enablers of children's participation enabled through, and inherent in, student/educator relationships, highlights, the role of the educational paradigm and associated power-dynamics in the creation of barriers and enablers of children's lived participation within the school context, through the 'production' of particular specifications of people and spaces.

Power: producing people and spaces through webs of relations

As previously noted, people and spaces are in a constant process of co-specification, with the resulting specifications of people and spaces determining the opportunities for children's participation embedded within school culture. The findings and analysis in relation to pedagogical practice and student/educator relationships reveal that (a) situated power-dynamics are at the centre of the process of co-specification, and (b) the educational paradigm determines the nature of student/educator power-dynamics. This thesis argues that in order for children's everyday informal lived participation to become a reality, key beliefs and values regarding, and constructions of, *children*, *education* and *participation* must be conducive to the production of people and spaces that support and enable lived participation. Given the interconnected nature of these three elements, a paradigmatic shift is needed within transmissive contexts to achieve such a goal.

While a two-dimensional view of power reveals how power can be exercised within student/educator interactions to prevent grievances from being aired, a three-dimensional view (Lukes, 1974, 2005) reveals the power of educators to shape children's identities in such a way as to prevent children from becoming conscious of their 'real interests' in the first place, thus preventing grievances from arising. Lukes (1974, 2005) asserts that to study this we must consider the 'counterfactual' - that which did not happen. In relation to this study, we must therefore, consider what the children would do/desire/believe had their identities/perspectives not been shaped by their school/educators to assure their compliance. The findings revealed that there is a relationship between children's priorities and their school's lived ethos and values. Thus, by considering the children's situated identities and perspectives in light of the educational paradigm within their school, the data reveals that through transmissive pedagogical practices, and student/educator relationships that do not encompass a personal mutually respectful quality, children's perspectives are influenced so that they do not question their subordinate positioning.

For example, in Gaelscoil Áitéigin the 'good student' is constructed as one who works hard without questioning the teacher's requests or challenging the status quo. Children in Gaelscoil Áitéigin are considered very capable in relation to hard work and academic achievement, but are not considered so in relation to participating in decision-making. The internalisation of the educational paradigm is evident in this school, in the students placing a high value on education and believing that to achieve academic excellence they must, above all else, work hard and meet their educators' demands without question. These students are seen to have internalised educators' beliefs, values and practices regarding children's needs and place within the hierarchy, and the pre-eminence of academic achievement. These students identified as important the need to 'appreciate your education'; 'work hard'; and 'behave' (comments made in the older focus group, Gaelscoil Áitéigin), and 'work'; 'do your work properly'; and 'do what the teacher says to do' (comments made in the younger focus group, Gaelscoil Áitéigin). The 'good student' 'participates' in their schoolwork by acquiring the skills and knowledge required, without question. They are 'protected' by adults from

participating meaningfully in the pedagogical process because they are not considered by adults to have the maturity to do so. Thus, the passive nature of children's roles within transmissive pedagogy reinforces children's situated identities as both subordinate and passive. Their role is not to question, but to demonstrate respect, by complying with the teachers' instructions and expectations. While a view of children as lacking the capacity to participate was evident within each of the schools that used predominantly transmissive pedagogy, in Gaelscoil Áitéigin it was particularly obvious given the construction of the children as very academically competent, but incompetent in relation to their ability to contribute meaningfully to decisions affecting them. However, the key point to highlight at this juncture is that the children's identities, that is, their perspectives and priorities, were influenced by the educational paradigm. Thus, within an educational paradigm encompassing: deterministic constructions of children; a transmissive pedagogical approach; and impersonal, disrespectful student/educator relationships, power's third dimension (Lukes, 1974, 2005), is evident in the influence the educational paradigm has in shaping the children's identities in such a way as to prevent them from challenging the interests of those in power.

By contrast, in Fairview E.T. educator's constructivist construction of children underpinned the respectful nature of student/educator relationships, children's more equal hierarchical positioning and the participatory pedagogical practices evident within this school. As in Gaelsocil Áitéigin, the children's identities were shaped by the messages they received and internalised from the mechanisms, structures and norms within this school. Students in Fairview E.T. identified an appreciation for the opportunities they had to be involved in committees such as the student council: 'the jobs [are an aspect of school that they like], cause there's a lot of really cool jobs to do that give you more responsibility, like on the student council' (Child in older focus group, Fairview E.T.). Furthermore, when asked to identify the aspects of their teacher they valued, the children in the older focus group noted that he 'compromises' and 'negotiates'. Thus, participating in their school lives was valued by the children in this school. In addition to educators' stated views regarding the children revealing constructivist constructions, the

construction of the children as capable of participating in decision-making was evident in the inclusion and consideration of children's perspectives within all areas of school life (for example the participatory pedagogical approach used within this school, and the existence of a student council). As noted previously, inclusion, equality and diversity are central values within the ethos of this school. The children's internalisation of the educational paradigm in this school is thus evident in their construction of the 'good student' as one who is inclusive, and in their value on participation.

Giannakaki et al (2018) explored educators' beliefs and values regarding children and education on the resulting 'cultural orientation' (ibid, p.4) within a school, and the implications of the school's culture on the students' right to be heard. Their findings revealed that deterministic constructions of children, and traditional views on learning, underpinned a 'custodial' (Lambert, 2009) cultural orientation (lack of power-sharing/traditional hierarchy) which undermined children's right to be heard. Additionally, a process perspective on teaching and learning was found to underpin a 'humanistic' (Lambert, 2009) cultural orientation within which a more egalitarian hierarchy and student/educator relationships supported participation (Giannakaki et al, 2018). This present study builds on this knowledge by identifying the mechanisms by which educators' beliefs and values regarding children and education manifest through student/educator power-dynamics to produce (a) people and spaces that are (non-)conducive to children's participation and (b) barriers and enablers of students' participation within pedagogical practice and student/educator relationships.

While the first three faces reveal the *practices* by which educators support or constrain children's participation, it is the fourth face of power which reveals that such practices are at the heart of the process of co-specification. As previously noted, a four-dimensional view of power conceptualises power as an ambivalent, as opposed to coercive force that produces subjects through a 'web of relations' (Gallagher, 2008, p.144). The first and second dimensions of power reveal the ways in which children are supported or denied opportunities to participate within, and through, the structures, mechanisms and norms that exist within a particular school culture. The third and fourth dimension of power, however, illuminates the

production of people and spaces that determine the cultural orientations with regard to children's lived participation. The third face illustrates the means by which children's identities are shaped in such a way as to maintain the status quo, thus creating barriers to lived participation. The fourth face, however, provides insights into potential avenues for social transformation, as it reveals that the participative child, and participatory spaces, are 'produced' through structures, mechanisms and norms, that are shaped by beliefs and values concerning children, education and participation, inherent within the school paradigm. Thus, the fourth face of power highlights the role of the educational paradigm in (a) producing barriers and enablers to children's lived participation through the 'production' of particular specifications of people and spaces, but also, importantly, (b) in achieving transformational change for, and through, children's lived participation.

Conclusion

Analysis of the power-dynamics within pedagogical practice and student/educator relationships reveals the structures, norms and mechanisms by which educators create barriers or enablers to children's participation, in other words the *how*, while analysis of the educational paradigm, in particular educators' beliefs and values concerning children, education and participation, reveals *why* educators create such barriers/enablers.

