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The Implementation of a literacy intervention 'Station Teaching' in Infant classes in Irish primary schools

Dympna Daly

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, School of Education, National University of Ireland, Cork.

Supervisors: Professor Kathy Hall and Dr. Brian Murphy

Head of School: Professor Kathy Hall

December 2015

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this dissertation has not been submitted to any other institution, and is, except where otherwise stated, the original work of the researcher.

Signed_____

Dympna Daly

Date_____

Abstract

Background

I conducted my research in the context of The National Literacy Strategy (DES, 2011), which maintains that every young person should be literate and it outlines targets for improving literacy in schools from 2011 to 2020. There has been much debate on the teaching of literacy and in particular the teaching of reading. Clark (2014) outlines how learning to read should be a developmental language process and that the approaches in the early years of schooling will colour the children's motivation and their perception of reading as a purposeful activity.

The acquisition of literacy begins in the home but this study focuses on the implementation of a literacy intervention Station Teaching in the infant classes in primary school. Station Teaching occurs when a class is divided into four or five small groups of pupils and they receive intensive tuition at four or five different Stations with the help of Support teachers: New Reading, Familiar Reading, Phonics, Writing and Oral Language.

Research Questions

These research questions frame my study:

- *How is Station Teaching implemented?*
- *What is the experience of the intervention Station Teaching from the participants' point of view: teachers, pupils, parents?*
- *What notion of literacy is Station Teaching facilitating?*

Methods

I chose a pragmatic parallel mixed methods design as suggested by Mertens (2010). I collected and analysed both the quantitative and qualitative data to answer the study's research questions.

In the study the quantitative data were collected from a questionnaire issued to 21 schools in Ireland. I used Excel as a data management package and thematic analysis to analyse and present the data in themes.

I collected qualitative data from a case study in a school. This data included observations of two classes over a period of a year; interviews with teachers, pupils and parents; children's drawings, photographs, teachers' diaries and video evidence. I analysed and presented the evidence from the qualitative data in themes.

Main Findings

- There are many skills and strategies that are essential to effective literacy teaching in the early years including phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension and writing. These skills can be taught during Station Teaching. Early intervention in the early years is essential to pupils' acquisition of literacy. The expertise of the teacher is key to improving the literacy achievement of pupils
- Teachers and pupils enjoy participating in ST. Pupils are motivated to read and engage in meaningful activities during ST. Staff collaboration is vital for ST to succeed
- ST facilitates small group work and teachers can differentiate accordingly while including all pupils in the groups. Pupils' learning is extended in ST but extension activities need to be addressed in the Writing Station
- More training should be provided for teachers on the implementation of ST and more funding for resources should be available to schools

Significant contribution of the work

The main significance of the study includes: insights into the classroom implementation of Station Teaching in infant classes and extensive research into characteristics of an effective teacher of literacy.

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My PhD journey has been a very exciting one and I thoroughly enjoyed being part of the cohort PhD in the School of Education in UCC.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my parents Joe and Kathleen Murphy who recently celebrated their 61st wedding anniversary. They worked extremely hard all their lives and their main priority was encouraging and supporting their children's education, thus enabling us to realise our dreams.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

> *Literacy is more than having the ability to read and write. It is about helping children to communicate with others and to make sense of the world. It includes oral and written language and other sign systems such as mathematics, art, sound, pictures, Braille, sign language and music* (Aistear, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2009, p. 56)

> *'If you only knew about literacy from being in this classroom what would you think it was for?'* (Comber, in Hall, 2003)

1.1 Introduction

The opening chapter sets the scene for this research on the implementation of a literacy intervention, Station Teaching, in the Infant classes in primary schools. Firstly I consider the context for examining literacy practices in the present day. I review the current discussions around literacy teaching methods and give a brief overview of recommended good practices on teaching children to read. I outline the focus of my study, my research questions and research methods and I also provide an overview of the thesis. Finally my personal rationale for embarking on this research is explained.

1.2 Background to the study

> *Literacy includes the capacity to read, understand and critically appreciate various forms of communication including spoken language, printed text, broadcast media and digital media* (DES, 2011, p. 8)

This broad definition of literacy is proffered by the Department of Education and Skills in the National Strategy for Literacy and Numeracy in Ireland (DES, 2011). It recognises the importance of including reading, writing, communication and oral language in both print and digital formats as literacy concepts. The National Strategy (DES, 2011) expounds that every young person should be literate and numerate and that we need these skills in all parts of our lives so we can contribute to a more just and equitable society. The National Strategy (DES, 2011) outlines the targets for improving literacy and numeracy in Ireland during the period

2011 to 2020. As I write the Primary School Language Curriculum in Ireland is being reviewed and should be ready for dissemination shortly.

How to teach literacy has been considered very controversial historically. While all are interested in literacy and while politicians of all colours and persuasions express views on it, in some countries political commentary can carry over to narrow prescription which of course is heavily criticised by the research and professional communities. Policy makers often link literacy achievement with opportunities to be successful in life and maintain that poor literacy leads to dysfunctional society. Clark (2014) posits that there is concern in countries surrounding children who leave school with limited literacy skills and that 'their failure has adverse consequences for their employability, their family and their social life' (Clark, 2014, p. 196). Clark (2014) advises that if we wish to develop literacy in all children, 'then we must proceed developmentally from oral communication for a purpose in a wide range of contexts to an integrated approach to reading and writing' (Clark, 2014, p. 15).

One study in England by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) (the inspection body for England) *Removing Barriers to Literacy* (Ofsted, 2011) identified these features as being crucial for teaching literacy in schools, particularly for those at risk:

- The importance of an emphasis on speaking and listening skills from an early age
- Teachers with high expectations
- Carefully planned provision to meet individual needs with early diagnosis and early intervention for those with problems
- Literacy training for all staff and partnership with parents (Ofsted, 2011)

In this study I focus on literacy in the early years in primary school and in particular reading. Kim Dorian-Kemp, head teacher of High View School Plymouth, United Kingdom, on accepting the prestigious award for *The 2014 United Kingdom Literacy Association (UKLA) Literacy School of the Year* at the UKLA 51st International Conference in Nottingham in July 2015 opened her acceptance speech with this quote: 'A book is a dream you hold in your hand'. Dorian-Kemp (2015) uses this quote to relay to her pupils the magic of being able to read.

Sally Elborn (2015) in the introduction to the *Handbook of Teaching Early Reading: more than phonics,* elaborates on the importance of children being able to read:

> Reading is a skill we use every day. Whether a road sign, or a novel, at the supermarket or the library, reading is an integral part of our lives. It is not merely a functional tool to meet the demands of society, but a mechanism by which we can acquire knowledge and new ideas, gaining a greater understanding of the world around us. It opens the door to a feast of imagination and creativity which provides enjoyment to reader and author alike (Elborn, UKLA, 2015, p. 4)

There has been much debate on the teaching of reading and in particular in the UK at the moment. At the UKLA 51st International Conference (2015) there was much discussion surrounding the implementation of the National Curriculum in England and Wales (DfE, 2014) which requires that teachers teach children to read using synthetic phonics in the first instance. Clark (2014) is very critical of using this approach. Synthetic phonics refers to an approach in which 'the sounds identified with letters are learned in isolation and blended together, for example, a synthetic approach to reading 'cat' would require children to decode the word phoneme by phoneme 'c-a-t' (Elborn, 2015, p. 47). Analytic phonics on the other hand refers to an approach in which 'the sounds associated with letters are not pronounced in isolation but children identify phonic elements for words which each contain a similar element, either at the start of the word – onset – or in the later part of the word – rime' (Elborn, 2015, p. 47). Research

indicates that using both approaches in combination is more effective than using one approach on its own (Juel & Minden-Cupp, 2001).

Clark (2014) suggests that governments seem to ignore evidence from research in relation to the teaching of reading and in particular this dominance of using synthetic phonics. She paints a disquieting picture in some developing countries of how 'the power being wielded by large commercial organisations to influence government literacy policies, often falsely claiming a research basis for the policy' (Clark, 2014, p. 6). Clark (2014) also warns against undervaluing the role and contribution of parents in helping their children to learn to read.

Clark (2014) outlines how learning to read in school should happen:

> Learning to read should not be regarded as a hierarchy of skills from lower to higher order, but as a developmental language process. The approaches in the initial stages will colour the children's motivation and their perception of reading as a purposeful valuable activity. On completing their schooling children should not only be able to read with comprehension for a variety of purposes, but also be motivated to read (Clark, 2014, pp11, 12).

There are many skills and strategies that are essential to effective literacy teaching in the early years including 'phonological awareness, phonics (for reading/spelling), vocabulary, fluency, comprehension and writing (composition)' (Kennedy, E., Dunphy, E., Dwyer, B., Hayes, G., McPhillips, T., Marsh, J., O'Connor, M. & Shiel, G. 2012, p. 15).

Reading is one strand of literacy and the reading process is very complex. Effective teachers of literacy understand this complexity and use a range of strategies to teach reading successfully. Kennedy et al. (2012) identified a number of components that need to be considered in the teaching of reading:

- The establishment of varied and rich vocabulary
- The development of phonological processes

- The provision of a framework for teaching comprehension strategies
- A need to ensure that motivation and enjoyment of reading are key aspects of the reading process
- A renewed focus on reading fluency (Kennedy et al, 2012, pp114-117)

Ellis (2005) introduced the idea of teachers using a balanced approach to teaching reading:

> There is no single instructional method that deserves sole claim to being 'best practice'. Of course, this comes as no surprise to teaching practitioners operating in the real worlds of their classrooms. Rather than single strategy solutions, the common wisdom of research in the field currently points to the need for balanced approaches to be employed to accommodate the diverse needs of students (Ellis, 2005, p. 44)

The most recent Handbook on teaching early reading has just been published in time for the UKLA 51st International Conference (Elborn, 2015). Elborn (2015) recommends that good practice in teaching reading includes having effective teachers with sound subject knowledge in schools; the use of consistent approaches throughout the school; having quality resources which are well organised; rigorous assessments which are used effectively; daily reading sessions based on assessed needs; story time; reading to children; literacy rich environments and a high level of parental involvement (Elborn, 2015, p. 5). Underpinning all of these elements has to be a broad and rich reading curriculum which engages teachers and children alike and which promotes a positive reading ethos throughout the school (Elborn, 2015).

Clark (2014) highlights how the skill of the teacher is 'to capitalise on and to develop the strengths of individual children, aware of and sensitive to the contribution of the parents to the process of education.' Marie Clay (1972) refers to reading as 'a patterning of complex behaviour, so also is teaching' (Clark, 2014, p. 40). Therefore it is incumbent on teachers to provide supportive interactions with children to help them in the acquisition of reading. This

study focuses on one such intervention to help children in the acquisition of literacy in the infant classes in primary school.

1.3 Focus of this study

The acquisition of literacy does not begin in school but rather in the home; however this study focuses on a literacy intervention in the early years in primary school. Pupils can commence primary education in Ireland in the September after they reach the age of four, beginning in Junior Infants class. Some pupils do not commence primary school until they are nearer the age of five. Pupils spend eight years in primary school. Pupils spend year one in Junior Infants and year two in Senior Infants.

Station Teaching is a literacy intervention that teachers in Ireland are now implementing. In this study I focus on the implementation of Station Teaching in the infant classes. Station Teaching occurs when a class is divided into four or five small groups of pupils and they receive intensive tuition at four or five different Stations. Members of the Special Education team in a school, in collaboration with the class teacher, work in the classroom at the different Stations providing a range of literacy activities, for example: New Reading, Familiar Reading, Phonics and Writing activities. In some schools the intervention lasts for six to eight weeks per year, in other schools the intervention continues all year – it all depends on availability of staff.

1.4 Research questions

In this study these are the research questions that I aim to answer:

- *How is Station Teaching implemented?*
- *What is the experience of the intervention Station Teaching from the participants' point of view: teachers, pupils, parents?*
- *What notion of literacy is Station Teaching facilitating?*

I explore in detail the implementation of Station Teaching in Junior and Senior Infant classes. I report on the experience from the participants' point of view: teachers – both Class and Support, the pupils in the classes and their parents. All of their experiences allow a story to unfold.

1.5 Research Methods

In following Mertens' guidelines (2010) I chose a mixed methods design in researching my topic and included both quantitative and qualitative data collection in parallel form. I approached the research from a pragmatic paradigm. Onwuegbuzie & Teddie (2002) describe the Pragmatic Parallel Mixed Methods Design as one in which qualitative and quantitative data are collected and analysed to answer a single study's research questions. The final inferences are based both on data analysis results and the two types of data are collected independently at the same time or with a short time lag.

The research methods are outlined in detail in Chapter 5 and aim to present an accurate account of how the research was conducted.

In my study the quantitative data were collected from a questionnaire issued to teachers in 21 schools in Ireland. 115 teachers responded to this survey. The title of the questionnaire was

‘Teachers’ views and experiences of Station Teaching in primary schools’. The questionnaire results presented a snap shot of what is happening in schools nationally in relation to the implementation of Station Teaching.

The qualitative data were collected by way of a case study approach. By using a case study approach it facilitated an in depth exploration of the implementation of Station Teaching in infant classes. This involves extensive observations of class activities; interviews with class and Support teachers, pupils and parents; collections of field notes; videotapes of classes and the acquisition of children’s drawings.

1.6 Thesis overview

Following this introductory chapter, I present a review of literature in relation to literacy spanning three chapters. In Chapter 2, I consider definitions of literacy and what the research literature says about effective literacy teaching in the early years. I review national and international research. I also explore socio-cultural concepts of literacy and Vygotsky’s (1978) ideas on how children learn and how this supports the acquisition of literacy. I conclude this chapter with a synthesis of strategies that effective teachers use in the teaching of literacy.

Chapter 3 offers an in depth analysis of literacy policy for the early years in Ireland. I refer to official guidance on the teaching of literacy by the Primary School Curriculum (DES, 1999) and reviews on its implementation by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). I also consider the implications arising from the results of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (2009); the publication of the National Strategy (DES, 2011); the research reports commissioned by the NCCA (2012); the report by McCoy,

Smyth & Banks (2012) on the *Growing Up in Ireland study* as well as the National Assessments of English Reading by the Educational Research Centre (ERC) (2014).

Chapter 4 explores current practice by teachers in teaching literacy in Irish primary schools. The first section examines reports on effective literacy practices in schools in Ireland: reading and comprehension practice, raising literacy levels with collaborative on-site professional development in Irish classrooms, findings from the *Growing Up in Ireland Study*, a report on effective literacy practices in Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) in Ireland (2009). I explore the elements that are considered essential to the effective teaching of literacy in the early years, such as: developing concepts about print, vocabulary and fluency, phonological awareness, phonics and comprehension. I also address assessment methods and effective interventions for struggling readers. The second section presents effective strategies that teachers have found useful in improving literacy outcomes, such as: Peer Tutoring, Reading Recovery, Guided Reading and Station Teaching.

Chapter 5 provides an outline of the Research Design using the theory of educational research to frame the research process used in this study. The subsequent three chapters present and analyse the research findings. Chapter 6 presents the results of the questionnaire providing a national picture of the implementation of Station Teaching in 21 schools around the country. Chapter 7 provides an in depth report on the case study conducted on the implementation of Station Teaching in infant classes in one primary school. It relays experiences from the teachers', pupils' and parents' perspectives. The final chapter, Chapter 8, discusses the conclusions and implications resulting from the research findings.

In the final section of this chapter I outline my personal rationale for this study.

1.7 Personal / Professional journey with Literacy

I taught in an all boys' primary school in Dublin for 16 years with an inspirational principal, Dr. Jim Bennett, leading the teaching and learning in the school community. I always had a passion for literacy and was an avid reader all my life. While only teaching for a few years with my principal's encouragement I became a tutor on Induction courses for newly qualified teachers of Infants in Drumcondra Education Centre, Dublin. Through my work in the Centre I became a tutor for Oral language development and worked with schools in an initiative with the Department of Education in disadvantaged schools in the 1980's and as a tutor for school planning. I was co-author and co-editor for a manual for teachers on teaching oral language: *Twenty Steps Towards Language Development*, which was published in 1988 and is still being sold. That book arose out of a need to help teachers with literacy in disadvantaged schools in North Dublin and an education subcommittee was formed through the local branch of the INTO. I introduced and co-ordinated the '*Write a Book'* project in my own school and in the Education Centre for schools in North Dublin. In 1994 I trained as a tutor with School Planning with the INTO when their professional development unit was first established.

In 1997 I moved back home to Beara in West Cork and secured a teaching position in a small rural school. I taught multi grade classes at the junior level. I continued to implement various strategies to improve literacy in the school – shared reading programme, write a book project. In 2000 I became a full time facilitator with School Development Planning Support Service and had the privilege of working with schools in Cork and Kerry. I completed my M. Ed. Thesis in St. Patrick's College of Education, Dublin on *'Teachers' Perceptions of the benefits of School Development Planning in small rural schools'* in 2005. The completion of my Masters coincided with my appointment as administrative principal in my present school – a large rural school with 260 pupils. For the last five years I have been a tutor with the National Induction Programme for newly qualified teachers and I always present the Literacy workshops to teachers. My passion for improving literacy continues unabated. Sometimes I have to walk

away from book sellers in school. Every opportunity I get to speak to parents I try to convey the important messages about the importance of developing oral language and reading skills with the pupils. I give talks to parents of Infant classes on tips for helping their children to read and have given out handouts from the First Steps Programme with suggestions for helping their children with literacy.

Since I became principal in our school we have introduced many initiatives to improve literacy standards. We send home books with the Junior and Senior Infants every night to 'read' with their parents. In 2011 we commenced Station teaching in Senior Infant classes from October to June and in Junior Infant classes for six weeks in the last term. In First Class we continue with Station Teaching and follow on with Guided reading for the last six weeks of term. All classes from Second to Sixth participate in either the Peer Tutoring programme or Guided Reading. Since 2009 the staff sponsor free library tickets in the local library for all pupils in the school. I take Third Class to visit the local library every fortnight for the year and all teachers teach comprehension strategies to the pupils.

In 2007, we became one of the nine pilot schools for the Building Bridges Comprehension programme and one of our teachers was a participant in the project - teachers often visit our school to see this in action. In March 2012, I invited Dr. Martin Gleeson to give a presentation to staff on Comprehension strategies and through the Education centre invited all the teachers in West Cork – 130 attended. For the second part of the presentation, at my suggestion, our project teacher brought in her class and taught them a new comprehension strategy. This was a brilliant real life session and was the highlight of the evening. She taught the Second Class pupils the strategy 'Determining Importance' using a basket with ingredients for making pancakes with essential and non-essential items. All teachers in the school implement this programme and teach the strategies to the pupils. Brendan Culligan also presented a workshop

in our school in the afternoon to teachers and at night to parents from all over West Cork, on Spelling strategies.

I have had the privilege of attending the *Literacy Association of Ireland (LAI)* conference in 2014 and most recently the *United Kingdom Literacy Association (UKLA*) 51st International conference in 2015, after which I returned with renewed vigour and passion for improving literacy in school. I thoroughly enjoyed meeting and engaging with literacy experts from different countries – from Ireland, to the UK, Iceland, the United States, Australia and New Zealand. I am definitely going to implement an initiative recommended by key note speaker, Steven Layne from Illinois, United States of America. Layne (2015) contends that students read when teachers are both knowledgeable and excited about books and that students read when teachers are model readers. He suggests that all staff in a school have 'Hot Reads' each week. Layne (2015) explains that each adult working in the building displays a poster/sign with their 'Hot Read' – the book they are reading at the moment for the grade level they are working with. The school librarian has to ensure that they have four or five copies of this book in the school library. Once a week at assembly some member of the school community reads their 'Hot Read' thereby involving all the school and promoting reader engagement. I am very excited about this suggestion and am busily organising it in my head.

In our school teachers are encouraged and facilitated to attend any professional development in relation to Literacy. In October 2011 six teachers visited a school in north Cork to observe Station teaching in action in two classes. Following on from that fabulous visit we set up the project – this involved purchasing the books required for the different levels of ability in the guided reading groups, setting up the folders for these, organising equipment for the writing station, setting out the phonics programme and organising timetable for Support teachers required to facilitate the introduction of the programme. Most staff members have attended

workshops by the writer Stephen Graham who focused particularly on Writing and Guided reading.

All the strategies we have implemented in our school have prompted me to look at the implementation of these initiatives. I am anxious to pursue the experience and impact of these programmes, especially how they have impacted on the learning of the pupils and the teachers. What is the experience of the teachers involved in the introduction of these ground up initiatives, their professional development, how school culture has impacted on these? I am also interested in the parents' perspectives on how their children are progressing with their reading.

From an ethical point of view I am conscious that as school principal I have a vested interest in the findings from this research. I am both a participant and an observer in these programmes. I attend all the professional development opportunities afforded the staff. I help out in the classrooms with the different initiatives, so I am very familiar with all the strategies being taught. I realise that when I am interviewing participants they will be conscious that I am the principal of the school as well as a researcher. However the staff know how committed I am to improving standards of literacy that I hope this will overcome any reticence with regard to recommendations! I am very open to all suggestions in our school to improve the teaching and learning and the staff are very aware of this, so I hope that my research will be fruitful and that our school and other schools can benefit from my findings.

1.8 Conclusion

In summary this study seeks to critically evaluate the implementation of a literacy intervention, Station Teaching, in the infant classes in primary schools from the perspectives of the teachers, pupils and parents. The whole point of introducing a literacy intervention is to improve the

literacy outcomes for the pupils involved, particularly in the light of the disappointing PISA 2009 findings. I hope this study provokes reflection among its readers and that it will encourage people to engage with the implementation of Station Teaching in classrooms.

This chapter has given an outline of why this study was undertaken, the focus of the study along with the research questions and research methods used. I also presented an overview of the chapters and presented my personal rationale for engaging in this research. Though the research on Station Teaching in Ireland is sparse we can draw on much international literature on the effective strategies teachers use in teaching literacy and these are addressed in the following chapters.

Chapter 2 – Effective literacy teaching in the early years of school

2.1 Introduction

> *Skills and strategies that are essential to effective literacy teaching in the early years include phonological awareness, phonics (for reading/spelling), vocabulary, fluency, comprehension and writing (composition) (Kennedy et al., 2012, p. 15).*

Literacy and the effective teaching of literacy have been discussed at length by many educational researchers. It is a complex area of research and there is still much room for improvement in the teaching of literacy in classrooms. I am particularly interested in literacy in the early years and what teachers can do to improve literacy at this stage.

In this chapter I consider two themes. The first theme is examining what counts as literacy and the second theme explores what the research literature is saying about effective literacy teaching in the early years. Reviews of this area have already been carried out, so, for the purpose of this chapter on effective literacy teaching, I will draw on a selection of studies and reviews done since 1998 beginning with Snow et al. (1998) and concluding with Hall (2013) and McCarthy and Murphy (2014).

Firstly I define literacy and secondly I look at different ways of teaching literacy from four different theoretical perspectives. Thirdly I review the most recent report by Kennedy et al., (2012) on literacy in the early years in Ireland followed by a review of international research from The United States, Australia, New Zealand and The United Kingdom on effective literacy teaching. I also explore socio-cultural concepts of literacy and Vygotsky's (1978) ideas on how children learn and how this supports acquisition of literacy. I present a summary of the elements that Luke and Freebody (1999) recommend should be part of a literacy curriculum and I conclude with a synthesis of strategies that effective teachers use in the teaching of literacy in the early years.

In Chapter 3, I report on official literature and the policy context in relation to teaching of literacy and in Chapter 4, I demonstrate what we know about teachers' practice of teaching literacy in the early years of primary school.

2.2 Definition of Literacy

Literacy is one of the most important skills that teachers teach; it is a crucial skill for any pupil to acquire to enable them to live life fully.

The Oxford English Dictionary (1989) defines literacy as the ability to read and write. In England in the 1990s researchers tended to use the Oxford dictionary definition when referring to improving literacy levels and looked at improving the teaching of English in schools and in particular improving reading and writing standards. At this time the definition of literacy was very narrow but now the definition of literacy has expanded to include oral language development and appreciation of different types of media including broadcast and digital media.

The authors of the government-sponsored initiative Delivering Equal Opportunities in Schools (DEIS, 2005c) define literacy as 'the integration of reading, writing, listening and speaking'. Flewitt (2008) explains how the children's different modes of learning are influenced by the social and cultural environments in which they find themselves. She alludes to the various forms of technologies, such as mobile phones, computers and game consoles in which children have to become literate.

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (OECD, 2009) report defines literacy as 'understanding, using, and reflecting on written texts, in order to achieve one's

goals, to develop one's knowledge and potential and to participate in society' (OECD, 2009, p.14).

The definition of literacy in *Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* (NCCA, 2009) recognises the importance of multiple modes and representations in literacy:

> Literacy is more than having the ability to read and write. It is about helping children to communicate with others and to make sense of the world. It includes oral and written language and other sign systems such as mathematics, art, sound, pictures, Braille, sign language and music. Literacy also acknowledges the changing nature of information communication technology and the many forms of representation relevant to children including screen-based (electronic games, computers, the internet, television) (NCCA, 2009, p.56).

The concept of emergent literacy is significant. Aistear (NCCA, 2009) views emergent literacy as developing through 'play and hands-on experience where children see and interact with print as they build an awareness of its functions and conventions' (p. 54). The most recent report by Kennedy et al. (2012), and commissioned by the NCCA, recommends taking account of the interconnectedness of oral language and reading and writing within the emergent literacy phase. The Department of Education and Skills (DES) (2011) in its publication *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People* expands on the above definition and defines literacy in this way:

> Traditionally we have thought about literacy as the skills of reading and writing; but today our understanding of literacy encompasses much more than that. Literacy includes the capacity to read, understand and critically appreciate various forms of communication including spoken language, printed text, broadcast media, and digital media (DES, 2011, p.8).

Kennedy et al.'s report (2012) on *Literacy in Early Childhood and Primary Education (3-8 years*) also uses the definitions from the National Strategy (DES, 2011) and Aistear (NCCA, 2009). They suggest that reading, writing, oral language skills and strategies are very important to develop but 'it is important to espouse a broad vision of literacy which encompasses the

cognitive, affective, socio-cultural, cultural-historical, creative and aesthetic dimensions of literacy across the lifespan of the individual' (Kennedy et al., 2012, p. 44).

Kennedy et al. (2012) recommend the importance of considering the definitions of literacy across the lifespan of the individual from 'womb to tomb' (Alexander, 1997). The report refers to three international assessment initiatives, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and the Programme for International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIACC) which all 'emphasise constructivist interactive processes of reading, where readers actively construct meaning from text' (Kennedy et al., 2012, p. 10). These initiatives also recognise 'the importance of literacy in empowering the individual to develop reflection, critique and empathy, leading to a sense of self-efficacy, identity and full participation in society' (Kennedy et al., 2012, p. 10).

Socio-cultural theories of literacy are identified as they emphasise the role culture plays in the development of literacy, the social nature of learning and the way in which literacy practice is located within wider social, economic and political contexts (Kennedy et al., 2012, p.39).

Schools are very aware that the acquisition of literacy does not begin in school but rather in the home. Síolta, the National Quality Framework (NCCA, 2006), was developed by the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE) to support quality in the provision of early years' education and childcare facilities. Síolta (NCCA, 2006) is complemented by Aistear (NCCA, 2009), the early years' curriculum framework for children from birth to six, which was developed by the NCCA.

A wide range of theoretical perspectives on literacy development indicates three paradigm shifts – from behaviourist to cognitive to socio-cultural perspectives (Kennedy et al., 2012, p. 48).

There is now acceptance of the critical importance of phonological awareness in early literacy development. The emphasis on reading for meaning, the role culture plays, how critical literacy empowers children and the key role in literacy learning of children's motivation, engagement and sense of self-efficacy are all reviewed in the report (Kennedy et al., 2012). The authors also refer to key components of acquisition of literacy, as outlined in the introduction, including word recognition, vocabulary development, fluency, comprehension and the development of writing and spelling as they relate to the processing of print and digital texts (p.13).

The challenge of supporting literacy in a digital age: perspectives of Irish primary school teachers

McCarthy and Murphy (2014) examine digital literacy support from an Irish perspective. They refer to the definition of literacy which has developed to accommodate different literacies: digital literacy, media literacy and computer literacy. They claim that conventional literacy learning where use of the print media was the dominant resource is inadequate now and literacy teaching should begin with identifying the children's needs and interests to ensure a meaningful learning environment. They refer to Dwyer (2010) who suggests different skills, 'strategies and dispositions are required to successfully navigate the multimodal nature of online text' (in McCarthy and Murphy, 2014, p. 16). The key strategies include critical literacy – where children have to be critical of the texts they are reading; searching online which is a crucial skill when negotiating the internet, and multimodality – multimodal online texts include words, pictures, audio and video clips in interactive and diverse digital spaces. McCarthy and Murphy (2014) contend that teachers with adequate levels of knowledge are vital in nurturing digital literacy in the classroom and that both the NCCA and DES need to address this with continuous professional development (CPD) for teachers where 'needs-based individualised school

support with respect to literacy development in the broadest sense (including digital literacy), would be provided by literacy experts' (2014, p. 21).

McCarthy and Murphy (2014) conducted a small scale qualitative interpretive research study of 17 primary classroom teachers in the south of Ireland on '*The challenge of supporting literacy in a digital age'*. Teachers in this study shared the traditional understanding of literacy as synonymous with reading and writing printed words on paper and skills such as phonics and fluency. The level of technological integration in Irish classrooms appears quite limited with the interactive whiteboard being the only consistent technological advancement mentioned for supporting literacy development. Despite a push for ICT integration into literacy learning lessons, children are still not generally accessing technology and the internet in schools (2014, p. 23). McCarthy and Murphy (2014) conclude that surveyed teachers' understandings of how they should be developing digital literacy are at present insufficient. Even though research highlights the importance of digital literacy development, current classroom provision seems inadequate in this respect (2014, p. 24).

2.3 Different ways of teaching literacy

Kathy Hall (2003) in her book *Listening to Stephen read* presents multiple perspectives on reading: (i) a psycho-linguistic approach, (ii) a cognitive-psychological perspective, (iii) a socio-cultural perspective and (iv) a socio-political perspective and she invites us to develop our own perspective on reading development.

(i) A psycho-linguistic approach

Psycho-linguists speak about the importance of purpose, relevance and intrinsic motivation. Hall (2003) explains how they 'believe that all language is used for authentic purposes and that language, whether oral or written, is best if it is learned for authentic purposes' (2003, p. 41).

A psycho-linguistic perspective can define reading as a problem-solving activity. Frank Smith (1978) contends that all you need for children to read is to have books that are of interest to them and an understanding guide to help them to read. A whole language classroom with real books is recommended by psycho-linguists and reading-to-enjoy is an important aspect of the psycho-linguistic school. Hall (2003) concludes that psycho-linguistic theory helped us:

> appreciate the significance of knowledge of likely linguistic sequences in text – the probabilities of not only letters in words, but also words in sentences, sentences in paragraphs, and larger genres of text. By giving us miscue analysis and by highlighting reading as a constructive process, psycho-linguistics gave us, respectively, a means of examining the reading process and a theory of reading that were distinct from previous ideas about reading (Hall, 2003, p. 51).

(ii) A cognitive-psychological perspective

Drawing on the work of Juel (1991), Hall (2003) describes how those taking a strong cognitive-psychological perspective suggest pupils follow a stage model when learning to read – that they go through different stages, which are characterised by the addition of more efficient ways of identifying words and that there are differences in the processes readers go through. They also believe that word identification is key to comprehension and that knowledge of orthography is more important in that task than syntactic or semantic knowledge and that efficient use of orthographic knowledge leads to better comprehension (Hall, 2003, p. 68). Cognitive-psychologists accord prime importance to decoding or deciphering words. Hall (2003) refers to Ehri's (1995) thinking about the various stages or phases that children go through as they learn to recognise words by sight: pre-alphabet phase, partial alphabetic phase, full alphabet phase and consolidated alphabetic phase. Hall (2003) alludes to the influence of the cognitive-psychological perspective on the literacy curriculum in England, in particular to the emphasis on word recognition and within that on phonological awareness and secondly the emphasis on comprehension in the text-level work.

(iii) Socio-cultural perspective

A socio-cultural perspective on reading shifts the emphasis according to Hall (2003) from 'the individual per se to the social and cultural context in which literacy occurs' (2003, p. 134). Literacy is discussed in relation to culture, to context and to authentic activity and that culture is the key to meaning making and that meaning emerges from social interactions (Vygotsky, 1978, Bruner, 1996 and Lee and Smagorinsky 2000). Bruner (1996) argues that mind could not exist without culture and that although meanings are in the mind, meanings originate in the culture in which they are created (Bruner in Hall, 2003, p. 135). Hilton, who was interviewed in Hall's study (2003) advises that all children come from different home backgrounds and cultures and that teachers should familiarise themselves with the way that culture works and that they would be more effective teachers (2003, p. 131). Hilton contends that teachers can introduce children to great literature but it should be done with a sensitive knowledge of the child's home culture. Hall (2003) expounds that learning and thinking are always situated, always in a context, and always dependent on the use of person-made tools or resources and that the primary tool of all person-made tools is language (2003, p. 135). She maintains that language is the primary symbol system that allows us to shape meaning and teachers of literacy are very interested in improving pupils' capacity to use that symbol system and that learning is inherently social (2003, p. 136). Hall (2003) refers to communities of practice and funds of knowledge but stresses that understanding the nature of literacy interactions and practices in the home is crucial for maximising literacy learning opportunities in the school (2003, p. 138). Hall (2003) proposes that elements like partner reading, cooperative group work and reciprocal teaching approaches are consistent with socio-constructive perspectives on learning and highlight 'the significance of context and the learner's meaning in literacy events' (2003, p.149).

(iv) Socio-political perspective

Hall (2003) draws on the work of two scholars: Jackie Marsh and Barbara Comber. Marsh (in Hall, 2003, p. 153) contends that 'literacy is embedded within discourses of power' and that it is not a neutral technology and Comber (in Hall, 2003, p. 154) argues that 'literacy is always political' and she wants to discuss with children questions about language and power. She also argues that 'who is holding the book is an indicator of who is responsible for producing the text' (2003, p. 156) and that it is possible to have conversations with very young children about representations, about authors' choices and decisions about how things could have been written differently (2003, p. 164). Marsh (in Hall, 2003) sees literacy as a socially situated practice and refers to the critical literacy discourse and Bourdieu's (1977) concept of 'cultural capital' – 'that notion that it is only some children's cultural capital that is reflected within the curriculum, generally middle-class children's cultural capital (2003, p. 172). Marsh (in Hall, 2003) also discusses how she considers that self-esteem is at the root of our learning and she alludes to the importance of media texts in children's lives. Hall (2003) examines the status of critical literacy in practice and explains how it challenges inequities in society and promotes social justice and democracy where power is with all people (2003, p. 175). According to Hall (2003) those who have a socio-political view of literacy or a critical literacy, 'hold that learning to read includes being able to determine underlying assumptions and hidden biases in texts. This is how literacy and power connect' (2003, p. 176) and that learning to read in this perspective is as much about 'learning identities and values as it is about learning skills and codes' (2003, p.178).

Listening to Stephen read: Multiple perspectives on literacy

Hall (2003) explains that much research has been done on how best to teach literacy but she claims that there is no 'one' right approach for teaching reading. In this book Hall (2003) presents a story of Stephen who has struggled with reading tasks and she recorded him reading

and retelling a story to his teacher. Hall (2003) then transcribed this recording and approached eight well-known literacy educators and asked them to participate in the project. She asked all of them the same questions including what his teacher should do to enhance his reading (p. 3). One of the experts Mary Hilton (2003) explains how literacy is now a multidisciplinary field and that 'understanding the nature of literacy interactions and practice in the home is critical for maximising literacy learning opportunities in the school' (2003, p. 138). Hilton (2003) also states that 'Literacy is what literacy does. Literacy can only be understood from knowledge of the conditions under which it occurs' (p. 139). The replies from all the educators suggest that reading or literacy is not a simple matter but rather that it is complex and multidimensional. They recommend that 'mandated programs should not replace the teacher's professional prerogative and intellectual freedom' (2003, p. 191). What is important is that children are 'learning how to participate in the social activities of their classroom and that they form a community of learners' (p. 192). All eight educators recommended that Stephen needed to improve his decoding skills and comprehending text as well as realising the importance of the purpose of reading. They advocated the 'integration of reading and other language modes; the provision of lifelike contexts and real purposes for reading; the building up of confidence and positive expectations about what literacy can do for his life; and the use of a variety of texts' (p. 192). The literacy experts also urged the explicit teaching of skills for meaningful purposes and suggested shifting the focus from oral reading to silent reading (to remove the stress of reading aloud). Hall (2003) outlines the broader notion of what literacy is and this requires teachers to use a 'broader range of teaching strategies from direct explanation and explicit teaching to modelling, scaffolding, facilitating and guided participating' (p. 192).

It is important for teachers to be familiar with the different perspectives on teaching literacy but they must use their professional discernment to choose which one suits the particular children they are teaching. Hall (2003) is adamant that teachers begin with children and their

needs, not methods or resources (p. 194). All of the experts agreed that 'learners have to understand and believe that reading is important for them in the here and now of their lives' (p. 194). Hall (2003) concludes with Barbara Comber's question: 'If you only knew about literacy from being in this classroom what would you think it was for?' (p.194).This is an interesting question for me as I embark on my empirical study of Station Teaching in Infant classrooms. I return to this issue later in my analysis chapters. Station Teaching, as will be demonstrated later in the study, would appear to align with elements of both a cognitive psychological perspective and a socio-cultural perspective.

In the next section I discuss teachers' perceptions of what is a 'good' teacher in Irish primary schools and then I focus on effective teachers of literacy.

2.4 Research on 'good' teachers and effective literacy teaching

There has been scant focused research on teacher effectiveness in Irish schools. Sugrue's (1997) work with primary teachers indicated that teaching was perceived as a 'craft' and that 'good' teachers were born as much as made. Kitching's (2009) work depicts the complexities and emotional challenges for new teachers.

Devine, Fahie and McGillicuddy (2013) conducted an in depth study in 6 primary schools and 6 post primary schools in Ireland on what constitutes a 'good' teacher, This involved 78 extensive observations, 82 interviews and 126 questionnaire surveys. The findings from the 'Good' Teacher Questionnaire produced very interesting data. 'Good' teachers were identified as having five factors: they have a passion for teaching and learning; they are socially and morally aware; they are reflective practitioners; they effectively plan for and manage learning and they have a love for children/young people. Contradictions are evident 'between teacher beliefs and observations of their practice, the latter mediated by the socio cultural context of

the school (gender, social class and migrant children), teacher expectations for different types of students and leadership practices within the school' (Devine et al., 2013, p. 83). This research leads me to pursue what makes for an effective teacher of literacy.

The National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life* (DES, 2011) posits that a positive attitude and motivation are vital for pupils to improve in literacy and numeracy. It also states that 'all learners should benefit from the opportunity to experience the joy and excitement of getting 'lost' in a book' (2011, p. 43). Teaching pupils to read is a very complex activity and effective teachers who have an understanding of this complexity can use a range of teaching approaches that produce confident and independent readers.

In May 2012, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA, 2012) published three research reports on Early Childhood and Primary Education. For the purpose of my research I will focus on Kennedy et al.'s report (2012), No. 15: *Literacy in Early Childhood and Primary Education (3 – 8 years).* The other reports are No. 14: *Oral Language in Early Childhood and Primary Education (3-8 years)* and No. 16: *Towards an Integrated Language Curriculum for Primary Schools (3-12 years)*. This research was commissioned in light of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (2011).

Kennedy et al. (2012) draw on widespread research material on literacy development from other countries and present it to us in the Irish context. It is the most recent and up-to-date research of this magnitude in relation to literacy development in Ireland and presents an excellent summary of literacy in the early years. The report defines Literacy and looks at the theoretical perspectives, stages of literacy development, literacy pedagogy, contexts for literacy teaching, assessment, oral language and literacy, literacy across the curriculum and draws conclusions and synthesizes the implications. To me this document is a very important one and will set the context for future in-service provision for the teachers in Ireland.

Kennedy et al. (2012) report on how important motivation and engagement are in predicting achievement and in determining children's academic success. Kennedy et al. (2012) describe how a research-based approach to balanced literacy instruction gives attention to the affective dimensions of literacy and develops and builds children's motivation, engagement and self-efficacy. Closely connected to engagement is the concept of 'perceived self-efficacy' which Bandura (1995) defines: 'Perceived self-efficacy refers to beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations. Efficacy beliefs influence how people think, motivate themselves and act' (1995, p.2). Self-efficacy is closely linked with self-regulation. Pupils who can self-regulate their own learning and motivation will perform much better. Kennedy et al. (2012) acknowledge that there is no one best method for teaching literacy and highlight a wide range of strategies with which all teachers should be familiar. They outline the importance of teachers teaching in ways that are motivating and engaging for children and they identify 'the importance of building on success in meeting challenges and creating opportunities for children to develop their agency and sense of self-efficacy' (2012, p.45). This sense of agency was highlighted by Anne Looney (2014) (CEO of the NCCA for the last decade) who published an article on *Curriculum politics and practice: from 'implementation' to 'agency'* in the recent Irish Teachers' Journal by the INTO (2014). She refers to a significant development in the NCCA recently of the NCCA working directly with networks of teachers, schools, early years' practitioners, parents and others to support innovation in schools and other educational settings. One example is the Aistear Tutor Network, made up of teachers in the infant years form across the country using Aistear (NCCA, 2009). This direct engagement according to Looney (2014) 'alongside the deliberative engagement with representatives and nominees, is an attempt to include curriculum as practice in the process of developing the national curriculum that represents a nation's aspirations for its children' (2014, p. 12). Looney (2014) maintains that these teachers are seen as agents of

curriculum development, and that their practice is valued as a context for innovation. She recommends that we continue our journey towards implementing a 'motivating curriculum, with its promise of a delicate balance of skills and knowledge, a focus on mastery mindsets, which promotes self-directed and autonomous learning in equal measure and supports child and teacher well-being' (2014, p. 13).

Rueda (2011b) contends that the goal of education is to produce a learner who has developed expertise, can self-regulate his learning, is motivated and can perform to the best of his ability. Kennedy et al. (2012) argue that this success is dependent on three variables:

> (i) levels of teacher and student knowledge and skill,
> (ii) teacher and student motivation and
> (iii) organisational and contextual factors which are situated within the wider social and cultural context (2012, p. 67).

Research on the acquisition of literacy was examined by Kennedy et al. (2012) and the authors looked at key components including word recognition, vocabulary development, fluency, comprehension and the development of writing and spelling. The authors recommend a balance in the elements which support early literacy with due regard for language and vocabulary development, fluency and comprehension (2012, p. 82). In the 1999 Curriculum development of vocabulary was not even mentioned, this was a huge oversight. It can be an indicator of early and later literacy outcomes and is strongly associated with reading comprehension (2012, p. 82). Reading fluency supports the development of reading comprehension. The importance of using a writing process was also outlined, and how handwriting is identified as being important in developing fluency of writing. In Station Teaching handwriting is the focus in the Writing Station in the Infant classes.

Skills and strategies needed for effective literacy teaching include: phonological awareness, phonics for reading and spelling, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension and writing are

identified. The authors explain constrained skills which, once mastered, contribute little to literacy development in later life. These include phonological awareness, phonics, spelling, grammar and punctuation. These skills are very important in the Infant classes. However unconstrained skills continue to develop and enhance literacy development. These include oral language, vocabulary knowledge, comprehension and writing. In my empirical study of Station Teaching I observe teachers teaching both constrained and unconstrained skills in the Infant classes.