As noted, the literature identifies a need to generate knowledge regarding what student participation is and how it can be measured, monitored and assessed (Anderson et al, 2019). This research addresses the gap in knowledge highlighted within the literature (e.g. Anderson et al, 2019; Graham et al, 2018; Horgan et al, 2017; Baroutsis et al, 2016; McCluskey et al, 2013; Percy-Smith, 2010; Mannion, 2007) in relation to children's informal everyday lived participation within the school context, in particular with regard to issues of power, identity and relationships. Existing literature has highlighted the impact of educators' beliefs and values on children's participation (Cruz, 2019; Giannakaki et al, 2018; Simpson, 2018). This research adds to this body of knowledge by revealing the mechanisms, norms and structures, arising from, and inherent in, a school's

educational paradigm, and the role of power-dynamics within such mechanisms, structures and norms, in (a) creating barriers and enablers to students' lived participation, and in (b) the 'production' of particular specifications of people and spaces which further prevent or enable children's lived participation. So too has this research highlighted the value and importance of non-decision-making moments in realising children's lived participation. Such moments are evident in both pedagogical spaces and student/educator relationships, and facilitate children's right to express themselves and to participate within their everyday school lives. In doing so this study has included children's perspectives and priorities and adds to existing knowledge with regard to conceptualisations of children's lived participation within the school context. In particular, this research illustrates the affordances of Lundy's model in considering both decision-making and non-decision-making moments of participation.

The need for whole-school approaches to participation has been identified as key to the successful realisation of children's participation rights within a school context (Graham et al, 2018; Stamatović and Cicvarić, 2018). This study concurs with such an assertion, and adds to the literature by providing knowledge that can contribute to the achievement of such a goal. In identifying the key cultural elements, with regards children's lived participation within pedagogical spaces and educator/student relationships, and the factors that contribute to these, this research provides knowledge that can be used to develop a whole-school approach to participation. Specifically, this research has highlighted the role of the educational paradigm, as a key cultural form, in shaping how teaching and learning is understood and practiced. So too has this research highlighted that beliefs, values and practices concerning children, education and participation are key interconnected aspects within an educational paradigm that must be addressed in developing children's lived participation within schools. Thus, this research has revealed the need for a paradigmatic shift to underpin a whole-school approach. Importantly, this research also highlights the need for adults to instigate this paradigmatic shift, given educators' control of the educational paradigm and the situated power-dynamics within associated mechanisms, structures and norms. If lived participation is to become a reality within schools, it is *educators'* beliefs,

values and practices that must change, as it is *they* who control the paradigm, and have the power to instigate change.

Chapter Ten: Conclusion

This study set out to generate knowledge in relation to the barriers and enablers of children's lived participation within a primary school context, and in doing do has generated an original contribution to knowledge. Having presented and discussed the research findings in the previous chapters, this chapter discusses the key conclusions drawn from these findings, in addition to identifying the contribution made by this research. The chapter ends with a reflection on future steps in research with regard to the realisation of students' lived participation rights.

The following diagram (*Figure 12*) provides a visual summary of the key findings, and highlights pedagogical practice and student/educator relationships as key sites of children's lived participation within the school context.

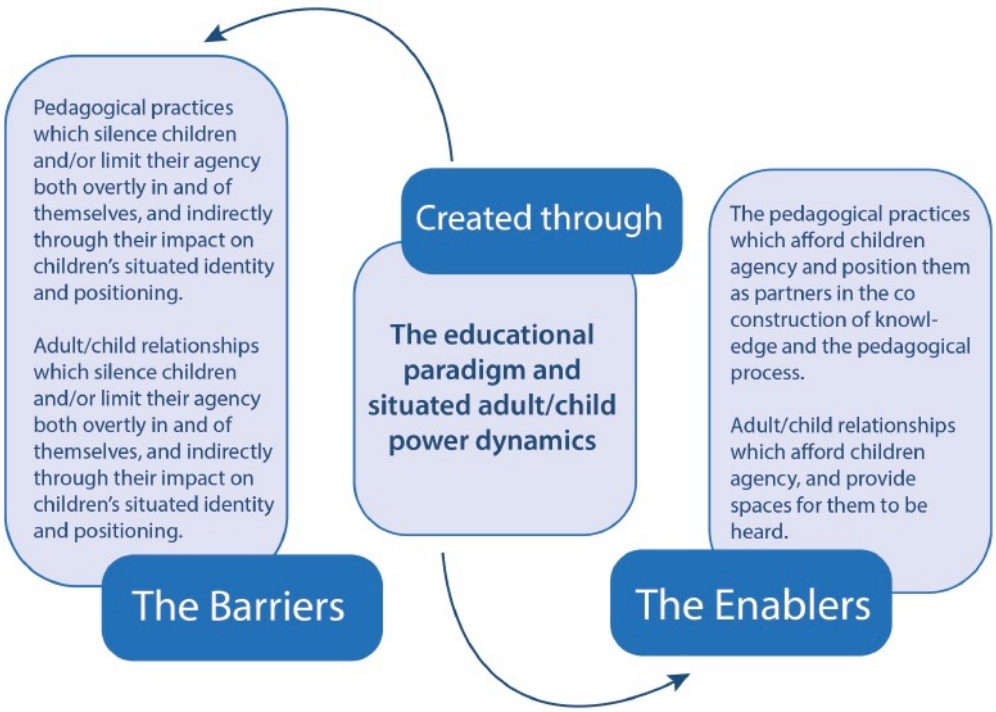


Figure 12. A summative illustrative representation of the key findings

As evident in the diagram, the barriers and enablers of children's lived participation within a school context are produced both directly and indirectly, as a consequence of, and through, the particular student/educator power-dynamics

that arise from the educational paradigm within a school. As a consequence, reducing barriers and increasing enablers to children's participation, requires the establishment of beliefs, values and practices concerning children, education and participation, inherent in the educational paradigm, that align with participatory practice. Thus, a whole-school approach is required to develop a school culture that is conducive to children's lived participation. This diagram provides context for the consideration of the overarching conclusion deduced from this research.

Key Conclusions resulting from this research

There is one overarching conclusion, leading to two sub-conclusions, derived from this research. Whilst, in order to provide clarity, these conclusions are discussed separately, their interconnected nature is evident. The principle conclusion is as follows: student's informal everyday lived participation holds the key to transformational change in children's lived school experiences, and is made possible through a whole-school approach grounded in the development of an educational paradigm that enables a more egalitarian hierarchical structure and educator/student power-dynamics. Implicit in this overarching conclusion are the following sub-conclusions: Firstly, recognition of a broader understanding of children's participatory rights, that includes but also transcends decision-making contexts and/or moments, underpins the progression of children's lived participation within the school context. Secondly, the government has a key role to play in motivating schools and educators to instigate the paradigmatic shift necessary to develop participatory school cultures.