Kennedy et al. (2012) recommend that teachers implement a balanced literacy framework but this requires high levels of teacher expertise. On reviewing many studies the authors, Kennedy et al. (2012) suggest the following insights into how effective literacy teachers excel: by providing a print rich environment, giving pupils choice and control to select books and topics, by facilitating collaboration in literature discussion groups, by setting tasks at a moderate level of challenge and by differentiating according to child need, by using a metacognitive approach to strategy instruction, by incorporating a wide range of formative and summative assessment data, by providing substantial blocks of time for literacy and by having expert classroom management (2012, pp.180-182). Many of these components are covered by Station Teaching classes.

Furthermore the authors reviewed studies on effective schools of literacy and reported the following characteristics: there is a strong leadership in literacy, there is on-going on-site customised professional development, staff adopt an 'inquiry as stance' to determine the effectiveness of changes to pedagogy and assessment, they have designed and implemented a balanced literacy framework, staff collaborate in planning, teaching and reviewing assessments and use a range of formative and summative assessment tools and the schools report strong home-school links (2012, pp. 183-184).

Kennedy et al. (2012) report that research on reading development confirms that 'the two clusters of oral language abilities – phonological awareness on the one hand and general language abilities (e.g. vocabulary knowledge, syntactic knowledge) on the other- are predictive of later reading ability' (2012, p. 293). When delays in language development occur they are likely to impact negatively on reading and literacy. Children's writing development is also supported by language-based activities. Children can describe and explain their own written work in the same way as they explain texts they have read.

The authors look at inquiry-based models that can be deployed in teaching literacy across the curriculum. Activities such as 'reading, dramatic play and writing can be used to foster creative skills' (2012, p. 313). With regard to children for whom English is a second language Kennedy et al. (2012) outline the following principles as supportive of development of literacy: oral language development in the context of social interactions, meaningful use of language in a variety of literacy contexts and engagement in comprehension strategies that build oral language discourse skills (2012, p. 314).

The authors conclude by identifying 71 key points and suggest the following 11 implications for future curriculum development:

1. The curriculum should be founded on a broad definition of literacy
2. The curriculum should be informed by a broad range of theoretical perspectives
3. The curriculum should recognise that literacy learning is developmental, constructivist and incremental in nature
4. The curriculum should be underpinned by a research-based, cognitively-challenging balanced literacy framework
5. Effective literacy instruction should include attention to the cognitive, metacognitive and affective dimensions of literacy
6. The curriculum should emphasise the importance of developing higher- and lower-order skills and strategies
7. The curriculum should recognise the long-term contributions of unconstrained skills
8. Schools and teachers should create collaborative learning environments

9. The curriculum should recognise the key role of parents in contributing to children's literacy development
10. Assessment in the literacy curriculum should be built on a framework that includes the purpose and uses of reading and writing
11. Professional development should be an on-going process and should be embedded within professional learning communities within schools (2012, pp. 332-333)

Finally the authors acknowledge that the implementation of a research-based balanced literacy framework within the Irish context poses challenges for the system. While the provision of extra time for literacy has been granted, concerns are raised with how this time is to be spent. Schools will all be at a different stage with regard to development planning and will need on-going professional development to help them to engage in self-evaluation and to engage in customised professional development so that they can implement the balanced literacy framework. Cowen (2003) offers this definition and example of an integrated balanced approach:

> A balanced reading approach is research-based, assessment-based, comprehensive, integrated and dynamic, in that it empowers teachers and specialists to respond to the individual assessed literacy needs of children as they relate to their appropriate instructional and developmental levels of decoding, vocabulary, reading comprehension, motivation and socio-cultural acquisition with the purpose of learning to read for meaning, understanding and joy (Cowen, 2003, p. 10)

The most recent review of evidence on effective literacy teaching in the early years of school has been written by Kathy Hall (2013) where early years refers to pupils in the 5 to 8 years range. She refers to literacy being multimodal, 'requiring the integration of pictures, movies, written prose and electronic texts' (p. 523). Hall (2013) expounds how effective literacy teachers integrate two major aspects of teaching literacy. They provide a wide range of opportunities for their pupils to read and respond to children's literature and to write for specific purposes as well as attending 'to the codes of written language – sound symbol correspondence,

word recognition, spelling patterns, vocabulary, punctuation, grammar and text structure' (p. 524).

The Professional Development Services for Teachers (PDST, 2013) identify how teachers can facilitate the excitement and motivation to read by providing students with:

- interesting and rich texts in a print rich environment
- choice of text matched to children's stages of development and interests (Lipson, Mosenthal, Mekkelson, & Russ, 2004)
- authentic purposes for reading
- opportunities to explore, interact and experiment with text
- opportunities to be read to every day in a variety of voice tones and expression
- optimal challenge in order towards moving children beyond their Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978)
- opportunities for collaboration and social interaction (Guthrie, et al., 2007) (2013, pp. 3,4).

Afflerbach (2000) in his article on '*Our Plans and Our Future'* examines ways and means of 'improving reading instruction, and the centrality of teachers' professional development to students' learning to be better readers' (p.75). This article appeared in a book called *Balancing Principles for Teaching Elementary Reading* which was written by members of the professional community of reading educators (including Afflerbach) and the goal for this book was to represent what they have learned about effective teaching and learning as members of this community. There was a rising call within the profession at this time for a balanced perspective on reading. Afflerbach (2000) expounds that it his firm belief that 'student success in reading is the result of talented teaching and that successful schools are those that combine effective practice, appropriate materials, and continual professional development for teachers' (p. 76). I totally concur with his views on this and I feel that it is incumbent on schools to succeed in achieving this challenge.

With the introduction of the NCCA Aistear (NCCA, 2009) programme for children from birth to six years and the National Strategy for Literacy (2011) in primary schools currently and in light of the recent research review of literacy by Kennedy et al., (2012), schools have to engage

in self-evaluation and implement effective strategies to improve literacy in primary schools. Much support has been introduced in disadvantaged schools but not in the ordinary primary schools with regard to implementation of strategies. I now examine research from the United States on effective teaching of literacy.

2.5 What is an effective teacher of literacy? Studies from the United States

Richard Allington (2002) conducted a study over a decade on effective reading instruction by exemplary elementary classroom teachers. Resulting from this study he outlines 6 common features of effective elementary literacy instruction: time, texts, teaching, talk, tasks and testing. Allington (2002) contends that effective teachers of literacy routinely had their children actively reading and writing for as much as half of the school day and that extensive reading is critical to the development of reading proficiency (p. 742). He explains how these effective teachers provide a rich supply of books so that pupils enjoy a reading experience in which they perform with high levels of accuracy, fluency and comprehension.

Furthermore Allington (2002) claims that part of good teaching is planning instructional time and modelling useful strategies that good readers employ (p. 743). Teachers offered models of decoding, composing and self-regulating strategies as separate lessons to the whole class and to targeted pupils. He points out how the exemplary teacher fosters more student talk and that this classroom talk was purposeful. These teachers encouraged, modelled and supported lots of talk across the school day. Teachers discussed ideas, concepts, hypotheses, strategies and responses with students (p. 744).

Allington (2002) suggests that effective teachers made greater use of longer assignments and less emphasis on filling the day. Students read whole books and he found that the instructional

environment was one of ‘managed choice’ (p. 745) and finally he reports how effective teachers evaluated students’ work and awarded grades based more on effort and improvement than simply on achievement. These teachers often used a ‘rubric-based evaluation scheme’ to assign grades and believed that good instruction would lead to enhanced test performance (p. 746). Allington’s (2002) evidence of effective elementary classroom teachers is very similar to Williams and Baumann’s review published in 2008.

Duffy & Hoffman (1999), Gambrell, Malloy, & Mazzoni, (2007) agree that teaching pupils to read is a very complex matter and much research has demonstrated that teacher expertise is the critical variable in effective reading instruction rather than the method. Williams and Baumann (2008) researched and reviewed published studies on elementary teachers from 1990 to 2007. They defined effective literacy teachers as those who ‘exhibit the greatest ability to improve the literacy achievement of students’ (p. 359). The authors presented their findings under 17 category codes and organised these into four themes: teacher philosophy, instructional practices, engagement practices and personal qualities.

Theme i: Teacher philosophy

Williams and Baumann (2008) alleged that effective teachers held high expectations for all students and believed that all their students could learn to read and write at high levels. These teachers also believed that learning is social and structured their classrooms accordingly. Effective teachers also valued and strove toward fostering student independence.

Theme ii: Instructional practices

Williams and Baumann (2008) contended that effective teachers employed various strategies depending on students’ needs and could switch to a different strategy if required. Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, Rankin, Mistretta, Yokoi, & Ettenberger (1997) believed that these

teachers also used multiple materials. They used a wide range of texts including poems, expository titles and pattern-predictable books.

Furthermore, Williams and Baumann (2008) outlined how effective literacy teachers provided explicit instruction, which included direct explanation, modelling, guided practice and independent practice. They also integrated instruction by connecting lessons across the language arts or across content areas. Wharton-McDonald et al. (1997) reported that the best primary-grade literacy teachers used a variety of assessment strategies, including comprehension questions, writing portfolios and regular parent conferences (1997, p.365).

Researchers also found that successful literacy teachers often employed small-group instruction (Block et al., 2002; Taylor et al., 2000; Pressley et al., 1998).

Theme iii: Engagement practices

Praise is an important part of engagement. Ruddell (1995) found that effective literacy teachers use a combination of motivation and praise. Dolezal, Welsh, Pressley & Vincent (2003) argue that engaging teachers of literacy provide a supportive classroom environment – areas for reading, exploring and cooperative learning. They also highlighted the importance of display of student work in promoting engagement. Effective literacy classrooms have an ongoing 'rich talk between students and teacher' (p. 366). Hall and Harding (2003) outline how effective literacy teachers use a variety of classroom management routines – passing out materials, coordinating instructional groups and transitions between activities (p. 57).

Theme iv: Personal qualities

Personal qualities are not necessarily specific to literacy instruction but apply to all academic areas. Allington & Johnston (2002) reported that researchers often characterised effective teachers as being compassionate or warm and caring. Empathy was a related characteristic to

compassion and was also present. Spencer & Spencer (1993) stated that excellent teachers demonstrated instructional adaptability and that they could adapt their instructional practice to meet individual student needs. Williams and Baumann (2008) concluded that effective teachers engaged students by demonstrating enthusiasm about reading and writing and communicated their own value of reading and writing in an exciting and dynamic way (p. 367).

Underpinning this literature review has been the vital importance of the role of the teacher in early years' literacy teaching. It is the teacher who delivers the literacy program within the context of the school community. Snow, Burns & Griffin (1998) published a book on *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*. It really is a bible for any teacher of literacy and is widely quoted in literacy literature but the authors are coming from a strong cognitive-psychological perspective, already detailed in Section 2.3. Snow et al. (1998) assert that children arrive in school with very different backgrounds, and they allude to the 'individual differences in children's progress from playing with refrigerator letters to reading independently' (1998, p. 79). Ideally they claim that a child comes to reading instruction with 'well-developed language abilities, a foundation for reading acquisition, and varied experiences with emergent literacy' (p. 79). Snow et al. (1998) outline how children who turn out to be successful in learning to read 'use phonological connection to letters, including letter names, to establish context-dependent phonological connections, which allow productive reading' (p. 79). They conclude that children need 'simultaneous access to some knowledge of letter-sound relationships, some sight vocabulary, and some comprehension strategies' (1998, p. 79 – 84).

The National Reading Panel (NRP) (2000) published a report on *Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and its Implications for Reading Instruction.* In this report they identified certain instructional methods that are more effective for implementation in the classroom:

- Phonemic awareness
- Phonic Skills
- The ability to read words in text in an accurate and fluent manner
- The ability to apply comprehension strategies consciously and deliberately as they read

It has been shown that both Snow et al. (1998) and the National Reading Panel (2000) identified specific features of effective classroom practice for early literacy learning. Snow et al. (1998) claim that research findings converge to show that quality classroom instruction in the early years of school is the 'single best weapon against reading failure' (p. 343). Furthermore, they declare that the skills of good teachers are extremely complex, 'effective teachers are able to craft a special mix of instructional ingredients for every child they work with' (pp. 2-3). They identified, from previous research, some characteristics of effective teachers of early literacy (see Table 2A). These findings address both general classroom and early intervention literacy practice.

Table 2.A: Some characteristics of effective early literacy teachers

General classroom practice	Effective early intervention practice
• Strong knowledge base • Planning instruction to meet diverse needs • Creating a 'literate environment' with access to a variety of reading and writing materials • Providing explicit instruction in reading and writing in 'authentic' and 'isolated' practice • Creating multiple opportunities for sustained reading practice • Choosing a variety of texts at	• Strong knowledge base • Planning a daily program for much of the school year • Allocating additional time in reading (not sufficient in itself) • Providing a variety of activities, including reading and rereading of continuous text, writing, word study and decoding strategies • Carefully choosing materials to include engaging texts

children's instructional level, especially children's literature, including Big Books • Providing activities that link reading and writing • Adjusting groupings and explicitness of instruction according to individual needs • Encouraging self-regulation through meta-cognitive strategies • 'Masterful' management of the classroom	• Integrating assessment into the program • Engaging in professional development

(Modified from Snow et al., 1998 and Louden et al., 2005, p. 26).

This emphasis on effective early years' literacy teaching for all children has been taken up by other researchers. Based on research literature, Strickland (2001) describes a number of 'at risk' factors in young children's literacy learning, one of which is 'ineffective classroom practices' (Strickland, 2001, p. 325). The NRP report (2000) contended that teachers are the key and that they must know how children learn to read, why some children have difficulty learning to read, and how to identify and implement instructional approaches of proven efficacy for different children.

Taylor, Pearson, Peterson and Rodriguez (2005) examined classroom practices across two years in 13 schools in relation to the *Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA) School Change Framework*. The authors found that in schools that were implementing the reform effort reasonably well, teachers were changing their teaching in the direction of more high-level questioning and more coaching and the authors stress the importance of evidence-based, reflective professional development (2005, p. 64). The *CIERA School Change Framework* provided support for school improvement in reading. However it was 'teachers' collaboration, teachers' decisions about what to study, and teachers' perseverance that made the difference in the more successful schools' (p. 66). The authors conclude that when teachers

collaborate and engage in ongoing reflective professional development and use data to improve teaching practice, their students' reading achievement can grow significantly.

Dickinson, Freiberg and Barnes (2011) in their article on '*Why Are So Few Interventions Really Effective?*' confront us with this question. The authors recognise the powerful impact of early language learning on later academic success and acknowledge how factors such as poverty place children at risk of failing to acquire language skills needed for later reading. However it appears that many interventions in schools to foster learning have not had lasting effects in developing language skills and therefore reading and comprehension skills have not improved as a result. Dickinson et al. (2011) contend that if we are to 'craft effective methods of intervening and supporting teachers we need better insight into exactly what is and what is not happening in classrooms where interventions are being mounted' (p. 354). The authors also suggest that coaching and professional development may be needed to address 'teachers' core conceptions of what it means 'to teach' the varied kinds of knowledge children require to become skilled readers, and the differing methods teachers should employ to foster children's acquisition of these abilities' (p. 354). They advise that if we are really in earnest about implementing interventions we need to understand the dynamics of the classroom and to create curricular and coaching supports that foster sustained changes. I will be very mindful of this advice when I observe the implementation of an intervention – Station Teaching in a classroom.

Hall (2013) in her review of evidence from the U.S. outlines how effective teachers of literacy offer a variety of literacy experiences to their pupils: 'from partner reading, shared reading, independent reading and book choosing to explicit instruction using familiar and new texts and from daily writing in journals and workshop settings to mini-lessons about the mechanics of writing based on children's needs' (p. 526). These teachers teach guided reading lessons, they show their pupils how to use a range of reading cues and teach explicit methods for the development of comprehension. The mechanics of writing occur in the context of real writing

and the process of writing is emphasised. Literacy for these teachers is integrated across the curriculum and there is much emphasis on oracy. The teachers make extensive use of scaffolding and are able to intervene just at the right moment to ensure 'the acquisition of some skill or concept' (2013, p.526). These teachers are coming from a socio-cultural perspective.

Wharton-McDonald, Pressley & Hampston (1998) outline that what distinguishes 'outstanding teachers from their more average colleagues is their ability to incorporate multiple goals into a single lesson'. This was defined as 'instructional density' (Hall, 2013, p. 527). Pressley, Wharton-McDonald, Allington, Block, Morrow, Tracey, Baker, Brooks, Cronin, Nelson & Woo (2001) maintain that exemplary teachers exhibit excellent classroom management including the co-ordination of support teachers, they are well-planned, they monitor their pupils' literacy activities, they have well-established routines and pupils are expected to be self-regulated and independent (Hall, 2013, p. 527). Hall (2013) contends that outstanding teachers of literacy use a whole host of elements and do not adhere to one particular method of teaching (p. 527). Overall Hall (2013) concludes that effective teachers of literacy teach language conventions within the context of interacting with whole texts to maximise meaningfulness to pupils. Integration of reading, writing, oracy and collaboration and sharing texts are used effectively. Exemplary teachers were found to use every minute productively and offered timely and focused feedback (2013, p. 529).

These studies all show how an effective teacher of literacy should operate and fully support Duffy & Hoffman (1999); Gambrell et al. (2007) in their assertions that teaching to read is indeed a complex matter and we need to support our teachers to facilitate this process. Next I examine research on effective teachers of literacy in Australia and New Zealand.

2.6 Research from Australia and New Zealand

Louden, Rohl, Barratt Pugh, Brown, Cairney, Elderfield, House, Meiers, Rivalland, & Rowe (2005) reported on the results of two Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) funded children's literacy and numeracy projects: '*100 Children go to School*' and '*Mapping the Territory: Primary School Students with Learning Difficulties in Literacy and Numeracy'*. Louden et al. (2005) identified the characteristics of the more effective teachers: they have highly developed classroom management skills, and a variety of strategies for motivating children to participate in literacy activities. These teachers make explicit to children their substantial knowledge of literacy including creating and using a rich literacy environment. 'They provide a high degree of support for literacy as they persistently scaffold learning, they provide differentiated levels of challenge, instructions and tasks for individual needs and create a socially supportive classroom environment in which children demonstrate pleasure in learning' (Louden et al. 2005, p. 5).They further outline the key components of effective reading/literacy programs under content knowledge and classroom practice:

Content knowledge:

- Balanced literacy curriculum that includes word and text level knowledge, with particular reference to phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension and oral language

Classroom practice:

- Systematic, explicit and focused instruction
- Guided practice of literacy skills
- A variety of motivating, interesting literacy experiences
- Diagnostic teaching of literacy in terms of regular assessment that guides planning
- Adapting the literacy environment for individual differences, including focused attention on students who make a slow start in literacy learning
- Precise teacher talk that includes clarity of explanations of literacy learning
- Recognition of community knowledge and individual children's home backgrounds

- Establishment of classroom literacy routines
- Teacher professional development that increases teachers' knowledge of reading/literacy (Louden et al., 2005, p.19).

John Hattie (2003) is Professor of Education at Auckland University, New Zealand. He produces some of the most important educational research. His research paper *Teachers make a Difference* (2003) explores the difference between experienced teachers and expert teachers, the latter really influencing student learning. Hattie (2003) contends that students who are taught by expert teachers demonstrate an 'understanding of the concepts targeted in instruction that is more integrated, more coherent, and at a higher level of abstraction than the understanding achieved by other students' (2003, p. 18). Hattie (2003) demands a deeper representation of excellence in teachers and teacher expertise and the need to identify and esteem and encourage excellent teachers. Hattie (2003) believes that we should be focusing on 'the person who gently closes the classroom door and performs the teaching act' (2003, p.3). He argues that teachers must have exceptional effects on the learners and that we need to direct attention at higher quality teaching and higher expectations for our students. Hattie (2003) concludes that the focus is to have a powerful effect on achievement and this is where excellent teachers come to the fore – 'as such excellence in teaching is the single most powerful influence on achievement' (2003, p.4).

Louden et al. (2005) report that Hattie and colleagues (Hattie, 2003), on the basis of a review of the literature and a synthesis of over 500,000 studies identified five major dimensions of 'expert' teachers that it is claimed can distinguish them from other 'experienced' teachers. Sixteen attributes of expertise, which are outlined in this table, are subsumed under these five dimensions.

Table 2B: Attributes of teacher expertise (Hattie, 2003)

Identify essential representations of subject

• Deep representations about teaching and learning, resulting in ability to concentrate on instructional significance and adapt lessons to student needs
• Problem solving approach to their work, focusing on individual students' performance and a flexible approach to teaching
• Anticipating, planning and improvising, seeking and using feedback
• Decision making, skill in keeping lesson on track but also building on student input

Guide learning through classroom interactions
• Optimal classroom climate – increased probability of feedback, error welcomed and engagement the norm
• Multidimensional perspectives on classroom situations – effective classroom scanning
• Sensitivity to context – knowledge of students

Monitor learning and provide feedback
• Feedback and monitoring learning
• Testing hypotheses about learning difficulties
• Automaticity of classroom skills – ability to deal with situational complexity

Attend to affective attributes
• Respect for students – ability to overcome barriers to learning
• Passion for teaching and learning

Influence student outcomes
• Motivation and engagement of students in learning
• Challenging tasks and goals
• Positive influence on student achievement
• Enhancement of surface and deep learning
(Louden et al., 2005, p. 21).

Hattie (2003) explains that whilst content knowledge is of vital importance it does not appear in the attributes as a key distinguishing feature, since it is necessary for both experienced and expert teachers. He also explains that the distinguishing features are seen as overlapping facets of the whole profile so that no one feature by itself is necessary (Louden et al., 2005, p. 21). It is clear from the existing reviews of effective literacy teaching that we know a great deal about it. Although settings may vary and national policies may differ in emphasis, it is clear that there are many principles and procedures that are common across the studies, not least of which is the meaning-making of the learner and the understanding that engagement in the process is vital for the child.

2.7 Studies from the United Kingdom (U. K.)

A study commissioned by the U. K. government Teacher Training Agency (Wray, Medwell, Fox and Poulson, 2000; Wray, Medwell, Poulson and Fox, 2002) used existing research into teacher effectiveness to further examine the characteristics of effective primary school literacy teachers. They aimed to compare the teaching practices of a group of teachers identified as effective at teaching literacy with those of a group of teachers not so identified. To do this they identified two main sample groups: (1) the main sample of 228 primary teachers identified as effective in the teaching of literacy; (2) the validation sample of 71 primary teachers not so identified.

The validation sample was chosen from a regular random list of teachers. The effective teachers were chosen from a list of teachers recommended as effective by advisory staff in a number of areas. The key criterion for this choice was whether they could obtain evidence of above-average learning gains in reading for the children in the classes of these teachers (Wray et al., 2000). They sent questionnaires to 228 'effective' teachers and 71 'validation'; conducted observations on 26 'effective' and ten 'validation' teachers and interviewed them also. Their research included a validation sample of teachers in order to provide a meaningful benchmark for comparison. Results showed that the practices of effective teachers differed from those of validation teachers in different ways as shown in Table 2C.

Table 2C: Differences of practice between effective and validation literacy teachers (Wray et al., 2002)

• Reading practices - more use of Big Books, use of other adults, short regular teaching sessions • Embedding of teaching of reading in a wider context – using whole texts as the basis for teaching skills and having a clear purpose for this • Making explicit connections between levels of text • Brisk pace – refocusing of attention onto task and reviewing learning • Modelling and demonstrations accompanied by verbal explanations of metacognitive processes

- Differentiation of tasks and support for individuals and groups
- Heavy emphasis on literacy and use of the literacy environment
- Clear assessment procedures informing choice of literacy content appropriate for student needs.

E. C. Wragg, C. M. Wragg, Haynes & Chamberlin (1998) conducted and reported on the research project *Leverhulme Primary Improvement project* on improving the teaching of reading in schools. This project was undertaken at Exeter University and funded by Leverhulme Trust from 1994-1997 and is also called the *Exeter project*. Wragg et al. (1998) carried out research on two important aspects of education, firstly on improvement – what schools sought to do to raise the quality of children's achievement and learning and secondly they focused on literacy (Wragg et al., 1998, p.7). This project sought to identify the strategies used by effective teachers of literacy to help pupils experiencing difficulties in literacy development. The researchers undertook four major interlinked studies involving questionnaires, interviews, recording and analysis of the processes and intensive observations (Wragg at al., 1998, p. 10). The project involved looking at 1400 schools between 1994 and 1997. Wragg et al. (1998) observed the teaching practices of 35 teachers who were rated by their head teachers as successful teachers of literacy. Wearmouth and Soler (2001) report that almost two thirds of the 258 individual children in the study showed improvement beyond the mean over one year. The Exeter project (1998) identified ten characteristics of a good teacher of literacy. These teachers have a high level of personal enthusiasm for literature, often supplementing with their own books; they provide a rich literacy environment; they celebrate progress publicly and increase children's confidence; they teach individualised programmes; they provide systematic monitoring and assessment; they organise regular and varied reading activities; they encourage pupils to develop independence and autonomy in attacking unfamiliar words and backing pupils' judgement as authors; they portray a high quality of classroom management skill and personal relationships with pupils; they have high

expectations of children and they use a great variety of methods of teaching (Wearmouth and Soler, 2001, p.118).

Wearmouth and Soler (2001) conclude that following on from the Exeter research that 'effective literacy pedagogies demand the fostering of a greater awareness and understanding by teachers and classroom assistants of the process of children's literacy development' (2001, p.118). Teachers, as learned professionals, need to be able to make reflective judgements about their pupils and learning situations based on a sound theoretical knowledge of literacy.

Hall and Harding (2003) published a systematic review of effective literacy teaching in the 4 to 14 age range of mainstream schooling in the U.K. The main focus of their review was to examine the professional characteristics, beliefs and classroom approaches of teachers of literacy of this age group who have been nominated as being effective (p. 2). Twelve studies were analysed in depth. Although this systematic review spanned a greater age range than the focus of this thesis, the findings are relevant to my study and they also show the level of agreement there is across the many reviews that have been conducted to date. The review showed 'that effective teachers of literacy have a wide and varied repertoire of teaching practices and approaches (e.g. scaffolding, where support in learning is initially provided by the teacher and gradually withdrawn as the pupil gains confidence) integrating reading with writing, differentiated instruction, excellent classroom management skills, and they can intelligently and skilfully blend them together in different combinations according to the needs of the pupils. The 'effective' teacher of literacy uses an unashamedly eclectic collection of methods which represents a balance between the direct teaching of skills and more holistic approaches' (p. 3). In relation to implications for practice the authors advise that there is no one single critical variable that defines outstanding literacy instruction but that research evidence points to a 'cluster of beliefs and practices like scaffolding, the encouragement of self-regulation, high teacher expectations, and expert classroom management' (p. 4). Hall and

Harding (2003) refer to Taylor et al. (2000) who point out that 'teachers' understanding of and commitment to, particular teaching strategies are crucial' (2003, p. 9). They argue that this commitment may be more important than the methods themselves and that teachers make a larger difference in students' growth as readers. Hall and Harding (2003) produce substantive findings in relation to the important pedagogical practices that effective literacy teachers share and these are summarised under 10 headings. Six of these overlap with Hattie's list of characteristics as reported in Table 2A – classroom management skills, creating a positive environment, encouraging self-regulation, using scaffolding and differentiation, holding a strong core of professional knowledge and continuing professional development. The other four are: (1) Balance – effective teachers obtain a balance between skills teaching and the application of literacy for meaningful purposes.(2) Integration – effective teachers integrate reading, writing, listening and talking as well as in other curriculum areas. (3) Pupil engagement and instructional density – effective teachers keep their pupils on task most of the time. (4) Links with parents – effective teachers maintain close links with parents (2003, pp.48, 49).

Marian Whitehead (2004) published a book on *Language and Literacy in the Early Years – Third edition,* which is a very useful text for any early years' educator. This edition reflects continuing research over the last 20 years in the field of language and literacy development but also takes into account recent developments and initiatives which have influenced early years' education. It is a very readable text with a balance of theory and practice. Whitehead (2004) focuses much on the baby and pre-school years and she recommends that 'literacy progress must be monitored closely in the early years and that it should be the dominant and joyful focus of the early years curriculum' (p. 149). Whitehead (2004) further expounds that there is no one single approach or method that will teach reading to all children. She is critical of the 'primers' used in literacy hours saying they are bland and humourless and that teachers are over

dependent on their use. In a section dealing with emerging literacy she highlights four aspects of literacy that can be focused on in the early years of education: the roles of authors and readers; the significance of collaborative approaches to emerging literacy; the nature of written forms as both permanent and disposable; and, finally, the issues of independence and of written conventions (p. 214). Whitehead (2004) concludes with advice that the breakthrough in relation to reading achievements seems to come, 'according to the research, when children have closely-monitored one-to-one tuition; have approaches that are literacy orientated and involve writing; have meaningful material to read; and, perhaps most importantly, receive the powerful hidden messages that they are valued and respected' (2004, p. 234).

Snowling and Hulme (2005) edited a *Handbook on The Science of Reading* which provided an overview of scientific studies of reading and is in seven sections. The editors who are coming from a strong cognitive psychological perspective begin by reminding us that 'word recognition is the foundation of all reading; all other processes are dependent on it. If word recognition processes do not operate fluently and efficiently, reading will be at best inefficient' (p. 3) and that a consensus has been reached that phonological coding is central to word recognition. In Part Two the editors identify the two key predictors of emergent literacy as 'responsive parenting and home literacy' (p. 103). Brian Byrne (2005) in his article on *'Theories of Learning to Read'* in this Handbook reminds us that 'there will be no single theory of learning to read' (p. 108). Judith Bowey (2005) in her article on '*Predicting Individual Differences in Learning to Read'* claims that 'understanding the alphabetic principle and developing efficient phonological recoding skills are arguably the key competencies that the beginning reader must acquire in order for reading to become a self-teaching process' (p. 171). In Section seven Snow and Juel (2005) in their article '*Teaching Children to Read: What Do We Know about How to Do It?*' emphasise the considerable evidence showing that 'the quality of teaching has a larger effect on children's reading skills than the nature of the curriculum that

is followed' (p. 499). They stress the importance of how an approach is implemented by the teachers in the classroom. Snow and Juel (2005) discuss the balanced approach to reading instruction and advise two compelling reasons for integration of phonics activities and comprehension activities – '(1) much is required to 'learn' a word, and (2) coherent approaches to literacy development must take into consideration a particular child's literacy skills' (p. 510). They conclude that the findings from a 'wide array of sources – studies of reading development, studies of specific instructional practices, studies of teachers and schools found to be effective – converge on the conclusion that attention to small units in early reading instruction is helpful for all children, harmful for none, and crucial for some' (p. 518). Snow and Juel (2005) refer to many studies done on the role of the teacher in teaching literacy and the characteristics of effective teachers 'including responding with explicit instruction to children in need, promoting independent reading, organizing lively engaging discussions about texts being read, holding children accountable for reading and meaning, asking open-ended questions, and holding high expectations' (p. 515). They identify 'teacher skill and the specifics of teacher practices as factors influencing students' reading outcomes' (p. 515).

All of this research highlights how an effective teacher of literacy has a profound effect on the learning opportunities for pupils in a classroom. In my research I look at the implementation of a literacy intervention in junior classes in an Irish primary school and the impact of same on teachers, pupils and parents.

All of this research is very interesting because it aligns very much with what we know about learning from a neo Vygotskian and Brunerian perspective and a general constructivist and socio cultural perspective and I discuss this in the next section.

2.8 Socio-cultural concepts of literacy

In the NCCA-commissioned research report by Kennedy et al. (2012) socio-cultural theories of literacy are reviewed. Kennedy et al. (2012) explain how socio-cultural theories of literacy 'emphasise the role that culture plays in the development and practice of literacy' (2012, p. 54) and that literacy learning from this perspective is a social practice. They refer to Vygotsky's (1978) claims that 'language learning is influenced by the social contexts in which children are immersed as they grow up and that they draw on a range of mediational tools in the construction of meaning' (2012, p. 54). They contend that literacy is not simply an individual cognitive activity but rather a 'communicative tool for different social groups with social rules about who can produce and use particular literacies for particular social purposes' (2012, p. 55). Research in the socio-cultural field has also portrayed how adults can scaffold children's literacy learning through apprenticeship models as espoused by Rogoff (1990). Socio-cultural theories of learning emphasise the social nature of learning and also draw on concepts such as 'community of practice model' (Lave and Wenger, 1991), in which 'novice learners join more expert learners in a community and, as they gain skills, knowledge and understanding, become more central members of the expert group' (2012, p. 55).

More recent work drawing on socio-cultural theory has been within the area of New Literacy Studies (NLS), which 'emphasises the way in which literacy is a social practice that is located within a wider social, economic and political context' (2012, p. 55) and they refer to the concepts of autonomous and ideological definitions of literacy.

The authors further explore how socio-cultural theories of literacy have led to an understanding of the way in which children are immersed in literacy and how they develop a range of skills, knowledge and understanding of literacy (2012, p. 57). Children's own cultural interests are important in literacy learning and research has shown how popular culture and media inform children's literacy learning (2012, p. 57). Socio-cultural theories of

literacy were identified as those which emphasise the role culture plays in the development of literacy, the social nature of learning and the way in which literacy practice is situated within a wider social, economic and political context (2012, p.68). This notion of the importance of a child's environment impacting on their learning in the classroom is widely recognised and reported on by Hilton in her observations in Hall's book (2003). Research has acknowledged the importance of valuing children's home experiences and have utilised the concept of 'funds of knowledge' (Moll, Amanti, Neff & González, 1992). 'Funds of knowledge' refers to the knowledge individuals and communities build up through their life experiences, which can be drawn upon in educational settings (Kennedy et al., 2012, p. 175). Teachers should recognise children's out-of-school literacy practices and build on these in the classroom.

Becoming a reflective language teacher

Vygotsky (1962) contends that there are two stages of development of knowledge: in the first stage we learn about things or how to do things and in the second stage there is a gradual increase in active, conscious control over language. In developing children's literacy, teachers must help children to become reflective about their language. Wilson (2001) suggests that teachers can only do this if they themselves are reflective readers, writers and speakers. Teachers must talk about what they are reading and help children to do likewise. They must respond enthusiastically to a piece of children's writing and perhaps suggesting areas for further work (2001, p. 7). Carter (1994) in Wilson (2001) claims that understanding the differences between speech and writing is one of the most important aspects of language knowledge for teachers – speaking and listening are of equal importance. Wilson (2001) argues that speaking and listening are part of everyday life, of the way we negotiate our relationships, our jobs, our interests, our sense of ourselves and our place in the world. She claims that the roots of language are in everyday speech. Children need to acquire more knowledge about the construction of texts, the structure of sentences and the choice of words to become empowered

as a speaker, listener, reader or writer. Teachers can pass on this knowledge if they feel empowered themselves and this is where teacher training and professional development comes in. Classrooms can become a rich interactive learning community with a reflective language teacher at the helm.

Zone of Proximal development (ZPD)

Vygotsky (1978) proposed a relationship between learning and development that is determined by what he named a child's zone of proximal development (ZPD). This is the area in which a child can perform a task with the help of a more skilled or knowledgeable person. Vygotsky (1978) defined ZPD as 'the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem-solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers' (1978, p.76).

Fostering an enjoyment of reading can be ensured in a variety of ways one of which is by ensuring optimal challenge towards moving children beyond their ZPD. In the classroom context this might be the gap between a child being able to complete a task easily without any help or support, and a task which is out of reach for the child and cannot be attempted without help or guidance from a more knowledgeable person. In this way Read (2004) contends that the ZPD provides a 'valuable conceptual framework in an educational context for situating the level of challenge in activities and tasks that may be appropriate for children at any one time – tasks which will challenge, stretch and extend learning but which are also achievable and which will allow for success' (2004, pp. 2,3). Independent performance is the best a learner can do without help but assisted performance is the maximum a learner can achieve with support. If a teacher observes a learner's assisted performance they can investigate the learner's potential.

By providing assistance to learners within their ZPD teachers are supporting their growth (Wood, 1998).

Scaffolding according to Read (2004) is the 'metaphorical concept used to describe the interactive verbal support provided by adults to guide a child through the ZPD and enable them to carry out a task that they would be unable to do without help' (2004, p. 3). Scaffolding is based on Vygotsky's (1978) premise of learning as a socially constructed process and is often adopted to describe teacher intervention in pupils' learning (Wood, 1998). Bruner (1983) describes scaffolding as the 'process of setting up the situation to make the child's entry easy and successful and then gradually pulling back and handing the role to the child as he becomes skilled enough to manage it' (1983, p.60). In Guided Reading this can be compared to the teacher's gradual release of responsibility. As Vygotsky (1978) argues 'what the child can do with assistance today she will be able to do by herself tomorrow' (1978, p. 87).

In my research I am very aware of the Vygotskian perspective as I report on Guided reading as an activity in the intervention - Station Teaching in the junior classes in Irish primary schools. I observe the scaffolding that is going on during the intervention as teachers guide their pupils through their ZPD. I note the role culture plays in the development of literacy and the social nature of learning and how literacy practice is situated within a social, economic and political context (Kennedy et al., 2012, p.68).

Hall (2003) recommends Luke's model (2000) which summarises all the elements that are necessary as part of a literacy curriculum. Luke (2000) talks about children as code breakers, meaning makers, text users and text critics (2003, p. 193) – see Table 2D.

Hall (2003) explains how all four aspects are important and essential from the beginning of a child's literacy learning, that children do not just begin with code breaking and move in a linear way through the four and that they can be developed using a range of teaching methods (2003, p. 193)**.** Luke and Freebody (1999) suggest that each one should be thought of as a family of

practices to 'emphasize their dynamic, fluid and changing nature as well as to stress the fact that they are undertaken by people in social contexts' (in Hall, 2003, p. 181). Luke and Freebody (1999) advise that these families of practice should be seen as inclusive and that this framework is useful for examining the emphases of current classroom literacy curricula and that perhaps there is an exclusive emphasis on the code aspect with little attention to the critical aspect of a literature programme. In Table 2D, I present a summary of the elements that need to be part of a literacy curriculum as recommended by Luke and Freebody (1999).

Table 2D: Summary of the elements that need to be part of a literacy curriculum

Children as Code breakers	**Children as Meaning makers**	**Children as Text users**	**Children as Text critics**
How do I crack this text? How does it work? What are its patterns and conventions? How do the sounds and the marks relate, singly and in combinations?	How do the ideas represented in the text string together? What cultural resources can be brought to bear on the text? What are the cultural meanings and possible readings that can be constructed from this text?	How do the uses of this text shape its composition? What do I do with this text, here and now? What will others do with it? What are my options and alternatives?	What kind of person, with what interests and values, could both write and read this naively and unproblematically? What is this text trying to do to me? In whose interests? Which positions, voices, and interests are at play? Which are silent and absent?

Modified from Luke and Freebody (1999)

To conclude this section of my literature review in Table 2E, I have compiled a synthesis of the strategies effective teachers use in the teaching of literacy in the early years, based on the reviews of literature.

Table 2E: Daly Synthesis of strategies effective teachers use in the teaching of literacy in the early years

Meaning
The provision of lifelike contexts and real purpose for reading, use a variety of texts.

The establishment of varied and rich vocabulary. The development of phonological processes. Provide interesting and rich texts in a print rich environment including poems, expository titles, Big Books and pattern predictable books. Choice of text matched to children's stage of development. Authentic purposes for reading. Reading to pupils every day in a variety of tones and expression. Provide a rich supply of books so that pupils enjoy a reading experience in which they perform with high levels of accuracy, fluency and comprehension. Teachers offering models of decoding, composing and self-regulating strategies. Children who turn out to be successful in learning to read use phonological connection to letters, including letter names to establish context-dependent phonological connections, which allow productive reading. Children need simultaneous access to some knowledge of letter-sound relationships, some sight vocabulary and some comprehension strategies.
Skills Broad range of teaching strategies – direct explanation, explicit teaching, modelling, scaffolding, facilitating and guided participating. Student success in reading is the result of talented teaching – schools combine effective practice, appropriate materials and continued professional development for teachers that increases teachers' knowledge of reading/literacy. Excellence in teachers. Teachers who are warm or compassionate and caring. Sensitivity to context – knowledge of students. Use a variety of assessment strategies including comprehension questions, writing portfolios and regular parent conferences. Six common features of effective elementary instruction: time, texts, teaching, talk, tasks and testing. Effective teachers of literacy use a combination of motivation and praise. Use a variety of classroom management routines – passing out materials, coordinating instructional groups and transitions between activities. More high-level questioning and more coaching.
Participation/Engagement Positive attitude and engagement. Motivation and enjoyment of reading are key aspects of reading process. Opportunities to explore, interact and experiment with text. Foster more student talk and ensure it is purposeful. Employ small group instruction. Display of student work in promoting engagement.

Engaging students by demonstrating enthusiasm about reading and writing and communicate their own value of reading and writing in an exciting and dynamic way. Ensuring children's attention is focused on literacy tasks.
Agency – having a choice The provision of a framework for teaching comprehension strategies. A renewed focus on fluency. Optimal challenges aiming to move children beyond their ZPD. High expectations for all students. Teachers believe that learning is social and structure their classrooms accordingly. Value and strive towards fostering student independence. Pupils with self-efficacy beliefs and self-regulation strategies perform better. The design and implementation of a balanced literacy framework.
Integration Integration of reading and other language modes. Literacy is integrated across the curriculum. Opportunities for collaboration and social interaction. Teachers provide large blocks of time; they create a motivating and engaging classroom environment; they teach skills within a balanced literacy framework; they scaffold and coach children in the use of strategies; they utilise a dynamic and flexible range of instructional groupings; they differentiate according to child and they have expert classroom management. A variety of literacy experiences for pupils: partner reading, shared reading, independent reading and book choosing, explicit instruction using familiar and new texts, daily writing in journals and workshop settings, mini-lessons about the mechanics of writing based on children's needs. Guided reading lessons – they show their pupils how to use a range of reading cues and teach explicit methods for the development of comprehension.

2.9 Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined what counts as literacy, what we know about effective teachers of literacy in the early years and how excellence in teaching is a key influence on student achievement (Hattie, 2003). The importance of the teacher and teacher competence, not just methods is highlighted. The importance of the teacher giving feedback to students and the importance of what the learner brings in terms of experience to the literacy encounter are all

stressed. I also discussed the influence of Vygotsky on learning and the importance of the teacher's role in ZPD. The need for a whole school approach to the effective teaching of literacy is articulated and the need to examine interventions with a view to establishing the extent to which they align with the literature on effective teaching.

In the final section I have compiled a synthesis of strategies that effective teachers use in the teaching of literacy.

In the next chapter I report on the official policy literature in relation to literacy in Ireland.

Chapter 3: Review of Irish Policy Context and Policy Literature on Literacy in the Early Years

3.1 Introduction

Overall this chapter offers an in depth analysis of literacy policy for the early years in Ireland. Firstly I review the official guidance on the teaching of literacy in primary schools outlining the Primary School Curriculum (DES, 1999) and reviews on its implementation by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) (2005, 2008a, 2010) and by the Inspectorate (DES, 2005a, 2010).

The Department of Education in Ireland, in conjunction with the Department of Education in Northern Ireland (DES, 2010), presented a joint report on how best to improve literacy and numeracy in our schools and I discuss their recommendations in the second section and how they impact on the teaching of literacy in primary schools. Thirdly I refer to PISA 2009 and the publication thereafter of the National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy in Ireland (DES, 2011) and the follow-on Circular 0056/2011 which directs schools on implementation of the National Strategy. I also consider a critique of the National Strategy (DES, 2011).

Straddling the aftermath of PISA 2009 and the National Strategy (2011) is the Chief Inspector's Report covering the years 2010 – 2012 and I discuss its implications for literacy teaching in Section 3.5.

In the light of the Department of Education's concerns with regard to literacy standards in Irish schools, the NCCA (2012) commissioned a research institution to produce a research report on Literacy Teaching in primary schools in Ireland. The Education and Special Education Department and the Educational Research Centre in St. Patrick's College along with the University of Sheffield, UK compiled the report. They published three research reports in support of the development of a new primary language curriculum, as Nos. 14, 15, and 16 in the NCCA's Research Report Series (NCCA, 2012). In Section 3.6, I briefly refer to Report no. 15 by Kennedy et al. (2012) on *Literacy in Early Childhood and Primary Education* (3-8 years) as this is my area of research which I reviewed in detail in 2.4 of the previous chapter. I discuss the consultation process on the new Language Curriculum in section 3.7.