Overarching Conclusion: student's informal everyday lived participation holds the key to transformational change, and is made possible through a whole-school approach grounded in the development of an educational paradigm that enables a more egalitarian hierarchical structure and educator/student power-dynamics

To embed a participatory culture within a school, the beliefs, values and practices that constitute the educational paradigm must be conducive to participation. Thus, a whole-school approach, predicated on a paradigmatic shift (with regard to

beliefs, values and practices concerning children, education and participation), is required for children's lived participation to be facilitated within their everyday school lives. Lived participation cannot be achieved through add-on mechanisms and initiatives alone. Mechanisms that seek to facilitate children's participation such as school councils, and pedagogical pockets within which children are facilitated to make choices and participate actively in their learning, such as a weekly or daily 'Aistear hour', play a role in facilitating children's participation. However, such mechanisms and initiatives do not challenge the status quo by disrupting unequal and more traditional educator/student power-dynamics. To achieve a participatory school culture, a school's educational paradigm, through situated and associated power-dynamics within pedagogical practices and student/educator relationships, must produce spaces (mechanisms, structures and norms) and people that are conducive to participation. Thus, a whole-school approach to participation must encompass and recognise all pedagogical processes and student/educator relationships as key participatory sites. Mechanisms, structures and norms relating to pedagogical practices and student/educator relationships serve both overtly as barriers and enablers of children's lived participation within the primary school context, and covertly through their role in the 'production' of particular specifications of people and spaces. Within the educational paradigm, educators' beliefs and values concerning children and education must align within, and result in a value on, children's lived participation. For many schools, in particular schools that take a transmissive pedagogical approach, achieving this goal requires a fundamental paradigm shift. Without the requisite educational paradigm, specific isolated initiatives or mechanisms such as 'Aistear hour' will not achieve the cultural change necessary to facilitate students' lived participation within their everyday school lives. A paradigm shift is thus fundamental to the type of whole-school approach needed to develop a participatory school culture.

A key barrier to participatory school cultures is the traditional school hierarchical structure. A school's hierarchical structure is determined by and contributes to its educational paradigm, and is established through norms and practices within pedagogical processes and student/educator relationships. A traditional school

hierarchy underpins and enables a transmissive pedagogical approach and unequal student/educator relationships which limit or prohibit children's lived participation. Developing an educational paradigm that is conducive to participatory culture both requires and creates a more egalitarian hierarchical structure. A whole-school approach is needed to challenge the subordinate positioning of children within such a structure. Subordinate positioning of children is a consequence of the perceived need by those in power, in this case educators, to dominate and control students' school experiences in order to achieve positive academic outcomes, and to meet the perceived educational needs of children. Deterministic constructions and discourses of children lie at the heart of the beliefs, values and practices that create traditional school hierarchies and unequal student-educator power-dynamics. As pointed out, generational structures will always place adults in a position of power in relation to children. However, the valuing of participation prompts educators to exercise power to empower children, and in doing so, creates greater equality between students and educators, and a more egalitarian school hierarchy. Given the particular beliefs, values and practices regarding children and education, required to achieve a participatory school culture, the achievement of such a goal necessitates the disruption of many existing norms and practices within pedagogical processes and student/educator relationships, in particular those which contribute to traditional school hierarchies. A whole-school approach to developing a participatory school culture grounded in lived experience, is thus enabled through working towards an egalitarian school hierarchy, through pedagogical processes and student/educator relationships.

Whilst certainly an ambitious and challenging goal, given the significant and fundamental attitudinal and practice changes required, the achievement of a participatory school culture holds considerable potential in relation to affording children dignity, respect and agency within their school lives. How children are viewed, taught, learn, are disciplined, spoken to, and treated, are all impacted on in a positive way through the development of a participatory school culture. In addition to contributing to more positive and egalitarian student/educator relationships, so too are educators' and children's very identities changed through such a whole-school approach. Such an approach contributes towards 'producing'

educators who serve as duty-bearers and facilitators of children's rights and learning, while children are enabled and supported to become active agents within the co-construction of knowledge, influencing norms and practices within pedagogical processes and educator/student relationships. Thus, through the realisation of students' lived participation through a whole-school approach, traditional hierarchical unequal teacher/student relationships give way to greater levels of relational equality, with students and educators positioned more as partners within the pedagogical process. This whole-school approach to realizing children's lived participation therefore, both requires and creates radical transformational change.

Sub-Conclusion 1: A broader understanding of participation and one that encompasses non-decision-making moments is a necessary foundation for achieving children's participation within the school context

The need to broaden conceptualisations of participation by recognising both decision-making, and non-decision-making moments, is fundamental to achieving children's meaningful participation within their everyday lives, and transcends the limitations of formal participatory structures and mechanisms. Children can have an influence both within and beyond overt decision-making moments. Facilitating children's right to express themselves (Article 13) within pedagogical processes and student/educator relationships enables children to influence such spaces, and in doing so create more egalitarian student/educator relations and school hierarchy. Such a conceptualisation of participation also recognises and supports children's priorities with regard to having 'nice' teachers who listen to them, and thus influence children's lived experiences in a positive way. Facilitating children's right to participate in non-decision-making contexts and moments, serves as a precursor to enabling environments which facilitate their participation within decision-making. Such an approach provides children with opportunities to practice sharing their perspectives within pedagogical processes and student/educator relationships. In contributing thus, children develop not only the skills needed to participate but, crucially, come to identify and recognise themselves as co-constructors of knowledge and agentic contributors. They learn that their perspectives are of value and have an impact, and the norm becomes one

in which children's voices commonly feature within student/educator interactions and processes. Thus, when decision-making moments arise, either formally, for example within a school council, or within the everyday, children have the capacity and dispositions necessary to participate meaningfully within such spaces. Whilst the facilitation of children's voices within decision-making contexts and/or moments is a key element in meeting children's participatory rights, so too is the facilitation of children's participation rights within non-decision-making contexts and/or moments. Creating spaces for lived participation within both decision-making and non-decision-making contexts enables more egalitarian democratic relationships to develop, and associated confidence building in facilitating children to express, and even know their views. Together, these two aspects of lived participation can produce the radical cultural change that has eluded the participation agenda thus far.

Sub-Conclusion 2: The role of the government in instigating the rights-based perspective needed to mediate neoliberal-driven performative-orientated priorities is crucial

The findings revealed the role of a school's educational paradigm in creating barriers and enablers of children's lived participation. Implicit in this is the impact of macro influences on such paradigms. The argument was made that a neoliberalist performative agenda dominated educators' priorities, whilst a right-based discourse was lacking. Educators' priorities tend to focus on issues of protection and provision, and not participation. Educators' lack of knowledge of the UNCRC, in addition to a lack of value on children's participation, undermine the facilitation of children's participation rights within the primary school context. Without the requisite policy and legislative context, as required by Article 4 (UNCRC, 1989), and the active and successful implementation of such policy/legislation, educators are devoid of the incentive and support needed to learn about and take up their role as duty-bearers in relation to children's rights. Considering the significant attitudinal and practice changes the required paradigm shift entails for many educators, without strong encouragement and obligation to do so, the change required is unlikely to be attempted, let alone achieved. Instigating such paradigmatic change from a rights-based perspective is

fundamental to unlocking the potential of lived participation to result in meaningful transformational change, as it is only when children's *right* to participate is recognised and upheld, that such participation can challenge the performative orientated priorities of adult decision-makers, and disrupt the very unequal educator/student power-dynamics that create barriers to participation.

A recommendation arising out of this particular conclusion is as follows: to instigate the rights-based paradigmatic changes within schools, required to achieve participatory school cultures, national educational policy and legislation, and participatory policy must (a) include actions that address and support children's broader everyday informal lived participation rights and (b) exert a greater level of influence/mandate on educators, and in particular school principals, including the provision of training and support, to embark on such an endeavour. Furthermore, any such policy and/or legislation must forefront and construct children's participation from a rights-based perspective, in order to ensure that participation is recognised first and foremost as a right - as opposed to a tool for increasing academic outcomes.

Contributions to existing knowledge

The contributions to existing knowledge made by this research are threefold; Firstly, the knowledge and insights it provides in relation to how children's lived participation can be facilitated within a school context. Secondly, in its contribution to the theorising of participation through: (1) contributing to understandings of the spatial/relational nature of children's participation, through the analysis of the role and dimensions of power; (2) the development of a theoretical framework that enables the examination of children's lived participation, and; (3) building on theorisation in the field in relation to the conceptualisation of children's everyday informal *lived* participation. Thirdly, the contribution it makes through the rights-based methodology, and in highlighting the benefits and challenges of using observation as a method of generating rich data in relation to exploring children's lived participation.

Contribution to progressing children's lived participation in school contexts

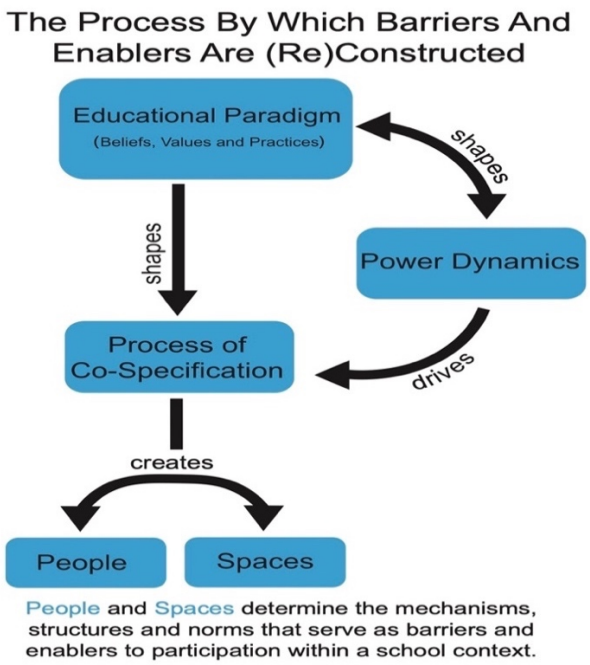
In identifying the key barriers and enablers of children's lived participation within a primary school context, the factors that influence their (re)creation, and the process(es) by which they are created and enacted, this research makes a significant and original contribution to existing knowledge. This is of value as it enables the recognition, assessment and moderation of the processes, structures and norms that facilitate or limit children's lived participation within a school context. This knowledge provides key insights that address the gaps in knowledge (as noted by: Anderson et al, 2019; Graham et al, 2018; Horgan et al, 2017; Baroutsis et al, 2016; McCluskey et al, 2013; Percy-Smith, 2010; Mannion, 2007) with regard to understandings of children's participation within a school context. In revealing the beliefs, values and practices which must be addressed to develop participatory school cultures, and in illustrating the applicability of Lundy's model to recognising and assessing lived participatory cultures and/or moments, the knowledge generated through this study provides the means to both assess and progress children's lived participation within the school context.

Theoretical Contribution

A growing critique of participation is that it is 'under theorised and over-practiced' (Malone and Hartung, 2010, p.35; Forde et al, 2018; Horgan et al, 2016; Tisdall et al, 2014) resulting in practice that does not take account of the complexities inherent in such practice. The contributions to the theorisation of participation made by this research are; Firstly, the analyses of the role, and dimensions, of power in relation to children's lived participation in a school context develops understanding with regard to the spatial/relational nature of lived participation. This analysis provides key insights into the impact of, and intersections between, particular spaces and relationships on the nature and quality of participatory opportunities within schools' cultures. A multi-dimensional conceptualisation of power is particularly suited to exposing the power-dynamics inherent in both the enablers and barriers of children's participation within a school context. This analysis demonstrates why the impetus for change must come from the adults. In revealing the spatial/relational nature of the barriers and enablers, as well as the process(es) by which they are created, this research makes a key contribution to

the theorising of participation. This is an important contribution because it illuminates and forefronts the spatial/relational factors that must be addressed (and the elements that influence these factors) in the facilitation of children's lived participation, and in doing so generates knowledge that progresses the realisation of children's participatory rights.

Secondly, this research makes a theoretical contribution to knowledge through the development of a conceptual framework (as included below, and previously displayed in *Figure 6)* that illustrates the process by which the barriers and enablers are produced, which can be used to examine and progress children's lived participation within various contexts. This spatially/relationally grounded conceptual framework, forefronts the role of beliefs, values and practices, and resulting power-dynamics that exist within a particular context, in the production of particular people and spaces that determine the mechanisms, structures and norms that serve as barriers and enablers. By considering the prevailing paradigm within the relevant context, this framework can be used to assess children's lived participation in settings other than the school context and thus, has wider affordances in relation to its application to the examination of children's lived participation.



Finally, this research also builds on theorisation in the field, in presenting a conceptualisation of participation that is both rights-based and spatially/relationally grounded, encompassing both 'decision-making' and 'non-decision-making' participatory moments and contexts. This conceptualisation of participation, identified throughout the thesis as 'lived participation' provides the basis by which to examine children's everyday informal participation. An important aspect of this conceptualisation, is that it encompasses children's perspectives and priorities in how participation is understood. In illustrating the significance and impact of children's participation in non-decision-making contexts and/or moments, this research contributes to a broader conceptualisation of participation that aligns more closely to children's participatory rights, including and extending beyond the parameters of Article 12. Whilst Lundy's model conceptualises and articulates children's participation as enshrined in Article 12, and thus decision-making contexts lie at its heart, this research illustrates the applicability of this model's constitute elements; space, voice, audience and influence, to a broader conceptualisation of lived participation which includes non-decision-making moments and contexts.

Methodological Contribution

The final area in which this research makes an original contribution to knowledge is through its methodology. This research (1) provides insights which further the conversation in relation to the involvement of CRAGs within rights-based participatory methodology, and (2) highlights the value and challenges of using observation as a method of generating rich data in relation to exploring children's lived participation.

This research contributes to knowledge in relation to understandings of the role of CRAGs within rights-based child participatory methodologies. Children's meaningful involvement requires the adult researcher to ensure that the children are provided a space to share their expert perspectives, that they are supported with information to do so, and that the researcher actively listens to and considers the children's perspectives in accordance with their age and maturity. As with

children's participation within all formal participatory mechanisms, that children must have significant decision-making power is not a requirement of all rights-based participatory research. The extent and level of decision-making power children have within the research process does not define rights-based participatory research – but rather the extent to which children are facilitated, in accordance with their rights, to engage meaningfully with the research process as appropriate to the research in question. Furthermore, while children have a right to participate in research, the lengths that must be taken to enable their meaningful participation in adult-led research can themselves be a violation of children's rights (right to play, recreation, not participate etc). The role and contribution of CRAGs requires careful consideration and transparency in order to: (a) meet the requirements of the research; (b) ensure children's meaningful participation; and (c) ensure that claims to a rights-based participatory approach are merited. This research provides original knowledge with regard to the issues inherent in determining the level and extent of CRAGs' role, and decision-making power, within rights-based participatory research. Whilst differing levels of decision-making are appropriate dependent on the research project, clarity and transparency with regard to the role and contribution of CRAGs is essential, not only to facilitate the development of best practice, but also to enable the appraisal of research that uses child participatory methodologies.