In Section 3.8, I review the most recent National Assessments of English Reading and Mathematics by the Educational Research Centre (ERC) (2014) and the personal letter from the Minister for Education (O'Sullivan, 2015) on the improvement in test results.

I discuss pupil participation and pupil voice and its relevance to the National Longitudinal study – *Growing Up in Ireland Study* (McCoy, Smyth & Banks, 2012) which is being carried out in Ireland presently and I discuss the first wave findings in Section 3.10 and its relevance to my research. This ongoing study is yielding some valuable insights about practice and McCoy et al. (2012) report on the way the Primary School Curriculum is implemented in the classroom and this has important implications for the Department of Education and Skills Literacy and Numeracy for Life strategy, published in 2011 (McCoy et al. 2012, p. iii).

All of these reports by the Department of Education, the Inspectorate, the NCCA and the ERC, form the context for literacy teaching in primary schools in Ireland including the desire to improve literacy standards in the schools and the resulting implications for teachers.

3.2 Policy context – Official Guidance on the Teaching of Literacy in Irish primary schools

The revision of the Primary School Curriculum (PSC) (DES, 1999) was guided by the recommendations of the Report of the Review Body on the Primary Curriculum (1990), incorporated the principles of *Curaclam na Bunscoile* (1971) and developed them (Introduction, DES, 1999). The PSC (DES, 1999) 'endorsed the general aims and approaches of the 1971 curriculum and remains a broadly based curriculum which takes into account an inclusive understanding of how children think and learn' (Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO), 2008 p.1). This revised curriculum has taken place in 'the context of a number of developments which have occurred in second-level education in recent years. The revised curriculum also incorporates new content and embraces new approaches and methodologies' (Introduction, DES, 1999, p. vii).

The INTO (2008) explains how the principles underlying the primary curriculum are based on different theories of children's development and growth, including the theories of Piaget (1983), Bruner (1996) and Vygotsky (1978) on how children think and learn. The curriculum's vision of education is expressed in the form of three general aims:

- to enable the child to live as a child and to realise his or her potential as a unique individual;
- to enable the child to develop as a social being through living and co-operating with others and so contribute to the good of society; and
- to prepare the child for further education and lifelong learning (INTO, 2008, p. 5).

A key concern of the curriculum was the importance of literacy and numeracy to personal fulfilment. The introduction of the PSC (DES, 1999) was the culmination of many years of development and planning that involved all the partners and interests in primary education including teachers, parents, school management and the Department of Education and Science. The development of the PSC became the responsibility of the NCCA, whose function it is to advise the Minister for Education and Science on matters of curriculum and assessment in early childhood education, primary and post-primary schools. The NCCA established committees to draw up subject statements and teacher guidelines in each of six curriculum areas: Language; Mathematics; Social environmental and scientific education (SESE); Arts education; Physical education; and Social, personal and health education (SPHE) (Introduction, DES, 1999, p. 2). While the curriculum was being revised a National Convention on Education took place, a White Paper on Education, *Charting our Education Future* (1995) was published and the Education Act (1998) was passed. 'The debate surrounding these events and other educational initiatives resulted in a consensus on a number of issues of relevance to primary education' (Introduction, DES, 1999, p. 9). These issues include: quality in education, literacy and numeracy, the role of information and communication technologies in enhancing learning, the crucial role of early childhood education and the role of the curriculum in establishing patterns of lifelong learning. Some of the defining features of the curriculum are: a focus on learning; a relevant curriculum; a broad and balanced curriculum; a developmental approach to learning; a detailed statement of content; a balance of knowledge, concepts and skills; assessment as an integral part of teaching and learning and the importance of planning.

The PSC (DES, 1999) comprises 23 books: six curriculum areas divided into 11 subjects. The NCCA (2010) contends that the significance of all 11 curriculum subjects is acknowledged in the Introduction and that the word 'importance' is used no less than 33 times in the Introduction book. However while it would seem that all subjects are regarded as equal, the curriculum notes

that ‘the particular goals associated with literacy and numeracy are a priority of the curriculum’ (Introduction, DES, 1999, p. 26). The suggested minimum weekly time framework for all curriculum subjects bears out this prioritisation. Fifty-two per cent of total teaching time is afforded to Language and Mathematics (NCCA, 2010, p. 13).

The New Primary School Curriculum (DES, 1999) was introduced to Irish teachers in 1999 beginning with a general overview and English was the first subject to be presented. The pace of the in-career development support for subjects was rapid. This in-career development support was organised at a national level by the then Primary Curriculum Support Programme (PCSP) and the School Development Planning Support, Primary (SDPS). Teachers were invited to attend two seminars for each subject in local Education centres and initially were allowed one School Development Planning (SDP) day to help implement the revised Curriculum (DES, 1999). A commissioned evaluation of the PCSP by Murchan, Loxley, Johnson, Quinn and Fitzgerald in the Education Department in University of Dublin, Trinity College (Murchan et al., 2005) noted that while the quality of the in-service provided was regarded by the teachers as satisfactory, the seminars themselves, ‘were quite rushed, with little time for the type of critical reflection known to enhance teacher learning’ (2005, p. 7). Murchan et al. (2005) also explained that trainers had little contextual information about the schools, so their ability to provide differentiated support to schools was limited, thus contributing to the huge amount of information being presented to teachers at the seminar days.

Facilitators were allocated to schools to help them with their planning and this was followed by the provision of facilitators who came into schools to model lessons. Eventually teachers received in-service on all eleven subjects in the Curriculum (DES, 1999). A review of the implementation of the 1999 Primary School Curriculum by the NCCA (NCCA, 2005) showed that although the teaching of reading had improved, concerns were expressed about the

teaching of oral language and the teaching of writing as a process, the lack of time devoted to literacy as well as the need for differentiation.

This review was followed by a report from the Inspectorate (DES, 2005a) who evaluated the effectiveness of the new Curriculum (DES, 1999) in 59 classrooms in 26 schools. The main areas requiring attention were the development of an appropriate whole school plan in English, the lack of coherence between the Support teachers and the class teachers and differentiation. The teaching of writing using a process approach was also weak as well as the development of higher-order thinking skills. The teaching of reading was identified as posing a problem for a significant minority of teachers.

The NCCA (2010) published a report on Curriculum Overload in Primary Schools which stated that in both reviews by the NCCA (2005, 2008a) teachers and principals identified time as one of their greatest challenges in implementing the Curriculum (DES, 1999). However, the NCCA (NCCA, 2010) alludes to the introduction to the Primary School Curriculum (PSC) (1999) which notes that 'the particular educational goals associated with literacy and numeracy are a priority of the curriculum' (Introduction, DES, 1999, p. 26). This was borne out by the suggested minimum weekly time framework for all curriculum subjects, which afforded 'fifty-two percent of total teaching time (10.5 of 20 hours weekly) to Language and Mathematics' (NCCA, 2010, p. 13). The NCCA (2010) report suggests that 'the sheer depth of and breadth of the totality of subjects all contribute to curriculum overload' (2010, p.14) and that perhaps 'the child-centred approach has become submerged under the weight of the curriculum documents and development which were, ironically, designed to support teachers and ultimately benefit children' (2010, p. 35).

A joint report was published in 2010 by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) and the Department of Education and Skills (DES) Inspectorate on *How Best to Promote and Improve Literacy and Numeracy in our Schools* (DES, 2010). The publication of this report is important

in the educational context both in Northern Ireland and The Republic of Ireland and is commended to all whose work relates to the promotion of high standards in literacy and numeracy. The report (DES, 2010) highlights how fundamental the quality of teaching and learning in literacy and numeracy is to children's success in school in all areas of learning and indicates the key characteristics of good practice in the areas of literacy and numeracy. A series of prompts are included to help teachers 'become more self-evaluative through professional discussion and debate, in order to bring about improvement in the children's experiences in literacy and numeracy, and thereby help to raise standards' (DES, 2010, p.3).

Under Literacy the report includes general planning recommendations on effective literacy and then focuses on how teaching and learning in literacy are effective under oral language, reading and writing. The report (DES, 2010) outlines prompts for teachers to consider how planning for literacy is effective when teachers' planning meets the needs of all learners and is planned for within and across each curriculum area and how the development of oral language should permeate all aspects of literacy. The Inspectorate recommends that the teachers' planning should demonstrate progression and coherence and should include appropriate learning objectives within a specific time frame for the development of oral language, writing and reading skills, that class teachers and special educational support teachers are given the opportunity to plan together and that all planning should identify agreed methodology for teaching (DES, 2010, p.4).

Firstly when focusing on oral language the report contends that teaching and learning in literacy are effective when teachers give sufficient time to allow considered responses by the children, when appropriate strategies are used to promote a greater emphasis on talking and listening especially in the early years, when there is effective use of open-ended questioning and when teachers use a variety of teaching approaches giving pupils regular opportunities to use language to analyse, predict, synthesise, describe, present, debate and summarise.

Secondly the report (DES, 2010) focuses in on reading and suggests that teaching and learning in literacy are effective when there is explicit teaching including teacher modelling of specific reading skills, when there is evidence to show that children's reading skills are taught and developed and that teachers are given the opportunity to become skilled in identifying early reading difficulties and developing expertise to help promote the children's phonemic awareness and that there is a wide range of appropriate literacy resources including ICT applications (DES, 2010, p. 5). Thirdly the report (DES, 2010) focuses on writing and suggests similar points in relation to how teaching and learning in literacy are effective when writing is promoted and taught within and across all areas of the curriculum, when children have a broad and enriched range of writing experiences and are not restricted by unnecessary isolated and unchallenged exercises and that writing is enjoyable, purposeful and creative taking place within a relaxed, supportive and language-rich environment (DES, 2010, p.6).

Standards of literacy are always of interest to the general public as well as to educationalists and in that context I review the findings from the Programme for International Assessment (PISA) (2009).

3.3 PISA 2009

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA 2009) statistics were published and they attracted much media attention and commentary. The Irish Times newspaper (2010) discussed the results under the headline 'shattering the myth of a world-class education system' (December 8, 2010). Journalists were very quick to report on the 'dramatic slump' in PISA scores in 2009 (The Irish Times, Humphreys, 2014). Murphy (2015 in press) describes PISA as being a high profile and powerful international comparative assessment of 15-year olds which is used by governments

worldwide in assessing educational outcomes and achievements. Humphreys (2014) describes the OECD as the 'most influential player internationally in shaping education policy' (2014, p. 9). In PISA 2009, it was claimed that the literacy skills of students in Irish primary schools, measured by the National Assessments of English Reading, have not improved in over thirty years. There has also been a decline in the performance of post-primary students in Ireland in international literacy tests. In 2006, Irish fifteen-year-old students performed at the 'above average' level in the OCED's Programme for International Student Assessment but in the 2009 round of the assessment, Irish students performed at the 'average' level, ranking 17th out of the 34 OECD countries. The PISA 2009 tests 'showed that 17 per cent of all Irish fifteen year olds and almost one in four teenage boys lack the literacy skills to function effectively in today's society' (DES, 2011, p. 13). The decline was the largest across all 39 countries that participated in PISA, 2009. These scores prompted detailed investigations into possible reasons for the decline, particularly in reading. Cosgrove and Cartwright (2014) argue that 'the case of Ireland represents the 'perfect storm', since a range of actors appear to have been in operation to produce the results' (2014, p.1). The PISA scores were highly criticised by researchers in the field. Murphy (2015) alludes to the 'apparent' serious decline in the 2009 assessments which resulted in a national outcry about literacy teaching and literacy standards in Irish schools. The Department of Education and Skills (Ireland) sought input from independent international experts in explaining the Irish results. These inquiries produced two reviews of the results (Cartwright, 2011; LaRoche and Cartwright, 2010). Staff at the Educational Research Centre undertook additional analyses to try to disentangle some of the possible reasons for the Irish PISA 2009 achievement scores, particularly in reading (Cosgrove, 2011; Cosgrove and Moran, 2011; Cosgrove, Shiel, Archer and Perkins, 2010; Shiel, Moran, Cosgrove and Perkins, 2010).

Perkins, Moran, Cosgrove and Shiel in The Educational Research Centre (2011) made a submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skills on *PISA 2009: The*

Performance and Progress of 15-year-olds in Ireland. The authors reflected on the findings from PISA 2009. They alluded to the fact that 'some factors may have contributed to a real decline in student achievement in the Irish education system during the past decade' (Perkins et al., 2011). These factors included:

- demographic changes that include an increase in the percentage of students with an immigrant background from 2.3% in 2000 to 8.3% in 2009, and an increase in the percentage of students who speak a language other than English/Irish from 0.9% in 2000 to 3.6% in 2009 may have impacted on student achievement levels
- Changes in the way 15-year-old students were distributed in post-primary schools may also have impacted on student scores. The percentage of 15-year-olds in Transition Year increased from 16.0% in 2000 to 24.0% in 2009
- Changes in the curriculum experiences of students might be expected to impact on their achievements (Perkins et al., 2011, pp. 8, 9).

The 2009 sample of students included eight 'low-scoring' schools – schools with average reading achievement scores that were considerably lower than the lowest school mean scores in 2000. Survey fatigue could have impacted on the way in which schools and students responded to the PISA test administration in 2009. There is 'evidence of greater levels of skipping test items in 2009, it is not clear if this can be attributed to disengagement with the test, an inability to attempt such items, or some combination of these' (Perkins et al., 2011). The authors report that the establishment of trends in international surveys of education is a complex and evolving area. They contend that changing the structure of test booklets can have a significant impact on the resulting achievement scores and this was evident between 2000 and 2003. In another publication *Reading Literacy in PISA: A Guide for Teachers* by Perkins et al. (2011) they refer to factors such as the linking and scaling methodology used in PISA may also have led to an over-estimate of the change in performance, but it is clear however, that there has been a serious decline in performance since 2000 and that actions need to be taken to address this (2011, p. 72).

In summary the factors considered relevant to an examination of performance in PISA 2009 according to The National Economic and Social Council (NESC) (2012) are:

- demographic changes – an increase in the proportion of students with an immigrant background, a decrease in the proportion of early school leavers and a decrease in the proportion of 15 year olds in a Leaving cert course
- reading habits – a decrease in leisure reading
- chance factors – the chance sampling of 8 low-performing schools
- student engagement – evidence of less effort in 2009
- method of producing and reporting trends – evidence that scaling and linking of data across cycles may have resulted in the reported results representing an overestimate of the difference between 2000 and 2009 (NESC, 2012, p. 33).

Murphy (2015) suggests that the legacy of PISA 2009 was to put literacy on the agenda of all schools and a focus on improving key aspects of literacy pedagogy. In the most recent PISA tests, of 2012, Ireland bounced back to fourth for reading ability, among 34 countries, but these results did not get the publicity of the previous report. According to Humphreys (2014) 'the reasons for the 2009 slump are still debated, but its impact continues to be felt' (2014, p. 9). Either way the PISA 2009 results paved the way for the introduction of the National Strategy to improve Literacy and Numeracy (DES, 2011).

3.4 The National Strategy to improve Literacy and Numeracy

A draft report on literacy and numeracy was published in March 2011 (DES, 2011) and submissions were invited from interested parties. In July 2011, Ruairi Quinn, then Minister for Education and Skills launched the new strategy: Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life – The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020 (DES, 2011). Quinn (DES, 2011) in his foreword in the National Strategy describes how 'literacy and numeracy skills are crucial to a person's ability to develop fully as an individual, to live a satisfying and rewarding life and to participate fully in our society. Ensuring that all young people acquire these skills is one of the greatest contributions that we

can make to achieving social justice and equity in our country' (Quinn, DES, 2011, p. 5). He further expounds that all young people should leave school being able to read, communicate orally, in writing and in digital media.

The National Strategy (DES, 2011) sets out ambitious targets to achieve these goals over the period to 2020 and describes the actions that must be taken to improve the teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy (DES, 2011, p. 5).

The National Strategy (DES, 2011) was finalised following intensive consultation with parents, students, teachers, staff groups in schools, lecturers, researchers and departments in colleges and other third-level institutions, representatives of community organisations and public bodies, as well as parents' associations, trade unions, employers' associations and school management bodies. Some of the submissions included very 'valuable reviews and summaries of relevant research and detailed bibliographies regarding the teaching, learning and assessment of literacy and numeracy skills' (DES, 2011, p. 7). In addition officials from the Department of Education met with over sixty organisations to hear their proposals as well as consulting with staff with specialist expertise at the NCCA, the Educational Research Centre (ERC) and the Teaching Council. Literacy and numeracy are urgent national priorities for the education system according to the National Strategy (DES, 2011) and world-class literacy and numeracy skills will be essential for the rebuilding of our economic prosperity and ensuring the well-being of our society.

When the National Strategy (DES, 2011) refers to literacy they mean the broader understanding of it including speaking and listening as well as communication using writing, print and digital media. It further expounds that every young person should be literate and numerate and that we need these skills in all parts of our lives – in written forms, through the internet and digital media, following signs and instructions, when we try to make sense of the mass of information and data available through the media and when we manage our lives (DES, 2011, pp. 8 - 9).

Without the skills of literacy and numeracy, a young person or adult is cut off from full participation in many aspects of life, such as reading or sending an email; advertisements and notices are meaningless to them (DES, 2011, p. 9). The National Strategy (DES, 2011) outlines how better literacy and numeracy for individuals contributes to a more just and equitable society and the strategy is about the contribution of the education system to better literacy and numeracy. Children's development of language and mathematical understanding takes place from the earliest years and both primary and post-primary schools have key roles in teaching essential literacy and numeracy skills and to ensure continuity for the learner across all stages of education (DES, 2011, pp. 9-11). The National Strategy (DES, 2011) acknowledges the vital role that parents play in literacy and numeracy. It puts forward suggestions for how home and other educational settings can work together; how parents need to know how best to help their children; how building learning communities will help children's learning; how many community projects and family literacy initiatives work to support learning; how libraries are a valuable resource for families and communities and how we need to target support for family and community initiatives that are proven to work (DES, 2011, pp.19-21). The National Strategy (DES, 2011) proposes actions to enable parents and communities to support children's literacy and numeracy development:

- Support a national information campaign to build up awareness of the important role that parents play in supporting literacy and numeracy learning
- Provide advice and information to parents to enable them to support their children's language, literacy and numeracy development
- Ensure that parental engagement in children's learning is integrated into each schools' *School Improvement Plan*
- Identify and learn from effective initiatives that enable parents, families and communities to support children's well-being and learning and that strengthen links between home, ECCE settings and schools
- Seek to target and coordinate support for these initiatives
- Develop and promote models of good practice that enable parents, families, communities, ECCE settings and schools to work together to support literacy and numeracy acquisition (DES, 2011, pp. 22-25).

These proposals in The National Strategy (DES, 2011) link in with socio-cultural and cognitive psychological perspectives in relation to how pupils learn.

3.4.1 Targets for schools

The National Strategy (DES, 2011) outlines the targets for improving literacy in primary schools and explains that 'during the period 2011 to 2020 we will aim to:

Improve our attitudes to literacy

- Promote better understanding of the critical importance of supporting the development of children's ability to become effective communicators from their earliest years and the key role played by parents, families and communities in this regard
- Raise public awareness of the importance of oral and written language in all its forms (including print, writing and digital media)
- Foster an enjoyment of reading among young children and young people

Improve outcomes at early childhood level

- Improve the communication and oral-language competence of young children in early childhood care and education (ECCE) settings

Improve outcomes at primary school level

- Ensure that each primary school sets goals and monitors progress in achieving demanding but realistic targets for the improvement of literacy skills of its students in a school improvement plan
- Increase the percentages of primary school children performing at Level 3 or higher (i.e. at the highest levels) in the National Assessment of Mathematics and English Reading by at least 5 percentage points at both second class and sixth class by 2020
- Reduce the percentage of children performing at or below Level 1 (i.e. minimum level) in the National Assessment of Mathematics and English Reading by at least 5 percentage points at both second class and sixth class by 2020
- Increase awareness of the importance of digital literacy and include assessments of primary students' ability to read digital material as part of the National Assessments of English Reading' (DES, 2011, pp. 17-18).

In implementing the National Strategy (DES, 2011) the DES will draw on specialist advice from national and international experts on literacy, numeracy, assessment and school improvement and consult with the education parties regarding the implementation. It also sets out in broad terms the actions that will be necessary to achieve the improvements sought. These

actions include objectives which will need to be achieved, then details of how these objectives will be reached, names of who is responsible for these actions and an indicative date. The actions apply to all sectors of the education system from early years through primary school and post-primary school. The National Strategy (2011) outlines in different chapters priorities for all sectors and includes: enabling parents and communities to support children's literacy and numeracy development; improving teachers' and Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) practitioners' professional practice; building the capacity of school leadership; improving the curriculum and learning experience; helping students with additional learning needs to achieve their potential and improving assessment and evaluation to support better learning in literacy and numeracy (DES, 2011, p. 3).

Following on from the publication of this strategy, Circular 0056/2011 was sent to schools outlining Initial Steps in the Implementation of The National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy. These included five areas for immediate action:

1. Improved professional development for teachers
2. Increasing the time available for teaching literacy and numeracy
3. Improving arrangements for assessment of children's literacy and numeracy achievement
4. Better arrangement for reporting children's progress
5. Co-operating with the administration of national and international assessment studies (Circular 56/2011, p. 3).

I will consider each of these areas and outline development since the National Strategy (DES, 2011) was published.

(i) Improved professional development for teachers

In relation to these areas of action, The Department of Education has commenced implementation. In Section 4 of the National Strategy: Initial And Continuing Professional Development for Teachers, The Minister is committed to ensuring that relevant and focused

continuing professional development opportunities would be provided for teachers during the lifetime of the National Strategy.

The Teaching Council is advancing the changes to initial teacher education and in summer 2011 over 12,000 primary teachers participated in an increased number of professional development courses that focused on literacy and numeracy.

Specific units on the teaching of literacy and numeracy and the use of assessment are included in the Induction programme which is available to all newly qualified teachers during their probationary period (DES, 2011, p. 3).

A national programme of continuing professional development courses for principals commenced in autumn 2011. The Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) has been given the task of implementing this. In Chapter 5 of The National Strategy under the Section 'Building the Capacity of School Leadership' PDST is supporting principals and deputy principals in implementing robust self-evaluation, focusing in particular on improvements in literacy and numeracy (National Strategy, DES, 2011, Chapter 5, Target, p. 40). This has involved providing seminars on School Self-evaluation for School Leaders. By June 2015 workshops have been provided for all school principals and link teachers in literacy and numeracy to support School Self Evaluation in schools.

In Chapter 4 under the section 'Improving Teachers' and ECCE Practitioners' Professional Practice' the target is to focus the provision of Department supported continuing professional development for teachers on the teaching of literacy and numeracy and the use of assessment (National Strategy, DES, 2011, Chapter 4, Target p.36). To this end PDST has rolled out seminars to one teacher from each school in the various regions on key areas signalled in the National Strategy including Comprehension. Other workshops include Guided Reading, ICT in Literacy and Numeracy and English as an Additional Language (EAL).

International researchers concur with improving professional development for teachers, as outlined in Chapter 2. Afflerbach (2000) claims that student success in reading is the result of talented teaching and that in successful schools, continual professional development for teachers is a key factor. Snow et al. (1998) include 'engaging in professional development' as a characteristic in effective early intervention practice for early literacy teachers. Duffy and Hoffman (1999), Gambrell et al. (2007) all agree that teaching expertise is the critical variable in effective reading instruction and professional development is vital. Hattie (2003), Louden et al. (2005) and Taylor et al. (2005) all argue that teacher professional development that increases teachers' knowledge of reading/literacy is a key component of effective reading/literacy programmes. All of this research supports the above target.

When my research on a literacy intervention, Station Teaching, is published I hope it will be beneficial to teachers in providing them with information on the implementation of this strategy in their classrooms.

(ii) *Increasing the time available for teaching literacy and numeracy*

The time allocated to the development of Literacy skills, particularly in the first language of the school, has increased from January 2012 by one hour overall for language per week (Irish and English). This means that in Infant classes, 6.5 hours per week and in other classes 8.5 hours per week will be allocated to Literacy.

The time allocated to mathematics has been increased by 70 minutes per week to 3 hours and 25 minutes per week for Infants and to 4 hours and 10 minutes per week for other classes. (Section 5.2 Circular No. 0056/2011).

Schools were also requested to facilitate this time adjustment with integrating literacy and numeracy skills with other curriculum areas, using discretionary time for literacy and numeracy activities and by prioritising the curriculum objectives which are considered most valuable in

supporting children's learning and delaying the introduction of elements of some subjects. This has led to schools delaying the introduction of strands and strand units from the history and geography curriculum to the beginning of Third class.

Allington (2002) reports on a study on exemplary literacy instruction and outlines 'time' as a common feature of literacy instruction and that effective teachers of literacy had their children actively reading and writing for as much as half of the school day. He also contends that part of good teaching is planning instructional time. Kennedy et al. (2012) in their review of many studies argue that effective literacy teachers provide substantial blocks of time for literacy and this is in line with the implementation guidelines of the National Strategy (DES, 2011).

(iii) Improving arrangements for assessment of children's literacy and numeracy achievement

Since the end of the school year, June 2012 - all primary schools must provide standardised tests in Literacy and Numeracy to pupils in Second Class, Fourth Class and Sixth Class, the aggregated results of which have to be given to the Boards of Managements of the schools and to the Department of Education and Skills. This is a new departure and one of which teachers are fearful. Even though names are not included and schools are assured that league tables will not be published we are unsure what the outcomes will be into the future. A grant was furnished to schools to facilitate the purchase of these tests. However there is more to assessment than standardised tests and teachers need to monitor and assess their pupils' literacy skills to help their pupils to progress.

In Chapter 2, I reviewed effective literacy teaching and much of this research outlined the importance of teachers' monitoring and assessing their pupils' literacy skills as part of their effective teaching practices. Pressley et al. (2001) contend that exemplary teachers monitor their pupils' literacy activities. The Exeter project (1998) identifies characteristics of a good teacher of literacy including that they provide systematic monitoring and assessment of their

pupils. Whitehead (2004) recommends that literacy progress must be monitored closely in the early years and that it should be the dominant focus of the early years' curriculum. Wray et al. (2002) outline how effective literacy teachers have clear assessment procedures informing choice of literacy content appropriate for student needs. Kennedy et al. (2012) advise that assessment in the literacy curriculum should be built on a framework that includes the purposes and uses of reading and writing. A combination of formal and informal assessment procedures is considered beneficial to improving pupils' literacy skills.

(iv) Better arrangement for reporting children's progress

In May 2012 the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) issued standardised report cards which schools have to use to provide end of year reports to parents. This work can be done on line and end of year reports now must be issued to parents before the end of term to allow parents to meet with teachers if they have queries around the report.

Kennedy et al. (2012) suggest that the curriculum should recognise the key role of parents in contributing to children's literacy development. Hall and Harding (2003) posit that effective literacy teachers maintain close links with parents. The National Strategy (DES, 2011) aims to regularise this link between schools and parents.

(v) Co-operating with the administration of national and international assessment studies

Schools were asked to facilitate and co-operate with the administration of national and international assessments. As schools interpreted the results of the PISA assessments they will be aware that we in Ireland had a very high rate of incompletion of test items so this is certainly something that they will take on board for the next round (Perkins et al., 2011). As I write, the results of PISA 2012 have been published and Ireland has again performed strongly in literacy, so as Murphy (2015 in press) contends our performance in the 2009 assessments was just a blip!

In January 2015 it was reported by The Minister for Education Jan O'Sullivan (O'Sullivan, Minister for Education, 2015a) that great progress has been made with regard to the recommendations of the circular resulting from the National Strategy (DES, 2011) and that Literacy and Numeracy certainly has been prioritised in primary schools. In her address to the National Conference of Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN), the Minister for Education Jan O'Sullivan (30 January 2015) announced her delight that the key national targets in relation to Literacy and Numeracy have been exceeded – that the overall performance in English and Mathematics has improved and that English and Mathematics standards are now higher in Second and Sixth classes in primary schools. She further claims that the progress anticipated in nine years by the implementation of the National Literacy Strategy (DES, 2011) has been achieved in three years as reported in the 2014 National Assessments of English Reading and Mathematics (O'Sullivan, Minister for Education, 2015a). I will discuss the 2014 National Assessments in Section 3.8 and I now examine a critique of the National Strategy (DES, 2011).

3.4.2 The National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy: Pedagogy or politics?

The publication of the National Strategy (DES, 2011) to improve literacy and numeracy in our schools has set out the road map for schools to examine and develop their literacy teaching practices. Ó Bréacháin & O'Toole (2013) in their article '*Pedagogy or politics?: cyclical trends in literacy and numeracy in Ireland and beyond'*, which was published in the Irish Educational Studies journal, offer a critique on the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (DES, 2011). Ó Bréacháin & O'Toole (2013) suggest that the Strategy was not founded on pedagogy but rather on politics: it was a question of PISA (OECD, 2009) results and 'test fatigue' that resulted in this strategy being published (2013, p.407). The authors are critical of the Department of Education not looking at the whole child. They suggest that if we were to redevelop the curriculum at the height of the 'Celtic Tiger' to cater solely for the construction

industry and how the job market changes we would have no graduates now for other areas (2013. p. 414). The authors claim that there is a shift in ethos from the Primary School Curriculum (DES, 1999) to the National Literacy strategy and this threatens the holistic ethos of the curriculum. They argue that the National Literacy Strategy is giving mixed messages and that the word 'literacy' is replaced by the word 'reading' and a shift to performance on standardised tests. There are concerns in the NCCA (2005, 2008, 2010) that there is an over reliance on textbooks and workbooks and that there is a lack of focus on the critique of texts and higher order thinking. The NCCA (2010) feels that teachers could simply use the same old methods for longer periods of time each day. Ó Bréacháin & O'Toole (2013) feel that a focus on literacy and numeracy to the exclusion of other educational objectives may undermine the self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1994) of children whose talents lie elsewhere. They conclude by advising teachers in Ireland to engage in the consultative process with the NCCA with regard to influencing the direction of change in the curriculum in Irish schools.

In the next section I discuss the Chief Inspector of the Department of Education's report on quality and standards in Irish schools with particular reference to literacy standards.

3.5 Quality and Standards in Irish primary schools

3.5.1 Chief Inspector's Report 2010 – 2012

Harold Hislop, the Chief Inspector published his report- Chief Inspector's Report 2010 – 2012 (DES, 2013) on the quality and standards in Irish schools that were inspected by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills. It is a report covering a broad range of issues in Irish education but I will focus on literacy in primary schools. The report (DES, 2013) is complimentary of the initiative Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS). During the period 2010 – 2102, DEIS schools continued to receive additional funding, teaching

resources and access to a number of initiatives and strategies such as School Completion, Reading Recovery and First Steps. The outcome of evaluations by the Educational Research Centre (ERC) and the Inspectorate were considerably positive according to the report. The Chief Inspector (DES, 2013) contended that the National Literacy Strategy was informed by evidence from the 2009 report of PISA and findings from the Inspectorate reports that suggested that the teaching of Literacy and Numeracy needed to be strengthened (2013, p. 15). In 2010, the Inspectorate published Incidental Inspection findings: *A Report of the Teaching and Learning of English and Maths in Primary Schools* (DES, 2010). This report indicated that from October 2009 to October 2010 the Inspectorate had found good practice in the teaching of English and Maths is almost 85% of lessons but that over 14% of such lessons had been rated as less than satisfactory. Given the concerns regarding literacy and numeracy according to the Chief Inspector (DES, 2013), the National Strategy for Literacy and Numeracy (DES, 2011) initiated wide-ranging integrated reforms in teacher education, curriculum content, assessment and reporting of student progress and evaluation and assessment policies. This reform began to be implemented from summer of 2011 onwards (DES, 2013, p. 16). The incidental inspections (2010) showed that the learning outcomes for pupils were satisfactory in 87% of the English lessons inspected and that the teaching approaches used in the lessons were appropriate in 86% of cases. In the Whole School Evaluations (WSE) carried out during this time 89% of lessons were considered satisfactory or better. 96% of parents surveyed in relation to WSEs reported that they were satisfied that 'the school is helping my child to progress with reading'. However pupils' perspectives on their perception of their reading progress was not quite as positive with 83% of pupils surveyed indicating that they thought they were doing well at reading.

The Chief Inspector's Report (DES, 2013) also reported on English: Learning from inspections in schools. He referred to the outcomes from inspections regarding English in the period 2010-

2012 highlighting a number of issues that need to be addressed in a significant minority of schools (2013, p. 45). In relation to Preparation – teachers were found to be inadequately prepared in 18% of lessons inspected and in 22% of lessons observed teachers had no long or short term plans in evidence. With regard to Assessment – 67% of teachers were reported as being satisfactory in 2010 and this rose to 77% in 2012. In Whole School Inspections the Chief Inspector (DES, 2013) examined schools which were underperforming and found that the approaches used for teaching of English were an issue and inspectors advised on these:

- Oral language - there was a need for explicit teaching of a structured oral language programme
- Writing - he alluded to the importance of establishing a whole school developmental and systematic approach to the teaching of writing and experience of writing in a variety of genres
- Comprehension – the need to implement a whole school approach to the development of comprehension skills
- Reading – the need to ensure that there is a cohesive and explicit teaching of reading skills as pupils progress through the school as well as ready availability of differentiated reading materials to sustain interest in and ensure progress in reading (DES, 2013, p. 45).

Finally the Chief Inspector (DES, 2013) concludes that his report challenges schools 'to ensure that our learners' experiences are very good, not just good, teaching and learning, that satisfactory provision becomes better, and that excellence in terms of learning experiences and standards can be achieved' (DES, 2013, p. 107). One cannot argue with this challenge and I will endeavour in my research to evaluate a literacy intervention that is designed to enhance literacy learning in schools.

3.5.2 NCCA Research Reports on Literacy in Early Childhood and Primary Education

In May 2012 the NCCA published three Research Reports (Numbers 14, 15, and 16) which they commissioned on ways of improving Literacy. It was envisaged by the NCCA that the publication of the three research papers would support the development of a new primary

language curriculum. Research Report no. 14 is: *Oral Language in Early Childhood and Primary Education (3-8 years)* by Shiel, Cregan, McGough and Archer (2012); Report No. 15 is: *Literacy in Early Childhood and Primary Education (3-8 years)* by Kennedy et al. (2012) and Report No. 16 is: *Towards an Integrated Language Curriculum in Early Childhood and Primary Education (3-12 years)* by Ó Duibhir and Cummins (2012).

I already reviewed Research Report No. 15 on *Literacy in Early Childhood and Primary Education (3-8 years)* by Kennedy et al., (2012) in Section 2.4 of the previous chapter.

3.6 Consultation process on the New Primary School Language Curriculum

As I write the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA, 2014) is engaging in a consultation process on the New Primary School Language Curriculum. Common specifications for Language 1 and 2 are intended to support 'integration within a specific language, between languages and across the curriculum' thereby helping pupils to integrate ideas about language. The NCCA (2014) published a Draft Primary Language Curriculum for consultation on April 9th, 2014. In September 2014 they published an Interim Report and extended the period for consultation to October 2014. According to the Interim Report (NCCA, September 2014) the new Draft Primary Language Curriculum was informed and supported by findings from curriculum reviews (NCCA 2005; 2008); findings from three commissioned research reports (Shiel et al., 2012; Kennedy et al., 2012; Ó Duibhir and Cummins, 2012) and NCCA's work with schools. It is an integrated curriculum – it has the same curriculum structure and components for English and Gaeilge (Irish) to support integration across the two languages. The new Primary Language Curriculum focuses on positive dispositions as well as skills and concepts; it supports teacher practice and teacher judgment and it will be an online curriculum; it has fewer outcomes/objectives than in the 1999 curriculum; and 'it includes a continuum of

significant milestones and detailed steps involved in children's language learning and development. The outcomes and continua are complemented by examples of children's work to help teachers' (NCCA, 2014, p. 5). The Draft also reflects the principles and methodologies of Aistear (NCCA, 2009). Sarah Fitzpatrick, Arlene Forster and Yvonne Uí Fhlaithimhín from the NCCA facilitated a round table discussion on this new Draft Curriculum at the 38th Annual Conference Reading Association of Ireland (September 2014). The NCCA was concerned at the lack of feedback on the consultation process and provided this opportunity for members of the 'Reading Community' at the Conference to engage in discussion which we did and provided many suggestions with regard to the New Curriculum. Murphy (2015a) alludes to the implicit understanding of literacy in the new Draft Language Curriculum with only two specific mentions of literacy. He outlines the key elements of language learning as meaningful communication, interaction with others, exposure to language and implicit and explicit processes and approaches. The Reading Association of Ireland recognises that the development of literacy including language, reading and writing is a complex activity involving cognitive, emotional, affective and socio-cultural aspects. Schools require systematic and structured plans to improve literacy. There is much research in this area but teachers obviously need highly continued professional development and support in effective literacy instructional practices. At the Literacy Symposium in University College Cork (7 February 2015) there was a very strong call from all the attendees for continued professional development for teachers of literacy at all levels – both primary and post primary. Effective literacy development requires classroom teachers with knowledge of a range of instructional approaches to accommodate the developmental needs of children in diverse settings.

During the school year 2014-2015 the new Integrated Primary Language Curriculum is being piloted in some schools but no decisions have been made with regard to its implementation yet.

In the next section I review the findings from the 2014 National Assessments of English reading in Irish schools.

3.7 The 2014 National Assessments of English Reading and Mathematics

National assessments involving representative samples of schools and pupils have been conducted in Ireland since 1972. The most recent assessment The 2014 National Assessments (NA, 2014) of English Reading and Mathematics, which involved 8,000 pupils in the Second and Sixth classes in 150 primary schools, was implemented in 2014. The assessments were prepared by the independent Educational Research Centre (ERC), in Dublin. This representative sample of pupils sat tests of English Reading and Mathematics. Furthermore the pupils, their principals, their teachers and their parents completed questionnaires. The results of these assessments were published by the ERC on 12 January 2015, in a report by Shiel, Kavanagh and Millar (2014). An earlier assessment, conducted in 2009, also involved English reading and mathematics in Second and Sixth classes. In addition to reporting on performance in English reading and mathematics in 2014, performance in 2014 is compared with performance in 2009 (Shiel et al., 2014, p. 1). Shiel et al. (2014) describe the tests used in NA, 2014 thus:

> The tests used in NA, 2014 were secure curriculum-based instruments developed for the 2009 National Assessments and updated for NA, 2014 through the inclusion of a small number of new items to replace those that were released following NA, 2009. At each class level, there were multiple test booklets in each domain, allowing for greater coverage of content and processes. Item Response Theory (IRT) scaling was used to link booklets, and to place performance in 2014 on the same scales developed for NA, 2009. All scales developed for NA, 2009 had been set to a mean score of 250 and a standard deviation of 50. In addition, fixed percentages of pupils were assigned to proficiency levels in each domain at each class level, such that 10% of pupils performed below Level 1, 25% at Level 1, 30% at Level 2, 25% at Level 3 and 10% at Level 4 (Shiel et al., 2014, p. xi).

The reading assessment framework emphasises reading comprehension and the majority of items on the test instruments assess reading comprehension. It ‘distinguishes between two main

dimensions of reading comprehension: the purpose of the text (reading either for literary experience or to acquire and use information), and the process used to comprehend it (Retrieve, Infer, Interpret & Integrate, Examine & Evaluate)' (Shiel et al., 2014, p. 14).

All items in the Second class tests are multiple-choice in format and include items on ability to retrieve information, making inferences, and to an extent, interpreting and integrating information. Sixth class, in addition to being expected to retrieve, infer, and interpret, pupils are also expected to be able to evaluate that which they read. At Sixth class, 'approximately two thirds of the comprehension items are multiple-choice items, while one third are constructed-response (i.e. open-ended and requiring a written response)' (Shiel et al., 2014, p. 15). I include a table to explain the processes of reading comprehension and related examples of test items:

Table 3.A: Processes of reading comprehension, and related examples, NA 2009 and NA 2014

Process	Examples
Retrieve requires the reader to read a text, and to understand how what is stated in the text relates to the information that is sought	Look for specific information, events, ideas, definitions or phrases; identify the setting of a story; find the main theme of a text when explicitly stated
Infer requires the reader to make inferences about how pieces of information relate to each other. The nature of the relationship is not explicitly stated in the text, but the inferences are usually simple, and based on explicitly-stated information	Deduce or infer that one event caused another; determine the main point of a series of arguments; identify generalisations in a text; describe the relationships between two characters
Interpret & integrate requires a more holistic understanding of the text, beyond the level of sentence. Some integration of personal knowledge or experience with text content may be required	Discern the overall message of these of a text; consider an alternative to actions of characters; compare and contrast text information to a real world situation
Examine & evaluate involves evaluation of a text, either from a personal perspective or a more critical and objective viewpoint. Emphasis changes from understanding the text to critiquing it	Evaluate the plausibility of what the text describes; identify and comment on the structure and organisation of texts; judge the completeness or clarity of information in a text; identify or comment on the writer's purposes and viewpoints

Adapted from Shiel et al., 2014, p. 15.

According to the report the overall standard of reading and mathematics in Second and Sixth classes has significantly improved for the first time in 30 years – overall performance in reading and mathematics is significantly higher than in the previous assessment carried out in 2009. Jan O'Sullivan, Minister for Education (2015) has endorsed the publication of these results. (O'Sullivan, Minister for Education, 2015, p.1). In 2014, O'Sullivan (2015) explains that 'there was a reduction in the proportion of lower-achieving pupils and increase in the proportion of higher achievement pupils in both English reading and mathematics compared to 2009' (O'Sullivan, Minister for Education, 2015, p. 1). The overall performance on English reading in Second class was significantly higher in NA 2014 than in NA 2009 by 14 score points. The corresponding effect size was 0.29, which can be interpreted as being substantively important in the context of educational studies. The overall performance in English reading in Sixth class increased by 13 score points. The corresponding effect size, 0.26, can also be considered substantively important.

Significant performance increases were also observed for the Reading Vocabulary and Reading Comprehension component subscales. Increases at Second class were about the same for the Retrieve, Infer and Interpret & Integrate reading processes, while pupils at Sixth class made more progress on Retrieve, Infer and Interpret & Integrate than on Examine & Evaluate (an additional process assessed at this level) (Shiel et al., 2014).

In NA, 2014, 22% of pupils in Second class performed at or below Proficiency Level 1, compared with 35% in NA, 2009, while 46% performed at Levels 3-4, compared with 35% in NA, 2009, while 44% again performed at Levels 3 and 4 combined, compared with 35% in NA, 2009.

At Sixth class, 25% performed at or below Level 1, again compared with 35% in NA, 2009, while 44% again performed at Levels 3 and 4 combined, compared with 35% in NA, 2009. Hence, the targets established in the National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy

(2011) (to reduce the proportion performing at or below Level 1 by 5 percentage points, and to increase the proportion performing at or above Level 3 by the same amount) were reached at both class levels (Shiel et al., 2014, p. 62). The National Strategy (DES, 2011) set out specific national targets linked to the national assessments of English reading and mathematics that should be achieved by 2020. The 2014 National Assessments provide an opportunity to gauge progress towards the achievement of those targets (Shiel et al., 2014, p. 13).

Shiel et al. (2014) argue that:

> A number of initiatives referred to in the National Strategy that have yet to be implemented including the introduction of revised curricula in English and mathematics that place a stronger focus than heretofore on learning outcomes, and on the use of formative assessment. In the case of English, there would seem to be opportunities to enhance links between oral language, reading and writing, in the context of responding to and writing about texts across a range of subject areas, and this work could be expected to strengthen pupils' reading comprehension (Kennedy et al., 2012). Similarly, proposals to strengthen work on oral language in both early years and primary-school settings, including the development of vocabulary and background knowledge, should, if implemented, provide a stronger basis for engaging children in reading comprehension as they move beyond the initial stages of reading acquisition (see Shiel, Cregan, McGough & Archer, 2012). Some of this work can be carried out using the Aistear curriculum framework, both in the context of the free school year for 3-4 year olds, and in early years education across the state-funded sector.
>
> (Shiel, Kavanagh & Millar, 2014, p.67)

Jan O'Sullivan (Minister for Education, 2015a) acknowledges the wonderful work done in schools to ensure the comprehensive targets in relation to Literacy and Numeracy are being achieved and she also expounds that early intervention is the key to success in education. The implementation of Aistear (2009) also forms the basis for the early years' education programme. The revised Integrated Language Curriculum will further strengthen Shiel et al.'s (2014) and Kennedy et al.'s (2012) proposals to strengthen oral, reading and writing skills by promoting language development, reading acquisition and comprehension development.

On the 22 January 2015, the Minister for Education, Jan O'Sullivan, (2015) wrote a personal letter to the Principals, Teachers and Boards of Management of Primary Schools congratulating them on the progress which has been made on achieving the targets set out in the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy 2011-2020 (DES, 2011). She refers to the report of the 2014 National Assessments of Reading and Mathematics and that 'the findings have shown really heartening results' (O'Sullivan, Minister for Education, 2015, p. 1). O' Sullivan (2015) claims that the excellent progress achieved is such that targets set for 2020 in the National Strategy (DES, 2011) have already been met in 2014, targets which were thought to be too ambitious in 2011, and that this is a tribute to the 'commitment, professionalism and drive to improve outcomes for young people' (O'Sullivan, Minister for Education, 2015, p. 1). O'Sullivan (2015) has asked her officials to review the National Strategy (DES, 2011) in 2015 instead of in 2016 and 'to look in particular at whether there should be new targets set for some of the particular cohorts who are continuing to perform behind the national averages' (O'Sullivan, Minister for Education, 2015, p. 1). O'Sullivan (2015) intends that the review process will draw on the benefit of a wide range of insights from the chalk face. She concludes her letter by asking all in school to continue their 'focus on creating high expectations and aspirations for all our young people and to motivate them to believe in themselves and in their ability to achieve' (O'Sullivan, Minister for Education, 2015, p. 2). I would caution against complacency in the light of these encouraging words. The Chief Inspector's Report (DES, 2013) and published findings of incidental inspections (DES, 2010), as discussed in Section 3.5, prove that there is plenty scope for improvement of teaching of literacy and numeracy in our schools.

I am researching literacy teaching in junior classes in primary schools and I am interested to know what exactly is being taught in literacy lessons in schools and children's voices form a very important part of this research. One cannot talk about schools and not talk about children.

3.8 Children's Participation and Voice in Education and literacy learning

Adult discourse on children and childhood and their participation in society and particularly in education has undergone dramatic changes in the last thirty years. The children's rights movement has a 'rich and substantial heritage' (Franklin and Franklin, 1996, p. 96) and this has been influenced by a number of factors. The development of a new sociology of childhood has emphasised children's agency and their role as actors in their own lives (Lundy and McEvoy, 2009, 2011). This has also increased the attention being given to childhood in a wider socio-cultural context with children as active agents in their learning (Vygotsky, 1978; Bronfenbrenner, 1993; Quortrup, 1994).

The Republic of Ireland has 1.1 million children constituting 25% of its population making it the country with the highest child population in the European Union (EU). Since the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children (UNCRC) in 1992, Ireland has made some strides to recognise and improve children's participation in society. The concept of pupil voice is not new and predates the UNCRC (Toller, 1999) and is described by Hargreaves (2004) as possibly one of the most powerful concepts in personalised learning. The implementation of pupil voice stresses the link with the constructivist learning theory of Bruner (1966). It is closely linked with pupil participation and more recently with pupils as active co-researchers. As Rudduck and Flutter (2004) state pupil voice is the consultative way of pupil participation.

The focus during the last decade in Ireland in relation to children has concentrated specifically on child poverty and welfare (Ireland, 2012), school absenteeism (Millar, 2012) and the ongoing concern regarding children's literacy (DES, 2011; RAI, 2011). Levels of pupil voice have increased undoubtedly in recent decades, but research in Irish primary schools remains remarkably scant. A case-study by Devine (1998) reveals pupils' perception of an imbalance between schoolwork and play and that classroom organisation is overtly authoritarian. The

second case study by McLoughlin (2006) describes children's frustration as being perceived as naive by their teachers. However, just one study of a large urban disadvantaged primary school (Downes, 2004) effectively explores the concept of bullying, teacher/pupil interaction, opportunities for pupil choice and peer/adult support through the use of pupil voice. Devine (1999, 2000) has written extensively on constructions of childhood in school and pupil voice.

It is hoped that the major longitudinal study, *Growing Up in Ireland* (GUII, McCoy et al., 2012) involving 8,500 nine-year-olds over seven years will refocus attention and concern on children's participation in Irish society and give children a voice. I am following this study with great interest and its implications for literacy learning in schools and in the next section I review some of the findings from this study.

3.9 Growing Up in Ireland Study

The *Growing Up in Ireland Study* is the National Longitudinal Study of Children of Ireland (Greene et al., 2010) which was commissioned in April 2006. It is funded by the Department of Health and Children in association with the Department of Social and Family Affairs and the Central Statistics Office. The study is being carried out by a consortium of researchers led by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) and Trinity College Dublin (TCD). The principal objective of *Growing Up in Ireland* is 'to describe the lives of Irish children and to establish what is typical and normal as well as what is atypical and problematic' (Greene et al., 2010, p. 7). The study will focus on a broad range of child outcomes with a view to documenting how well children are doing. They are tracking an infant cohort of 11,000 children from birth to age three and a child cohort of 8,500 children from nine years to thirteen. The report (Greene et al., 2010) highlights that by providing 'an evidence-base of research and insights into children and childhood, the study will inform and contribute to the setting of

responsive policies and the design of services for children and their families' (Greene et al., 2010, p. 7). I am particularly interested in the area of children's education as studied by the research team with particular reference to literacy. In the first report on *The Lives of 9-Year-Olds*, by Williams et al. (2009) among the key findings are that the child's academic performance varied by social class, income and maternal education, with those from the higher class, higher income and higher educated groups achieving higher scores on the Drumcondra Reading and Mathematics tests. Generally, children were found to be positive about their schooling, with girls being more positive than the boys. Girls were more likely than boys to report that they liked Reading and Irish, but Mathematics was more popular with boys. In the study girls were also more likely to read for fun than boys. If children report that they like reading then they will achieve more. It is up to teachers to ensure that children enjoy reading so that they can experience success and further progress. These findings are reflected in The National Strategy (DES, 2011) which outlines the challenges for literacy development in the primary years including the need to provide teachers with a clearer statement of learning outcomes expected for pupils at each stage, the need to ensure that the most effective teaching and learning approaches and strategies are used consistently and to ensure that the curriculum reflects the reading interests of all children including boys and allows them to have access to a better balance of texts as well as re-considering the suggested time framework for subjects (DES, 2011, pp 49-50).

According to Williams et al. (2009) most nine-year-old children were taught by female teachers, aged in their twenties. There were some very interesting findings in relation to mothers supporting their children's education and having high expectations for their children progressing beyond Junior Certificate. Maternal expectations were strongly related to their own education levels. This finding provides strong support for the provision of extra help for parents through Home-School Liaison programmes, particularly in DEIS areas. The education of the

child's mother was also positively related to how many children's books were in the home, while reading for fun also showed important differences across social class groups and educational attainment groups (Williams et al., 2009, p.101).

In the year 2000 the public health nurses in Ireland through the Health Service Executive (HSE) issued sets of books to parents of new born babies to encourage parents to read to their children. For many of these parents these might be the only books in those homes. It is very important that this continues in light of these findings. The real strength of *Growing Up in Ireland* is the extent to which it will 'facilitate an analysis of the impact of the many influences and characteristics of the child's early life on her/his longer-term educational outcomes in teenage and adult years' (Williams et al., 2009, p.102).

McCoy et al. (2012) reported on the Influences on 9-Year-Old's learning: Home, School and Community, Report 3. In Chapter 6 they explored the relationship between children's activities outside school and their academic performance in school. The authors admit that 'a further wave of data would be required to establish causality' (McCoy et al., 2012, p.57) but using data from a single wave shows evidence of significant achievement differences between schools and among teachers within schools. Achievement was 'strongly structured by several dimensions of family background, including social class, parental education, household income and educational resources' (2012, p. 57). Another finding was that children who engaged in organised cultural activities and in frequent reading for pleasure had a significant achievement advantage over those who could be regarded as having a 'traditional' childhood. An achievement advantage was also evident for the social networker group comprising children who used ICT as a means of social interaction, even though they had frequent face-to-face contact with their friends outside school. This group used ICT also for fun, learning and listening to music or watching films but they also read for pleasure fairly frequently and 'this

seemed to result in forms of social and cultural capital that facilitated school performance' (McCoy et al., 2012, p. 57).

In relation to the use of ICT, an article on the digital era appeared in the Irish Times (2 December 2014) written by Aileen Lee entitled 'Driven to distraction'. People are very concerned about the 'app' generation and her heading is 'The app generation are unable to focus on a task for more than 11 minutes without being tempted by email, Facebook or Twitter. Ironically, reading may be the cure, says Aileen Lee' (2014, p. 15). Lee (2014) alludes to the constant interruptions from digital technology and recommends that reading to children and fostering their love of reading aids children in their development of language and logical thinking. She also advises that reading improves children's communication skills, their academic performance and improves their concentration and refers to recommendations by the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) to parents on reading to their children and the benefits of same: 'reading aloud with your young child combines the benefits of talking, listening and storytelling within a single activity and builds the foundation for language development' (2014, p.15). Lee (2014) informs us that reading helps us to hone our real-life social skills and what better way to prepare our children for all the situations they will have to navigate than by reading to them and she concludes that children should have books in lieu of ipads!

The National Strategy (DES, 2011) is very definite in its recommendations in relation to improving the curriculum and learning experience for our children. It recommends that we must ensure that children have a rounded and fulfilling educational experience, that literacy should permeate all elements of a broad and balanced curriculum and to prioritise it in our school curriculum:

> The development of positive attitudes and motivation are vital for progression in literacy and we have to ensure that the learning experience for all learners in these areas is enjoyable

> and satisfying. All learners should benefit from the opportunity to experience the joy and excitement of getting 'lost' in a book (in both paper-based and digital formats) (DES, 2011, p. 43).

There are many ways to foster an enjoyment of reading including providing a print rich environment, giving pupils choice and control to self-select books and topics for reading and writing, providing optimal challenge to pupils and by providing opportunities for collaboration and social interaction (PDST, 2013, p. 4). Other ways of motivating pupils suggested by PDST (2013) are establishing a reading time; time for sharing after reading sessions; reading to pupils; making literacy links to current fads; providing opportunities to read material linked to appropriate films; ensuring a variety of poetry texts is available; by having book discussion groups; creating class books; creating a publicity campaign for a text or author; by reading to different audiences; reading with a friend; creating a 'This is Your Life' programme on a character and colouring in a 'Where in the World' map where pupils relate a text to any country of the world (PDST, 2013, pp.4, 5).

Finally in the *Growing Up in Ireland* report on influences on 9-year-olds' learning McCoy et al. (2012) conclude that children who led 'busy lives', combining involvement in a range of out-of-school activities had a slight performance advantage in mathematics, but not in reading. This finding provides 'some support for the suggestion that the over-structuring of children's recreation cancels out the benefits of 'concerted cultivation' (2012, p. 57). It may be that 'literacy skills are 'squeezed out' by over-involvement in recreational activities because they rely more on positive reinforcement outside school than mathematical skills' (2012, p. 57). This finding bears out what many teachers comment on in relation to children who are leading very busy lives and are often too tired to fully engage in school.

This study provides very rich data in the Irish context and as new waves of data appear educationalists will watch it very carefully and it will definitely influence policy decisions with regard to improving education provision and the lives of our children.

3.10 Conclusion

This chapter explored the official guidance with regard to the teaching of Literacy in Irish primary schools. This review of the policy literature: The Primary School Curriculum (DES, 1999, 2014), the National Strategy (DES, 2011), PISA 2009 results and the inspector reports (DES, 2010, 2013) highlights the importance of effective teaching of literacy in school. This policy literature has implications for all schools, placing literacy firmly on the agenda.

All policy holders stress the importance of the effective teacher of literacy who differentiates for the pupils and also draw attention to the importance of a whole school approach to teaching literacy. This aligns with the literature I reviewed in Chapter 2. The *Growing Up in Ireland* study (McCoy et al., 2012) explores the importance of listening to pupil voice and that leads me to my case study which focuses on the perspectives of all participants: teachers, parents and pupils.

In the next chapter I discuss what we know about Irish teachers' practice of teaching literacy in the early years of primary school.

Chapter 4: What do we know about Irish teachers' practice of teaching literacy in the early years of primary school?

4.1 Introduction

There are many skills and strategies that are essential to effective literacy teaching in the early years including phonological awareness, phonics for reading and spelling, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension and writing (composition). Kennedy et al. (2012) explain that:

> Skills and strategies are best embedded within a research-based balanced literacy framework that provides opportunities for children to develop the essential skills in contexts that are meaningful, developmentally appropriate and which capitalise on the 'funds of knowledge' (Moll et al., 1992; González et al. 2005) that children bring from home. In reading, these contexts include, teacher read-alouds in a range of genres, make-believe play, shared reading of texts, guided reading, reading workshops and opportunities for independent reading of self-selected texts. In writing, these contexts include opportunities for play, emergent writing, shared and interactive writing and writing workshops (Kennedy et al., 2012, pp. 187-188)

In this chapter I explore current practice by teachers in teaching literacy in Irish primary schools and endeavour to include many of these essential skills and strategies. The chapter is divided into two main sections – the first examining reports on effective literacy practices in schools in Ireland and in the second half detailing essential skills and strategies required for effective literacy teaching.

Firstly I analyse one report on reading and comprehension practice and another on raising literacy levels with collaborative on-site professional development in Irish primary classrooms. Next I discuss the first wave of findings in relation to literacy from the *Growing Up in Ireland* study followed by a report on effective literacy practices in DEIS schools (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) in Ireland (2009)

I then review two very interesting projects – the first is 'Doodle Den' - an after-school literacy focused programme which was implemented by the Childhood Development Initiative (CDI) to target literacy improvement in a disadvantaged area. The second project is based on a study by Dunn (2015) along with a Children's Research Advisory Group (CRAG) in Northern Ireland on children's views on the use of popular culture in teaching writing.

In the next section I discuss what we know about classroom practice in the early years in literacy. I explore the elements that are considered essential to the effective teaching of literacy in the early years such as: developing concepts about print, vocabulary and fluency, phonological awareness, phonics and comprehension. I also address Assessment in reading and effective interventions for struggling readers.

In Section 4.4.1 of this chapter, I present some effective strategies that teachers have found useful in improving literacy outcomes in schools, in particular 'Peer Tutoring', 'Reading Recovery', 'Guided Reading' and 'Station Teaching'. With 'Guided Reading' I refer to Vygotsky's (1978) 'Zone of Proximal Development' (ZPD). Finally I outline how 'Station Teaching' originated and how teachers can set it up in their classrooms.

4.2 Reading practice

The 'simple view' of reading instruction (Gough and Tunmer, 1986) is that the teaching of decoding should supersede the explicit teaching of comprehension, based on the belief that reading comprehension is a process which will just happen through accurate oral decoding. This view has been promoted in England as the theoretical framework to be followed for reading development (Department for Education and Skills) (DfES) (2006). The following report on a study provides an insight into reading practice and comprehension instruction in the Irish context.

4.2.1 Reading practice and comprehension instruction in Irish primary classrooms

Concannon-Gibney and Murphy (2010, 2012) conducted a study in Ireland among a sample of 400 primary teachers on their understanding of reading instruction. This research consisted of

a questionnaire survey and follow-up semi-structured interviews with a sample of 12 of these teachers. Among the key findings were that classroom practice was traditional and that instruction appeared ‘un-balanced’ in nature (Pressley, 2002). Teachers indicated a lack of balanced reading instruction across primary classrooms. Concannon-Gibney and Murphy (2010) reported that teachers used a dominance of word attack skills over comprehension instruction and placed an emphasis on reading for pleasure over explicit comprehension teaching. There seemed to be a ‘persistent use of oral sequential reading, a continued reliance on workbooks and commercial reading schemes and an assessment-based approach to comprehension instruction’ (2010, p. 124). Concannon-Gibney and Murphy (2010) were concerned with the ‘static nature of reading pedagogy in Irish classrooms and a failure on behalf of research, a revised curriculum, pre-service and in-career development to induce any ‘paradigm shift’ (Pressley et al., 1998) in reading instruction’ (2010, p. 124). Concannon-Gibney and Murphy (2010) propose that a ‘less simple view’ be promoted as a reformed framework for the teaching of reading in classrooms. They accept that reading is a complex process and requires a ‘multi-componential response’ (Pressley, 2000, p. 557) which can be represented by a reading puzzle with ‘four core integrated factors: comprehension, decoding (to include accuracy and fluency), vocabulary and engagement’ (2010, p. 128). These components are essential at each stage of a child’s reading development and are ‘embedded in the socio-cultural context of the child’s learning’ (2010, p. 128). Concannon-Gibney and Murphy (2012) contend that ‘it is widely accepted that a steady diet of phonics and word attack skills does not necessarily produce efficient readers, as decoding does not guarantee linguistic comprehension’ (2012, p. 439).

Concannon-Gibney and Murphy (2012) assert that ‘many years of research have formed a consensus that ‘balanced reading instruction’ involving contextualised phonics, vocabulary and comprehension instruction within a motivating environment, is core to effective reading

programmes' (Snow et al., 1998) (2012, p. 435). Concannon-Gibney and Murphy's (2012) research found that teachers tended to assess comprehension rather than teach it, in spite of current research which recommends that comprehension strategies should be taught in an explicit manner through cognitive modelling (Pressley and Wharton-McDonald, 2006). The authors argue that the traditional unbalanced approach to reading instruction, which neglects comprehension instruction, may be affecting reading achievement. They conclude that the 'implementation of a more holistic and inclusive 'balanced' model of reading development is immediately imperative in reading classrooms' (2010, p. 122). The authors advise the starting point for achieving more balanced approaches to reading 'will be to help teachers to reconstruct their own understandings of reading and reading pedagogy through professional development programmes which would allow for reflection, discussion and deepening understanding of the reading process and appropriate reading pedagogy' (2010, p. 128). This would be a vital first step in rebalancing reading pedagogy in classrooms to reflect how students learn to read effectively. This is in line with Kennedy et al.'s (2012) recommendations for teachers to implement a balanced literacy framework. However, Concannon-Gibney and Murphy (2012) highlight a need for 'fundamental reappraisal and reorganisation of pre-service education and in career development opportunities for teachers in Ireland with respect to reading development' (2012, p. 445) to include opportunities to explore interactive and balanced models of reading instruction, including the teaching of explicit comprehension strategy instruction. I return to the area of comprehension again in Section 4.3.1 under essential literacy skills. I now consider further insights into current practices in the primary classroom in relation to literacy learning.

4.2.2 Raising Literacy Levels With Collaborative On-Site Professional Development in an Urban Disadvantaged School

Kennedy and Shiel (2010) conducted a study over a two year period in a disadvantaged school in Dublin, Ireland. The teachers sought to equip themselves 'with a repertoire of strategies, tools, and methodologies from which they could choose and which would enable them to make critical decisions on what was appropriate for their particular context and for the particular stages of development of their students' (Kennedy and Shiel, 2010, p. 373). A multifaceted collaborative professional development programme, that was sensitive to the specific needs of the school, was implemented in the school during this time. Following consultation with the staff, it was decided to begin the change process with the four first-grade classes (56 students: 25 boys, 31 girls), their class and support teachers, and their parents, and continue with these classes into second grade. A 'key element of the change process was the nature of the relationship between the facilitator (a teacher educator) and the participants' (Kennedy and Shiel, 2010, p. 374). It involved a collaborative partnership whereby the teachers and the facilitator worked cooperatively to discover what could work in the school context. A range of data was gathered, pupils' strengths and weaknesses were identified and the facilitator and teachers 'negotiated and prioritized the first steps in the change process' (2010, p. 374). It was decided to introduce a daily 30-minute writing workshop with 'the goals of supporting students to articulate their ideas further, motivating students to view writing as purposeful, and moving those writing at a semi-phonetic level to a phonetic level' (2010, p. 374). There was sustained, intensive on-site professional development over the two school years. This included professional development in which a new aspect of literacy was explored, debate around the professional readings that teachers had engaged in, examination of pupils' work and test results, planning for implementation of changes and reaction to new methods already tried. The professional readings were provided to 'enhance teachers' content knowledge in alphabetics, comprehension, vocabulary, fluency, and writing and supporting teachers in combining these elements into a balanced literacy framework suitable for their context' (2010, p. 376). Another

element of the programme, at the request of teachers, was demonstration of lessons by the facilitator. At three points in the intervention, observation of classroom practices was conducted. The professional dialogue that occurred following demonstrations and observations served to 'strengthen the collaborative nature of the intervention' (2010, p. 378). There was an ongoing focus on assessment during the intervention.

On the whole the intervention was very successful. There was increased expertise and stronger self-efficacy on the part of the teachers. The school had developed as a professional learning community; the teachers reported having higher expectations and were teaching a cognitively challenging curriculum. In relation to the students there were improvements in motivation and engagement in relation to literacy activities. There was also evidence that students were using more strategic approaches to reading and writing and performance in standardized reading tests had also improved. Kennedy and Shiel (2010) conclude that there were many crucial factors involved in this intervention to 'create the conditions that contributed to the observed gains in achievement, motivation, and engagement of the students and facilitated the changes observed in teachers and in the instructional programme for literacy' (2010, p. 381). Without a doubt the nature of the collaboration between the facilitator and the teachers and the phased introduction of the balanced literacy framework were of critical importance. 'The sustained, on-site, multifaceted professional development enhanced teacher expertise and opened up new ways of working with students' (2010, p. 381). The professional readings, the planned meetings, the demonstrations all gave teachers the confidence to experiment with their teaching. The balanced literacy framework allowed for the development of students' creativity and offered choice and control over activities and this balanced literacy framework is recommended by Kennedy et al. (2012) in their report for the NCCA. In this intervention teachers adopted a facilitative role, scaffolding and coaching students in applying word-identification and comprehension strategies. Reading and writing were promoted at home. Kennedy and Shiel

(2010) maintain that the success of the intervention ‘created a school dynamic and sense that there was much that could be done to enhance achievement and contributed to a school vision in which all staff focused on the goal of not only enhancing achievement but also developing students as readers and writers who could use literacy as a tool for personal goals’ (2010, p. 381). This statement aligns with the National Literacy Strategy’s (DES, 2011) aspirations that students develop their literacy skills that they will need to ‘participate fully in the education system, to live satisfying and rewarding lives, and to participate as active and informed citizens in our society’ (DES, 2011, p. 7).

The sustained support led by the University was a major factor in the success of this collaboration, as one teacher reported ‘our knowledge has gone up one million percent’ (Mary, classroom teacher, 2010, p. 376). Mary (2010, p. 372) also commented that the most important resource at all times during the intervention in the classroom was the teacher and that the University had invested so much in the teachers – in up-skilling them and that even if they moved to another school they were trained so well that they could implement any of the strategies. The study also shows that there is no quick fix to the problem of underachievement in literacy but that a multifaceted approach to raising achievement, such as this intervention, is a possibility for the Department of Education to consider implementing (Kennedy and Shiel, 2010, pp. 381-382).

In the next section I discuss findings from the *Growing Up in Ireland study* in relation to literacy experiences of young children.

4.2.3 Learning in Focus: The Primary Classroom: Insights from the *Growing Up in Ireland* Study

McCoy, Smyth & Banks (2012) report on the first wave of the *Growing Up in Ireland* study, examining the lives and experiences of one-in-seven nine year old children in Ireland.

The *Growing up in Ireland* study provides 'a unique opportunity to examine the school and classroom experiences of primary school children, placing these experiences in the context of very detailed information from school principals and classroom teachers' (2012, p. ii). The 'Primary School Curriculum' (1999) presented a strong 'vision of child-centred education, with children viewed as active agents in their own learning' (2012, p. 53). Findings in the report by McCoy et al. (2012) provide systematic evidence of the dominance of the whole-class teaching approach in primary education with much less of active learning methods such as group-work than had been suggested in the 'Primary School Curriculum'' document, reinforcing the findings of earlier studies which drew on different data sources (Murphy, 2004; NCCA, 2005, 2008). The study suggests that more recent teacher graduates use more active learning methods than more experienced teachers, suggesting that 'continuous professional development in support of the 'Primary Curriculum' has not led to a change in pedagogical approaches among this group' (McCoy et al., 2012, p. 53). More active methods are less prevalent in larger classes, indicating the constraints of class size on the effective implementation of the primary curriculum. McCoy et al. (2012) also report that girls attending 'fee-paying schools, those attending gaelscoileanna and those in non-disadvantaged schools are more likely to experience active learning in their classroom than boys, those in English-medium schools and those in disadvantaged (DEIS) schools' (2012, p.ii). The authors suggest that from data available, that the reasons for this may reflect group work and pair-work being seen as 'easier' to manage with more engaged groups of students. The findings also point to significant variation in the time allocated to particular subject areas between schools and among individual teachers working in the same school. The results also show generally high levels of engagement with school among Irish nine-year-olds. However, McCoy et al (2012) note that 'it is of policy

concern that even at this stage boys are more likely to be disengaged from school and to be more negative about literacy-based subjects than girls' (2012, p. iii). Significant disengagement levels were also found among children with special educational needs, raising issues around inclusion at primary level. In conclusion the *Growing Up in Ireland* data has important implications for the National Literacy Strategy (DES, 2011), 'for teacher education programmes, for the DEIS programme, for curricular and school organisation policy and for policy on the inclusion of students with special educational needs' (2012, pp. 54-55) and also has relevance for all the stakeholders in education. In my research I will study the implementation of a literacy intervention: 'Station Teaching', which will involve children working in small groups as had been recommended by the 'Primary School Curriculum'.

In the next section I report on effective literacy practices in DEIS (DES, 2009) schools in Ireland. This is interesting in the light of the first wave findings from the *Growing Up in Ireland* study (2012) which suggests that pupils in DEIS schools experience less active teaching methods. However the study of these five DEIS schools tells a different story.

4.2.4 Effective literacy practices in DEIS schools in Ireland

In 2005, the Department of Education launched a new programme called DEIS (DES, 2005) with a view to improving the identification of disadvantaged schools and providing more focused programmes in literacy and other areas (Kennedy and Shiel, 2010). Enhanced professional development in literacy for teachers is facilitated and support for schools is provided to establish and develop literacy targets. DEIS promotes two initiatives intended to improve literacy levels in disadvantaged schools: 'Reading Recovery' (Clay, 2002) and 'First Step's (Education Department of Western Australia, 1994).

The Department of Education and Science Inspectorate (DES, 2009) published a report on *Effective literacy and numeracy practices in eight DEIS schools*. This was as a result of the specific recommendations in the DEIS action plan (2005) to identify existing models of good practice in literacy and numeracy. In this publication (DES, 2009) the inspectors describe effective literacy and numeracy practices in eight schools which have been designated as serving areas of considerable socio-economic disadvantage. The schools are supported by DEIS, the action plan for educational inclusion of the Department of Education and Science. Eamon Stack, The Chief Inspector (DES, 2009) in the foreword describes how all the schools share a commitment to bringing about improvements in teaching and learning and how in various ways they are making carefully planned and sustained efforts to enhance children's learning in literacy and numeracy. The inspectors hope that the publication of this report (DES, 2009) should promote discussion, reflection and questioning about how we can improve children's learning in all schools and that others will be inspired by the success in these DEIS schools. Five of the schools describe effective literacy practices in their schools in this report (DES, 2009).

One school (School 1) used the findings from a recent school inspection report and cumulative standardised test results to take a closer look at their literacy standards and conducted a whole school in-depth review. The review highlighted the willingness of staff to update their teaching skills and a team of experienced 'Reading Recovery' tutors devised a co-teaching approach to literacy teaching called the 'literacy work station model' and seven teachers undertook a six-week pilot study of the model. This project included modelling of lessons and mentoring from the literacy team. On completion of the pilot the findings were presented to staff stating that the collaborative model of teaching was 'effective and essential' and recommended the adoption of this new model on a whole-school basis. The 'Literacy Work Station Model' is timetabled for an hour each day when pupils have an opportunity to spend time at four, out of

the five, different work stations. The stations incorporate focused activities in: listening; guided reading; independent reading; writing and word-detective work (phonics, vocabulary extension and sentence construction). The mainstream class teacher is assisted by other school staff involved in the school's learning and special education support (DES, 2009, pp. 13- 14). The results are very promising – the pupils have become more independent as learners and work well together. Many teachers spoke of the confidence they gained from the structured nature of the literacy work station model. The teachers are using an extended range of effective strategies and are striving to ensure that activities and resources are differentiated for the needs of each group (DES, 2009, p. 17). All the stakeholders in this school firmly believe in the importance and success of this model of teaching and 'with a clear vision and strong, purposeful leadership, this school is striving to make a difference, and succeeding' (DES, 2009, p. 19).

Another school (School 3) in this report attributes their success to 'working together for the benefit of us all' (DES, 2009, p. 33). In particular they believe in collaborative planning and mentoring of new staff. They use co-teaching approaches for teaching phonological awareness and they use 'First Steps' – an approach to teaching writing. They introduced a shared parent and child reading project using a novel. One of the reasons that co-teaching works so well is this school is that 'the management and teachers are open to change and not afraid to make mistakes along the way… the pupils' attainment levels are very impressive and no doubt the pupils' own motivation, their parents' support, the dedication of the school staff and the clarity of focus that exists within the school have helped in bringing this about' (DES, 2009, p. 40).

A third school (School 5) in this report also works collaboratively. This school has a whole-school phonics programme and engages in intensive literacy lessons, 'Station Teaching' for thirty minutes every day for six weeks. Each lesson incorporates the following five activities: Phonics; High frequency words; Writing; New reading and Familiar reading. As part of their whole-school approach to the teaching of reading, specific reading programmes are set out with

details of the reading activities to be conducted at each class level, for example shared reading with parents, 'Drop Everything and Read' (DEAR) time and library sessions. The standardised test results are improving all the time. According to the report (DES, 2009) 'the whole-school emphasis on smart preparation and planning, the use of structured literacy programmes for early intervention and the teachers' willingness to learn from each other make for a highly successful school' (DES, 2009, p. 60).

A fourth school (School 7) is a junior school which facilitates a workable arrangement for staff rotation of mainstream and special education teachers ensuring continuous professional development and co-learning among the teaching staff. There are many opportunities for teachers to plan collaboratively and 'Team teaching' is well established in the school with all teachers – special education and mainstream- working well alongside each other in the classrooms. The support staff help with structured play activities in the junior-infant classrooms, they co-teach a phonological awareness programme with the senior-infants' class teacher and deliver a structured literacy programme for an hour each day to first-class pupils. In the pre-school classrooms they operate 'Book Start', a five-week pre-reading programme involving the parents of pre-school children. A comprehensive oral language programme is provided in the school and following discussions with the local speech and language service they introduced a pilot language programme in the junior-infant classes.

Even though all teachers in schools use 'Assessment for Learning' (AFL) strategies some use the approach more informally. However, in this school the teachers are more consciously aware of using 'Assessment for learning' approaches to help pupils to be clearer about what, how, and why they are learning. Teachers have incorporated many strategies into their teaching of literacy, for example:

- Think time – pupils are given extended thinking time before they are expected to answer or contribute

- Sharing the learning intentions/outcomes and success criteria – at the start of each lesson the teacher tells the class what they will learn
- No hands up – during certain discussion periods pupils are asked not to put their hands up, but wait to be questioned which allows teachers to ask different pupils questions and not just those whose hands are up
- Traffic lights – pupils use this strategy to identify their understanding of a topic or their readiness for the next stage of a lesson
- Providing feedback – teachers are aware of how important effective feedback is to learning – they stress positive aspects of the pupils' work as well as mentioning specific areas that could be improved (DES, 2009, pp. 77-79)

The culture of team teaching is very well established in this school. Collaborative planning, the early involvement of parents, whole-school literacy programmes that match the learning needs of the pupils, being open to new ways of doing things, their use of 'Assessment for Learning' strategies, all serve to enhance the pupils' literacy standards. From this success the school is now set on improving attainment in Mathematics (DES, 2009, p. 81).

The fifth school (School 8) which the inspectorate reported on in relation to effective literacy practices is a school where small things matter and successes were celebrated: 'the reception area was rich with print and photographs' (DES, 2009, p. 84). The teachers have initiated 'a number of highly successful literacy activities which have resulted in sustained improvements throughout the school in the standards of reading attainment' (DES, 2009, p. 85). Many of the teachers attribute the steady improvement in reading readiness among infant pupils to the 'systematic effective teaching of early-reading skills' (DES, 2009, p. 86). Some of their early-reading activities include: the systematic teaching of phonics using the 'Jolly Phonics' programme; the 'Power hour' for literacy in Senior infant classes for one term (incorporating four literacy work stations – new reading, familiar reading, sounds and word work and a writing station); the use of 'Big books' and story sacks; 'Language-experience charts' and library books to make reading pleasurable; nursery rhymes taught on a daily basis and the operation of the 'Language for fun' programme in the junior-infant classroom delivered by the class

teacher and four parents. The inspectorate reports (DES, 2009) that 'this is a happy place to learn and work and an example of how visionary leadership and staff dedication can make a vital difference to the lives of pupils' (DES, 2009, p. 92).

4.2.5 Summary of effective literacy practices in DEIS schools

Each story describes a range of approaches that the teachers and school community have adopted to improve the teaching of literacy or numeracy for their pupils. None of these schools would say that it has the perfect solution to improving literacy; they have had their successes and failures but all schools share many characteristics. These are summarised in Chapter 10 of the report (DES, 2009, pp. 94-100) and I identify the main components of effective literacy practices in these DEIS schools: leadership style; positive expectations about levels of behaviour for all pupils; teachers are committed to strategic planning; schools share a commitment to CPD and schools are committed to involving parents.

Leadership style

Leadership style is reported as a very important influence in these schools and one of the main contributions to their overall effectiveness. The ability to share leadership responsibly with others is a common strength across all the schools. In the inspectors' report they contend that the 'can do' attitude that many of the principals, teachers and boards of management adopt in these schools is one of the characteristics of their leadership and success (DES, 2009, p. 95).

Positive expectations about levels of behaviour for all pupils

The teachers have consistently positive expectations about levels of behaviour for all pupils. The teachers care about their pupils and respect them. They realise effective classroom management is the key to successful teaching and 'the teachers' consistent application of well-established classroom routines helps to save the day' (DES, 2009, p. 96)

Teachers are committed to strategic planning

The teachers are also committed to strategic planning and there are high levels of team teaching in these schools. Their planning is both 'SMART' (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound) and highly relevant to the learning needs of the pupils. Teachers work purposefully and beneficially together in special educational needs teams and in co-operation with other mainstream class teachers. These teachers engage in in-class support for pupils with special educational needs. The most common approaches of co-teaching involve 'Station Teaching' (pupils rotate on a predetermined schedule through stations operated by a number of teachers), 'Parallel Teaching' (where the class is split into heterogeneous groups and each teacher instructs half on the same material), and 'Alternative teaching' (the majority of pupils remain in a large group setting but some pupils work in a smaller group for more individualised instruction) (DES, 2009, p. 96).

Schools share a commitment to continuous professional development and to involving parents

The schools share a commitment to continuous professional development as the teachers believe that the school is a learning organisation for more than just the pupils who attend there. There is a very strong work ethic in all of these schools (DES, 2009, p. 97).

Most of the schools are genuinely and strongly committed to involving parents in their children's learning. Not only is there provision of help and financial support but also there is a focus on how parents can improve the learning experienced by their children. In many cases contact is made with pre-schoolers to help in the preparations for school (DES, 2009, p. 97).

4.2.6 Literacy lessons from the schools

Within these DEIS schools, the teaching of literacy and numeracy education is prioritised clearly and purposefully: 'The teachers understand the importance of literacy and numeracy in

overcoming educational disadvantage' (DES, 2009, p. 97). Teachers waste no time and take every opportunity to reinforce literacy and numeracy is all areas of the curriculum.

The teachers carefully assess where the pupils are starting from so that they will know whether their varied interventions are successful. Teachers use assessment to inform their practice. 'The teachers use a range of assessment practices that include anecdotal notes, checklists, retaining the pupils' completed work, summative and formative statements, photographs and video' (DES, 2009, p. 98).

However, the teachers are aware that change is incremental and that it takes time. Given that, 'the teachers invest considerable time and effort at the initial research and development stage, a decision to discontinue a particular intervention is never taken lightly' (DES, 2009, p. 98). The teachers are adamant that consistency of approach and collaborative decision making is critical to school success. They believe that teaching and learning must be consistent throughout the whole school. The teachers 'realise that it is the school and the approaches that the teachers use that must adapt to meet the pupils' learning needs rather than expecting the pupils to change to match the school's needs' (DES, 2009, p. 98).

The teachers in these schools create learning and teaching opportunities tailored to the varied needs of groups or individual pupils through differentiation and have moved away from the practice of withdrawing pupils from the mainstream classroom for supplementary learning support. 'The mainstream and support teachers have chosen to work together in the classroom to provide for the pupils' (DES, 2009, p. 99).

4.2.7 Areas needing improvement

The staff in the schools are well aware of areas where improvement is still needed – oral language teaching is one such area: 'The children's lack of experience in using the language of

school makes it difficult for them to learn and to demonstrate their learning' (DES, 2009, p. 100). Finally the teachers were candid about their particular school's stage of development in literacy and numeracy provision and in many instances were only beginning to make headway. Some of their interventions were relatively recent, they had 'established their pupils' needs as best they could, they chose a suitable intervention or interventions to help cater for those needs, and are now sticking tenaciously to their goal of improving the pupils' learning outcomes' (DES, 2009, p. 100). The report demonstrates that no one size fits all and different practices suit different schools in different circumstances. The report highlights the importance of the general management and organisation in schools and also lessons about teaching and learning in literacy and numeracy (DES, 2009, p. 94). While every school is unique there are lessons to be learned by other schools and it is up to individual schools to read and learn from the effective practices in these schools.

In my empirical study I examine one literacy intervention 'Station Teaching' in junior classes in a non-DEIS school. I follow a class of children in the last term of Junior Infants right through all of Senior Infants and report on the implementation of the initiative.

In the following section I report on a programme that has been implemented as a literacy intervention in the after school context in some disadvantaged areas in Ireland. It shows what can be done when a community can work together.

4.2.8 Doodle Den

Doodle Den is an after-school literacy focused programme which was implemented by the Childhood Development Initiative (CDI) (2012) to target literacy among children in Senior Infants in Tallaght West in Dublin. CDI is a prevention and early intervention programme organisation, jointly funded by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, and Atlantic

Philanthropies (Ó Fatharta, Irish Examiner, 7 November 2012). Tallaght is an area which has been designated as an area of social and economic disadvantage. The after-school literacy programme involved pupils attending three after-school sessions each week, each lasting 1½ hours. It was piloted in 2008-2011 and was rolled out in 2012 in sites in Tallaght West and Limerick. The 'Policy Brief' by CDI (2012) described the programme which aimed to improve children's literacy through targeting the following literacy domains through a balanced literacy framework: writing; text comprehension; phonics; sight vocabulary; independent reading and fluency (CDI, 2012, p.1). The 'Brief' (CDI, 2012) also highlighted how 'implementing evidence-based programmes such as 'Doodle Den' with young children in disadvantaged communities can help meet the aims of the National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People (2011-2020)' (CDI, 2012, p.1).

The programme was independently evaluated by the Centre for Effective Education at Queen's University Belfast using a Randomised Controlled Trial design and reported by Biggart et al. (2012): *Evaluation of the Effectiveness of the Childhood Development Initiative's Doodle Den Literacy Programme*. 464 children, 472 teachers and 197 parents in Tallaght West participated in the trial over three years. This evaluation by Biggart et al. (2012) found improvements in children's overall literacy ability including word recognition, sentence structure and word choice. Other positive outcomes were: improvement in pupils' concentration; reduced problem behaviours in school; an increase in family library activity and in the child's reading at home. 'Doodle Den' was positively received by facilitators, school principals, parents and the children themselves. However, some issues did arise such as overcrowding of activities within the 'Doodle Den' curriculum at any given session and the need for clarification of roles where teachers and youth workers were co-facilitating sessions. CDI recommends that 'Doodle Den' be offered within the 'School Completion Programme' and that all Government Departments commit to using evidence to inform planning and service delivery. CDI also demands that key

training and supports are provided to appropriate structures to ensure fidelity of intervention delivers and pre-service training for professionals working with children including mandatory modules on engaging parents (Biggart et al, 2012, p.66). Rafferty and Colgan (2013) reported on replicating 'Doodle Den' Literacy Programme in Limerick and gave a summary of key learning for replication (2013, pp. 21-22) They referred to key roles in leadership of the project, ensuring all stakeholders buy in to the project, that training be provided for all involved, the 'fit' of the programme with the local demographic and profile of need, and that the programme will be mainstreamed when it becomes routine and embedded in the local system (2013, p.22). This intervention is very interesting and shows what can be done in a community to help improve literacy skills in young children and hopefully educators can catch them young enough to make a difference. It also demonstrates how a focused literacy programme in school could be effective at targeting pupils aged 5-6 years, the same as the group I am targeting with my intervention 'Station Teaching'.

In the next section I report on a study done in schools in Northern Ireland on the use of popular culture in the teaching of writing. Research (Marsh, 2009) has shown how pupils' levels of engagement are higher when the content is more relevant to their lives.

4.2.9 The use of Popular Culture to Teach Writing in the Primary Classroom

What do we mean by popular culture? Popular culture in relation to young children may be referred to as the range of texts, artefacts and practices that are popular with large numbers of children and are either commercially produced or produced and circulated amongst children themselves (Marsh, 2010, pp.13, 14). There is a growing literature which recognises the central role that popular culture and media play in many young children's lives outside of school (Millard, 2003; Ashton, 2005 and Marsh, 2005). Marsh (2009) argues that the introduction of

popular culture into the school curriculum can promote engagement and enthusiasm in school literacy practices and provide experiences which will support literacy learning. Whilst there has been rich research on the role of popular culture in literacy learning there has been very little research on the children's perspectives with regard to it. Jill Dunn (2015 in press) conducted a small scale study along with a Children's Research Advisory Group (CRAG) on children's views on the use of popular culture in teaching writing. The findings indicate that, if we want to garner meaningful children's views on their literacy learning, it is important to include children in an advisory role in the different phases of the research, thus creating a 'community of learners' (Wenger, 1998) where children not only learn from adults but adults learn from children who are experts with the insider's knowledge and experience of popular culture and its potential for learning (Dunn, 2015). I also endeavour to do this in my study on the implementation of ST in Infant classrooms.

Dunn (2015) outlines how her research is relevant to current policy in Northern Ireland. She refers to the Department of Education's vision which is to ensure that every learner fulfils her or his full potential at each stage of their development and to the Northern Ireland Chief Inspector's Report 2008-2010 which informed us that significant numbers of children are failing to reach the level of attainment of literacy expected of their age. Dunn (2015) also comments on the Count, Read: Succeed Strategy (DENI, 2011) whose aims are that teachers and school leaders should be supported in their work to raise overall levels of attainment in literacy among young people and to narrow the current gaps in educational outcomes. This Strategy (DENI, 2011) is very similar to our National Literacy Strategy which I will report on later.