The second methodological contribution comes from the use of non-participant observation as a research method, in identifying (a) the significant value of this method in the examination of children's lived participation and (b) issues in relation to consent. As noted previously, there is a dearth of research using this method in exploring children's participation. The ethical, practicable and gatekeeping issues encountered and discussed within the methodology chapter, highlight the significant challenges in obtaining meaningful consent in relation to the use of observation within schools, and provides an indication as to why such a valuable method is not utilised more frequently in studies exploring children's participation. Given that lived participation is a situated dialogic event shaped by the people involved and the space in which it occurs, this method provides pivotal data needed to examine children's lived participation within a school context,

including: (a) the relationship between the individual and the context in which they are situated, (b) the relationships between educators and students, and (c) interactive processes between educators and students within pedagogical practice including issues of discipline. Analysis of the observation data in light of the data generated through interviews and focus groups, enables the analysis and interrogation of participants' stated beliefs and values in relation to their practice, thus providing a much deeper perspective on (a) the beliefs, values and practices that constitute the educational paradigm and (b) actors' motivations. Such triangulation of the data also contributes to the validity of the findings. This research, therefore, contributes to existing knowledge with regard to the process, benefits, challenges and practice of using non-participant observation within a school context. Solutions to overcoming existing obstacles in the use of this method are essential, as the knowledge to be gleaned from conducting observations plays a significant role in generating meaningful knowledge that is of benefit to understanding and improving children's lived participation.

Further avenues of exploration and research dissemination

The following section reflects on how the knowledge generated through this study can be used and built upon through future research to further progress children's participatory rights, as well as dissemination plans for the research.

In considering the role of future research in the furthering of children's participatory rights within the Irish school context, an examination of potential avenues for instigating the paradigmatic changes needed within schools to develop participatory cultures would be of value. One such avenue is the Rights Respecting Schools Award (RRSA) (UNICEF, 2007). The RRSA award scheme employs a transformational whole-school approach to embedding the UNCRC within schools' curriculum and ethos (ibid), through the provision of training, support and accreditation to schools. An exploration of the impact of engaging with the RRSA on participating schools' educational paradigms and associated student/educator power-dynamics would provide key knowledge with regard to developing and supporting participatory school cultures.

Another such avenue for furthering children's lived participation within their school lives lies in the Department of Education and Skill's inspection process. An exploration of the educational paradigm inherent in the Department of Education and Skill's inspection process, including both external inspections and the whole-school self-evaluation process, as it relates to children's everyday informal lived participatory rights would provide valuable insights into this critical policy maker's practices. In particular, an examination of if, and to what extent, the inspectorate incorporates and promotes a children's rights-based perspective, in addition to if and how the inspection process could be utilised to incentivise and support schools to develop participatory pedagogical approaches would be of value.

Dissemination

As noted at the beginning of this thesis, this research emerged from a very real desire to generate knowledge that would contribute to the realisation of children's right to be heard within their school lives. Thus, disseminating and communicating the fruits of this research with as wide an audience as possible is a key goal. To this end it is my intention to prepare a number of articles for submission to academic peer-reviewed journals including: *The International Journal of Children's Rights; Children and Society; Childhood; Irish Educational Studies; British Educational Research Journal; International Journal of Educational Research*. Any published articles will be shared with the schools who participated in the study. So too will they be sent to key policy decision-makers within the Department of Education and Skills, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, and Integration, as well as Hub na nÓg (government youth participatory hub, available at: www.hubnanog.ie).

In addition to disseminating this research to an adult audience, steps will also be taken to communicate the research to children. Whilst the current COVID-19 pandemic has certainly delayed such plans, the children in the CRAGs and I intend to produce a child-friendly information source (for example, a YouTube video, poster or leaflet) for primary school-aged children, based on the findings of this

research, to raise awareness of children's participatory rights within their school lives. This information source will be shared with the schools who participated in the study, as well as with children in the wider community and Hub na nÓg.

The dissemination of knowledge generated through this research plays an important role in furthering understandings of, and research concerning, children's lived participation within the school context.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Information/Consent - CRAGs

Children's Consent Form (Advisory Group)

I want to tell you about a research study I am doing. A research study is a special way to find out about something. I am trying to find out more about how children's ideas are listened to in school. You are being asked to join the study because you can tell me what it is like being a child in school.

If you decide that you want to be in this study, this is what will happen. You and four other children will meet with me and another adult every few weeks, five times in total. When we meet we will talk about what it's like to be listened to or not in school. I will tell you what other children have told me about this and I would like you to tell me what you think about what they said. We won't just sit around talking though – we will do lots of games and exercises to help us think. It should be fun! Each time we meet it will be for about an hour.

Can anything bad happen to me? No - nothing bad will happen to you if you take part.

Can anything good happen to me? Yes! You will get to meet other children and have fun.

You can choose not to be in this study.

When I am done with the study, I will write a report about what I found out. I won't use your name in the report.

What if I do not want to do this? That's okay ☺ . You don't have to be in this study. It's up to you. If you say yes now, but you change your mind later, that's okay too. All you have to do is tell us or get your parents to give us a call.

If you want to be in this study, please fill in this form

I _____ agree to participate in Jane O' Sullivan's research study.

- I understand what Jane wants me to do and why she wants me to do it.
- It is my own decision to do this.
- Jane is allowed to use the information she gets from what I say and do in her research.
- I know that it is ok to change my mind and not take part in the study at any time, even in the middle of it, and I will not be in trouble.
- I know that I don't have to answer any question I do not want to.
- I know that when Jane is telling people about her research she will not tell people that it was me who said things.

Signed_____
Date:_____

Appendix 2: Introduction Letter to Schools

Jane Maeve O'Sullivan
School of Applied Social Studies
University College Cork
College Road
Cork

12th May 2015

Re: Children's Voice Research

Dear XXXXXXX,

I am a PhD student from UCC and I am currently conducting a study that is exploring children's rights within education. Specifically, I am looking at children's right to be heard, in accordance to article twelve of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and noted in the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020 (Government of Ireland 2014). My research seeks to identify the opportunities educators provide and the challenges they face in facilitating this right within a classroom context, in particular in light of the many constraints and structures teachers must work within (such as pupil/teacher ratios and curriculum demands). The aim of this research is to document good practice and to develop strategies for overcoming the obstacles identified. The knowledge gained from this study will serve as a resource for teachers in guiding their practice. Furthermore, the research process will provide a unique opportunity for the children involved to develop their knowledge and skills in regards to conducting research.