The sample involved in Dunn's (2015) study was from two schools in Northern Ireland, one in a lower socio economic area and one in a higher socio economic area comprising 45 children in total in Primary 3 classes. Children were asked for their views on the purposes of writing

and their responses included: writing for learning; writing for communication; writing for entertainment and writing for future work e.g. form filling and names on dinner tickets. In relation to their likes and dislikes about writing: they liked writing for entertainment; for learning and for enjoyment and under dislikes they alluded to physical issues, time and quantity. With regard to favourite things to write about the boys mentioned: play station; army games; Donkey Kong; football; the shark from the film Jaws; Sponge Bob; a house fire one boy saw on the news that morning and animals from Deadly Sixty (CBBC programme). The girls reported that they liked to write about the Little mermaid; Barbie and the fairies; Barbie Mariposa; Sleeping Beauty; Mr. Bean; Granny's dog; Disney princesses – Rapunzel, Ariel and Mum getting married.

In relation to popular culture the children were asked their favourite popular culture, their views on it and suggestions for popular culture. The list was exhaustive – from Mario to Bob the Builder and Toy Story; from Angry birds to Cars - not to mention all the Disney films and characters. As Dunn (2015) declares, children are the experts in children's popular culture! When CRAG asked why boys liked Mario some of the responses were: 'Because his friends are nearly all boys like Donkey Kong' or 'Because Mario is a boy and all his friends are boys'. The girls liked the princesses and when asked why, their responses include: 'Because it's got Princess Peach' and 'Daisy's a princess and every girl wants to be a princess'! Children were asked why teachers would not like using popular culture to teach literacy and their responses include: 'they wouldn't want the children to learn about that stuff', 'they wouldn't watch children's stuff, 'they might think that we were not really learning just sitting back and watching TV and all', 'the children might get distracted and wouldn't listen to the teacher' and 'because it annoys them!' These were interesting observations by the children! Dunn (2015) recommends that listening to children is not just good pedagogical practice but has a legally binding obligation. She contends that children are capable of informing the research design to

maximise the authenticity of the data being gathered and that children are capable of interpreting data and giving the child's perspective on that data. Dunn (2015) advises that if the Government wants to improve standards in literacy across primary schools in Northern Ireland and reinvigorate writing practice they would benefit from listening to the view of the key stakeholders in education, the children themselves.

This research resonates in schools in the Republic of Ireland also and we may also take this advice on board! In my empirical study I observe and interview children about their perspectives on reading, writing and Station Teaching. Pupil voice is very powerful and it is very important that it is included in this study. I also include the pupils' drawings which provide very insightful views of their perceptions of ST.

So far in this chapter I have reviewed many programmes in schools, from literacy practices in DEIS schools to focused programmes both in the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland. I now turn my attention to address the essential literacy skills needed for the teaching of literacy, as well as assessment in reading, effective literacy interventions to help students and strategies in use in schools to improve literacy outcomes.

4.3 Essential Literacy Skills

> *The essential literacy skills include the 'five pillars' of reading instruction outlined by the National Reading Panel (NRP, 2000) – phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension as well as other important aspects such as developing concepts about print (Snow, Burns and Griffin, 1998).*

4.3.1 Developing concepts about print

Developing concepts about print is an essential component of literacy development. Concannon-Gibney at the Reading Association of Ireland conference (RAI) (2014) suggests

that teachers need to teach this list of concepts about print: how to hold a book; left to right and top to bottom orientation; return sweep; title; author; illustrator; understanding the notion of a letter and a word; one to one matching; punctuation; capital and lower-case letters; blurb; table of contents; index; glossary; parentheses; bold print and italics (2014, pp. 25-26).

4.3.2 Vocabulary and fluency

Vocabulary knowledge is considered a reliable indicator of early and later literacy outcomes according to Snow and Oh (2011) and it is also associated with reading comprehension. Neuman (2011) argues that vocabulary should be placed at the forefront of early literacy instruction and Juel (2006) contends that it is an area that requires investment in instructional activities to foster it. Mehigan (2009) explains how vocabulary is acquired incidentally through indirect exposure to words and intentionally through explicit instruction in specific words and word-learning strategies. Mehigan (2009) states that there are four types of vocabulary: listening vocabulary; speaking vocabulary; reading vocabulary and writing vocabulary. He claims that these categories are important because the source of children's vocabulary knowledge changes as they become more familiar with the written word. He also refers to the relationship between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension and that vocabulary learning is developmental. In the early years the primary source is oral language experience – often context related, pupils tend to define words using synonyms/functions attributes rather than taxonomically (Mehigan, 2009). For effective language instruction, he argues that teachers need to provide rich and varied individual words and teach word learning strategies. Healy (2015) adds to this and refers to word consciousness as the knowledge and disposition necessary for students to learn to appreciate the effective use of words. She recommends that word consciousness should be incorporated into daily literacy lessons in schools – through the use of jokes, poems, riddles, tongue twisters, similes, metaphors and solving codes. She advises

that teachers need to purposefully target the teaching of some words and she refers to Beck, McKeown and Kucan (2002) and their 'Tiers of vocabulary':

1. Tier one incorporates basic vocabulary – basic words which rarely require direct instruction and typically do not have multiple meanings. Early reading words occur at this level. Examples are: book, girl, sad, run, dog and orange. There are about 8,000 word families in English included in Tier one.
2. Tier two includes high frequency and utility words/ Multiple meaning vocabulary. These words occur often in mature language situations and strongly influence speaking and reading. They are the most important words for direct instruction. Examples are: masterpiece, fortunate, industrious, measure, benevolent. There are about 7,000 families in English in Tier two.
3. Tier three contains specialised words – low frequency, context-specific vocabulary. These low-frequency words occur in specific domains which include subjects in school, hobbies, occupations, geographic regions, technology and weather. Examples are: economics, isotope, asphalt, revolutionary, war and crepe. The remaining 400,000 words in English fall into this tier (Beck et al., 2002).

It is important to remember that Tier two and three words are not all clear-cut in their tier classification. Beck et al. (2002) recommend providing explicit instruction on the high-utility words (Tier two) in reading classes. Teachers select Tier two words based on their importance and utility, their instructional potential, and student's conceptual understanding. Content-specific words are best learned in the subject area where they are encountered.

Healy (2015) agrees with Mehigan (2009) by advising teachers that they need to teach vocabulary before, during and after reading a text.

Daly and Scanlan (1988) published a series of lesson plans for teachers for all four class groupings, from infants to sixth class covering twenty different topics. The lesson plans provide suggestions for vocabulary, teaching aids and reinforcement and integration activities and are a useful resource for the teaching and development of language in the primary school. Even though the manual was published 27 years ago it is still being sold and in use in classrooms in primary schools in Ireland! Beck et al. (2002) advise that full understanding and use of vocabulary occurs only over time and multiple encounters.

The Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) (2013) suggests activities teachers can use to support vocabulary development: small words in big words; semantic gradient; compound words; multiple meanings; vocabulary development to encourage deep processing; word wall; word taxonomy and word of the week (PDST, 2013, p. 16).

Fluency is 'the ability to read aloud with expression to demonstrate an understanding of the author's message' (Department of Education and Training in Western Australia, 2004, p. 30). According to McKenna & Stahl (2009) the three key components of reading fluency are: word recognition, automaticity and appropriate rhythm and intonation of speech. Quinn (2015) explains that children read words by decoding, analogizing, predicting and recognising whole words by sight. She argues that the key components that facilitate automaticity and word recognition are phonological awareness, letter knowledge and alphabetic principles.

Concannon-Gibney, (RAI) (2014) describes how reading rate, accuracy and prosody are all components of fluent reading and that studies have highlighted an important link between fluency and comprehension (Pinnell, G. S., Pikulski, J. J., Wixson, K. K., Campbell, J. R., Gough, P. B., & Beatty, A. S. 1995). Concannon-Gibney (RAI) (2014) contends that reading accuracy can be developed though 'systematic phonics instruction and through acquiring a strong sight vocabulary of high frequency words' (2014, p. 29). She recommends using large format books -'Big books' to teach children these essential words while also communicating their importance in the reading task and suggests that 'Big books' are an excellent forum for the development of comprehension. Concannon-Gibney (RAI) (2014) further maintains that vocabulary instruction is an essential aspect of a child's comprehension development and shared reading can be an excellent way to enhance a child's vocabulary acquisition (Fisher, Frey and Lapp, 2008) as explicitly teaching word meanings within the context of the 'Big book' can have a powerful effect on increasing a child's word consciousness and interest in expanding their vocabulary (Coyne, M. D., Simmons, D. C., Kame'enui, E. J., & Stoolmiller, M., 2004).

Other approaches to reading that focus on enhancing reading fluency are: ‘Guided reading’, ‘Reading Partners’, ‘Peer Tutoring’, ‘Readers Theatre’, ‘Choral reading’, ‘Taped reading’, ‘Echo reading’ and ‘Buddy reading’ (PDST, 2013, p. 8).

4.3.3 Phonological Awareness

Phonological Awareness can be defined as “an ability to recognise, combine and manipulate the different sound units of spoken words” (Department of Education and Training in Western Australia, 2004, p. 73).

Phonological awareness is a central part of learning to read (Adams, 1990; Goswami, 1986; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHHD), 2000). Although different to phonics, it is an important precursor to learning phonics effectively (Savage, 2008). PDST (2013) in their report on *The Reading Process* describe Phonological awareness as an umbrella term and can be divided into the following three levels: (a) syllabic awareness, (b) onset and rime and (c) phonemic awareness.

(a) Syllabic awareness involves syllable blending, segmentation and isolation.

(b) Onset-Rime awareness means that all syllables can be divided up into onsets and rimes, for example the word ‘cat’: ‘c’= onset, ‘at’= rime. By splitting the word into these two parts it helps beginning readers to correspond letters with the sounds they hear. Once they recognise a rime, they can pair it with different onsets to form new words. For example in the word ‘cat’, the ‘c’ is the onset and the ‘at’ is the rime. Using the word family ‘at’ children can make other words e.g. bat, fat, hat, mat. Once children grasp that that one word can be used to generate other words this often helps both their reading and writing skills.

Mairéad Ní Mhurchú (1998) explains how children with the ability to use onset and rime can recite nursery rhymes, they can tell you if words they hear (or see pictures of) rhyme with one

another and can think up words to rhyme with a visual cue or orally presented word as well as generating rhyming words independently.

(c) Phonemic awareness is the awareness that spoken language consists of a sequence of phonemes (a single unit of sound). Time spent on word play, nursery rhymes, riddles, and general exposure to storybooks develops phonemic awareness (PDST, 2013).

4.3.4 Phonics

Systematic phonics instruction has been defined as follows by the Department for Education and Skills in London (DES) (2006):

> Phonics is a method of instruction that teaches students correspondences between graphemes (letters) in written language and phonemes (sounds) in spoken language and how to use these correspondences to read and spell. Phonics instruction is systematic when all the major grapheme–phoneme correspondences are taught and they are covered in a clearly defined sequence (DES, 2006, p. 18).

It is important that phonics be taught early in a systematic and structured way and is best preceded by training in phonological awareness. PDST (2013) advises that students should understand that letters have a name and represent sounds in words. Letters may represent a number of different sounds depending on their position in the word and the surrounding letters (PDST, 2013, p. 27).

PDST (2013) suggests this sequence for teaching phonics:

> The ability to say the sounds of the letters
> The ability to sound out and read consonant vowel consonant (CVC) words
> The ability to sound out and read 4 letter words with initial and final blends (short vowel sounds)
> The ability to understand and read magic e words (long vowel sounds)
> The ability to understand and read vowel digraphs (long vowel sounds)
> The ability to segment and read multisyllabic words (PDST, 2013, p.29).

Research has shown that phonological awareness activities combined with instruction in sound-symbol relations have a positive effect on reading and writing ability (NICHHD, 2000).

4.3.5 Comprehension

'The ultimate objective of reading is comprehension or the reconstruction of meaning' (DES, English Curriculum, Teacher Guidelines, 1999). The teaching of reading according to PDST (2013) needs to include a range of comprehension strategies which need to be explicitly taught towards developing independent readers who engage meaningfully with text. By dividing instruction into pre-reading, during reading and post-reading, teachers can design activities for each stage that will improve student's comprehension (PDST, 2013, p. 9).

That leads me to a very exciting publication by Ann Courtney and Martin Gleeson 'Building Bridges of Understanding: Theory and Actual Classroom Practices in Multiple Comprehension Strategy Instruction' (2010). The purpose of this study was the promotion of a strategic approach to comprehension instruction and the development of appropriate resources to help with implementation in the Irish primary classrooms. Nine teachers were trained in effective comprehension instruction and fully supported over a two year period – the second one involving the promotion of a whole school approach.

Comprehension Strategy Instruction (CSI) is an essential component of effective early reading instruction. It enables children to become purposeful, active readers who are in control of their own reading comprehension. Courtney & Gleeson (2010) outline the strategies that form the core of an instructional framework in CSI: prediction; visualisation; making connections; questioning; inferring; clarification; determining importance and synthesis.

Courtney & Gleeson (2010) argue that research has shown that the translation of theory to classroom practice presents a formidable challenge and that teachers are not aware of the steps necessary to ensure rigorous, strategic reading in classrooms (Dole, 2000, Pressley, 2000, Courtney, King, Pedro, 2006). They outline Irish studies which find that the teaching of comprehension strategies is one of the weakest aspects of reading instruction (DES, 2005a,

Martin & Morgan, 1994, Shiel & Hogan, 1997). The Learning Support guidelines (DES, 2000) recognise that strategy instruction can improve pupils' performances greatly but gives little assistance to teachers to engage with this. Courtney & Gleeson's (2010) study endeavours to provide teachers with clarity of purpose and a range of appropriate resources to facilitate a strategic approach to children's comprehension development.

A very detailed teachers' manual has been produced to aid schools in implementing this approach and will enable schools to teach comprehension from the earliest stages of children's literacy development. Courtney & Gleeson (2010) suggest that it is time to update the 1999 English Language Curriculum to take cognisance of current research in the area of children's comprehension development.

Courtney & Gleeson (2010) also propose that the curriculum would benefit from a concise explanation of the process of comprehension involving the transaction between the reader, text and context and the variable associated with effective comprehension instruction such as children's word identification skills; vocabulary knowledge; oral reading fluency; background knowledge; oral language proficiency; cognitive capacity; ability to apply a strategic approach to reading and motivation.

CSI would require a whole school approach, where high quality picture books need to be widely available. It promotes inclusive practice by enabling children of all abilities to engage with the text. There is also potential for team teaching with this approach. While I have addressed the essential skills of literacy I feel it is important to consider assessment in reading, as teachers need to be familiar with assessment methods to develop their teaching strategies and to consider where to go and what to do to improve literacy skills in their pupils.

4.4 Assessment

4.4.1 Assessment in Reading

Schools measure the effectiveness of reading initiatives in many different ways according to PDST (2013) but to do this it is crucial that we gather and analyse information before we begin an initiative, so that on conclusion we can repeat a similar assessment in order to measure the success of the initiative.

> Assessment is the process of generating, gathering, recording, interpreting, using and reporting evidence of learning in individuals, groups or systems, which relies upon a number of instruments, one of which may be a test. Educational assessment provides information about progress in learning (Assessment in the Primary School Curriculum, Guidelines for Schools, NCCA, 2007, p. 4).

PDST (2013) outlines some of the many sources of evidence that we can use to monitor pupils' reading development and the impact of our reading initiatives:

- Self-assessment – Using questionnaires, Reading logs, Use of tools to reflect on positive aspects of work and area for improvement – WWW – what went well, Two stars and a wish, Ladders (NCCA, 2007, p. 85), Rule of thumb when choosing books, Prompts, KWL - know already – what I want to know and what I have learned
- Conferencing – Guided reading, independent reading and conferencing record sheet teacher/parent
- Portfolio Assessment – Running Records, Taped Reading
- Concept Mapping – Graphic Organisers
- Questioning – using Bloom's Taxonomy of Questioning (NCCA, 2007, pp. 86-88)
- Comprehension Development using CSI
- Teacher Observation – using checklists, running records and Drumcondra English Profiles
- Teacher-Designed Tasks and Tests – including oral assignments, individual tasks, group tasks and cloze tests
- Standardised Testing – The NCCA (2007, pp. 62-65) gives advice to schools on interpreting standardised test results in English reading and reporting of these to parents. Examples: Middle Infant Screening Test (MIST), Micra T, Drumcondra Reading Test. Whole school analysis of standardised tests can be done with Excel – a simple tool which can be used to compile and analyse whole school results in English.

- Diagnostic tests – Neale Analysis, Running records, Aston Index are some examples and these are carried out by at trained teachers (PDST, 2013, pp. 31-34).

Teachers are continually gathering evidence of their pupils' progress in class and use this information to inform their planning. Standardised test results may be interpreted in different ways and at different levels and can feed into the building of a whole school picture. This whole-school picture allows teachers to identify trends, whole school strengths and areas for improvement and can be used as a basis for whole school planning in English (PDST, 2013, p. 33).

4.4.2 Trinity Early Screening Test in Reading and Writing (TEST2r)

Pauline Cogan (2015) has been engaged in research to develop the Trinity Early Screening Test for Reading and Writing (TEST2*r*) for some time with the support of the Department of Education and Skills. In April 2015, Pauline along with Blackrock Education Centre published a manual for teachers as the first step towards launching this new test instrument in the Irish context.

> TEST2*r* (Trinity Early Screening Test in Reading and Writing) comprises both an initial screening test for 5- and 6-year olds and a follow-up diagnostic test for individual children who may be at risk of developing dyslexia. It is designed to be administered by classroom teachers, and is intended to identify potential difficulties before children fail. Appropriate interventions can take place early in the child's school career when they can have most effect and will enable the teacher to intervene early, thereby avoiding the trauma of reading failure….. Up to 200 teachers from all over Ireland voluntarily gave a great deal of time to administering the research instruments over a period of 6 years. By such active participation in their own professional development, they have ensured the authenticity of the research and have exemplified the best standards of professionalism (Cogan, 2015, Foreword)

TEST2*r* is divided into two parts. Part one constitutes a rapid screener test, which is made up of five subtests (tasks) for use by the classroom teacher:

1. Letter knowledge: Upper and Lower Case: Muter and Snowling (1998), Riley (1996) and Clay (1985) all found that the ability to identify and label the letters of the alphabet was a powerful predictor of successful reading (Cogan, 2015, p.4)

2. Rhyme Recognition Oddity: The research of Bradley and Bryant (1983) has demonstrated that failure to learn to categorise sounds has negative implications for reading acquisition (Cogan, 2015, p. 8)

3. Phonetic Spelling: Snowling, Gallagher and Frith (2003) found that a task involving transcoding sounds to letters can identify 6-year-old high-risk children (Cogan, 2015, p. 16)

4. Copying: The development of copying skills is considered to have implications for the development of later letter formation, writing skills and perceptual matching skills (Cogan, 2015, p. 16)

5. Rapid Automatised Naming (RAN) Digits: RAN assesses the speed with which a child can access the names of a series of digits set down in print and is very important for later reading comprehension skill (Cogan, 2015, p. 28). Badian, McAnulty, Duffy and Als (1990) found that RAN by kindergarten children differentiated dyslexics from normal readers in fourth class literacy tests with 98% correct classification.

These five subtests will be administered to all the children in the class as a means of formative assessment. If a child does not perform well in a particular subtest (or subtests), then the Learning Support will administer Part 2 which are more diagnostic in nature in order to clarify any literacy subskill needs. These diagnostic subtests will further examine the child's emergent

literacy skills and will lay out an intervention programme as necessary. Resources for interventions can be accessed at www.ldr.ie. How the child performs will determine the intensity and duration of the intervention.

In April 2015 training sessions were conducted with interested teachers who have volunteered to be involved in the norm-gathering stage of TEST2*r*. These teachers have been trained in the administration of TEST2*r* as well as in how to randomly select the children. Parental consent will be obtained and parents will be informed that TEST2*r* is made up of tasks which assess the child's progress towards literacy. This testing will be conducted in October 2015 and will be completed by the end of October 2015 in order that national norms can be made available to every school who wishes to use TEST2*r*. The availability of TEST2*r* is a very exciting development in Irish primary schools as it will answer a number of needs which exist today, such as objectively identifying young children at risk of literacy difficulties early on, diagnosing the cause of these and providing interventions to address them.

In the next section I refer to some effective interventions for struggling readers and ways of helping pupils to progress their literacy skills.

4.5 Effective interventions for Struggling Readers

The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) (2012) published 'A Good Practice Guide for Teachers', which is based on current knowledge in relation to effective interventions for struggling readers. The guide is for teachers, particularly learning support and resource teachers as well as teachers in special education settings. It covers the age range 6 years to 18 years with the focus on reading skills: the ability to decode and understand text (NEPS, 2012, p. 2). In Section 2 they outline the elements which should all form part of an effective

programme for reading instruction, based on research by The National Reading Panel (NRP), 2000; Scammaca et al., 2007; Singleton, 2009; Kennedy et al., 2012; Eurydice Network, 2011:

- Phonemic awareness and the teaching of phonics
- Decoding and word studies including the learning of sight vocabulary
- Language development including vocabulary development
- The explicit teaching of comprehension strategies
- Meaningful writing experiences
- The development of fluent reading by reading and rereading familiar texts
- A wide-range of reading materials
- Opportunities for both guided and independent reading

(NEPS, 2012, p. 5).

NEPS (2012) advises that teachers need to ensure that students are given a healthy balanced diet of literacy activities and that they need to seek out interventions relevant to their particular context and the individual needs of the student. NEPS (2012) also argue that teachers need to have high expectations of their students. When it comes to failing readers, ordinary class teaching is not enough and specialist interventions are required (Brooks, 2007; Singleton, 2009). They contend that once an evidence-based programme is selected, it should be taught with fidelity – a highly structured, systematic approach has been found to be the most effective (NEPS, 2012, p. 10). The report offers details of different teaching approaches – the systematic teaching of phonics, teaching sight vocabulary, small group or 1:1 tuition, frequency and duration of interventions, teaching to the point of automaticity, teaching students to read fluently, assessment and monitoring, computer assisted learning and motivating and engaging students. Evidence that was collected over four years of action research by NEPS, has indicated that there are a number of interventions that have proven to be effective in Irish schools. Five of these are described in this report:

1. Acceleread/Acclewrite -a computer based programme
2. Peer Reading - learner reader matched with non-professional
3. Toe by Toe - individualised highly structured programme that teaches phonic skills
4. SNIP - suitable for students in upper primary – precision teaching of sight vocabulary
5. ARROW - Aural-Read-Respond-Oral-Write (NEPS, 2012, pp. 25-29).

NEPS (2012) advises that it is important to appreciate that there is research evidence to support the use of other interventions such as 'Reading Recovery' and 'Literacy Catch-Up', but that the interventions they are showcasing in this report are those that were involved in the NEPS research (NEPS, 2012, p. 24).

In the next section I present strategies in use in schools in Ireland to improve literacy with particular reference to 'Station Teaching' and 'Guided Reading' as this is the focus of my research.

4.6 Strategies in use in schools to improve literacy

With the introduction of the Revised Primary School Curriculum, (DES, 1999) came a hunger for new methods of teaching literacy. Integration and inclusion were also the buzz words and teachers were seeking strategies for integrating children with special needs into mainstream classrooms. Differentiation was the key to meeting individual needs of pupils but help was required in implementing this in the classroom. In 2005 the Department of Education and Science granted additional teaching resources based on the total enrolment in schools in the format of the General Allocation model with a recommendation for in class support for pupils over withdrawal from class.

4.6.1 Peer Tutoring

King (2006) published a practical guide to 'Special Education in Irish classrooms' offering alternative teaching methods, resources and groupings in an attempt to meet the needs of all pupils (p.vii). King outlines models of in-class support: peer tutoring, parallel teaching, co-operative learning, station teaching, one teacher – one support teacher and whole class teaching. King's main focus is on 'Peer tutoring' and provides detailed guidelines for implementing 'Peer Tutoring' in schools in different areas:

- for reading, accuracy and fluency
- for reading comprehension
- for creative writing
- for spelling.

King followed up this with training courses for teachers and a video to help teachers implement these strategies.

4.6.2 Reading Recovery

'Reading Recovery' is a school based early intervention programme designed to provide children who have particular difficulties in reading and writing with intensive individual teaching. Woods and Henderson (2008) describe how the 'Reading Recovery' program developed by Clay (1993b) is conducted by teachers trained by 'Reading Recovery' tutors and supervised by trainers. It is based in a cognitive theory of reading acquisition, as theorized by Clay (1991). 'Reading Recovery' involves daily, individualised instruction of students who are removed from the classroom for this instruction.

A typical 'Reading Recovery' tutoring session would include each of these activities as the format of the daily lesson:

- Reading two or more familiar books
- Rereading yesterday's new book and taking a running record
- Working with letter identification
- Breaking words into parts
- Composing and writing a story
- Hearing and recording sounds in words
- Reconstructing the cut-up story listening to the new book introduction
- Attempting to read the new book (Clay, 2005).

Woods and Henderson (2002) published a critique of 'Reading Recovery' as a program, as a way to begin problematizing early interventions as a solution for literacy failure. They suggested that students might be learning ways of 'doing' literacy within the constraining and disciplining context of 'Reading Recovery', and that might not serve them well in other literacy learning contexts such as their classrooms (Groves, 1994; Woods, 2004). Although Clay (1993b) states that there is room for individual variations in lesson plans providing there is a sound rationale, Woods and Henderson (2008) contend that 'Reading Recovery' lessons 'closely follow this structure, timing and sequence in the many contexts in which they are delivered' (2008, p. 254). Clay (1993b) claims that skilled teachers should 'select the activities needed by a particular child' (1993b, p. 19) but Woods and Henderson (2008) argue that this 'selection only occurs from the procedures and problems detailed within the model's source book' (2008, p. 255).

In this study Woods and Henderson (2008) investigated and analysed Eloise, a student, during her involvement in the 'Reading Recovery' programme in her school. In particular they analysed the shifting ways to be a reader required of Eloise during a 'Reading Recovery' lesson. In this article they demonstrated 'how the shifting subjectivities required of students within'

Reading Recovery' lessons in fact run counter to learning even this narrow band of literacy skills and processes' (2008, p. 264). They argue that the 'competence required to negotiate various literacy contexts across one morning of learning adds to the complexity of school-based literacy learning as much as it might provide support' (2008, p. 251). Woods and Henderson (2008) are concerned about the destructive potential of 'one-size-fits-all' programs and the 'potential for such programs to widen the gap between those who are successful at school-based literacy learning and those who are not' (2008, p. 265). All programs have their critics, but this study shows that these authors think that perhaps 'Reading Recovery' is too prescriptive. They do not like the fact that the students are withdrawn from their regular class for this extra tuition. The authors seem to think that the program is too confining and that the improvements that students make are not transferable to other literacy activities. It is from the 'Reading Recovery' model that 'Literacy Lift Off' or 'Station Teaching' originated, but in this case all pupils receive extra tuition in their own classroom, no pupil is singled out for separate tuition in another room.

4.6.3 Co-teaching

Early literacy development can be developed through co-teaching. Tiernan and Kerins at the Reading Association of Ireland conference (RAI) (2014) describe how there are many co-teaching models identified in the literature (Conderman, Bresnahan and Pederson, 2009; Vaughn, Schumm and Arguelles, 1997) which include 'lead and support', 'parallel teaching', 'alternative teaching', 'station teaching' and 'team teaching'. Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain & Shamberger (2010) describe how co-teaching can be viewed as 'a reasonable response to the increasing difficulty of a single professional keeping up with all the knowledge and skills necessary to meet the instructional needs of the diverse student population' (Friend

et al., 2010, p. 11). They allude to recent policy changes in the United States which has ensured the rapid evolvement of co-teaching as a strategy for ensuring that all students have access to the same curriculum as other students while still receiving the specialized instruction to which they are entitled (Friend et al., 2010, p. 9). Villa, Thousand & Nevin (2008) espouse that with inclusion on the rise teachers are sharing classrooms more than ever in co-teaching partnerships to differentiate instruction but Villa et al. (2008) advise that the goal is always to improve the educational outcomes of students through the selected co-teaching strategies. Tiernan & Kerins (RAI, 2014) caution that effective 'co-teaching' requires consideration of a number of issues such as roles and responsibilities of the teachers who engage in the process, approaches to planning and organisational decisions.

Kerins, P., & Tiernan, B. (2014) published an article in the Journal of Special Needs Education in Ireland on *Inclusive planning: Supporting the development of early literacy skills through co-teaching in the junior infant classroom.* This article describes how the development of early literacy skills can be achieved in mainstream junior infant classes through co-teaching. Kerins & Tiernan (2014) focus on 'Station Teaching' as a model of in-class support for a pupil with special educational needs. 'Station-Teaching' is also portrayed as an effective co-teaching model for facilitating the development of early literacy skills in all pupils. Advice is given on how to plan for an effective 'Station-Teaching' intervention in the area of early literacy using a five-stage approach. The importance of inclusive planning to meet the needs of all pupils is highlighted (2014, p. 91).

Martina Horkan and Bairbre Tiernan (2014) published an article in the Journal of the Irish Learning Support Association on '*In-class Support: Investigating the Impact of Station Teaching on Reading Attainment'*. The authors – Horkan & Tiernan (2014) allude to the recommendations from the Government of Ireland's policy of inclusion (2004) of in-class

alternatives to the withdrawal model of support for addressing special educational needs (SEN) in the mainstream classroom. Their article details a 'study which investigated an in-class support model of 'Station Teaching' for the teaching of reading in a consecutive-grade class of nineteen first and second class pupils' (Horkan & Tiernan, 2014, p. 50). Horkan & Tiernan (2014) outline many co-teaching models such as: 'One teaches, one supports'; 'Parallel teaching'; 'Team-teaching'; 'Peer-tutoring'; 'Co-operative learning' and 'Station Teaching'. The aim of this particular action research study was 'to design, implement, review and evaluate an in-class support intervention using the 'Station-Teaching' model' (2014, p. 53). The 'Station Teaching' intervention was chosen as so many pupils were presenting with SEN and were in the cohort for whom early intervention is recommended (DES, 2000). The pupils were tested pre and post intervention and the intervention was timetabled for 45 minutes, four days per week, for eight weeks. The research intervention produced some interesting results in terms of the pupils' reading attainment. The majority of the pupils achieved an increase in terms of reading age from greater than one month to two years (2014, p. 56). However the research reveals a complex picture and 'comparison of the pre-and post-intervention MICRA-T (Wall and Burke, 2004) assessments disappointingly appears to provide minimal data supporting the assertion that this intervention improved student academic achievement' (2014, p. 60). The results also suggest that the intervention was more successful at first class than second class level, pointing to the importance and success of early intervention, as recommended in the literature (DES, 2000; NICHHD, 2000). The intervention was more successful for pupils in the average range but not for pupils in the high ranges, who appeared to make small gains, leading to the suggestion that additional differentiation of activities would be needed for future co-teaching intervention. However the findings revealed positive outcomes, both academic and otherwise, for the pupils identified with reading difficulties. Horkan and Tiernan (2014) conclude that 'Station Teaching' as an inclusive co-teaching model of in-class support should

not be the only support model utilised in promoting reading attainment in Irish primary schools (2014, p. 62).

Friend et al. (2010) refer to different co-teaching approaches including 'Station Teaching' which they define as an approach in which 'instruction is divided into three nonsequential parts and students, likewise divided into three groups, rotate from station to station, being taught by the teachers at two stations and working independently at the third' (Friend et al., 2010, p. 12).

4.7 Station Teaching in primary schools in Ireland

Lynch (INTO) (2011) describes 'Station Teaching' as a whole-class Literacy intervention. Many schools are now implementing this approach and it has been called by many names according to Lynch (INTO) (2011) – 'Intensive Literacy', 'Power hour', 'Literacy hour', 'Station Teaching' and 'Literacy Lift Off'.

'Station Teaching' is particularly 'suitable as a model of in-class support for development of early literacy skills in the infant classes, as it allows for variation in activities and for pupil movement in the classroom after relatively short intervals' (Tiernan & Kerins, RAI, 2014). 'Station Teaching' or 'Literacy Lift Off' is an intensive intervention of Reading and Writing for a set number of weeks based on the principles of 'Reading Recovery'. 'Station Teaching' takes place 'when a number of activities are set up at stations in a classroom, with pupils moving from station to station over the course of a set time period' (Conderman, Bresnahan and Pederson, 2009). Satty O'Riordan, (2011) a 'Reading Recovery' leader based in Cork Education Support Centre, explains how since 2003 many 'Reading Recovery' teachers in Ireland have established collaborative professional learning communities in their schools and have been sharing the 'Reading Recovery' approach to literacy learning with class teachers.

This programme gives pupils many opportunities to read books at their own level of competency. Children are equipped with the necessary problem-solving skills to improve their reading and writing. The aim is to make pupils constructive learners. 'Literacy Lift Off' is what Taylor et al (1999) would describe as a 'push-in collaborative model of intervention' (1999, p. 29) whereby members of the Special Education team, in collaboration with the class teacher, work in the classroom every morning for six to eight weeks in four or five eight to ten minute rotating sessions on a range of literacy activities which mirror the activities in a 'Reading Recovery' lesson. These activities include:

- Re-reading familiar books to build fluency and confidence
- Being introduced to and attempting to read a new book
- Composing and recording their own messages
- Exploring how words work using magnetic letters and whiteboards (O'Riordan, NASC, 2011, p. 48).

4.7.1 Getting 'Station Teaching' started

This intervention is usually done in Senior Infants / First class. Some Education centres are running training workshops for teachers interested in implementing this approach. Teachers will have opportunities to develop skills and strategies in the teaching of literacy and will acquire knowledge and skills to initiate a school-based 'Literacy Lift Off' programme.

Staff and pupils of Creagh National School, Ballinasloe, Co. Galway shared their reading initiative with PDST (2011) and they outline some suggestions for preparatory work in setting up the intervention. They recommend doing a running record on every child in the class to find out their instructional level, putting children in groups of five/six according to their level, having four or five teachers prepared to work with the class and each teacher taking responsibility for a different part of the lesson. Teachers need to meet before the intervention

to discuss the aims and procedures for each ‘station’, one person needs to take responsibility for the timer every eight minutes. As well as running records they recommend that schools choose other entrance and exit tests so as they can measure the efficacy of the intervention (2011, p.7).

4.7.2 Outline of the ‘Stations’: advice for teachers

PDST (2011) advised teachers to use these Stations in ST:

- Familiar reading: the purpose of this Station is to promote enjoyment, fluency, comprehension and speed. Children read the same story in round robin. Teachers do not interrupt the reading. As the children are reading teachers should note what is going well and one or two things they want to draw the group’s attention to e.g. a good self-correction or something that didn’t sound right, look right or make sense or a good visual analysis.
- Word work: the purpose of this Station is to show children how words work so that they can make a fast visual analysis of their reading. Magnetic letters are used to show children how words are composed of letters and sometimes have ‘bits that look the same and sound the same’. This is based on words that they know and are in the reading.
- Writing: the purpose of this Station is that the children will learn how they can write their own messages by hearing and recording sounds in words, using analogy and learning unusual words (by ‘look, cover, write, check’). Children compose a sentence and have-a-go at writing it. The teacher helps them problem solve by showing them how to hear and record sounds in words (using sound boxes) or by using analogy (If I can spell “tack” I can spell “cracking”). On the practice page the children can try out words and every day they must learn one or two words or practise one or two words that they already know.
- New Book: the purpose of this Station is to allow children daily practice in attempting to read new material. The children learn to use strategic activities to read new texts. The teacher prepares the children for success by giving them the plot of the story and introducing them to any new or unusual words or phrases. As the children are reading the new text the teacher directs them to the most effective strategy to use at any given time. This strategy might be a prompt to meaning (e.g. Where were the children going?), to visual information (e.g. Cover the ‘ing’ or ‘can you see a bit you know’) or to structure (e.g. predict how the phrase might end) (PDST, 2011, pp 7-8).

PDST (2011) suggests that if there are more than twenty five children in the class it might be necessary to have a fifth activity especially if 'Station Teaching' is being used. This could be a listening Station where either an adult (e.g. a parent) reads a story or the children listen to a story on headphones.

Furthermore PDST (2011) advises that if children are to read for meaning they need to read in a phrased and fluent manner and this should be encouraged at all times. Children need to be encouraged to monitor their own reading and writing. They should know that when it doesn't sound right, look right, or make sense they need to re-read and correct. In order to read fluently children need to be able to problem solve words on the run. A critical aspect of this approach to teaching literacy is matching books to individual children. Every child gets a new book each day so schools need multiple copies of books, banded along a continuum of difficulty. (PDST, 2011, p. 8)

In 'Station Teaching' when children are engaged in the two Stations with reading they are learning skills and behaviours that enable them to read new and familiar material in a meaningful way with the focus on 'Guided Reading'. Teachers need to be aware of the Zone of Proximal development (ZPD) when engaging in 'Guided reading' during 'Station Teaching' so that children gain maximum benefit from the Stations.

4.7.3 Guided Reading

In 'Guided Reading', Key Stage 2, Hobsbaum et al. (2006) maintain that the theoretical foundation of guided reading lies in the work of Vygotsky. 'His view of the teachers as guide has been applied to many educational settings, and his concept of the scaffolding provided by an expert to help a novice to scale the heights is often invoked' (Wood, 1998). Scaffolding is

a temporary structure which helps learners move on to the next step on the ladder; it will be unnecessary once they can achieve this without help. The goal of 'Guided Reading' according to Hobsbaum et al. (2006) is to enable learners to become independent, able to read, understand and appreciate texts on their own without the teacher's help (2006, p. 3).

In 'Guided Reading' the teacher has an explicit reading role, to point out the relevant features in text and ensure the children have the strategies to cope with them. Hobsbaum et al. (2006) have called it 'Guided Reading' to emphasise the importance of the teacher's role. They explain how 'by guiding their pupils' reading, the teacher is enhancing reading strategies so that they will be able to internalise these approaches and apply them when reading independently. By reading with a guide, pupils will be able to read with more awareness and understanding and will bring these skills to bear when they tackle texts alone' (2006, p. 5). Fountas & Pinnell (F&P) (1996) define 'Guided Reading' as an approach in which the teacher works with a small group of pupils who use similar reading processes and can read similar levels of text with support (as cited in Beard, 2000, p. 430). Beard (2000) further explains how the teacher introduces the text to a group, then works with individuals as they simultaneously read their own copy and that the teacher may select one or two points for the whole group to consolidate or extend their reading experience. Beard (2000) asserts that the ultimate goal of 'Guided reading' is to help children learn how to use independent reading strategies successfully (2000, p. 430).

Stephen Graham (2015) is a well-known Australian educationalist who gives workshops worldwide on 'Guided Reading'. He asserts that it is the strategy that is having the greatest impact on reading. Graham (2015) describes how in 'Guided Reading' situations teachers work with one student or a small group of students to read and learn about text. He explains that in 'Guided Reading' situations:

‘Teachers – support, prompt, guide, questions, scaffold, observe, instruct, make inferences about further reading, assess and record.

Students – try, explore, problem-solve, experiment, take risks, approximate, predict, self-correct and practise’ (2015, p. 3).

Graham (2015) speaks about the three qualities of a balanced reader: they have to be able to decode – say the words on a page using phonological awareness and phonics, they have to be able to read with fluency and phrasing and they have to be able to comprehend. Graham (2015) contends that a balanced reader can do all three of these on a wide range of texts and genres but that texts have to be levelled and he recommends using Marie Clay’s (2002) criteria for levelling texts for guided reading.

The use of levelled readers is a common practice in many schools today and is underpinned by the belief according to Kontovourki (2012), that children learning to read need to be introduced to texts that are not too difficult, that struggling readers need exposure to texts that do not cause frustration, and that skilled readers need to develop their proficiency through exposure to challenging texts. Reading instruction aims to develop independent readers and the use of levelled readers can support this aim (Tiernan, 2015 in press).

F&P (1999) are leading voices in the area of guided reading instruction and have rooted their products and teaching in the work of Marie Clay one of which is the F& P Text Level Gradient which was first introduced in ‘Guided Reading: Good First Teaching for All Children’ (1996). This F & P Text Level Gradient is often referred to as Guided Reading Levels and directs teachers towards selecting the most appropriate texts for pupils. F&P (1999) contend that the goal of ‘Guided Reading’ is to bring the child to the level of complex texts appropriate for the grade. In doing so, they argue, teaching must begin with where the child can read and

understand with some success, so that there is a point of contact, thereby engaging the child's development of a self-extending system for processing texts.

To conclude I will cite Graham's (2015) summary of 'Guided Reading' thus:

> 'Guided Reading' is
>
> - The right book
> - In the hands
> - Of the right child
> - At the right time (Graham, 2015, p. 2).

4.8 Conclusion

In this chapter I began by setting the context for effective teaching of literacy according to Kennedy et al. (2012) in their commissioned report for the NCCA. Next I reported on the findings from studies on reading practice in Irish primary classrooms followed by the *Growing Up in Ireland* study. I outlined what needs to be taught in the early years in literacy as children's early literacy is a learned skill (Ding, 2012). Its development during the early years is extremely important for the acquisition of advanced literacy skills (Cunningham and Stanovich, 1997; Entwisle et al., 2005; Boscardin, Muthén, Francis, and Baker, 2008). I also discussed Assessment in reading and outlined some effective interventions for struggling readers (NEPS, 2012).

I presented strategies in use in schools to improve literacy: 'Peer tutoring', 'Reading Recovery' and 'Co-teaching'. Finally I outlined 'Station Teaching' and 'Guided Reading' as interventions to improve literacy in the early years' classrooms. In my empirical study I focus on the implementation of 'Station Teaching' as an intervention for improving literacy in the Infant classes in primary school.

Chapter 5: Research Design

5.1 Introduction: Choice of design

This chapter describes the research design for this study of the implementation of Station Teaching in junior classes in primary schools. I outline the research questions and present the rationale for choosing a mixed methods approach. I have divided the chapter into two sections, one dealing with the quantitative approach and the second with the qualitative approach. In each approach I have detailed all the salient considerations as recommended by Mertens (2010): sample; measures; pilot testing – questionnaire and observation schedule; conducting surveys and interviews; data collection procedures and data analysis; ethical dilemmas; limitations of the study and timelines.

> Research design can be thought of 'as answering the questions: who gets what when? It involves decisions about how many groups to have and how many times to administer the dependent variable with an eye to controlling threats to validity' (Mertens, 2010, p. 132).

Each research study is unique and rather than favouring one method of research over another, it is important to choose the method that is appropriate for the research study being undertaken. Silverman (2005) contends that no method of research, quantitative or qualitative, is intrinsically better than any other and each research study has its own particular design (2005, p. 6). Very often a combination of methods is necessary. Denscombe (2003) advocates using more than one method of research when investigating a topic. He says that researchers should recognise the value of using multi-methods for the corroboration of findings and for enhancing the validity of data.

What must be examined to establish how a research study will be carried out are the specific research questions (McCarthy, 2011, p. 72).

The research questions of this study were outlined in the introductory chapter as follows:

1. *How is Station Teaching implemented?*

2. *What is the experience of the intervention Station Teaching from the participants' point of view: teachers, pupils, parents?*

3. *What notion of literacy is Station Teaching facilitating?*

Relying on one research method alone would fail to provide full answers to the research questions. In my study both quantitative and qualitative methods were required so I have chosen to use the mixed methods design in researching my topic on the implementation of Station Teaching as a literacy intervention in junior classes.

Mixed methods designs according to Teddlie & Tashakkori (2009) include both qualitative and quantitative features in the design, data collection, and analysis. Mertens (2010) contends that 'mixed methods can refer to the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods to answer research questions in a single study, as well as those studies that are part of larger research programme' (2010, p. 293).

Mixed methods can be approached from a pragmatic or transformative paradigm. Teddlie & Tashakkori (2009) propose the use of pragmatism as one philosophical orientation to guide mixed method researchers. According to Mertens (2010) pragmatists consider 'the research question to be more important than either the method they use or the worldview that is supposed to underline the method. These researchers use the criterion 'what works?' to determine which method to use to answer a specific research question' (2010, p. 296). Teddlie & Tashakkori (2009) describe the pragmatic researcher this way:

> Pragmatists decide what they want to study based on what is important within their personal value systems. They then study the topic in a way that is congruent with their

> value system, including units of analysis and variables that they feel are most likely to yield interesting responses (2009, pp. 90-91).

Mertens (2010) maintains that qualitative and quantitative data collection can occur in parallel form or sequential form. Parallel form is when concurrent mixed methods/model designs in which two types of data are collected and analysed and sequential form is when one type of data provides a basis for collection of another type of data. Mertens (2010) favours the term parallel as she feels it is a more inclusive term with the inference from parallel that the two methods occur in proximity to each other. Onwuegbuzie & Teddlie (2002) in Mertens (2010) describe the Pragmatic Parallel Mixed Methods Design as one in which qualitative and quantitative data are collected and analysed to answer a single study's research questions. The final inferences are based on both data analysis results and the two types of data are collected independently at the same time or with a short time lag (2010, p. 298).

In my study the quantitative data were collected from a questionnaire issued to teachers in 21 schools in Ireland. I was interested in examining the national picture around the implementation of a literacy intervention - Station Teaching in other schools. Going from the macro to the micro I also collected qualitative data from a case study in a school on the implementation of Station Teaching in Junior and Senior infant classes.

The qualitative data included observations of classes, interviews – both individual and focus group, as well as using children's drawings, photographs and video evidence to give a complete picture of the implementation of the intervention. In the next section I report in detail on how I collected my qualitative data.

On 28 March 2013 I received ethical approval from the Social Research Ethics Committee (SREC) in University College Cork (UCC) for my research. This involved submitting a detailed application form outlining a description of my project: the aims of the project; a description and justification of methods and resources to be used including copies of

questionnaire survey; an interview protocol and observation schedule; recruitment methods of participants; a statement of ethical issues raised by the project; arrangements for informing participants about the nature of the study; how I obtain informed consent and estimated start date and duration of the project. It also includes assurances of the confidentiality of the data, maintaining anonymity for the participants and ensuring no risk to participants in involvement in the study. The letter of ethical approval states 'I am pleased to say that we see no ethical impediment to your research as proposed and we are happy to grant approval' (SREC, 2013) (Appendix 1).

Firstly I report on how I collected my quantitative data.

5.2 Quantitative data: Questionnaire survey

5.2.1 The postal survey

For this part of my research I collected quantitative data through the use of a questionnaire survey. Surveys according to Mertens (2010) 'rely on individuals' self-reports of their knowledge, attitudes, or behaviors. Thus the validity of the information is contingent on the honesty of the respondents' (2010, p. 173). I was interested in teachers' practices with regard to Station Teaching in other schools around the country apart from my own school. I chose to use the mail option for data collection. Mertens (2010) recommends that 'mail surveys are good for collecting detailed information in a closed-ended format, the cost is relatively low, and they can allow a respondent to consult records before responding .. and the disadvantages of mail surveys are that the surveyor does not have an opportunity to probe for more in-depth answers or to determine if the respondent understood the questions appropriately' (2010, p. 178). I was

not worried about probing more deeply as I knew I would be conducting interviews with teachers as part of my qualitative approach.

5.2.2 Questionnaire design

I used the 'simple descriptive approach' which Mertens (2010) describes as 'a one-shot survey for the purpose of describing the characteristics of a sample at one point in time' (2010, p. 177). I opted for a semi-structured questionnaire, which Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) describe as a powerful tool, it has a clear structure, sequence and focus in that the researcher sets the agenda but the respondents have the chance to reply in their own terms (2007, p. 321). The questions may be mixed in that some are closed and others open-ended (McCarthy, 2011). Closed formats according to Mertens (2010) include questions in which the respondent chooses from a list of possible options for example multiple choice questions, true-false questions, scalar questions, or a checklist that asks the respondent to mark all that apply or to select from a list of response options. Open formats are questions that allow respondents to answer in their own words (2010, p. 188). I used a combination of both of these formats in my questionnaire. Attention was paid to the layout of the survey, the font and formatting, question organisation and sequence and completion instructions (Mertens, 2010).

The questionnaire was 8 pages in length including the cover page with instructions for completion and return details as well as assurances of confidentiality. The title of the questionnaire was 'Teachers' views and experience of Station Teaching in primary schools' (Appendix 2). It comprised 4 sections.

Section 1 deals with School information, four closed questions: type of teacher; number on staff; what class they teach and how many pupils. All this is straightforward quantifiable data.

These help to further define the sample surveyed and to depict the everyday settings of such practitioners.

Section 2 covers the Implementation of Station Teaching (ST) as a literacy intervention, 11 closed questions: questions on who co-ordinates ST in school; which classes; how long the intervention lasts (tick one box out of list of 4 and space for 'other'); how many adults involved; if SNAs are involved; how many pupils in each group; which Stations teachers have in a class (tick the box from a list of eight activities and a space for 'other'); how many minutes pupils spend at each Station and do teachers or pupils move from Station to Station?

Section 3 details Selection of groups, resources and teaching approaches, four closed questions: identify the assessment methods for grouping pupils (multiple choice of seven); are groups of similar or mixed ability; are all pupils engaged in ST and tick the resources used in ST (list of 14 and space for 'other').

Section 4 asks Teachers' views on ST, 12 questions. Nine of these questions were open-ended asking teachers if they think ST covers the relevant aspects of literacy for their pupils; which aspects are well catered for or neglected; how teachers learned about ST; if their pupils enjoyed ST; if ST has enhanced their teaching of literacy; would they prefer to use another method; what other teaching practices they find effective for teaching literacy and additional comments about ST and the teaching of literacy. Teachers were asked to rank the criteria from 1 to 6 that they use to judge the success of ST and to indicate their views on 21 statements about ST on a Likert scale item of 5 from strongly agree to 1 strongly disagree.

At the very end of the questionnaire I included instructions about returning the questionnaire and thanked the respondents for participating.

5.2.3 Pilot testing the questionnaire

Mertens (2010) advises that pilot testing your questionnaire 'means that you try it out with a small sample similar to your intended group of respondents' (2010, p. 191). On Mertens' (2010, p. 191) advice I selected a pilot sample similar to my population: I chose three class teachers, two Support teachers and one principal in different schools. I instructed the pilot respondents that I was interested in their reactions to the process and questions and I encouraged them to note any ambiguities or response options that were not included. I followed the same procedures for administration that I planned to use in my study. As I was using a mail survey I asked the pilot group to read the survey and answer it first without asking me any questions (Mertens, 2010, p. 191). My supervisor and a PhD colleague also read the questionnaire and gave me very valuable feedback.

All pilot respondents agreed that it took them between 10 and 15 minutes to complete the questionnaire. They thought it was easy to fill out and pointed out some questions and instructions which were ambiguous or unclear and some items that were too similar. Based on their feedback I made changes to the questionnaire. Some changes were technical – making spaces bigger, adding in – please tick the box or some questions which were too similar. Other changes involved changing or adding questions.

In Section one I had asked questions on school background. I already had this information so I deleted these unnecessary questions.

In Section two when I asked about the length of the intervention ST they suggested that I add in another box for 'other' to give that option. In the question I asked how many adults are involved in ST they suggested I ask how many SNAs are involved. With regard to one question I asked if teachers teach at different Stations during the intervention one pilot respondent suggested that I add in – 'If yes, how often do they change Station – weekly, monthly, termly, other'. I included this question.

In Section three - in the question identifying what assessment methods they use to group pupils I included a list to tick off on the advice of the pilot group. In the question detailing resources teachers use in ST they suggested that I add in two more resources – handwriting copies and handwriting books with laminated pages and I decided to make this into a table for clarity and teachers could tick the boxes. In the question asking teachers what criteria they use to judge the effectiveness of ST, the pilot respondents found this difficult to answer so I included a ranking list from 1 to 6.

In Section four I included statements that best reflect opinions of ST, the pilot respondents suggested I add three extra – 'I see an improvement in pupils' literacy skills since implementing ST', 'Working with other adults in the classroom is very challenging' and 'Staff collaboration is vital for ST to succeed'. In one statement I referred to 'pupil affirmation' and on queries from the pilot respondents I changed this to 'pupil praise'.

I included a question on the National Literacy Strategy and policies affecting literacy, however the pilot respondents did not understand what information I wanted so I deleted this question. One young teacher found one question difficult on what other teaching practices you find effective for teaching literacy and suggested I provide a list. However on reflection I decided against this as I wanted to leave it open to elicit additional information from the respondents. I was very happy with the pilot testing and the questionnaire was ready to mail out on 11 November 2013.

5.2.4 Letter of transmittal/Cover letter

A letter of transmittal can be used as a cover letter for mail surveys. ‘In addition to specifying the purpose of the survey, the most important function that a letter of transmittal can serve, is to give the respondent a good reason to respond to your survey’ (Mertens, 2010, p. 199). I have followed Mertens’ (2010) advice on establishing motivation for responding to the questionnaire by appealing to self-interest, professional interests, altruism, curiosity and to a sense of connection with me. I specified the return date as well as my contact details. I signed each cover letter (Appendix 3) personally and addressed the envelopes by hand. On the front page of the questionnaire also I specified my contact details, and the date by which the form should be returned to me, as Mertens (2010) claims the letter and the questionnaire can often be parted!

5.2.5 Sample

Mixed methods research designs can be parallel as already outlined and so for the purpose of my study I chose multilevel sampling where according to Mertens (2010) ‘different people from different populations are chosen for the different approaches of the study’ (2010, p. 326). I used a convenience sample for the quantitative portion of my study that consisted of teachers in 21 schools in Ireland where I knew Station Teaching was being implemented. I chose a mix of schools – DEIS and non-DEIS, rural and urban schools. I am a tutor with the National Induction Programme for teachers and have contact with facilitators in schools all over the country, as well as with principals through the Irish Primary Principals Network (IPPN). Over the last number of years I had many discussions with these teachers and had ascertained which schools were implementing Station Teaching.

5.2.6 Data collection - Conducting the Survey

I contacted the principal personally in each of these 21 schools and asked for permission to conduct a survey in the school. I asked if any teachers who were involved in Station Teaching in the school would complete the questionnaire. On advice from my supervisor I asked my contact person in the school to collect the questionnaires (which were numbered). I provided an envelope for each teacher to give back to the contact person in the school who could return them all to me in the large stamped self-addressed envelope.

I had some lovely telephone conversations with the principals of the schools chosen and they were all very supportive. Some comments were:

- Sure – a pleasure!
- No problem – send them on
- We would be honoured (I was invited to come and see ST in action)
- You're very welcome – delighted to help
- Yes – we're all doing ST
- Hope it's not too long (I took this on board)
- Wonderful, yes of course – glad to help (Principals' comments)

The impression I formed from these comments and my contact with principals and teachers is that teachers were eager to participate in the study because they were positive about the prospect of a study being conducted on their professional practices and thinking. Some teachers requested the results in due course.

One principal asked me to email the questionnaire and it was filled out and returned by email.

On Monday 11 November 2013, I posted the questionnaires to the principal of 20 schools chosen and emailed a questionnaire to the 21st school. I also enclosed an information letter about the study. I requested the respondents to return the questionnaires by Friday 22 November 2013. I issued 153 questionnaires (Appendix 2).

5.2.7 Survey response rate

On 5 December 2013, I sent reminders to 5 of the 21 schools by way of a telephone call to the principals who were very apologetic. Out of the 153 questionnaires issued, 115 were returned giving me a response rate of 75%. All of the 21 schools were represented. In January 2014, I issued a personal thank you letter to all the schools who had participated. I have since met many participants who thanked me sincerely for this added touch and one person told me it was their first time ever getting a thank you letter for filling out a survey.

As the questionnaires were returned I dated each envelope on acceptance. In this way I was able to keep track of responses. Some teachers returned their questionnaires to me directly. I kept all the questionnaires from the same schools together.

5.2.8 Data analysis

Initially I used a clean copy of the questionnaire and filled in raw numbers for frequency counts and percentages as appropriate (Mertens, 2010, p. 204) – I did this manually. Using a systematic approach I then collated all the questionnaires into a Master copy on the computer. This was quite tedious but I felt it helped me to familiarise myself with the data.

At the next stage I put all the responses from class teachers in one file, the responses from Support teachers in another and the ones from Principals in a third file. I used Excel as a data management package and once I logged my data I was able to profile the entire data base as one group. I ran frequencies for the incidence of responses on various items on the questionnaire so I was in a position to analyse the entire group as a single group. I did this by putting in the relevant statistics by hand against a clean questionnaire. Then I divided the file

into sub groups according to various biographical variables – status in the school, i.e. principal, class teacher, Support teacher and I ran frequencies for those groups. All of this enabled me to conduct a comparative analysis of different groups with a view to noticing any differences and similarities across the responses of different sub groups.

I counted responses for each question and manually recorded these in numbers using different coloured pens and when I had the totals I changed these into percentages, using the Google percentage calculator facility.

Through inputting data in Excel, it enabled me to display the data using three diagrams and 15 tables which included five graphs where appropriate. The use of tables and graphs was very appropriate to convey the information on:

- the types of schools surveyed
- the breakdown of respondents
- the size of classes and groups at Stations
- the length of the intervention in classes
- the amount of time pupils spend at each Station
- the assessment methods teachers use to select pupils for groups in ST
- how teachers learned to do ST
- the criteria teachers use to judge the success of ST
- teachers' views of ST
- how other teaching approaches complement ST.

I also used the tables from the questionnaire and combined the responses to give the total picture e.g.

- Question 7 in Section 2 on the different types of Stations teachers have in their classes (Table 6H)
- Question 4 in Section 3 on the resources teachers use in ST (Table 6I and Appendix 6)
- Question 7 in Section 4 where teachers were asked to indicate their view of a list of statements on organisation of ST by ticking the box that best reflected their opinion (Table 6N and Appendix 9).

I encountered difficulty with Question 5 in Section 4 where teachers were asked to rank the criteria they use to judge the success of ST in their classes. In the end I recorded their responses in 2 tables – 6K and 6L, as I felt the information was too important to simplify and summarise. I included the other three tables in Appendix 8.

I collated responses from the open-ended questions and analysed them, I then reported these responses in prose form. Teachers had so many comments to make on ST that I had much work to report these in a thematic way.

5.2.9 Validity and reliability

When collecting quantitative data, postpositivists are concerned with reliability, validity and objectivity (Mertens, 2010, p. 401). Researchers are concerned with the 'reliability' of a research instrument. Denscombe (2003) argues that a research instrument such as a questionnaire is said to be 'reliable' if it is consistent. The results of my questionnaire show consistency throughout all the results. The audit trail subsequently set up, allows readers to

develop their own interpretations from the generated data and to have trustworthiness in the original texts. Lincoln and Guba (1985) construe this as dependability, where the researcher creates an audit trail to safeguard the process.

In relation to validity Denscombe (2003) describes how in a broad sense validity means that the data and methods are 'right'. He contends that 'the idea of validity hinges around the extent to which research data and the methods for obtaining the data are deemed accurate, honest and on target' (2003, p. 301). It is generally considered that quantitative methodology is high in reliability, but low in validity. Results of surveys are more readily analysed and interpreted. Triangulation is an important element in establishing the validity of a piece of research as it confirms data from one research instrument to another (Cohen et al, 2000). It is hoped that the triangulation of results received from the questionnaire and case study will further validate the research in question.

5.2.10 Limitations of the Study

I have to acknowledge the limitations of this survey. It was confined to schools I knew around the country so I privileged response rates over possibly a representative sample. Previous research shows how increasingly difficult it is to obtain response rates over 50% from teachers (and indeed other groups) thus hindering the validity and reliability of claims and findings made. I was keen to maximise the validity and trustworthiness of the claims and findings and I felt it was better, therefore, to approach a sample of school representative of infant settings, but not necessarily statistically representative.

Station Teaching is a new concept in schools in Ireland and is most prevalent in DEIS schools where it is called Literacy Lift Off, but this is only implemented in classrooms for one block

of six-eight weeks in the year. The survey gives a snapshot of current thinking and practice in schools in Ireland at a point in time.

If I were doing a survey again with primary school teachers I would ensure that the questionnaire would arrive in schools in the first week of November, just after mid-term. I felt mine arrived into schools a little bit late and it ended up running into the Christmas season, which is a disastrous time for any research. I was telephoning some principals in December, which was too late in the term, but people were very polite and helpful nevertheless. It is possible that had I been ready to administer the questionnaire in the first week in November the response rate may have been higher than 75%.

5.2.11 Timelines

I commenced pilot testing the questionnaire from 14 October to 10 November 2013. I mailed out the questionnaires on 11 November 2013. I received the final questionnaire back on 20 December 2013.

5.3 Qualitative data: Case Study

I have chosen to carry out a case study using qualitative methods so that I can gain an understanding of the constructions held by people. I used an ethnographic case study approach as suggested by Stenhouse (1985). Anderson-Levitt (2009) argues that ethnography is an approach to studying people in everyday settings, with particular attention to culture and that it depends on two broad methods of participant observation and open-ended interviewing. Ethnography takes a dualistic approach. It requires the insiders' views but 'the ethnographer must also observe from an outsider's perspective to make visible the invisible' (Anderson-

Levitt, 2009, p. 285). McDuffie and Scruggs (2008) define case study as ‘an approach that involves an in-depth exploration of a single case, or an example of the phenomenon under study’ (2008, p. 233). Mastropieri et al. (2005) conducted four case studies of co-teaching and collected data through observations of class activities, interviews with class and Support teachers, field notes, videotapes of classes and other artifacts (2005, p. 233). Mertens (2010) contends that a variety of methods are used to collect data within case study research and that she discusses ‘case studies as one option in qualitative research strategy choices’ (2010, p.233). I was able to examine, in-depth a ‘case’ within its real-life context as Yin (2009) recommends. Nespor (2009) describes classrooms as ‘long-term situation’ and that the ‘overall context’ is neither static nor neatly bound (2009, p. 303). Yin (2009) posits that a case study helps a researcher to make direct observations and collect data in natural settings (2009, p.111).

By using a case study approach I explored in depth the implementation of Station Teaching as a literacy intervention and the experience of the participants involved in this intervention. This involved extensive observations of Class activities, interviews with Class and Support teachers and pupils, parents, field notes, videotapes of classes and other artifacts as recommended by Mertens (2010, p.233).

I used the single-group research design. There are three types according to Mertens (2010): ‘One-Shot Case Study’, ‘One-Group Pretest-Posttest Design’ and ‘Time Series Design’ (2010, pp.132, 133). I have decided to use the ‘Time Series Design’, which involved measuring of the dependent variable at periodic intervals. The biggest threat to this design according to Mertens (2010) is history, ‘because the experiment continues over a period of time and there is no control group who might experience the historical event but not the treatment’ (2010, p. 134). The ‘Time Series Design’ however does provide for control of several threats to validity. Mertens (2010) outlines questions to consider for critically analysing single-group designs under internal validity and external validity (2010, p. 147).

5.3.1 Sample

The decisions in relation to sampling are complex. As a researcher I used a purposive approach to sampling. Qualitative studies often occur in natural settings and all individuals in the setting are considered participants. I conducted my research within my school and identified groups of pupils where literacy interventions occur and the teachers involved in the implementation of this intervention.

I targeted the Junior classes in the school. I focused on the two Junior Infant classes in last term of the academic year – from Easter to summer 2013 and I followed these two classes into Senior Infants and observed them from September 2013 to the following summer 2014. I observed and interviewed the Class teachers and Support teachers, some parents of the pupils in these classes as well as some pupils in both classes. The reason I chose these classes as it is in these classes we are implementing Station Teaching. Altogether this gave me a sample of 42 pupils, four mainstream Class teachers, four Support teachers and parents from the Infant classes.

I am aware that ethics needs to guide the entire process of planning, conducting and using research as posited by Mertens (2010). Interviews have an ethical dimension. Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2004) identify three main areas of ethical issues: informed consent, confidentiality and the consequences of the interviews. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) add the researcher's role to this. Informed consent entailed informing the participants about the overall purpose of the research and the main features of the design. Voluntary participation was essential. Confidentiality in research implies that private data identifying the participants will not be disclosed (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 72). The consequences were addressed with respect to possible harm to the participants as well as to the benefits accruing to the participants for their participation in the study. The role of the researcher is crucial to the quality of the study.

Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) contend that the importance of the researcher's integrity is magnified because the interviewer herself is the main instrument for obtaining knowledge. I had to adhere strictly to the scientific quality of the knowledge published.

I received consent from the University's Ethics Board, the Board of Management of the school, the teachers and assistants and the parents on their own behalf and on behalf of their children (Appendix 4).

5.3.2 Measures

I conducted my research over the year – from April 2013 to June 2014, spanning across two school years. I worked with the Junior Infants through Senior Infants to June of the following year so there was continuity of research. This group had not been exposed to Station Teaching so we were starting afresh. I conducted pre tests on the pupils before commencement of the intervention in April 2013, again at the end of Junior Infants – June 2013 and at Easter of Senior Infants – March 2014. This data was designed to offer me some indication of the effectiveness of the intervention.

I began my research with a talk for parents of Junior Infant classes on 'Helping your child to read' and introducing Station Teaching as an intervention. I followed this up with consent forms for parents – giving consent for their children's participation as well as their own if interviewed.

In March 2013 I arranged two information sessions on Spelling and Handwriting, one for teachers and SNAs and another for parents by Brendan Culligan, author of 'Improving children's spelling' (1997) and 'Spelling and Handwriting'(2009). This element of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is an essential element of up-skilling all the school

community. The previous year (March 2012) I had arranged CPD for staff on teaching comprehension strategies by Martin Gleeson co-author of Building Bridges (Courtney & Gleeson, 2010).

My research involved acquiring data on the pupils – test scores, information on engagement, participation of pupils before, during and after the intervention. I observed two groups in each class with a focus on a target child in each group.

I tested the pupils in these classes – letter and sound identification, ability to form letters and concepts about print. These tests were conducted before the intervention began and also at the end of Junior Infants after six weeks of Station Teaching. In Senior Infants I checked on pupils' knowledge of sounds, word recognition, letter formation and reading fluency. In March 2014 the Middle Infant Screening Test (MIST) (1993) was administered and this will be used for data. The MIST is a practical screening tool which focuses on reading and writing skills and provide a comprehensive screening, diagnostic and recovery package. It is administered to pupils in their fifth term in school and they must be five years and eight months or more before testing.

I drew up an observation schedule and completed that during the programme. I tried to document the experiences of all the participants. I examined the impact the intervention is having on the pupils, what progress they are making, their experiences their engagement, the effects of Station Teaching. I also observed effective teaching and what constructs teaching and learning at the stations – teacher instruction, teacher/pupil interaction, use of teacher praise, how teachers extend pupils' learning and the activities and materials used.

Anderson-Levitt (2009) argues that the biggest challenge for us as insider researchers is to make the familiar 'strange' to make it visible (2009, p.286). She further cautions that the most

crucial technique is to record observation in writing. I made the distinction in my field notes between accurate detailed description and interpretive comments as adopted by Frank (1999).

5.3.3 Observation Schedule

I explained to the class about the project – Station Teaching. I told them how I was interested in seeing how it works and how well the pupils are doing. I came in to each class on two days on a monthly basis. I observed one group each day as they moved from Station to Station.

The class was divided into four groups according to ability. Each group spends eight minutes at each Station each day. During the observation I focused on the teachers and on two groups of pupils in the class – one average and one low group. I targeted one pupil in each group but observed other pupils also.

As an observer I sat away from the group and I used a clipboard for notes. After the observation I wrote a summary of the session – overall impression, classroom management and environment and other notable activities encountered (Sylva et al., 1999 and Taylor et al., 1999).

After observations ended I filled in my field notes with expanded notes using Frank's (1999) recommendations on note taking under two headings: description and interpretation. I also have sketches of the groups in the classes and video-taped each of the classes once during the project in Junior Infants and once in Senior Infants.

Initially for the first observation I used the strategy that Wolfinger (2002) calls 'comprehensive note-taking' which involves systematically and comprehensively describing everything that happens in class. For the second observation I used the second strategy that Wolfinger (2002) describes as 'salient hierarchy' where I recorded whatever observations strike me as most

noteworthy. This is highly subjective and I used my tacit knowledge in writing these field notes as the study progressed.

This is the Observation Checklist: Junior Infants – Station Teaching which I used (Based on Sylva et al; 1999; Taylor et al, 1999; Beard, 2000; Murphy, B. 2002)

Table 5A: Observation Checklist

Class: Date of observation:

Group to include T.C.:

Station 1	Teacher instruction	Teacher/Pupil interaction	Pupil engagement	Teacher praise	Extending pupil's learning	Activities and materials
New Reading (Group of 5/6) Adult:						

I used the same checklist for each Station – New Reading, Familiar Reading, Phonics and Writing.

I conducted my observations in the Junior Infant classes on these dates:

One JI room: 27/05/13; 08/06/13; 14/06/13; 17/06/13.

Second JI room: 23/05/13; 05/06/13; 12/06/13; 18/06/13

I conducted my observations in the Senior Infant classrooms on these dates:

Senior Infant room A: 10/10/13; 15/10/13; 11/11/13; 13/11/13; 02/12/13; 03/12/13; 20/01/14; 28/01/14; 24/02/14; 26/02/14; 27/02/14; 13/03/14; 19/03/14; 13/05/14; 22/05/14

Senior Infant room B: 08/10/13; 17/10/13; 11/11/13; 13/11/13; 03/12/13; 05/12/13; 20/01/14; 21/01/14; 24/02/14; 25/02/14; 27/02/14; 13/03/14; 19/03/14; 13/05/14; 28/05/14

As well as observations I conducted short individual interviews and focus group interviews with the pupils and the teachers involved. I also conducted a focus group interview with the parents. I amended my questions for the interviews. Two teachers also kept a reflective journal for me on the implementation of ST.

I am very aware of ethical issues and rigour as I am the principal of the school and have a vested interest in the success of the intervention. Therefore to avoid any bias on my part, I asked a colleague from the cohort PhD who is also a teacher to come and observe groups in Senior Infant classrooms on 25/03/2014, and check my observation schedule and my way of interpreting my findings. This process enhanced the reliability of the evidence.

As I was conducting qualitative research I was the data collection instrument of much of the data. I was both the researcher and the researched. I was involved in the implementation of the programme as a teacher and as an observer. I acted as substitute for the teachers in Station Teaching and was very familiar with the programme. This also helped me to get to know the pupils better as I was practically involved in their progress. Variables that were measured include pupil progress and this involved teacher observation as well as some continuous assessment tests as the study progressed.

5.3.4 Children's drawings

In November 2013 following on from a discussion with a colleague from the PhD cohort I decided to ask the pupils in Senior Infants to draw a picture for me about Station Teaching. While I was waiting for these pictures some of the children started talking to me about their pictures and what was in them. I had not planned this but as soon as I realised what was happening I wrote down what the children were saying – it was very rich data and in my findings I report on this. This additional data base complements the general qualitative case-study evidence. Later in the school year one of the pupils asked me when was I going to come in again to talk to them about Station Teaching so on his request I repeated this exercise in June 2014.

5.3.5 Data collection procedures and further contextualisation of the Study

I was conducting qualitative research in my school. I focused on strategies for improving literacy in the school with particular reference to Station Teaching.

This involved monitoring the implementation of this programme in the junior classes. We introduced Station Teaching in Senior Infants in October 2011 and in April 2012 we introduced Station Teaching to pupils in Junior Infant Classes for the last term of the school year.

The plan for literacy intervention in Junior Infant classes for the school year 2012-2013 was to support the class teachers in class. The class teachers use a variety of resources to supplement their teaching of literacy including oral language programmes and the Jolly Phonics programme. I meet the parents of Junior Infants before they start school and give them an overview of the Infant programme and some tips on how to help their children with literacy including the importance of nursery rhymes and dialogic reading. The Learning Support teacher works with individual pupils providing in-class support as recommended by The

Learning Support guidelines (DES, 2000) on improving fine motor skills. In April of Junior Infants I meet the parents and make suggestions on how they can help their children to read and introduce Station Teaching.

We commenced Station Teaching last term in Junior Infants from April to June 2013 and used PM readers. We continued this approach in Senior Infants and tested the pupils in March 2014 using Middle Infant Screening Test (MIST) (1993).

I had a double role in this research – as a participant in the Stations and as Principal of the school leading curriculum innovations. The method of data collection I used is as participant-as observer. I observed literacy interventions in the classrooms and took field notes. I video-taped the Station teaching and this is used for data as well as a teaching tool for other teachers to observe and learn from the strategies used.

I conducted interviews with the participants: pupils and teachers involved and some parents from each class grouping. These interviews are semi structured and I also conducted focus group interviews. I conducted the research over two school years – from April 2013 to June 2014.

As Mertens (2010) recommended, I acknowledge that as data collection and analysis overlap in qualitative studies I am aware of possible changes that may occur in the type of data or the focus, time or strategies used in the study (2010, p. 454). An example of this is when I asked the children to draw pictures for me about Station Teaching.

The data collected: the journal entries, the children's drawings, the video-tape recordings, the interview transcripts all provided high quality data that was analysed.

I kept detailed notes in my journal from the classroom observations. I employed a technician to do the video recordings to ensure high quality filming from which I can support my evidence.

I used a voice recorder for the interviews that I can import audio files to the computer so that they can be traced and listened to – this backs up the interview transcripts.

From my observations in the classrooms and from the interviews I gleaned information on the experiences of the participants of a literacy intervention in Infant classes.

Mertens (2010) contends that the overall purpose of conducting interviews is to get a full range and depth of information and to understand someone's impressions or experiences. She suggests that the purpose of observation is to gather information about how a programme operates. The use of focus groups allows for exploration of a topic in depth through group discussion and it can convey key information about programmes (Mertens, 2010, p. 352).

I followed Mertens' (2010) standards in relation to judging quality of data collection. The standards that have emerged from the constructivist paradigm collection of qualitative data are dependability, credibility, and confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

Mertens (2010) details the list of criteria for judging quality in qualitative research in Box 8.3 (2010, p. 256). In the section dealing with credibility she outlines: prolonged and persistent engagement; peer debriefing; member checks; progressive subjectivity; negative case analysis and triangulation. In the section of transferability she alludes to thick description and multiple cases. She suggests a dependability audit and a confirmability audit/chain of evidence. In the section on transformative criteria Mertens (2010) lists the following: fairness; ontological authenticity; community; attention to voice; critical reflexivity; reciprocity and catalytic authenticity (2010, p. 256).

5.3.6 Pilot testing: Observations

Firstly I pilot tested my observations using the observation schedule as adopted by Frank (1999) taking notes in two columns:

Description	Interpretation

After observation ended I filled in my field notes with expanded notes. However I realised that this schedule was too broad for my observations and that I needed a more focused approach. Following on from a meeting with my supervisors I conducted further research and devised a new observation schedule using the checklist as outlined in the section on Observation Schedule. In this checklist I observed Station Teaching lessons under headings on teacher instruction, teacher/pupil interaction, pupil engagement, teacher praise, extending pupils' learning and use of activities and materials.

5.3.7 Interview protocol

Brenner (2006) contends that the 'parameters for good interviewing can vary greatly depending on the disciplinary frame adopted by the interviewer' (2006, p. 358). She outlines four disciplinary frames: cultural anthropology, cognitive anthropology, cognitive science and developmental psychology.

Cultural anthropology and its ethnographic tradition is one of the most common disciplinary frames applied in education. Interviewing has long been associated with ethnographic research and 'at the heart of ethnographic research is the concept of culture' (2006, p. 358).

Brenner (2006) identifies many guides which have been published for ethnographic interviewing with origins in cognitive anthropology (2006, p. 358). Cognitive anthropologists propose that 'culture is a cognitive system shared by a group of people' (2006, p. 358). The

grand tour question is the best known question type used by cognitive anthropologists and is used by educational researchers. This is followed by mini-tour questions to probe the topics further. I used this format in my interview. Cognitive scientists try to gather information about the processes of thinking and is often referred to as the 'think-aloud method' (2006, p. 359). Brenner (2006) explains how the 'clinical interview stands somewhere between the ethnographic and think-aloud cognitive science interview' (2006, p. 359). The clinical interview is widely used in developmental psychology, often with children, it can be very informal.

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) define a semi-structured interview as an attempt 'to understand themes of the everyday world from the subjects' own perspectives (2009, p. 27). They further outline how similar to an everyday conversation the interview is. However, Kvale et al. (2009) claim that 'as a professional interview, it has a purpose and involves a specific approach and technique' (2009, p. 27). The interview focuses on certain themes and may include suggested questions, it is usually transcribed and subsequently analysed.

5.3.8 Preparing for the interview

Mertens (2010) made many recommendations in relation to planning and conducting personal interviews and I followed these.

I prepared an interview guide but was conscious that other issues might arise so I kept the questions very general at the start to allow for flexibility. I had open-ended questions and some specific ones. I followed Mertens' suggestions (2010) in drawing up these questions. Brenner (2006) explained how an open-ended interview often begins with a big question and proceeds in the 'funnel shape – beginning with large questions working down to details' (2006, p. 362).

I pilot tested my interview questions in May 2013 with a Class teacher and adapted the questions accordingly.

My list of questions for the teachers included:

1. Tell me about Station Teaching in your class – how does it work?
2. What group do you teach in Station Teaching?
3. What's its purpose?
4. What difference has Station Teaching made to your teaching of literacy?
5. What do you prioritise in your teaching of literacy and why?
6. What activities and materials do you use?
7. Tell me about pupil engagement during Station Teaching?
8. Do you get an opportunity to extend pupils' learning during Station Teaching?
9. Do you get a chance to affirm pupils in their learning during Station Teaching?
10. What are the strengths of Station Teaching?
11. Have you any concerns about Station Teaching as a method?
12. How about the structure of lessons and timing?
13. Are there other resources we could use/purchase for Station Teaching?
14. How about the pupils' writing? Have they got correct letter formation? Is there an opportunity for drawing/free writing?
15. Do you have any other recommendations for us as a staff with teaching literacy?
16. Is there anything that I didn't ask about or that you think I should know?

These are samples of questions I used when interviewing the teacher individually. The focus group is a guided discussion so when conducting a focus group interview the questions were more like prompts to keep the conversation going. I anticipated having a list of five to seven questions to ask during a one hour session.

The questions I used when interviewing parents revolved around their children's reading patterns and development. The questions with the children were simple ones around their experience of Station Teaching and reading books. I pilot tested the questions with two Junior Infant pupils in May 2013 and realised my questions were too difficult so I had to simplify the language of questioning.

These are sample questions for individual interviews with pupils in Junior Infants (adapted from Murphy, B. 2002):

1. I'd like to chat to you about Station Teaching. Imagine that I'm a new pupil to your class, I just arrived today, what can you tell me about Station Teaching?
2. Who is in your Station group?
3. What is your favourite Station? Why?
4. Do you like reading?
5. Why do you think we need to learn to read?
6. What words do you learn? Are they hard?
7. What games do you play when learning sounds/letters?
8. Tell me about the new books – do you remember the names of any of them?
9. If you come to a really hard word which you cannot read what do you do?
10. Who helps you to read?

11. What books do you like to read?

12. Do you go to the town library?

13. Tell me what do you do at the Writing Station?

14. Why do we need to learn to write?

15. Do you like writing?

16. Do you enjoy Station Teaching? Why?

Brenner (2006) posits that a semi-structured protocol has the advantage of asking all the interviewees the same core questions with the freedom to ask follow-up questions that build on the answers received (2006, p. 362). I used this format with interviewees.

5.3.9 My ethical dilemmas

My major concern with regard to my research is raised by Brenner (2006) in relation to interviewing in my workplace and it is 'consideration of the potential power relations between the researcher and the informants' (2006, p. 361). I have an ethical dilemma here with this study as I am the most senior person in the school; I am the point of authority and have a huge responsibility to both the staff and students in the school. I need to acknowledge the power dilemma here as I realise that I would be observing and interviewing both staff and students. I realise that some teachers might not tell me some things that are happening at times. I have a good working relationship with the staff but I am still the principal which may cause difficulties.

Brenner (2006) recommends that informed consent should be obtained through the use of a letter or form that specifies: the nature of the research; the procedures in which participants can be expected to participate; a description of the means by which confidentiality will be

protected; a list of contact people to whom questions can be put and a description of the issues and benefits of the research (2006, p.362). Mertens (2010) suggests that even though parents have legal authority to give permission for research participation for their children that ethical practice calls for getting 'assent' from the children by explaining the study to the children in language that is understandable to them and getting their agreement to participate (2010, p. 341). I have used the sample 'informed consent form' for research participants available on the UCC website and adapted it accordingly for staff members and parents (Appendix 4).

Malone (2003) refers to the complications that arise when conducting research in the researcher's academic home setting; coercion and resistance; institutional power and relationships and the myths of confidentiality and anonymity.

All of these areas ring true for me as I was researching in my academic home setting. I have alluded to the power differential and I was mindful of that. In relation to coercion and resistance I devised a formal way of getting consent from the staff and the parents on behalf of the students. I have a special obligation to the staff and students in my care and I am aware of their vulnerability. However I assured the parents that no harm will come to the pupils as a result of participation in the research. As regards the staff they had an opportunity to withdraw at any stage from the study, but this did not arise. There are sufficient groups of staff members involved in the project so it would be very easy for any staff member to withdraw at any stage without drawing attention to the fact. As Guba and Lincoln (1989) stated the relationship between the researcher and the respondent must finally take precedence over the quest for truth (Malone, 2003, p. 806).

In my case I did my utmost to protect the identity of the children and I gave pseudonyms to the pupils and teachers. I do not mention which teacher is a Class teacher or a Support teacher thereby protecting identity of individuals.

5.3.10 Data analysis procedures

Mertens (2010) outlines three steps in qualitative data analysis. Step 1 includes preparing the data for analysis and steps 2 and 3 the data exploration phase and data reduction phase.

I reviewed and reflected on the data as it was being collected. When I used video-taping of the Station Teaching in the classes I viewed all footage initially and made a judgement about how much to transcribe. As the researcher I transcribed the data as this is part of the data analysis process so that I could interact and engage with the data in an intensive way. Mertens (2010) suggests that this engagement with the data in a grounded manner, provides for the possibility of enhancing the trustworthiness and validity of my data gathering techniques (2010, p. 424). I organised my field notes from the observations under the different class headings and groupings. I put a copy of the footage of the video recording on my computer and also make CD's of Station Teaching in the different classes. I labelled all of these to ensure the transcripts followed the correct order. Likewise with the interviews of the participants I filed the transcripts under different headings: Class teachers, Support teachers, pupils in the different classes and parents.

The transcripts from the interviews with teachers, parents and pupils as well as my observational evidence were read over several times and further reading and subsequent application of line by line coding, helped reveal the commonalities in the transcripts (Moynihan, 2013, p. 271). Normally themes do not 'jump out' of the data (Morse & Field, 1995, p. 139). The researcher, they claim, needs to take a step back and carefully consider what he/she is looking at, along with the question 'What are these folks trying to tell me?' (p. 139). Themes can lie beneath the surface initially but once they have been identified they do seem more obvious (Morse & Field, 1995). On completion of the line by line coding, colour coding

was used, throughout all of the transcripts, to highlight the various themes as they were uncovered.

As I followed steps two and three I explored the data and reduced it. These two phases are synergistic according to Mertens (2010). The data reduction occurred as I selected parts for decoding, both from my observations and interviews. Some parts naturally 'hang together' and I assigned a label accordingly (2010, p. 425). This helped in the identification of themes ultimately for presentation of the case study evidence.

Triangulation, according to Mertens (2010) involves checking information that has been collected from different sources for consistency of evidence across sources of data. I used multiple methods such as interviews, observations, children's drawings, video-taping and document reviews. I interviewed teachers who are involved in the programme at different points along the way. Focus groups were useful to triangulate with the individual interviews. My teaching colleague from the cohort PhD also contributed to triangulating the evidence.

To add rigour to my qualitative data I also collected quantitative data by way of conducting pre and post-tests in Junior and Senior Infants. I collated the Concepts about Print test results including pupils' scores in knowledge of letter names and sounds, pre and post intervention in the Junior Infant classes. These results corroborated the evidence from the observations and interviews and showed the average scores in these test items. In the Senior Infant classes I assessed the MIST results on five sub tests: Listening Skills; Letter sounds; Written vocabulary; Three phoneme words and Sentence Dictation and I compared them with the previous year. I calculated the mean score in each test item and showed whether or not there was a noticeable difference in the years: 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014.

5.3.11 Limitations of the Study

Every study has limitations and in this case I was concerned with the absence of a control group. In our school we have two streams of the classes in the junior end of the school and I was conducting my research in both classes so I did not have control group. I could not be involved in the implementation of a literacy intervention which would exclude one cohort. I also realised that I was dealing with pupils in the very young age bracket, pupils who have a short concentration span and may not be very reliable with their observations. I addressed that with the use of extensive observations and video recording. I was very conscious of having a good rapport with the infants and this facilitated my involvement in the research. On the day of the summer holidays the pupils were showing off their style to me as they could come to school that day without uniform. I was delighted that they were eager to engage with me in that regard!

A second limitation was the movement of teaching staff from the junior classes. In the first year of the study there were two teachers of Junior Infants but one of these left the school in June at the end of her contract. Two different teachers took the classes in Senior Infants so they have to get to know the class in September and this takes a while, even with passing on records and files. In the second year there were two new Support teachers who had to be trained in to Station Teaching and this was an interesting development to see their induction into the programme. One Support teacher had observed Station Teaching in June and this gave her an insight into the working of the programme and both new Support teachers watched the video recordings. I conducted individual interviews with the Class and Support teachers who were no longer in that role the next year to have a record of their observations of the programme.

A third limitation of the study is the fact that I as a researcher was also the principal of the school and this may have an effect on some of the interview data. When I was conducting interviews I hoped that the teachers saw it as part of my research and were comfortable contributing to it. I was already a participant in the programme and teachers seemed to be happy

with my role in it but I was conscious of the fact that I am still the principal of the school. However, on the other hand I think that teachers might have felt that it gave them a vehicle to put forward suggestions and recommendations that they might not have suggested otherwise!

5.3.12 Timelines

I commenced my research in Junior Infants in April 2013 and continued with these classes into Senior Infants until June 2014. I pilot tested the interview with a teacher and a pupil. I conducted individual interviews with teachers and pupils at the end of Junior Infants. I also conducted focus group interviews with the teachers and SNAs in the school and the parents of Junior Infants.

I worked as a participant-observer in the Station Teaching programme and took notes on my observations of two groups in each class on a monthly basis. I continued the observations with these classes in Senior Infants from September 2013 to June 2014. I photographed and video-taped the classes at the end of Junior Infants and again in Senior Infants in April 2014. I collected drawings from the children in November 2013 and again in June 2014, at the end of the study.

I repeated the interviews with the participants to check on progress during the year before writing up my research on the effect / experience of the initiative/intervention 'Station Teaching' from the participants' point of view.

5.4 Conclusion

J. Morse (2003) describes the advantages to using mixed methods this way:

> By combining and increasing the number of research strategies used within a particular project, we are able to broaden the dimensions and hence the scope of our project. By using more than one method within a research study, we are able to obtain a more complete picture of human behaviour and experience. Thus, we are better able to hasten our understanding and achieve our research goals more quickly (2003, p. 189).

In this chapter I have outlined in great detail the mixed methods approach of my research design. 'The research design chosen was intended to offer the most appropriate way in which to gather the required data to answer all of the research questions posed' (Moynihan, 2013, p. 199). The sample chosen for this study is outlined along with the response rates and the design for both the quantitative and the qualitative elements of the research. Following an explanation of the measures and the data collection procedures, the pilot testing process is detailed followed by the data analyses procedures and limitations of the study. The survey reflects what is happening nationally in relation to Station Teaching and the case study provides an in-depth study of the implementation of Station Teaching in junior and senior infant classes in a non-DEIS school.