To gather data for this study I will conduct fieldwork in five primary schools. In each school I will conduct:

- A short interview with the principal
- Up to 5 days of classroom observations – two/three days in a classroom with children between the ages of five and eight years and a further two/three days in a classroom of children aged between nine and twelve
- Individual interviews with the teachers from both classrooms in which I conducted observations
- Two forty minute focus groups – one with a group of five children from the younger class I observed and one with a group of five children from the older class

This research has received approval from the Social Research Ethics Committee, University College Cork, and complies with guidelines for conducting research with children as set out by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. I have enclosed the information sheets and consent forms I will give to participating adults, children and their parents/guardians for your information. I have Garda Clearance through UCC.

I hold a Masters Degree in Social Policy, an Honours Degree in Early Childhood Studies, a Diploma in Steiner Early Years Education, as well as having several years teaching experience, affording me the knowledge and experience needed to conduct this study with professionalism and sensitivity.

I am very eager for your school to be one of the five schools included in this study, given its geographical and demographic profile, but also because I would particularly like to include an xxxxxxxxxx school in this research. Should you and your school choose to participate, **your school will not be identified in any way, as anonymity will be maintained throughout**. I sincerely hope you will meet this request favourably and I look forward to discussing the matter further.

Warm Regards

_____

Jane Maeve O'Sullivan
BA (ECS), M.Soc.Sc.

Email: XXXXXXXXXXX

Telephone: XXXXXXXXXX

Appendix 3: Information/Consent - Children in Focus Groups

Children's Consent Form (Focus Group)

I want to tell you about a research study I am doing. A research study is a special way to find out about something. I am trying to find out more about how children's ideas are listened to in school. You are being asked to join the study because you can tell me what it is like being a child in school.

If you decide that you want to be in this study, this is what will happen - during school one day you and a few other children from your class will meet with me and my assistant in a room at your school. We will talk about what it's like for children in school while doing some fun activities. It will take about 45 minutes and should be fun!

Can anything bad happen to me? No - nothing bad will happen to you if you take part.

Can anything good happen to me? Yes! You will hopefully have fun.

You can choose not to be in this study.

When I am done with the study, I will write a report about what I found out. I won't use your name in the report.

What if I do not want to do this? That's okay ☺ . You don't have to be in this study. It's up to you. If you say yes now, but you change your mind later, that's okay too. All you have to do is tell us or get your parents to give us a call.

If you want to be in this study, please fill in this form:

I _____ agree to

participate in Jane O' Sullivan's research study.

- I understand what Jane wants me to do and why she wants me to do it.
- It is my own decision to do this.
- Jane is allowed to use the information she gets from what I say and do in her research.
- I know that it is ok to change my mind and not take part in the study at any time, even in the middle of it, and I will not be in trouble.
- I know that I don't have to answer any question I do not want to.
- I know that when Jane is telling people about her research she will not tell people that it was me who said things.

Signed_____
Date:_____

Appendix 4: Information/Consent - Parents of Children in Focus Groups

Information/consent Sheet for the parents of child participants (Focus Groups)

Purpose of the Study. As part of the requirements for a PhD at UCC, I am carrying out a research study. The study is concerned with exploring children's participation within the classroom in the context of Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

What will the study involve? For your child the study will involve attending a focus group with four other children. The focus group will run for forty-five minutes and will involve an art activity and discussion. The focus group will take place during school and in a room within the school.

Why have you been asked to take part? You have been asked because your child has expressed an interest in participating and meets the general criteria for inclusion.

Do your child have to take part? No! – participation is voluntary. You may keep this information sheet and a copy of the consent form and you or your child may choose not to participate at any point without incurring any negative consequences. This will be made explicitly clear to the children during the study. You may also choose to discontinue after the data has been collected and withdraw your consent for the data to be used up to two weeks following data collection.

Will your child's participation in the study be kept confidential? Yes. I will do my utmost to ensure that no clues to your child's identity appear in the thesis associated research papers. Any extracts from what your child says that are quoted in the thesis will be entirely anonymous.

What will happen to the information that your child gives? The data gathered from your child's participation will stored securely by the researcher for seven years following which it will be destroyed.

What will happen to the results? The results will be presented in the thesis and associated publications. The thesis will be seen by my supervisors, other markers and external examiners. The thesis may be cataloged by the UCC library.

What are the possible disadvantages of taking part? I don't envisage any negative consequences for your child in taking part.

What if there is a problem? While I don't envisage any problems, should one occur (such as a child deciding to withdraw from the focus group) a teacher from your child's school will be on the premises and will contact you directly.

Who has reviewed this study? This study has received ethical approval from University College Cork's Social Research Ethics Committee.

Any further queries? If you need any further information, you can contact me: Jane O' Sullivan, at xxxxxxxxxxx, or email me at xxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

If you agree to take part in the study, please sign the consent form below.

Parent/Guardian Consent Form

I _____ (please print) agree that my child can participate in Jane O' Sullivan's research study.

The purpose of the study has been explained to me and I understand it.

The purpose of the study has been explained to my child and he/she understands it.

My child is participating voluntarily.

I give permission for the data provided by my child participation to be used in this study.

I understand that my child can withdraw from the study, without repercussions, at any time whether before it starts or while they are participating.

My child understands that he/she can withdraw from the study, without repercussions, at any time whether before the research starts or during participation.

I understand that anonymity will be maintained in the write-up by disguising my child's identity.

I understand that disguised extracts from what my child will say may be quoted in the thesis and any subsequent publications if I give permission below:

(Please tick one below)

I agree to quotation/ publication of anonymised extracts from my child's data
☐

I do not agree to quotation/ publication of anonymised extracts from my data
☐

Signed_____ Date: _____

Appendix 5: Information/Consent renewal for CRAGs

Jane O' Sullivan
School of Applied Social Studies
University College Cork
Email: XXXXXXX
Phone Number: XXXXXX

Date: 3rd August 2020

Dear XXXXXXXX

You may or may not remember being involved in a research project back in 2015 about children's right to be heard. We met three times in the community hall in XXXXXXX. I remember telling you all at the time that it would take me some time to finish the research and that I would get back to you, to tell you what I found out, when I finished. Well, it has taken me way more time than I thought it would! I'm so sorry for taking this long to get back in touch.

Because the advice you all gave me played a part in this research, I wanted to share with you what I found out. I would also like to ask you if you would be prepared to share your thoughts with me about these findings. Because of the COVID restrictions we would need to do this through the post, or online either as a group or separately.

So, I am sending you this list of key 'findings'. If you no longer want to be involved that's completely ok. Thank you so much for the help you have already given me.

If you **do** want to stay involved I would love to hear your thoughts on what you think about these findings and your ideas on how we can let teachers and other children know about them, so that children may become more likely to be heard in school.

I look forward to hearing from you and, once more, thanks so much for your help!

All the best,

Jane

Please tick the box(s) that you feel are correct for you and return this form in the self-addressed envelope provided. (thanks!)

I would no longer like to be involved in this research project ☐

I would like to remain involved in this research project ☐

If you want to remain involved would you prefer to:

(a) Do it through the post ☐

(b) Do it online on your own (for example, with an online survey) ☐

(c) Do it online with the other children in the group (for example, in an online group meeting) ☐

Signed ……

If you do want to remain involved online please could you send me an email address I can contact you through.

Email address……

Appendix 6: Information/ Consent Teachers

Information Sheet for Adult participants (Teachers)

Purpose of the Study. As part of the requirements for a PhD at UCC, I am carrying out a research study. The study is concerned with exploring children's participation within the classroom in the context of Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

What will the study involve? The study will involve the researcher conducting a two/three day observation within your classroom followed by an interview with you that will take about forty-five minutes.

Why have you been asked to take part? You have been asked because your expertise and experience as a teacher makes you suitable for this study. The data you can provide through my observing your classroom and through your interview is of value to this study.

Do you have to take part? No – participation is voluntary. You may retain this information sheet and consent form. You have the right to withdraw from this study at any point, whether prior to its commencment or at any stage during the study without incurring any negative consequences. You may also choose to discontinue after the data has been collected and withdraw your consent for the data to be used up to two weeks following data collection.

Will your participation in the study be kept confidential? Yes. I will do my utmost to ensure that no clues to your identity appear in the thesis or associated research papers. Any extracts from what you say that are quoted in the thesis will be entirely anonymous.

What will happen to the information that you give? The data will be kept securely by the researcher for the duration of the study. On completion of the thesis *anomymised* data gathered from adult participants will be archived with the Irish Qualitative Data Archive (IQDA) for possible future use by other scholars. The IQDA is a central access point for qualitative social science data generated in or about Ireland and is a valuable tool for both the research community and the public record. As this data will be anomymised no school or individual will be identifiable from the data. You have the right to have the data gathered from your participation excluded from the study up to two weeks after the data is gathered. All data will be anomymised so that confidentially is maintained at all times.

What will happen to the results? The results will be presented in the thesis and associated publications. The thesis will be seen by my supervisors, other markers and external examiners. The thesis may be cataloged by the UCC library.

What are the possible disadvantages of taking part? I don't envisage any negative consequences for you in taking part.

What if there is a problem? While I don't envisage any problems you are reminded that you have the right to discontinue from the study at any point.

Who has reviewed this study? This study has received ethical approval from University College Cork's Social Research Ethics Committee.

Any further queries? If you need any further information, you can contact me: Jane O' Sullivan, at XXXXXXXXX, or email me at:XXXXXXXXXXX

If you agree to take part in the study, please sign the attached consent form.

Consent Form

I……agree to participate in Jane O' Sullivan's research study.

The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me in writing.

I am participating voluntarily.

I give permission for my interview with Jane to be audio-recorded

I understand that I can withdraw from the study, without repercussions, at any time, whether before it starts or while I am participating.

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use the data within two weeks of the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.

I understand that anonymity will be maintained in the write-up by disguising my identity.

I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the thesis and any subsequent publications if I give permission below:

(Please tick one box:)
I agree to quotation/publication of anonymised extracts from my interview ☐

I do not agree to quotation/publication of anonymised extracts from my interview ☐

I agree for anomymised data from my interview to be shared with the
Irish Qualitative Data Archive ☐

Signed…… Date……

Appendix 7: Information/Consent Principals

Information Sheet for Adult participants (Principals)

Purpose of the Study. As part of the requirements for a PhD at UCC, I am carrying out a research study. The study is concerned with exploring children's participation within the classroom in the context of Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

What will the study involve for me? The study will involve an interview with you that will take about forty-five minutes. In your school I also plan to conduct; up to five days of classroom observations – 2/3 days in a classroom with children between the ages of five and eight years and a further 2/3 days in a classroom of children aged between nine and twelve, individual interviews with the teachers from both classrooms in which I conducted observations and two forty-five minute focus groups – one with a group of 4/5 children from the younger class I observed and one with a group of 4/5 children from the older class.

Why have you been asked to take part? You have been asked because your expertise and experience as a principal makes you suitable for this study. The data you can provide through your interview is of value to this study.

Why your school been asked to take part? Your school has been asked to participate in study because; this study requires the views and perspectives of children and teacher, while your particular school's demographic and geographic profile meets the criteria for inclusion in this study.

Do you have to take part? No – participation is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from this study at any point, whether prior to its commencment or at any stage during the process without incurring any negative consequences. Following your involvement with the study you may also choose to withdraw your consent for the data generated from your interview for up to two weeks after the interview.

Will your participation in the study be kept confidential? Yes. I will do my utmost to ensure that no clues to your identity appear in the thesis or associated research papers. Any extracts from what you say that are quoted in the thesis will be entirely anonymous.

What will happen to the information that you give? The data will be kept securely by the researcher for the duration of the study. On completion of the thesis *anomymised* data gathered from adult participants will be archived with the Irish Qualitative Data Archive (IQDA) for possible future use by other scholars. The IQDA is a central access point for qualitative social science data generated in or about Ireland and is a valuable tool for both the research community and the public record. As this data will be anomymised no school or individual will be identifiable from the data. Data gathered from the child participants will be destroyed on completion of the study. You may retain this information sheet and consent form. You also have the right to have the data gathered from your own participation excluded from the study up to two weeks after the data is gathered. All data will be anomymised so that confidentially is maintained at all times.

What will happen to the results? The results will be presented in the thesis and associated publications. The thesis will be seen by my supervisors, other markers

and external examiners. The thesis may be cataloged by the UCC library.

What are the possible disadvantages of taking part? I don't envisage any negative consequences for you in taking part.

What if there is a problem? While I don't envisage any problems you are reminded that you have the right to discontinue from the study at any point.

Who has reviewed this study? This study has received ethical approval from University College Cork's Social Research Ethics Committee.

Any further queries? If you need any further information, you can contact me: Jane O' Sullivan, at XXXXXXXXXXX or email me at XXXXXXXXXXXX

If you agree to take part in the study, please sign the consent form overleaf.

Consent Form

I……agree to participate in Jane O' Sullivan's research study.

The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me in writing.

I am participating voluntarily.

I give permission for my interview to be audio-recorded

I understand that I can withdraw from the study, without repercussions, at any time, whether before it starts or while I am participating.

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use the data within two weeks of the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.

I understand that anonymity will be maintained in the write-up by disguising my identity.

I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the thesis and any subsequent publications if I give permission below:

(Please tick one box:)
I agree to quotation/publication of anonymised extracts from my interview ☐

I do not agree to quotation/publication of anonymised extracts from my interview ☐

I agree for anomymised data from my interview to be shared with the Irish Qualitative Data Archive ☐

Signed……. Date…….

Appendix 8: Ethical Approval

University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

Oifig an Leas - Uachtaráin Taighde agus Nuálaíochta
Office of the Vice President for Research and Innovation

4th Floor, Block E,
Food Science Building,
University College Cork,
College Road, Cork, Ireland.

T +353 (0)21 4903500
E vpresearch@ucc.ie
www.ucc.ie

Jane Maeve O'Sullivan,
School of Applied Social Studies

1st October 2014

Dear Jane,

Thank you for submitting your revised research (project entitled Obedience and Children's Rights: Exploring democratic participation within the classroom) to SREC for ethical perusal. I am pleased to say that the amended proposal is acceptable and we are happy to grant approval

We wish you every success in your research.

Yours sincerely,

Mike Murphy,
Chair of Social Research Ethics Committee

Professor Anita McGuire BSc PhD CChem MRSC
Vice President for Research and Innovation

Ollscoil na hÉireann, Corcaigh
National University of Ireland, Cork

Appendix 9: Child-friendly Overview of research findings for CRAGs

PART ONE: STUFF THAT MAKES IT LESS LIKELY THAT CHILDREN HAVE A SAY

1. *It makes it less likely that children have a say….*when teachers think that they don't need to listen to what children think in order to know what the best thing for children is.