In the next chapter (Chapter 6) I present the findings from the survey and Chapter 7 details the findings from the case study. Table 5B presents a summary of my data collection.

Table 5B: Summary of Data Collection

Quantitative Data
Questionnaire survey November 2013: 21 schools 115 teachers responded (54 Class teachers; 57 Support teachers; 4 Principals)
Pre and Post-tests: Junior Infants: Letter and sound identification; ability to form letters; Concepts about print (April and June 2013) Senior Infants: Pupil knowledge of sounds; word recognition; letter formation; reading fluency; MIST (September 2013, March 2014)

Qualitative Data
Case Study in one school: April 2013 – June 2014 42 Pupils: 2 Junior and 2 Senior Infant classes
Classroom observations: 2 groups in 2 classes every month using checklist – teacher observation; teacher/pupil interaction; use of teacher praise; extending pupils' learning; activities and materials used. Field notes on these observations
Interviews: Individual interviews with 42 pupils in Junior Infants, June 2013 and Senior Infants, June 2014 Individual and focus group interviews with 4 Class teachers and 4 Support teachers June 2013, 2014. Focus group interviews with 9 parents June 2013, 2014.
Children's drawings of Station Teaching: Senior Infants in November 2013 and in June 2014
Photographs and video recording of ST: Junior Infants in June 2013, Senior Infants in June 2014
Teachers' journals: Senior Infant class teacher and Support teacher 2013/2014

Chapter 6

Teachers' views and experience of Station Teaching in primary schools:

Results of Questionnaire Survey

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I present the findings of a survey I conducted with teachers to ascertain their perspectives on Station Teaching in Primary Schools. Sometimes in the surveys some teachers use the term Literacy Lift Off (LLO) interchangeably with Station Teaching (ST). Firstly I present information on the types of schools which I surveyed. Then I present the evidence from the questionnaire survey under nine themes:

1. Organisation of Station Teaching
2. Focus of Literacy Activities in ST sessions
3. Resources teachers use in ST
4. Assessment approaches
5. Teachers' Perceptions of the effectiveness of ST
6. CPD for teachers on ST
7. Pupils' engagement with ST
8. Factors hindering and enhancing implementing ST
9. How Station Teaching can be improved.

6.2 Sampling details

In November 2013 I issued a questionnaire to 21 schools in Ireland. I had established that the teachers used Station Teaching as an intervention in these schools and so I contacted the principal in each case and asked for permission to conduct a survey in the school. I asked if any teachers who were involved in Station Teaching in the school would complete the

questionnaire. I issued 153 questionnaires and 115 were returned giving me a response rate of 75%.

The questionnaire was used to ascertain teachers' views and experience of Station Teaching in primary schools. Section one deals with school information. Of the 115 respondents who completed the questionnaires, 4 were principals, 54 were Class teachers and 57 were Support teachers.

Table 6A: Status of schools from which teachers responded (DEIS and non DEIS) and location of schools (rural, urban)

DEIS schools	**Non DEIS schools**	**Total**
9	12	21
Rural Ireland/Large towns	**Urban /Cities**	**Total**
8	13	21

The 21 schools are located around the country – 9 are Designated Disadvantaged Schools and are in a programme for Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) and 12 are non-DEIS schools.

DEIS the Action Plan for Educational Inclusion was launched in 2005 and is the Department of Education and Skills policy instrument to address educational disadvantage. 658 primary schools are included in the programme, 336 are urban/town schools and 322 are rural schools.

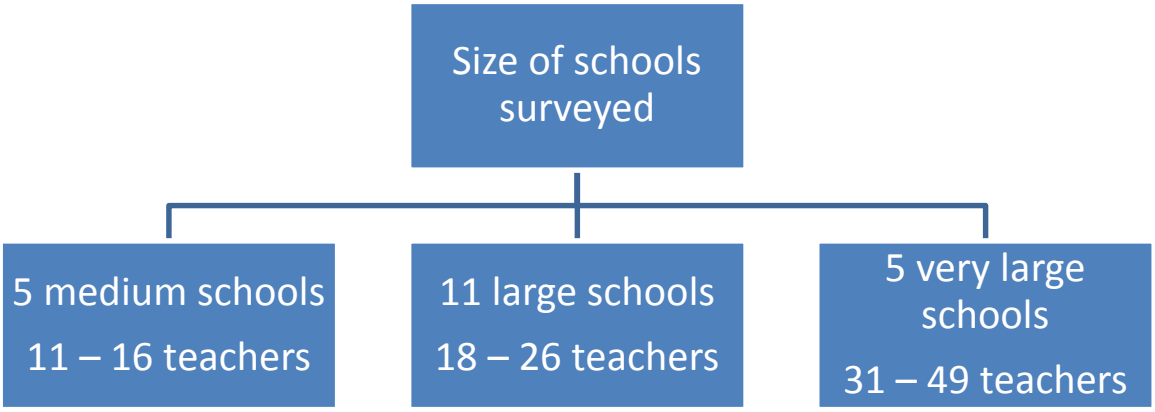
Eight of the schools I surveyed are located in rural Ireland and in large towns and 13 in the cities.

Table 6B: Types of schools represented in the survey

Mixed Boys and Girls	Vertical Boys	Vertical Girls	Senior Boys	Gaelscoil	Total
10	1	8	1	1	21

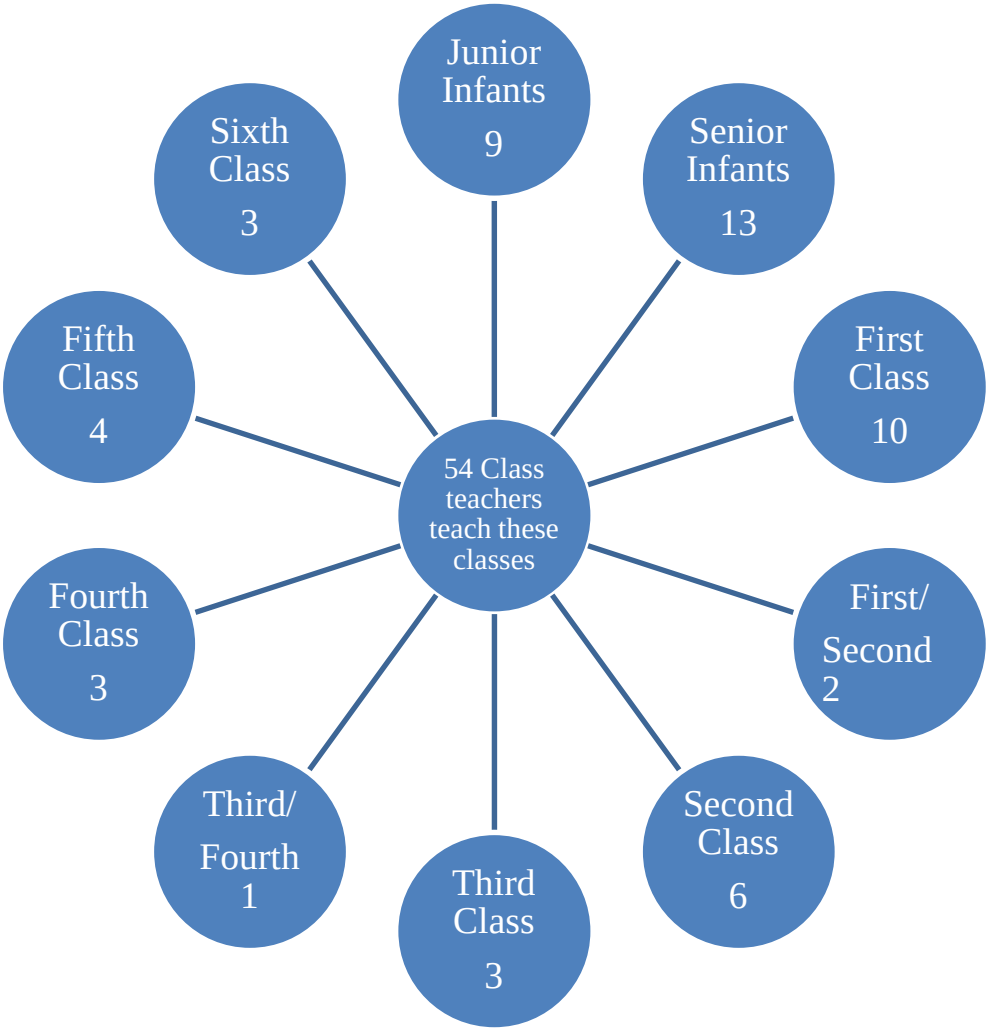
Of the 21 schools surveyed 10 are mixed – Boys and Girls, 1 is Vertical Boys, 8 are Vertical Girls, 1 Senior Boys and 1 a Gaelscoil (school where the first language of instruction is Irish).

Diagram 6A: Size of schools surveyed



The size of the schools varies from medium to very large, with 5 schools having from 11 to 16 teachers, 11 have from 18 to 26 teachers and the remaining 5 have 31 to 49 teachers.

Diagram 6B: Breakdown of the 54 Class teachers who responded to the questionnaire



Of the 54 Class teachers who responded, 9 teach Junior Infants, 13 teach Senior Infants, 10 teach First Class, 2 teach First/Second, 6 teach Second Class, 3 teach Third, 1 teaches Third/Fourth, 3 teach Fourth Class, 4 teach Fifth Class and 3 teach Sixth Class.

Table 6C: Size of classes the 54 Class teachers teach

Size of Classes	Classes of 13 – 19 pupils	Classes of 20 – 27 pupils	Classes of 28 – 30 pupils	Classes of 33 pupils
Number of teachers	14	27	12	1

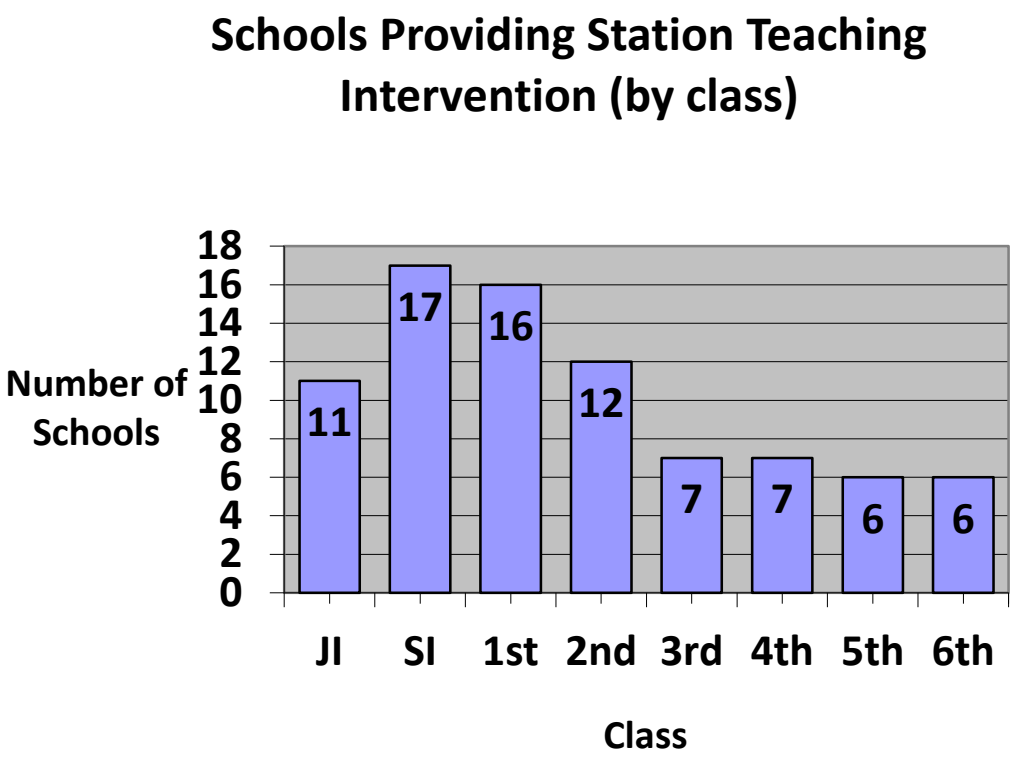
Of the teachers surveyed 14 teach classes of 13 to 19 pupils, 27 teach classes of 20 to 27 pupils, 12 teach classes of 28 to 30 pupils and 1 teacher teaches a class of 33 pupils.

The sample represents schools around the country where ST is being implemented and is satisfactory in relation to making judgements about practice of ST in the future, beyond the immediacy of the sample.

6.3 Theme 1: Organisation of Station Teaching (ST)

In this section I present the findings from the survey with regard to how schools organise ST as a literacy intervention. In 16 schools out of 21, the Support teacher co-ordinates Station Teaching (ST) and in 5 schools a team of Class teachers and Support teachers co-ordinates ST.

Chart 6A: Number of schools and classes providing Station Teaching



In 11 schools teachers provide the intervention ST in Junior Infants**,** 17 schools provide ST in Senior Infants, 16 schools in First Class, 12 schools in Second Class, 7 schools in Third and Fourth Classes and 6 schools in Fifth and Sixth Classes.

Table 6D: **Length of time schools use the intervention in each class**

N. of weeks per class	4/8 Weeks	1 term	2 Terms	All year
	N. of schools	N. of schools	N. of schools	N. of schools
Jun. Infants	6			3
Sen. Infants	7	2	2	6
First Class	10		2	3
Second Class	8			4
Third Class	5	1		3
Fourth Class	4			3
Fifth Class	4			3
Sixth Class	4			4

In one school Station Teaching lasts in Junior Infants for 4 weeks in a year, in 5 schools it lasts 6/8 weeks per year and in 3 schools ST lasts all year in Junior Infants.

One school provides ST for 4 weeks per year in Senior Infants, in 6 schools ST is provided for 6/8 weeks per year in Senior Infants. Two schools provide the intervention for 1 term in Senior Infants and 2 schools for two terms while six schools provide the intervention all year in Senior Infants. In First Class one school provides ST for 4 weeks per year, while 9 schools provide the intervention for 6/8 weeks, 2 provide ST for 2 terms and 3 schools provide ST all year in First Class. In Second Class one school provides ST for 4 weeks while 7 schools provide ST for 6/8 weeks and 4 provide ST all year in Second Class. In Third Class one school provides ST for 4 weeks, while 4 schools provide ST for 6/8 weeks, one school provides ST for 1 term and 3 provide ST all year. The results for Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Classes are similar – one

school provides ST for 4 weeks per year, 3 schools provide ST for 6/8 weeks and 3 provide it all year, except for Sixth Class 4 schools provide ST all year.

From these results, it would appear that ST is most popular in Senior Infants, First and Second classes in these schools and a block of 4/8 weeks is the most common time frame for the intervention. The reason for this may be due to availability of staff for the different Stations. In 3 to 4 of the 21 schools surveyed ST is implemented in some classes all year but in 6 schools ST is implemented in Senior Infants all year. These schools have obviously prioritised early intervention for literacy in Senior Infants and are utilising their Support staff to implement ST in Senior Infants.

I am particularly interested in the use of early intervention in developing literacy skills as advocated by Snow et al. (1998) and Dickinson et al. (2011) and as discussed in 2.5. In my empirical study I am targeting Junior and Senior Infant classes and researching the implementation of ST in literacy in these classes.

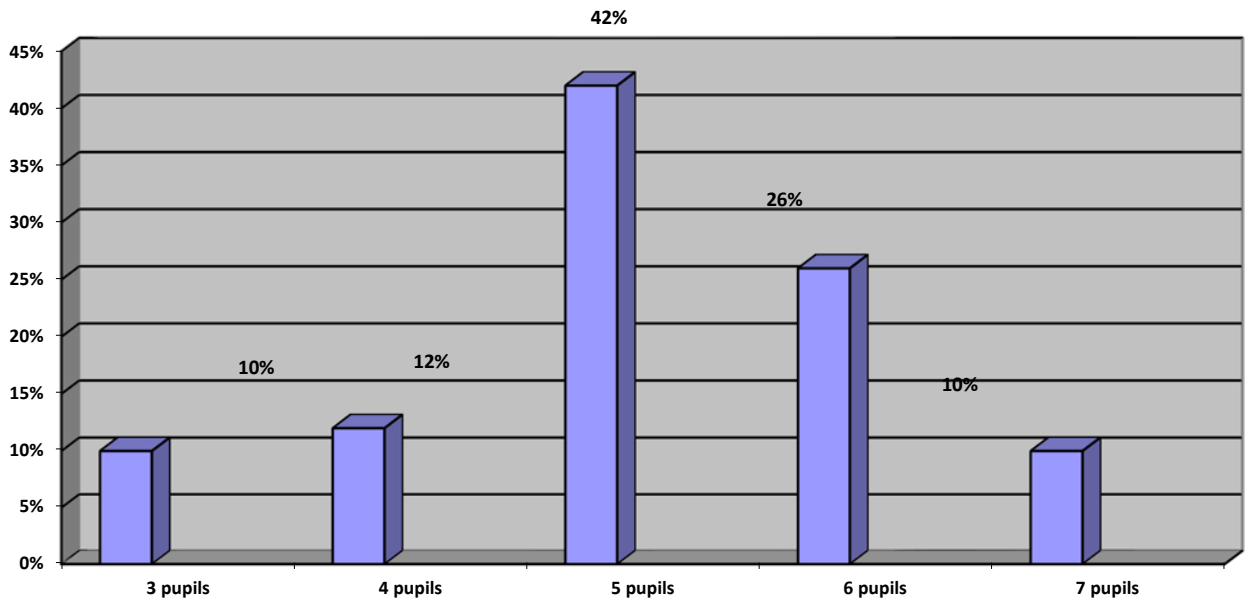
6.3.1 Personnel involved in classes for ST, the number of groups in ST and the numbers of pupils in groups

In 12 schools 4 adults are involved in teaching ST in a class at one time. In 7 schools 3 adults are involved in teaching ST in a class at one time. In one school 2 adults are involved in teaching ST and in one school 7 adults are involved in teaching ST at one time.

In 16 schools one SNA is involved in ST in a class and 5 schools report that 2 SNAs are involved and one school reports that 3 SNAs are involved in a class for ST.

Obviously availability of staff is an issue when it comes to personnel involved in ST. In the majority of the schools 3 or 4 adults are involved in ST and in the majority of schools 1 SNA is involved in ST thus allowing for 4 or 5 groups in the class.

Chart 6B: Percentage of schools reporting numbers of pupils in groups for ST

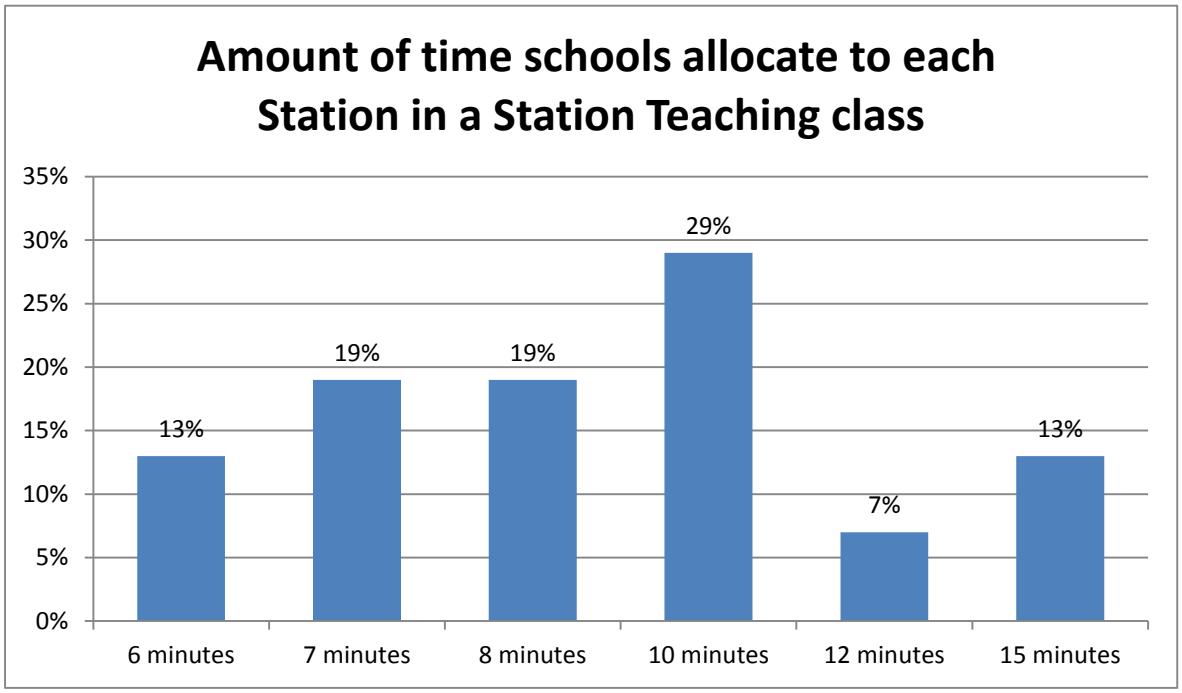


Number of pupils in each group for ST

In 10% of schools teachers report that they have 3 pupils in each group for ST, 12% schools have 4 pupils in each group, 42% schools have 5 pupils in each group, 26% schools have 6 pupils in each group and 10% schools have 7 pupils in each group.

From these figures one can see that the most common grouping of pupils for ST is groups of 5 or 6 with 68% of schools reporting this finding.

Chart 6C: Number of minutes pupils spend at each Station in 21 schools



0% - 29% - Percentage of schools

Thirteen per cent of schools provide 6 minutes at each Station, 19% provide 7 minute Stations and 19% provide 8 minute Stations, 29% spend 10 minutes at each Station, 7% spend 12 minutes while 13% spend 15 minutes at each Station.

Teachers reported that pupils spend more time at each Station as they progress through the classes starting with 6 minutes at each Station in Junior Infant classes and progressing to 15 minutes in Sixth Class. In 51% of schools the pupils spend 6 to 8 minutes at each Station, in 29% of schools pupils spend 10 minutes and the remaining 20% spend from 12 to 15 minutes.

The most common amount of time pupils spend at each Station is from 6 to 10 minutes with 80% of schools reporting this.

The answers to the question on the length of a ST class varied as children spend longer at Station Teaching in the more senior classes. 20% of schools report that a ST class is 30 minutes long, 48% report that it is 40 minutes long, 23% report that it is 50 minutes long while 9% report that it is 60 minutes long. The most common length of class is from 30 to 50 minutes long with 91 % of schools reporting this.

There is a link here with the number of groups teachers have in their Station Teaching class and the number of minutes the children spend at each Station. For example the most common occurrence is 4 or 5 groups of 5 pupils in a class, each group spending 8 to 10 minutes at each of the 4 or 5 Stations depending on the class standard.

6.3.2 Movement from Station to Station during the intervention

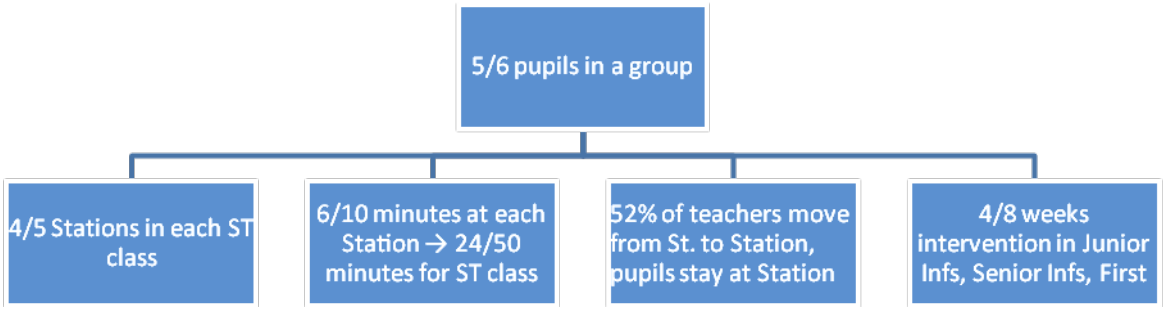
In 12 of the schools the teachers teach at different Stations during the intervention, while in 9 of the schools the same teachers teach at the same Station for the duration of the intervention. In 25% of the schools the teachers change Stations weekly, 17% of the schools change every 2 weeks, 33% change monthly, 8% change every 6/8 weeks and 2% change every term.

When teachers change Stations they all bring their own practices to each Station. However some teachers get very comfortable teaching at a particular Station and have no wish to change as is shown by this survey where in 9 of the schools the same teachers teach at the same Station for the duration of the intervention. In some cases the Class teachers wish to stay at a particular Station to monitor their pupils' reading or writing.

In 48% of schools pupils physically move from Station to Station and in 52% the teachers move. The reasons for this often are to do with actual space and it is sometime easier for the adults to move as reported by teachers in the survey. If space is tight in a classroom or if there

is a wheelchair user it may be too difficult for the pupils to move. Some teachers find it very disruptive for pupils to be moving and prefer to leave the pupils in position and the teachers move from Station to Station.

Diagram 6C: Summary of organisation of ST in classes



Having reported on the organisation of ST in schools and classes, in the next section I address the focus of literacy activities that teachers employ in Station Teaching sessions and the essential skills of literacy being taught.

6.4 Theme 2: Focus of Literacy Activities in Station Teaching sessions

In this section I discuss the focus of the literacy activities in ST and as such this provides an insight into what counts as literacy. I address two key questions:

(i) Is the curriculum focus in line with what the policy on ST suggests?

(ii) Is it in line with the range of elements deemed important in a literacy programme?

Firstly it seems that from Junior Infants to Second Class in the schools surveyed, most teachers have the same 4 Stations as recommended by the Professional Development Service for Teachers in Ireland (PDST) (2011) and as outlined in 4.7.3: New Reading, Familiar Reading, Phonics and Writing.

Secondly I discuss the essential elements of literacy as outlined in 4.3 (NRP, 2000; Snow et al., 1998):

- Phonological awareness and Phonics teaching
- Oral language, fluency and vocabulary work
- Comprehension strategies
- Reading and Writing strategies

In Table 6E I report on the breakdown of Stations teachers use in ST and the curricular focus of these Stations.

Table 6E: Curricular focus of Station Teaching

Classes	New reading	Familiar reading	Phonics	Writing	Word work/ vocab	Listening	Comp rehension	Other	Totals *N. of teachers*
Jnr. Infs	5	5	5	4	3	2	1	2	27
Sen. Infs	12	12	10	12	6	2	1	4	59
1st Class	13	13	11	14	6	4	2	5	68
2nd Class	9	9	8	11	5	2	3	1	48
3rd Class	5	5	1	5	4	1	5	2	28
4th Class	4	4	1	4	3	1	3	2	22
5th Class	3	3	1	3	2	1	4	3	20
6th Class	2	3	-	3	1	1	3	3	16

In Junior Infant classes 19 (69%) teachers have 4 Stations in their ST class: New Reading, Familiar Reading, Phonics and Writing, while (3) 12% report having a Word work/vocabulary Station and (2) 12% a Listening Station, (1) 4% an Independent Station, 1 (4%) Comprehension and 1(4%) an Oral language Station.

In Senior Infants the pattern is similar. 46 (77%) of teachers have the same four Stations with 6 (11%) having a Word work/vocabulary Station, 2 (3%) a Listening Station, 2 (3%) an Independent Station, 1 (2%) a Comprehension Station and 1 (2%) Language development and also 1 (2%) an ipad Station. The First Class Stations are similar with only a slight variation in statistics, 1(2%) also have an ipad Station. In Second Class the results are similar but the Writing Station is up to 11 (24%), there is no Independent Station and Comprehension is up to 3 (6%).

In Third, Fourth and Fifth Class the Phonics percentages are down to 1(4%) and Comprehension is up to 3 to 5 (18% - 20%) and there is an additional column for Dictation/Cloze tests at 1 (1%) and Fifth and Sixth have an Independent Station at 1 (5%-6%) and no Phonics Station in Sixth Class and one teacher has a Dictation/Cloze tests Station.

Out of the teachers who responded two teachers include an ipad Station in ST – one in Senior Infants and one in First Class.

From Third Class to Sixth Class in the schools I surveyed it appears that the Phonics Station has been replaced by a Comprehension Station and one teacher of Third, Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Classes includes a Station for Dictation and Cloze Tests. One teacher at all class levels and two in First Class include an Oral Language development Station. I was surprised at this inclusion as I expected that Oral Language would pervade all Stations and not be a different Station. Based on Hall's (2013) review of evidence as discussed in 2.5; Louden et al (2005) and Hattie (2003) as discussed in 2.6 and Kennedy et al. (2012) in 2.8, Mehigan (2009), Concannon- Gibney (2014) and Healy (2015) in 4.3.1, the primacy of oracy is emphasised in teaching children to read but oral language development needs to be part of a balanced literacy framework and part of every lesson. However these are DEIS schools and they may have felt the need to have a specific oral language Station.

From Chart 6A, it is clear that in these schools, Station Teaching occurs predominantly in Senior Infants, First and Second classes and from Chart 6B we have ascertained that groups of 5 pupils is the most common grouping in classes and from Table 6E that the most common activities in Stations are: New Reading, Familiar reading, Phonics, Writing and Word work, with comprehension replacing Phonics in the senior classes.

6.4.1 Effective teaching practices for teaching literacy

The essential literacy skills include the 'five pillars' of reading instruction as outlined by the NRP (2000) – phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension, as well as developing concepts about print (Snow et al. 1998). In this survey teachers reported lots of ideas of good practice. Jolly Phonics/Grammar and Building Bridges were mentioned by the vast majority of teachers. Other ideas mooted were: pair work; peer tutoring; shared and guided reading; paired reading; independent reading and team teaching, and I have discussed all of these in 4.6 and 4.7.

There were lots of comments on First Steps in particular the writing genres and the importance of oral language – vocabulary development, phonological awareness and rhymes. One teacher commented that 'oral language lesson are neglected or rushed – children with more advanced oral language ability bring this with them to literacy to aid decoding and comprehension'. Another teacher commented on the integration of reading and writing and that they should be used as tools to support learning in all curriculum areas.

The use of Big Books was reported by many teachers and the use of Word games, snap, bingo, flashcards. 'Reading eggs' – an online literacy programme was also suggested.

The teachers considered the importance of the print rich environment in the classrooms as part of effective teaching of literacy. They referred to labelling of objects, using word walls, a class notice board, library corners, magnetic letters, books of different types and poems.

The following is a list of the effective teaching practices that teachers in this survey reported. I have divided them into themes: Phonological awareness and phonics; Oral language and vocabulary work; Comprehension strategies; Reading strategies and Writing strategies.

6.4.2 Phonological awareness and Phonics teaching

Phonological awareness is reported as being a vital skill by all the teachers, and not only in Junior Infants. It is a central part of learning to read as discussed in 4.3 (Adams, 1990; Goswami, 1986; NICHHD, 2000). It is also an important precursor to learning phonics effectively (Savage, 2008). Many teachers in this survey refer to using the Jolly Phonics programme, which incorporates a multi-sensory approach with actions and songs and it is important that Phonics is taught early in a systematic and structured way (PDST, 2013). One teacher reported that 'Jolly Phonics allows teachers to teach letters/sounds and allows children to read in a way that appeals to every learner by using action songs'. Teachers also like the resources on the interactive whiteboard for Jolly Phonics.

6.4.3 Oral language and vocabulary work

Vocabulary knowledge is a reliable indicator of early and later literacy outcomes (Snow and Oh, 2011) and is also associated with reading comprehension. In 4.3, I discussed vocabulary and fluency and I also referred to Daly and Scanlan's (1988) manual of lesson plans for teachers on language development. Beck, McKeown and Kucan (2002) refer to their Tiers of vocabulary and advise teachers to purposefully target the teaching of some words. Teachers suggested different oral language activities such as: 'soap box' and 'hot seating'; debating; a conversation station with one to one; using new vocabulary during structured play, as in Aistear (NCCA, 2009), and linking with music, songs and rhymes, word building. Some teachers reported revising 'tricky words' as often as possible, using flashcards/flowers from the Jolly Phonics programme. Others mention rhyming word snap games, getting pupils to explain a story in their own words when they have read it and also 'show and tell' whereby children show an object and talk about it. One teacher of Fourth class alluded to teaching semantics to support

vocabulary development by using word mapping. Another teacher reported that children watch news on www.rte.ie/news2day and discuss news stories and vocabulary arising from the programmes. This is in line with Dunn's (2015) study on using popular culture to teach writing. Teachers also mentioned using brain storming and think-pair-share strategy.

6.4.4 Comprehension strategies

Building Bridges of Understanding (Courtney and Gleeson, 2010) was suggested as a very important resource for teaching comprehension strategies by most of the teachers. Comprehension Strategy Instruction (CSI) is an essential component of effective early reading instruction as discussed in 4. 3 (Dole, 2000; Pressley, 2000; Courtney, King, Pedro, 2006). Teachers in this study reported that Building Bridges enhances children's comprehension of texts and that the strategies are very useful for oral language and writing as well as reading comprehension. The Chief Inspector (DES, 2013) in his report challenges schools to implement a whole school approach to the development of comprehension skills and schools seem to have taken Building Bridges (2010) on board to fill this vacuum.

6.4.5 Reading strategies

All areas are integrated into reading, so it is difficult to separate them. Concannon-Gibney (RAI, 2014) describes how reading rate, accuracy and prosody are all components of fluent reading. She recommends using the Big Books to teach children essential words while also communicating their importance in the reading task and that they are excellent for comprehension development as discussed in 4.3. In this survey teachers reported using Big Books to form connections, noticing grammar points, shared reading of the Big Books using

reading strategies e.g. chunky monkey and flippy dolphin. Teachers highlighted the importance of reading aloud to children, which is also recommended by Concannon-Gibney (RAI, 2104). Teachers read stories and poems to children. They referred to using novels, going on library visits, using Reader's Theatre and drama with classes, KWL charts. Then teachers referred to different types of reading strategies that they use including: team teaching; repeated reading; echo reading and paired and shared reading, as recommended by PDST (2013). One teacher suggested varying the formation in the class for reading – circle formation, independent group work and collaborative groups or in pairs. Some teachers spoke about the use of ICT to teach reading – by putting the new words from new readers on power point and using applications on ipads as well as using IT paired reading. One teacher does shared reading for 6 weeks in Term three where a Fifth class pupil monitors a Senior Infant reading using books from the class library for 10 minutes per day. Some teachers recommended various programmes like Alpha to Omega, Toe by Toe as well as Dolch activities and the PAT programme. Many of these suggestions have been recommended by NEPS (2012) in relation to effective interventions for struggling readers, based on research by NRP (2000), Scammaca et al. (2007), Singleton (2009), Kennedy et al. (2012) and Eurydice Network (2011) as discussed in 4.3.

6.4.6 Writing strategies

Teachers referred to writing for a purpose: writing lists; invitations; signs as well as free writing; dictation and cloze writing. Teachers in the disadvantaged schools spoke about the First Steps writing genres and scaffolding for creative writing. Some teachers spoke about children writing and talking from their own experience and doing book reports and storyboards. Some teachers also referred to spelling and teaching the 'look, cover, write, check' strategy as

recommended by Culligan (2009). In the next section I report on the resources teachers use in ST.

6.5 Theme 3: Resources teachers use in ST and insights into Literacy Curriculum

Teachers use a variety or resources in the different classes for ST. For further detail on commercially produced resources please see Appendix 5. The full table of all resources in use is in Appendix 6.

Table 6F: Resources teachers of different classes use in Station Teaching

Classes	Jun Inf	Sen Inf	First	Second	Third	Fourth	Fifth	Sixth
N. of Teachers	81	82	82	82	45	39	32	25
	% of trs.	% of trs.	% of trs.	% of trs.	% of trs.	% of trs.	% of trs.	% of trs.
Levelled readers	22	24	23	29	33	30	29	29
Novels			3	3	9	27	25	28
Jolly Phonics/ Jolly Grammar	11	12	13	16	11	3	3	4
Mini whiteboards and markers	15	16	15	14	19	10	9	8
Handwriting copies/books laminated pages	15	19	18	20	16	18	25	19
Sand trays and sandpaper letters	8	3	1					
Listening activity book/ Oral language	6	4	5	5	7	5	3	4
Phonics games/sheets	2	4	2	1				
Magnetic letters	10	10	9	4				
Smart Pals/ Elkonin boxes	3	4	4	3				
Rhyming,Tricky words/flashcards	7	2	5	4				
Punctuation booklets/ First Steps/Worksheets/ Grammar book	1	2	2	1	5	7	6	8

Of the 115 teachers who responded to the survey 81 replied to questions detailing resources used in ST in Junior Infant and Senior Infant classes, 82 for First and Second Classes, 45 for Third Class, 39 for Fourth Class, 32 for Fifth Class and 25 for Sixth Class.

Teachers reported that levelled readers or novels were used for ST in all classes. In the junior classes an average of 23% of teachers use levelled books. 13% of Junior Infant teachers use PM books for ST, 2% Big Cat books, 2% Oxford Reading Tree books, 1% Red Rockets and 4% Sails books. All of these books are graded and levelled so teachers can move pupils up the levels as they progress. However Stephen Graham (2013), the Australian educationalist warns against pupils moving up the levels too quickly and advocates moving sideways across levels in different series. Otherwise pupils can decode the words at the next level but may have difficulty comprehending.

26% of teachers of First and Second classes and 33% of teachers of Third Classes use the graded schemes but 9% also use novels. 29% of teachers of Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Classes use levelled books and 26% use novels.

The Jolly Phonics programme is predominately used in Junior Classes but also in Senior Classes ranging from 11% in Junior Infant classes to 8% in Second and 4% in Sixth Classes. This programme provides teachers with actions for each of the 42 letter sounds to teach the five basic skills of reading and writing: learning the letter sounds, learning letter formation, blending sounds, identifying sounds in words and spelling the tricky words. It is a multi-sensory method and very enjoyable for pupils. The Jolly Grammar programme is the next stage after Jolly Phonics and it is used in middle classes – the classes for whom it is targeted. There is a wide variety of teaching aids with the Jolly Phonics programme from books, phonics cards, DVDs, posters, Big Books to resources for the interactive whiteboard.

An average of 5% of teachers surveyed use a listening activity book for Oral Language in all classes. Mini whiteboards and markers are used throughout all the classes ranging from 15% in Junior Infants to 14% in Second Classes and 8% in Sixth Classes.

Handwriting copies are used consistently across all the classes while handwriting books with laminated pages are used in some junior classes. Some schools are using First Steps writing programme in all classes. First Steps present 7 steps to teaching a genre: familiarisation; analysing one text model and multi-text model; modelled writing; shared writing; guided writing; independent writing and presentation to an audience.

Sand trays and sandpaper letters are used in Infant and First Classes. Magnetic letters and magnetic boards are used in junior classes as well as Smart Pals which are comprised of two durable sheets of plastic and allow any worksheet to be slipped inside via the open top and side and pupils use low-odour, dry-erase markers to write on these.

Teachers use Elkonin boxes to teach phonemic awareness by having the pupils listen for individual sounds and marking where they hear them in the boxes with each box representing one phoneme or sound. They also use Phonics sheets, differentiated worksheets, especially prepared handwriting copies and free writing copies, tricky words/flashcards and rhyming stories.

1% of teachers use the Big Yellow Box in First and Second classes and 3% of senior classes use a Grammar book. The Big Yellow Box focuses on strong independent reading and comprehension and contains 150 cards spread over 15 levels, from reading age of 5.6 to 11 years, they are self-managing and highly motivational.

Teachers of Infant classes report using Onset and Rime activities. Onset and Rime has been shown to be one of the most effective ways of improving phonological awareness as discussed in 4.3 (Ní Mhurchú, 1998; Adams, 1990). The term ‘onset’ refers to the beginning sound of a word – the consonant or consonant blend that comes before the vowel. ‘Rime’ consists of the vowel sound and the consonants that follow it.

Other resources that teachers use in Infant classes include laminated alphabets, snap and bingo cards for visual memory. They also report using some commercial resources: LDAids; Sounds OK books; Orchard toy games and Jeffries Auditory processing activities and I explain these resources:

LDA stands for Learning and Development Aids and this company provides a great choice of literacy resources to help children develop their reading, writing, grammar and speaking skills including memory games, sequencing cards and audio packs.

Sounds O.K. books are a phonic-based spelling book and also includes some useful sight words and provides a step-by-step guide to independent spelling.

Orchard Toys are fun games for children to play whilst learning. Games include: animals, dominoes and shopping lists. They are great for counting, sorting and colour recognition and they help to improve memory and communication skills.

Jeffries Auditory processing activities is a comprehensive book published by Jeffries and Jeffries which contains a multitude of audio processing activities and worksheets to develop auditory discrimination, memory, perception, association, synthesis and comprehension.

The use of the above resources gives an insight into what goes on in the enacted curriculum. The use of the different resources tells us about teachers conceptualising literacy and learners' needs. Teachers are using a broad range of resources to facilitate learning in ST and to enhance pupils' learning of the essential literacy skills. Groups of teachers in schools have devised unique ways of supplementing the curriculum e.g. making handwriting copies and laminated sheets as aids to teaching writing. This resonates with the attributes of an effective teacher of literacy as outlined by Hattie (2003), as discussed in 2.6.

In the next section I address the assessment approaches teachers use for selection of groups for ST and the criteria teachers use to judge the success of ST

6.6 Theme 4: Assessment Approaches

The following table shows which assessment method teachers employ for selection of groups for Station Teaching

Table 6G: Assessment Approaches teachers employ for selection of pupils for groups in ST

Assessment Approaches for selection of groups	% of teachers who use this method
(a) Teacher observation	100
(b) Standardised tests e.g. Belfield, MIST, Micra T, Drumcondra Tests	76
(c) Teacher made tests	57
(d) Running record on pupil's reading level	52
(e) Checklist or rating scale	19
(f) Checklist on Concepts about print	14
(g) Other	10
	N = 115

PDST (2013) outlined sources of evidence that teachers use to monitor pupils' reading development and this was discussed in 4.3. Their recommendations are in line with the findings presented in this table.

All respondents report that they use 'Teacher Observation' as an assessment method to help divide pupils into groups for ST.

76% use standardized tests to divide the pupils e.g. Belfield, MIST, Micra T and or Drumcondra tests (See information note in Appendix 7). 57% use Teacher made tests, 52% use a running record on pupils' reading level, 19% use a checklist or rating scale, 14% use a checklist for Concepts about Print. 10% of teachers recorded that they use other assessment methods to divide the pupils into groups for ST. When I examined this 10% who use other methods I realised they were all Junior Infant teachers. They did not elaborate on other methods used to select groups but, based on my classroom observations, some teachers selected the groups based on children who worked well together regardless of ability.

6.6.1 Useful for assessing pupil's progress

Teachers have found ST both effective and enjoyable and feel that it has enhanced their teaching and their pupils' learning. It also helps them to assess each child's progress as they can observe them in small groups and receive feedback about individual progress from their colleagues at other Stations. This is in line with NCCA (2007) recommendations as discussed in 4.4. One teacher commented: 'This gives an excellent insight in to the pupils' reading, word sounds and comprehension which is vital for 1st and 2nd class' and another: 'ST allows me the teacher to maximise my teaching and children's learning.' However teachers caution that assessment of how well the Station Teaching is working is crucial but quite difficult to do if targets are not clearly set. The class teacher needs to feel that the targets are being reached.

6.6.2 Type of groupings for ST

With regard to the type of groupings used for ST, 86% of schools place pupils in groups of similar literacy competence for ST while 14% use mixed ability grouping.

In 86% of schools all pupils in a class are engaged in ST while in 14% of schools not all pupils in the class are engaged in ST. These are the reasons for this:

- In one school a pupil with Special Education Needs (SEN) goes out to the Resource teacher at this time.
- Another school only has 2 teachers in the classroom so 2 groups work independently for half the session.
- In the third school the teachers report that 'if on a rare occasion children's behaviour is such that they cannot participate then they are accommodated otherwise'. In this school the children are supported by an SNA either in the classroom or in a different room during ST.
- In the fourth school the class is divided in half and one half participates in ST while the other half does other literacy activities in their classroom with an SNA.