2. *It makes it less likely that children have a say…* when teachers think that they are the ones who should make all the important decisions about children without the children having a say.

3. *It makes it less likely that children have a say…* when the teachers think that it is not appropriate for children to have a say in decisions that teachers make.

4. *It makes it less likely that children have a say…* when teachers think that they need to always be in control to be able to teach properly and for the children to learn.

5. *It makes it less likely that children have a say…* when teachers use reward systems, like giving points to groups for good behaviour.

6. *It makes it less likely that children have a say…* when teachers embarrass children by giving out to them in front of other people or by being sarcastic.

7. *It makes it less likely that children have a say…* when teachers make all the choices about what children learn.

8. *It makes it less likely that children have a say…* when children have to show respect to teachers but the teachers don't always show children respect.

9. *It makes it less likely that children have a say…* when teachers think that its cheeky for a child to question their decisions.

10. *It makes it less likely that children have a say…* when teachers only speak to children about school stuff and they don't talk about personal stuff or have chats.

11. *It makes it less likely that children have a say…* when teachers are treated as more important than the children.

12. *It makes it less likely that children have a say…* when teachers believe that their job is to teach the children specific things, rather than to teach them to how to learn.

PART TWO: STUFF THAT MAKES IT MORE LIKELY THAT CHILDREN HAVE A SAY

1. *It makes it more likely that children have a say…* when teachers think that you can only know what is best for children when you hear what the child thinks and feels.

2. *It makes it more likely that children have a say…* when teachers think that children can have great ideas that they wouldn't have thought of themselves

3. *It makes it more likely that children have a say…* when teachers think that children have a right to be heard

4. *It makes it more likely that children have a say…* when teachers always treat children with respect

5. *It makes it more likely that children have a say…* when teachers believe that they don't know all the answers but they want to discover them with children.

6. *It makes it more likely that children have a say…* when children are included in choices about what to learn, and when children decide how good their own work and their classmates work is.

7. *It makes it more likely that children have a say…* when children get chances to be in-charge during a lesson.

8. *It makes it more likely that children have a say…* when children come up with ideas and their teachers let them try out these ideas

9. *It makes it more likely that children have a say…* when children and teachers chat about stuff that's got nothing to do with the lesson.

10. *It makes it more likely that children have a say…* when children feel that their teacher will listen to them and they won't get into trouble for giving their opinions.

11. *It makes it more likely that children have a say…* when teachers and children negotiate.

12. *It makes it more likely that children have a say…* when teachers and children work together to resolve disputes or disagreements.

13. *It makes it more likely that children have a say…* when teachers explain why they want children to do things, and don't mind when the children question their explanations.

PART THREE; OTHER THINGS I FOUND OUT

1. Some schools are more likely to be places where children have a say than others.

2. Things that adults believe about **children**, **education** and **children's right to be heard** are what makes a school more likely or less likely to let children have a say.

3. Children begin to believe some of the things that their teachers believe – especially about children and education.

4. School can make children think and act in certain ways – in some schools this is in ways that make it more likely that children will give their opinions. In other schools it is in ways that make children less likely to say what they think.

5. In schools where adults are treated as more important than children, and adults control nearly everything, then children are less likely to have a say.

6. Teachers have the power to make sure that children have a say.

7. Children want their teachers to be in charge. They want them to be nice, to listen to children and be good at teaching and at maintaining order.

8. How well a child and their teacher 'get on' plays a huge role in whether children get to have a say or not. The better you get on with your teacher then the more likely you are to say what you think, and also the more likely it is that what you say influences decisions.

Appendix 10: Interview schedule for educators

General school ethos and culture

- How would you describe the general culture or ethos of this school?

School priorities

- What are the school's priorities with regards the children?

Participation policies

- Does the school have a policy (or approach) to student participation?
- Areas where children can make decisions within the school day/community?
- Formal procedures for children's participation (eg. school council) – what does the student council do and how often do they meet

Construction of children

- How would you describe the students in this school?
- What is your priority with regards the children?
- What do you feel is the role of a teacher?
- Is the way you engage with children any different in this school than it might be in another school?

Discipline policies

- Is there an official policy with regards the approach to discipline?
- Does the practice match up?
- Do the children play any role in devising the classroom rules?
- What factors impact on the enforcement of the classroom rules?

Challenging children

- What is the school's approach to challenging behaviour?
- What is your own approach in your classroom?

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

- How familiar would you say you say you are with the UN CRC (very, a little, not very much, not at all).
- Did you receive any training on the CRC in college?
- What are your views on children's rights
- What's your perspective on the right of the child to be heard?
- What do you feel are the challenges to the realisation of this right within a classroom context?
- What kind of choices do you think children can make within a classroom context.

Miscellaneous

- What, do you feel, are the most significant challenges facing teachers today?
- What do you feel are the key skills a teacher should have?

Appendix 11: Interview schedule for Focus groups

1. What do you like most about school?
2. What do you like least about school?
3. It is important that teachers are….
4. It is important that teachers are not….
5. It is important that students…..
6. It is important that students do not….
7. In school I can decide….
8. In school I would like to decide….
9. If I could change something about school it would be…

Appendix 12: List of commitments made within *The National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making 2015-2020* (DCYA, 2015) in relation to children's participation as relevant to the school context.

G14.20	Young people will continue to be consulted as part of the revision of curricula, including the Primary School Curriculum and the Junior Cycle Student Awards.
G14.21	The Department of Education and Skills will ensure that: • the views of children and young people will be reflected in the Digital Strategy for Schools; • the views of young people are gathered through the Webwise Youth Advisory Panel.
G14.22	The National Educational Psychological Service will ensure the voice of the child contributes to the development of policy and service delivery in relation to the provision of psychological services to schools and children, where this is appropriate.
G14.23	Audit current practices for hearing the voice of the child within the statutory Tusla Educational Welfare Services, the School Completion Programme, the Home–School Community Liaison Scheme and Home Education.
G14.24	Devise strategies to hear the voice of seldom-heard children in the education system in relation to their attendance, participation and retention issues.
G14.25	Ensure that the voice of the child is a core part of the services and supports provided to schools and children by monitoring and evaluating Educational Welfare Services and through the implementation of Tusla's 'One Child, One Team, One Plan' intervention model.
G14.26	Students will be consulted on teacher education and a range of other matters. Appropriate mechanisms for consulting students will be determined in consultation with relevant agencies.
G14.27	Through its consultative forum and other consultative processes, the National Council for Special Education will continue to consult with children and young people and/or their representative groups.
G14.28	Traveller representative groups will be required to include the voices of children and young people in their engagement with the Department of Education and Skills.
G17.1	The Department of Education and Skills will encourage more primary schools and all post- primary schools to establish student councils. Data from the latest Lifeskills Survey (2012) indicate that 14% of primary schools and 97% of post-primary schools have established student councils

G17.2	The Department of Education and Skills Schools Inspectorate will review its current practices on student participation in the inspection process with a view to enhancing the level and quality of student participation.
G17.3	The Teaching Council will consult students on teacher education and a range of other matters. Appropriate mechanisms for consulting students will be determined in consultation with relevant agencies.