6.6.3 How teachers judge the success of ST

I was interested to find out how teachers judge the success of Station Teaching in their classes. How do teachers know it is making a difference to the pupils' learning? I looked at what criteria they might use in making this judgment. How teachers answered the question on what criteria they are using to judge the success of ST in class depends largely on what class they are teaching. I have presented a summary table in accordance with teachers' top choices in relation to which criteria they deem to be the most important in judging success in ST. I have included a breakdown of classes - teachers of Junior classes (Junior Infants, Senior Infants), Middle classes (First, Second and Third class) and Senior classes (Fourth, Fifth and Sixth class). The full table outlining teachers' choices is available in Appendix 8.

Table 6H: Breakdown of Class teachers' criteria for judging success of ST

Criteria	1st choice	2nd choice	3rd choice	4th choice	5th choice	6th choice
n = 54 Class teachers	% of trs.	% of trs.	% of trs.	% of trs.	% of trs.	% of trs.
Enhanced engagement with books	24 – J 38 – M 10 - S	29 – J 28 – M 36 - S	14 – J 14 – M 28 - S	4 – J 14 – M 18 - S	13 – J 5 – M 10 - S	13 – J 5 – M - S
Enhanced decoding skills	40 – J 38 – M 45 - S	18 – J - M - S	11 – J 14 – M 18 - S	10 – J 19 – M 18 - S	10 – J 14 – M 10 - S	10 – J 19 – M 10 - S
Enhanced motivation for literacy activities	14 – J 14 – M - - S	9 – J 9 – M 10 - S	31 – J 14 – M 18 - S	31 – J 20 – M 28 - S	13 – J 20 – M 26 - S	13 – J 24 – M 18 - S
Enhanced comprehension skills	- J 5 – M 45 - S	22 – J 35 – M 26 - S	22 – J 30 – M - S	14 – J 14 – M 18 - S	18 – J 9 – M 10 - S	18 – J 9 – M - S
Enhanced letter knowledge	18 – J 5 – M - S	13 – J 14 – M 18 - S	13 – J 14 – M 18 - S	13 – J 14 – M - S	37 – J 28 – M 26 - S	8 – J 19 – M 36 - S
Progress in their writing	4 – J - M - S	9 – J 14 – M 18 - S	9 – J 14 – M 18 - S	28 – J 19 - M 18 - S	9 - J 24 – M 18 - S	38 – J 24 – M 36 - S

J = Teachers of Junior classes – Junior and Senior Infants

M = Teachers of Middle classes – First, Second, Third classes

S = Teachers of Senior classes – Fourth, Fifth, Sixth classes

(Note: The statistics for each class grouping's criteria all add up to 100% vertically)

Table 6I: Overall summary of criteria class teachers use to judge success of ST

Criteria	1st choice	2nd choice	3rd choice	4th choice	5th choice	6th choice
n = 54 CT	% of CT	% of CT	% of CT	% of CT	% of CT	% of CT
Enhanced decoding skills	42	6	14	16	12	13
Enhanced engagement with books	24	30	19	12	9	6
Enhanced comprehension skills	16	27	17	15	12	9
Enhanced motivation for literacy activities	9	9	21	26	20	18
Enhanced letter knowledge	8	15	15	9	30	21
Progress in their writing	1	13	14	22	17	34

(Note: The statistics for teachers' criteria all add up to 100% vertically)

The criteria that teachers use to judge the success of ST are very interesting and these are outlined in Tables 6H and 6I. The potential of ST to enhance the basic skills of print literacy trumps all other criteria with regard to judging the success of ST.

Enhanced decoding skills: 42% of all teachers surveyed report that enhanced decoding skills is their first choice and 62% place it in their top three choices, which would largely be relevant in junior classes. Of the teachers of Infants 40% rank enhanced decoding skills as first choice. In the middle classes 38% of teachers rank it as first choice and in the senior classes 45% of teachers rank decoding skills as first choice.

Enhanced engagement with books: 24% of teachers report that enhanced engagement with books is their top criteria and 73% place it in their top three choices. In the infant classes 24% of teachers rank it as first choice, in the middle classes 38% rank it as first choice and in the senior classes 10% rank it as first choice.

Enhanced comprehension skills: 16% of teachers report that enhanced comprehension skills is their first choice and 60% in their top three choices. In the infant classes it does not feature as first choice of ranking, in the middle classes 5% rank it as first choice and in the senior classes 45% rank it as first choice.

Enhanced motivation for literacy activities: In relation to enhanced motivation for literacy activities 9% have it as their first choice and 39% in their top three choices. In the infant classes 14% rank it as first choice, in the middle classes 14% rank it as first choice and in the senior classes it does not feature as first choice.

Enhanced letter knowledge: 8% of teachers use the criteria of enhanced letter knowledge as first choice, while 38% place it in their top three choices. In the infant classes 18% rank it as first choice, in the middle classes 5% rank it as first choice and in the senior classes it does not feature as first choice. Letter knowledge is considered a powerful predictor of successful reading as discussed in 4.3 (Clay, 1985; Muter and Snowling, 1998; Riley, 1996; Cogan, 2015)

Progress in writing: 1% of teachers report that progress in writing is their first choice while 28% place it in their top three choices. In the infant classes 4% rank it as first choice, but it does not feature as first choice in either the middle classes or the senior classes.

Looking at the results presented in this chart the criteria teachers use to judge the success of ST going on their first choice are enhanced decoding skills, engagement with books,

comprehension skills, enhanced motivation for literacy activities, letter knowledge and progress in writing at the end.

In judging the success of ST teachers are happy that pupils' decoding skills have been enhanced and that pupils are more engaged with books, which is one of the targets of the National Literacy Strategy (2011). Following on from these criteria improvement in comprehension skills is next and is an area where pupils struggle. Along with this comes enhanced motivation for literacy activities. If pupils are motivated to engage with literacy activities then their literacy skills will improve. Improved letter knowledge is more relevant in the junior classes and lastly progress in writing is the final criteria. In ST there is not a huge opportunity to engage with writing activities. In the junior classes this involves teachers teaching letter formation and the mechanics of writing. In the senior classes functional and creative writing take on a new form. Overall it would seem that teachers judge the success of ST according to pupils' reading skills.

All the skills mentioned are essential literacy skills as described by Snow et al. (1998) and Courtney and Gleeson (2010) in 4.3.5 and by NEPS (2012); NRP (2000); Scammaca et al. (2007); Kennedy et al. (2012) and Eurydice Network (2011) in 4.5.

In the next section I focus on teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of ST.

6.7 Theme 5: Teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of Station Teaching

All teachers, both Class and Support, agree that ST covers all relevant aspects of literacy for the pupils. Some feel that oral language needs to be addressed at a different time and that comprehension strategies need to be developed at other times as time is limited in ST. This is confirmed by Horkan and Tiernan (2014) as discussed in 4.6.3, when they argue that ST should

not be the only support model utilised in promoting reading attainment in schools. ST time should not be the only time literacy is taught in the classroom.

One teacher says 'It does what it is supposed to do' and over a course of 6/8 weeks where Class and Support teachers meet to discuss priorities and difficulties seems to be the ideal situation. The fact that pupils receive intensive tuition in short bursts was very positive as well as the fact that pupils are reading at their own level and are reading new and familiar books every day. This is in line with research on effective literacy teaching as outlined in 2.4 and 2.5 and with reference to 'instructional density' and the role of formative assessment (Snow et al. 1998; Afflerbach, 2000; Allington, 2002; Hall, 2013)

One Support teacher reports that 'in a small group situation especially when pupils are grouped according to ability you can ensure that the pupils are reading and learning at an appropriate level'. A Class teacher agrees that ST covers the relevant aspects of literacy; they do ST in her school and she thinks 'it's a fantastic initiative to have in the school and I feel that I would not be able to cover the relevant aspects of literacy on my own.' Some teachers may be overly dependent on ST and oo resources and not have the confidence or content knowledge to fully engage with extending their teaching of literacy. This is reported by Hattie (2003) and Louden et al. (2005) in their reviews of teacher expertise as outlined in 2.6.

6.7.1: Aspects of Literacy catered for in ST

There is a great sense of teachers working together and supporting each other to create a positive and progressive learning environment for the children (DES, 2011). All children benefit from ST according to this survey. Teachers reported that children take such pride in

being able to read and also feel extremely proud of their written work. This sense of pride and joy in reading is reflected in the National Literacy Strategy (DES, 2011).

Teachers reported that all aspects of literacy are well catered for in ST but in particular:

- Reading both new books and familiar books
- Reading aloud
- Word work, decoding skills
- Phonics – games, blending, tricky words, rhymes
- Handwriting, Free writing and creative writing
- Oral language development
- Concepts about print
- Developing fluency
- Comprehension strategies

Teachers also feel that ST facilitates small group work, that children get individual attention and that it is easier to notice difficulties. Pupils are also reading at their own level and pace. Station Teaching seems to cover all the essential skills of literacy as outlined in 4.3.1 - 4.3.5.

Teachers feel that ST is beneficial as it promotes teamwork, organisation, team teaching and interest in literacy. Although there is a lot of organisation and collaboration with other teachers children get to work with different teachers learning new things. Children get to do a variety of tasks in a short space of time. Children get to learn to work independently and focus for the 15 minute slot. One teacher reported: 'As a staff we have engaged in ST now for well over 8 years, it works for us here in a DEIS school, we are constantly learning from one another and ST gives us great opportunities to share our practice. The children have benefited enormously.' Teachers report that ST builds fluency and confidence in reading. One teacher stated: 'I have always found ST most useful in my teaching with the influx of EAL numbers it benefits the students tremendously, it promotes confidence in the student's own ability and more importantly it promotes a love of books and a print rich environment'. Teachers also found that

writing helps the children to express themselves and some teachers use ‘practice makes perfect notes’ to help improve the children’s spellings e.g. they write a word six times to help with learning a high frequency word.

6.7.2: Aspects of literacy which may be neglected or limited in ST

In relation to aspects of literacy which may be neglected or limited in ST, on the whole teachers are satisfied with the Stations. They all feel the time is limited with so much to do. However 11 (9%) of teachers felt that it is difficult to cover comprehension well enough as time is very short and 4 (3%) of teachers would like more time to cover grammar in the senior classes – ‘comprehension – limited amount of time to develop this aspect, could be explored more’. Teachers on the whole seem to have an obsession with time or lack of time in class to cover all areas of the curriculum. In this survey, teachers remark repeatedly on the lack of time. They certainly seem to feel under pressure in ST to cover all aspects of literacy in the short time available. This issue of lack of time was very evident in the NCCA reports (2005, 2010) on the overcrowded curriculum as discussed in 3.2.

Some teachers prepare the writing activity beforehand. One teacher reported that writing was neglected ‘purely because the time is limited. I’ve found it easier to prepare the ground work for the Writing Station just before the ST session. This enables the children to get into the work straight away and allows me to rotate or provide one to one assistance’.

Some schools provide one 6/8 week block for a class for ST each year but teachers would love to have a longer period. However you need extra staff to run ST and schools have to prioritise their interventions. Some teachers also feel that 6/9 minutes at a Station is very little at times. Some would like a supervised writing station – it was the one area that 16 (13%) teachers

commented on – they felt that the time was very short to do constructive work. One teacher of junior classes reported that 'the formation and pencil grip are not corrected as comprehension is the focus' and a teacher of a senior class reported that 'Writing can be neglected slightly as pupils do not have a whole lot of time to write something independently' while another reported that 'our writing Station is independent, so yes I think instruction is abandoned a little. The writing activities are usually handwriting or simple word recognition exercises pupils can complete with ease independently'. It seems to vary with teachers with regard to how much progress pupils are making and the activities pupils are engaged in. It appears that where pupils are working independently at a Station teachers are giving them a task to do that they can complete easily without interrupting the teacher.

Nine (7%) teachers felt that there is not enough time to cover Oral language, they would have liked an extra Station for Oral language but do not have the staff to have a fifth person available. One teacher reported that Oral language is neglected 'since you have a limited time it appears more writing/reading focused than oral', another reported that 'an Oral language Station would be beneficial and is an aspect of literacy that is equally as important as reading and writing'. Teachers realise the importance of oral language but feel that there is not enough time to devote to it during Station Teaching. It is a question of prioritising too at the Stations.

Four teachers expressed concern that Station Teaching does not suit the weaker pupils, as one class teacher reported 'the time at each Station is very short, I think the weaker children are just getting to grips with an activity when it's time to move on' and a Support teacher agreed 'quite often the less able child has difficulty moving from Station to Station and maintaining concentration'. This is an interesting observation and one I would not have thought of before researching this topic. Of course the weaker pupils have more difficulty changing task so it would follow that there is too much changing at Station Teaching for them to take on board. There is an issue of ensuring flexibility here for teachers who are challenged to deal with

diversity. This is a mark of an effective teacher of literacy as discussed in 2.3 with insights by Hall (2003) on how educators advised helping Stephen read. Hall (2003) contends that much research has been done on how best to teach literacy but that there is no 'one' right approach for teaching reading. In 2.5 and 2.6, I referred to Snow et al. (1998) and Louden et al. (2005) and the characteristics of effective early literacy teachers, one of which is that the teacher adjusts groupings and explicitness of instruction according to individual needs. In ST, as in any intervention, teachers may have to adjust their teaching approaches to suit the needs of their pupils. Teachers have to take account of personalised learning for pupils and not to allow the content and the task to dictate. There is a challenge here for teachers to accommodate individual needs and the possible consequences of this – the push to sameness and the normative.

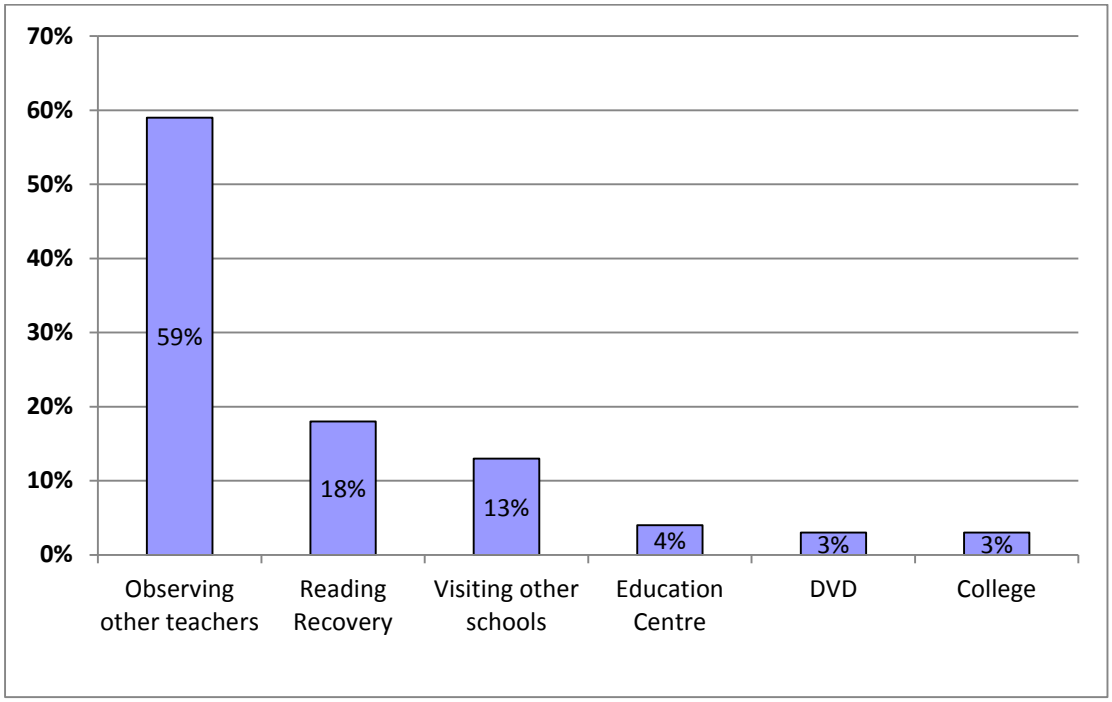
Of the 115 teachers surveyed, 49 (42%) did not report on any area they felt was neglected with 2 (1%) feeling that their approach to ST is effective and comprehensive but that 'there is always room for improvement with greater manpower to keep groups at similar levels' and the second that obviously there is 'a time and resources limit – we would love to be able to run it all year, in each of the 3 classes mentioned (Junior Infants, Senior Infants, First Class) and also with a fifth person to incorporate a writing group'. Teachers are happy with Station Teaching but can see opportunities for further development for example extending ST to other classes. It is very important and perhaps they can have an influence in their schools in future extension of Station Teaching.

This leads me into the next section which covers the theme of CPD for teachers on ST, how younger teachers learn from observing more experienced teachers and how teachers enjoy engaging in professional dialogue. I also report on teachers' perceptions of how ST has enhanced their teaching of literacy and has improved their literacy instruction practices.

6.8 Theme 6: Continuous Professional Development for teachers on Station Teaching

The majority of teachers seemed to learn about Station Teaching from other teachers either in their own schools, by visiting other schools or through courses in the Education Centres where the Support teachers were trained in the Reading Recovery approach.

Chart 6D: How teachers learned how to do Station Teaching



***N* = 115**

Fifty nine per cent of teachers learned about ST from other teachers in the school – from observing them, the Learning Support teachers attended courses in Literacy Lift Off and trained staff in the method – modelling lessons. 18% of teachers were trained in Reading Recovery and used knowledge from there to input into LLO.

13% of teachers visited other schools to observe Station Teaching; they also spoke to other teachers at courses about the method. 4% of teachers attended LLO courses in the Education Centres, 3% of teachers watched a DVD on ST and 3% learned about ST in college during SESE lectures.

This development of up-skilling in the schools is part of developing a professional community of learners in the schools and is in line with current policy (DES, 2011). Kennedy et al. (2012) recommend that these 'learning communities help to create a shared vision and collective responsibility for the development of a balanced literacy framework across the school' (2012, p.333).

6.8.1 Younger teachers observing and learning from more experienced teachers

Younger teachers appreciated observing more experienced teachers – training in on methodologies/ techniques/strategies for improving literacy and ideas for helping pupils and assessing the needs of the child. Through this observation they felt that their teaching of literacy was enhanced as one such teacher reported: 'As a NQT (Newly qualified teacher) I feel I have learned a great amount from watching and participation in ST – particularly in terms of teaching comprehension strategies and a greater understanding of how pupils learn. It has helped me also to learn more about differentiation'.

6.8.2 Teachers enjoy working with small groups of pupils and engaging in professional dialogue

Most teachers felt that they got such a good chance to work with pupils in small groups, that they could assess the pupils and intervene accordingly. They appreciated this opportunity and also enjoyed getting feedback from other teachers about the pupils in their class – professional dialogue. There is little facility in the school day for teachers to reflect and share practice with colleagues (Hargreaves, 1994; Day, 1999) but Station Teaching provides an opportunity for this dialogue as one teacher commented: 'It has afforded me with the opportunity to learn from

my colleagues and benefit from their experience. I feel we all have a wealth of knowledge to share within different areas it's important to work collaboratively for the benefit of pupils we educate'. Kennedy and Shiel (2010) in their study (4.2.2) proved how beneficial professional dialogue was to the success of their study on raising literacy levels in an urban disadvantaged school and these teachers are reporting similar ideas. The benefits of CPD in DEIS schools were also outlined in 4.2.4 and 4.2.5 (DES, 2009).

6.8.3 Enhancing teachers' teaching of literacy

The majority of teachers reported that they have learned the important aspects of literacy – word work, decoding, phonics, comprehension strategies, differentiation – and catering for every pupil's needs, the skills of Guided reading during the intervention. Hall (2003) recommends the broader notion of what literacy is and how this requires teachers to use a broader range of teaching strategies as these teachers have done (Hall, 2003, p. 192). One teacher commented: 'I realise the importance of prediction – getting the children to think ahead before they read the book. The importance of decoding words, the importance of the child running their finger under the words (not stabbing the words) these factors all contribute to the smooth running of ST'. Another teacher reported that: 'It has given me an insight into the different ways children learn – songs, rhymes, visual, kinaesthetic and auditory. It has given me a lot of ideas to use in the classroom in my teaching of phonics in the future'. Kennedy et al. (2012) identify a number of key components for effective teaching of reading including the establishment of varied and rich vocabulary, the development of phonological processes, the provision of a framework for teaching comprehension strategies, a renewed focus on reading fluency and to ensure motivation and enjoyment of reading. The teachers included all of these components in their comments on their enhanced teaching of literacy.

Teachers also commented how LLO has enhanced their teaching of literacy and that they now try to incorporate all aspects of literacy especially oral language and that they feel they have a wider range of skills that they can bring to the class in the field of literacy as a result. This is in line with many studies on the need for balanced models of reading instruction (Concannon-Gibney and Murphy, 2012; Kennedy et al. 2012). Teachers feel that the different strategies and techniques they use when teaching literacy are very active and hands on ways for children to learn and are fantastic for early intervention. Teachers also asserted that ST gives them a chance to give more individual praise to children and focus on aspects they are struggling with.

Teachers remarked on the limited time available in ST classes and stressed that it is very important that sessions are properly planned and that teaching is better as a result. Teachers reported that they have worked collectively to try to improve their practice and that their literacy programme is much more cohesive and developmental throughout the school now.

Then two teachers had these comments to make in relation to ST: 'I do not think it has enhanced my teaching of literacy but I feel it exposes the children to different styles of teaching and learning' and the second: 'The opposite – my experience in teaching literacy has enhanced ST'.

These comments are interesting and show the level of expertise that is in schools and of teachers' awareness of their knowledge! I noted with interest this last comment that this Support teacher who feels that she is so experienced in teaching literacy that it has enhanced ST in her school. She has a wealth of experience and has much to contribute to the implementation of ST in her school.

6.8.4 ST has improved literacy instruction

Teachers feel that ST has really improved the standards of literacy in their school. Before LLO/ST was introduced to their school other teachers found literacy difficult and stressful to

teach. As children are grouped according to ability it means they are given more attention leading to a more enjoyable teaching and learning experience. One teacher reported that:

> ST has greatly improved literacy instruction in our school. The variety of activities that children can participate in during a 28 minute lesson is fantastic. Children have become more fluent and comprehensive readers and have also grown in confidence. They enjoy working with a variety of adults and look forward to the daily lesson (Class Teacher)

Teachers report that the children enjoy the interaction with various activities, they enjoy the varied activities, they enjoy moving from Station to Station and appear happy, enthusiastic and actively engaged while they are participating in ST.

One teacher stated:

> I feel very strongly and passionate about ST. It has changed my life professionally both as a class teacher and Resource teacher. Previously, I felt isolated and swamped by the challenges ahead in our DEIS school. Nowadays with the support and knowledge gained from Station Teaching I feel enthusiastic and satisfied (Resource Teacher)

This collaboration among teachers eliminates the feeling of isolation that some Support teachers may feel when working on their own. The teachers in this survey report feeling fulfilled in their work as they see the pupils making progress and they attribute this to participation in ST.

Another teacher stated that 'It's great because you can be assured that all necessary literacy areas for infants are being taught e.g. phonics, decoding, concepts of print etc.' (Snow et al. 1998; NRP, 2000; Concannon-Gibney, RAI, 2014). Some teachers who feel the curriculum is overcrowded (NCCA, 2010) are delighted to have some structure to their teaching of literacy and feel that at least they get to cover the essential skills of literacy during ST as outlined in 4.3.1.

The next theme to emerge from the survey is around pupils' engagement with ST and how they love working in small groups and I report on this in the next section.

6.9 Theme 7: Pupils' engagement with Station Teaching

Teachers report that the pupils love the opportunities to read aloud and to complete tasks which they may not be confident to do in a whole class setting. As one teacher reported: 'The pupils love the attention from different teachers and have an opportunity to achieve as work is pitched at their level, the most important fact is that they are feeling successful reading at instructional level'. Kontovourki (2012) supports this comment by contending that children learning to read need to be introduced to texts that are not too difficult. Kennedy et al. (2012) identified a number of components that are key aspects to the effective teaching of reading including the need to ensure that children are motivated and enjoy reading as these teachers reported. The pupils look forward to ST classes, they feel they can achieve in these classes. One teacher reported: 'They love it and can feel the improvements themselves so it is very motivating for them as well as for parents and staff'.

Teachers report that the children respond really well to LLO/ST. They love getting a new book every night, they see it as fun and interesting and this keeps them interested and develops a love of reading as recommended by The National Literacy Strategy (DES, 2011).

I am always interested in the single figures representing teachers whose views may be different. One teacher is undecided about pupils' engaging in meaningful tasks during ST – this person obviously has mixed feelings about this statement and at times probably feels that the tasks may not always be meaningful. According to Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) engagement is strongly related to reading achievement and classroom contexts can promote engaged reading.

6.9.1 Children love working in small groups

From teachers' experience of ST, they report that the children love working in small groups, they enjoy the attention they receive, they enjoy questioning one another and the high levels of participation and variety of activities also. The children respond very well to the routine of ST and look forward to it daily. The perception of teachers is that children have a great opportunity to express their opinions and they are learning in an environment appropriate for their needs. There is closer engagement with the teacher. One teacher reported: 'All of the children I have taught using Stations have been enthusiastic and engaged. I believe this is because of the variety of learning activities, the short amount of time at each activity and having different adults at each station!' This is a theme that I will investigate further in my case study in Chapter 7.

Children love the variety of resources and personnel, as one teacher reported: 'there is always a happy, productive buzz in the classroom'. It would appear that children enjoy the movement between Stations and they also benefit from the praise and encouragement of the other teachers in the room. One teacher reported: 'Children find the different activities and different teachers appealing'.

One school reported that the success of ST is evidence based in their school: 'yes, we survey the boys every year – feedback is overwhelmingly positive. Parents and teachers report the same finding'.

The feedback on enjoyment of ST from the survey can be summed up by one teacher: 'They love the variety of books, variety of tasks and personnel and the small group attention'.

There was only one negative comment from a teacher on ST: 'yes but it can be quite difficult for the less able pupil to concentrate and to move from teacher to teacher'. This comment also appeared in an earlier section and is one area that teachers need to acknowledge when engaging in ST. Station Teaching may not suit all children, there is no single intervention that will be everything to everyone as no one size fits all. It is important to see ST as an intervention and

not the be all and end all. ST is an intervention that can be helpful and teachers will have to make decisions themselves around what may work best for their particular class.

In the next section I explore factors hindering and enhancing the implementation of ST.

6.10 Theme 8: Factors hindering and enhancing implementing Station Teaching

In this section I examine teachers' views on factors hindering and enhancing implementing ST. I present the teachers' views under three headings:

- Children's learning is addressed in items 1-5
- Teacher learning in items 6-11
- Concerns regarding organisation of ST in items 12-20

Table 6J: Teachers' views on Station Teaching (Full table in Appendix 9)

N = 115	Items	Strongly agree/Agree	Undecided	Disagree/ Strongly disagree
Childrens' learning: 1-5		% of teachers	% of teachers	% of teachers
1.	Pupils' learning is extended during ST	100		
2.	ST provides an opportunity to praise pupils for their achievements	100		
3.	Pupils engage in meaningful tasks during ST	99	1	
4.	ST provides opportunities for social skills training	87	9	4
5.	I see an improvement in pupils' literacy skills since implementing ST	97	3	

Teacher learning: 6-12				
6.	Staff collaboration is vital for ST to succeed	100		
7.	ST has provided an opportunity for professional dialogue with colleagues	95	5	
8.	Engaging in ST has helped to improve my teaching of literacy	92	7	1
9.	Staff relations are strengthened during ST	88	12	
10.	I have benefited from having the opportunity to see how other teachers teach	84	9	7
11.	I have had ample opportunity to learn how to do ST	80	11	9
12.	ST affords the opportunity to see how colleagues teach	76	14	10
Concerns regard. organis. 13-21				
13.	It can be very noisy in the classroom during ST	70	14	16
14.	ST involves a more public display of teaching	66	13	21
15.	Station Teaching (ST) is easily organised in junior classes	50	30	20
16	I feel very tired at the end of a ST class	42	11	47
17.	In our school we do not have sufficient resources for ST	15	7	78
18.	Working with other adults in the classroom is challenging	15	10	75
19.	ST makes me anxious about my disciplining skills	6	4	90
20.	ST makes me anxious about my teaching skills	2	4	94
21.	I do not like Station Teaching			100

6.10.1 Children's learning

All teachers (100%) either strongly agreed or agreed on these statements:

- Pupils' learning is extended during ST
- ST provides an opportunity to praise pupils for their achievements

The majority of teachers either strongly agreed or agreed that:

- ST provides opportunities for social skills training (87%)
- Pupils engage in meaningful tasks during ST (99%)

- They can see an improvement in pupils' literacy skills since implementing ST (97%)

These results are very positive in relation to the benefits to children of ST. Children are working in small groups and this allows more personalised contact time with the teacher. This group work in turn facilitates extending the pupils' learning, praising the pupils for their achievements, ensuring that the pupils are engaged in meaningful tasks and as a result the pupils' literacy skills are improved. The Primary School Curriculum (1999) recommends active learning methods such as group work as discussed in 4.2.3. However data sources such as Murphy, 2004; NCCA, 2005, 2008 and *Growing Up in Ireland* (2012) study suggest that there is more evidence of whole-class teaching approach in primary education with much less group-work. ST offers an opportunity for teachers to engage in group-work and to enhance the learning of the pupils.

6.10.2 Teacher learning

Teachers' responses in relation to their experience of ST were predominantly positive. All the teachers agreed that staff collaboration is vital for ST to succeed (100%).The majority of teachers either strongly agreed or agreed that:

- ST has provided an opportunity for professional dialogue with colleagues (95%)
- Engaging in ST has helped to improve their teaching of literacy (92%)
- Staff relations are strengthened during ST (88%)

- They have benefited from having the opportunity to see how other teachers teach (84%)
- Teachers have had ample opportunity to learn how to do ST (80%)
- ST affords the opportunity to see how colleagues teach (76%)
- They have had ample opportunity to learn how to do ST (80%)

Teachers enjoy the collegiality associated with ST classes. They get an opportunity to work with their colleagues in a focused intervention in a class. Engaging in ST has also improved their teaching of literacy and this was discussed in Section 6.8.5.

A young teacher commented that they would prefer if the English curriculum was more specific about what is to be taught at each class level and that the overall objectives are very broad and quite confusing. She commented: 'when I had Third class last year, I found it difficult to teach all the necessary reading, writing, and oral language elements in the allocated time. I feel the curriculum is overloaded in general'. This comment is interesting and similar to the findings in the NCCA (2010) report on the overcrowded curriculum.

6.10.3 Concerns regarding the organisation of ST

The majority of teachers either strongly agreed or agreed that:

- It can be very noisy in the classroom during ST (70%)
- ST involves a more public display of teaching (66%)

Half of teachers agreed that ST is easily organised in junior classes but 30% were undecided with 20% disagreeing. 47% disagreed that they feel very tired at the end of a ST class. 78% of teachers disagreed that in their school they do not have sufficient resources, 75% disagreed that working with other adults in the classroom is challenging, 90% disagreed that ST makes them

anxious about their disciplining skills and with 11% undecided and 42% who agreed. 94% of teachers disagreed that ST makes them anxious about their teaching skills.

All teachers (100%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed that they do not like ST.

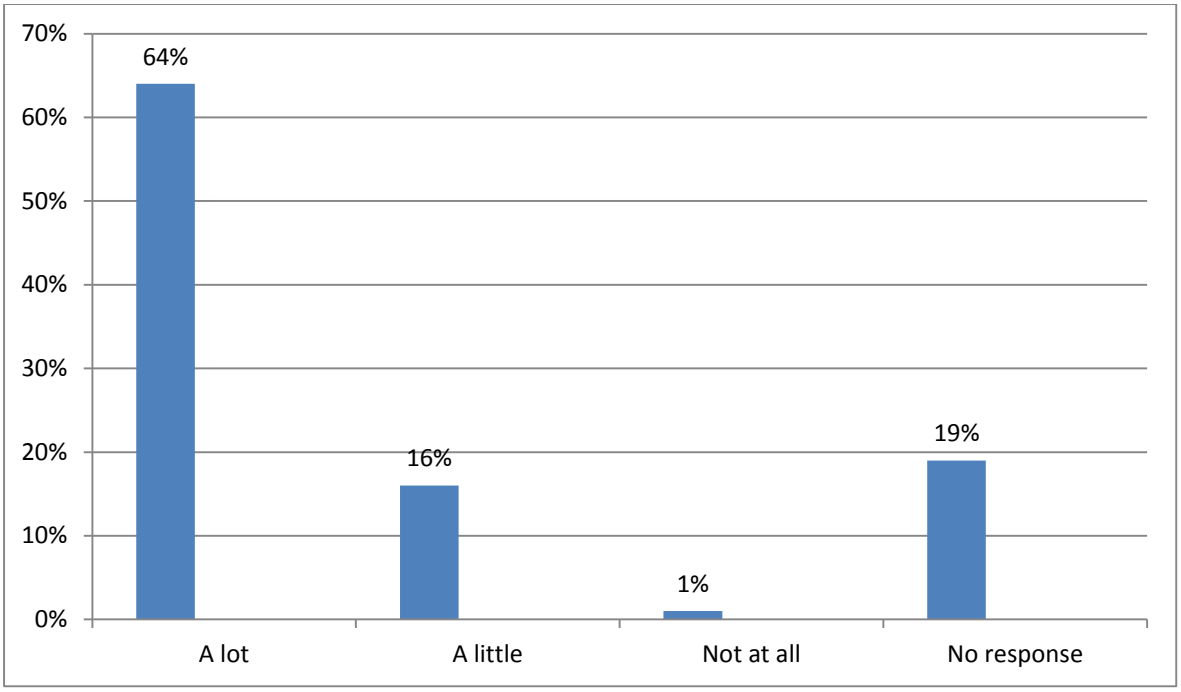
A small minority of the sample: 2% of teachers agree that ST makes them anxious about their teaching skills and 4% are undecided. These teachers may feel a little insecure and are worried that they may not be doing it right while 2% of teachers also strongly disagree that working with other adults in the classroom is challenging. 6% of teachers agree that ST makes them anxious about their disciplining skills. I wonder are these newly qualified teachers who are worried that they may not be able to manage the groups in ST as well as the other teachers? In relation to the 42% of teachers who feel very tired at the end of a ST class these are mainly Support teachers who may be doing ST in different classes, one immediately after another.

One Support teacher commented that the noise level in the classroom during ST is a big issue as it can be very distracting for the children as well as the adults.

6.10.4 How other teaching approaches complement ST

Teachers listed lots of teaching approaches, as already noted in 6.4, that they find effective for teaching literacy in class. They were then asked the extent to which they find that these other approaches complement ST.

Chart 6E: How other teaching approaches complement ST



***N* = 115**

Of the 115 teachers surveyed 64% reported that these other teaching approaches complemented ST a lot, 16% felt they complemented it a little, 1% reported that they did not complement ST at all and 19% did not respond – the latter number came from the principals' and Support teachers' surveys.

The final theme to emerge from the survey details how ST can be improved.

6.11 Theme 9: How Station Teaching can be improved

Teachers were given an opportunity at the end of the questionnaire in an open question to provide any additional comments on ST and teaching of literacy. 27 out of 54 teachers made comments, all the principals and 16 out of 57 Support teachers added comments. The additional comments were interesting and mainly teachers were positive in relation to ST as these comments show. I present the comments under six headings:

1. Longer block of ST needed in classes each year

2. More time, more staff, more resources needed
3. Children should be grouped according to ability, graded and individual instruction should be provided
4. Training should be available for teachers for ST
5. Planning and organisation are vital
6. Difficulty setting up LLO/ST

6.11.1 A longer block of Station Teaching in classes each year

All the teachers reported that they were satisfied with ST as a method of teaching literacy and would not prefer to use a different method at the moment. Their comments include a desire for a longer intervention period, the success of small group work and guided reading and they are happy with the resources they use.

Most of the teachers would like to have ST sessions for a longer period in their classrooms, as one teacher reported: 'I am very happy with this Early Intervention in our school. It is the most effective way I can think of to reach 120 children in Senior Infants and 1st class each year and identify those with difficulties'.

Many teachers have just one block per year and would like to extend this period for the intervention. One teacher did comment that whole class teaching of literacy should also be evident in classes and not just at ST time!

Teachers are also satisfied with the small group work in ST and with the resources in schools which facilitate ST: 'a wide variety of PM readers and experienced staff'.

However there were two negative comments with regard to the implementation of ST in their schools. One Support teacher teaches two classes of ST per day but finds it too intense: 'I'd

have preferred to have only one class per day – we did both Senior infants classes each day. My head was spinning after 8 groups. I loved the method'.

One class teacher who is happy with ST but also wants some weak children to be withdrawn from class: 'I do feel for some of the weak children, withdrawal from class is necessary as even in a small group, some still struggle to concentrate'. Both of these comments are very valid – it is very difficult for a Support teacher to work with 8 groups consecutively doing very intense work. The other comment from a class teacher is equally valid as she feels some weak children need some individual help as well as group support.

Teachers report that while ST works very well they are conscious that they also have to teach other aspects of literacy at other times during the day. ST does not cover everything!

6.11.2 More time, more staff and more resources needed

Teachers reported that ST has been very successful in their schools but that it is very dependent on extra staff and plenty of resources being available. Extra teachers are needed to ensure the effective implementation of ST in a classroom. The Learning Support Guidelines (DES, 2000) recommended in class support for pupils experiencing difficulty in class and teachers engaging in ST are facilitating this in class support.

Teachers are satisfied with the guided reading sessions as part of ST but would like more adults helping out in ST: 'Teachers see the value in allowing children to read at their instructional level and are slowly moving away from the class reader', as advised by Graham (2015).

Teachers also think that more time and resources should be provided for the teaching of oral language, as they feel that this is one element of literacy that can be left out in a lot of classrooms. Teachers recommend that every school should try ST if they can afford the books and the teaching time. The NCCA (2005) review of the Curriculum concurred with these findings.

6.11.3 Children should be grouped according to ability; graded and individual instruction should be provided

One teacher reported that the children all get something out of the ST sessions, when grouped according to ability. Teachers have been very impressed with ST as one teacher reported: 'I feel early intervention is essential in a class of 29 children they have greatly benefited from smaller similar ability groups. We can focus in on their needs with more precision'. Teachers also feel that the graded and individual instruction has really helped their pupils' literacy. Children are grouped according to ability in ST, that is to say they are grouped according to their achievement levels in literacy. Teachers are differentiating with levelled readers, thus children remain challenged and experience success regardless of their ability. Children's progression is easily monitored as they move up a level in readers. As one teacher reported: 'I have Station taught as a class teacher for the past ten years and it makes you realise the importance for catering for every pupil's needs and the inadequacy of simply relying on a class reader'.

6.11.4 Training should be available for teachers for ST

Teachers reported that 'A school-wide approach to the development of literacy skills is essential. In order for ST to be worthwhile and effective teachers need to believe in this strategy; perhaps more organised training would help teachers especially in terms of confidence and engaging in ST'.

Teachers recommended that other teachers should do a Guided reading/Lift off to Literacy course in the Education centres. They also claimed that training should be available for teachers to learn the methods. One teacher contended that 'even if a school can't afford the resources or staff for ST the teachers could incorporate the method/strategies into their small group

teaching'. Engagement in professional development is essential for effective early literacy teachers (Snow et al. 1998; Afflerbach, 2000; Hattie, 2003; Louden et al. 2005; Taylor et al. 2005, DES, 2011 – Target p. 36).

One teacher strongly disagrees that they have benefited from having the opportunity to see how other teachers teach; she says she is so busy with her own Station that she does not have time to look at others!

Finally 9% disagree that they have had ample opportunity to learn how to do ST, so there is room here for professional development in relation to ST training.

6.11.5 Planning and organisation of ST are vital

Teachers report that ST works really well but requires a huge amount of organisation and timetabling to cater for all changes in the school. It requires a lot of input from SNAs and Special education teachers and this can be hard to plan and organise: the availability of a suitable room; staff to help; purchasing and minding the books; substitutes when teachers are out and planning a unit of work etc. As one teacher commented: 'To sum it up, when it's done well it's fantastic and very beneficial' and another: 'ST requires a lot of preparation and planning but if done consistently and if planned for correctly it can be very effective and worthwhile learning experience for the children'.

Teachers recommend that the personnel involved in ST should draw up a working contract from the outset outlining agreed roles, permitted noise levels, disciplining, timing of activities etc. They also suggest that review meetings (minimum one per fortnight) be built in and that staff rotation of Stations also is very important and a testing week is essential.

ST has been very successful in some schools not only for literacy but also for maths, as recommended by King (2006). The positive attitude towards literacy ST has encouraged some

teachers to set up a similar model in numeracy which is rolled out in the middle classes. However these teachers caution that ST must be well organised in classrooms and be enjoyable for the children.

6.11.6 Difficulty setting up LLO: Soapbox

One teacher felt very strongly about the difficult of setting up LLO in their school

> We had to "beg borrow and steal" information to set up LLO three to four years ago. The schools who helped us were DEIS schools who had specific training in Reading Recovery. LLO is a progression from that in their schools. I believe that non-DEIS schools have had no support either professionally or financially in furthering the Literacy levels in their schools-as always, parental donations and Board of Management support in buying books (3000 euro) and the enthusiasm of a few teachers brought change. Each school works out the system that suits their own needs (PDST commenced training in Cork Education Support Centre on Guided reading November '13)'.

This view is echoed by other teachers and ST is very dependent on interested staff developing and promoting the implementation of ST. Staff collaboration is vital for ST to succeed.

Teachers report that when planning and teaching a programme together they learn from one another and thus resulting in the students being provided with better learning opportunities. Their achievements are assessed collaboratively by the teachers who then adjust the programme further as a result of this information (McCarthy, 2011). All in all the pupils benefit from this collaboration and this is what is happening with Station Teaching. As one principal commented 'Having seen the improvement in all pupils in such a short time the approach is unquestionably one of the most successful we have ever used'. The effectiveness of the teacher is crucial for the implementation of ST and if the teachers are up-to-date with effective strategies they are likely to secure good outcomes for pupil learning.

6.12 Conclusion

This chapter sought to present survey data on teachers' views and opinions on Station Teaching as a literacy intervention in schools. I outlined the sampling details with questionnaires returned from 115 teachers from 21 schools around the country. Table 6H outlines the Stations that are most common in these schools and Table 6I details the resources teachers use at the Stations. I explore the assessment methods which teachers use to select groups, monitor progress and how they judge the success of ST. I report on teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of ST and aspects catered for or neglected with ST. Teachers report on the training they received on ST and I examine the theme of pupil engagement with ST. In Section 6.10 I consider factors which hinder or enhance ST and finally ways in which ST could be improved as suggested by the teachers in the questionnaire survey.

The findings were mainly positive in relation to Station Teaching revealing that the pupils love Station Teaching and that they are benefiting from the intervention and I explore this further in my case study in the next chapter.

Chapter 7: Case Study findings and analysis

7.1 Introduction

The empirical research for this thesis commenced with the quantitative survey of 115 teachers in 21 primary schools in Ireland to ascertain their views and perspectives of Station Teaching. In particular it sought evidence about their practices and their claims about the effectiveness of Station Teaching. With that data in hand, the next step was to gather deeper insights by conducting a case study using multiple sources of evidence as recommended by Yin (2009). The most important advantage according to Yin (2009) presented by using multiple sources of evidence is 'the development of converging lines of inquiry' (2009, p. 115). This allowed me to collect evidence from observations in classes; individual and focus group interviews with pupils, parents and teachers; photographs; video recordings in class; children's drawings;

reflection journals from two teachers and pre and post test results in Junior and Senior Infant classes. I followed the three principles of data collection as advised by Yin (2009): using multiple sources of evidence, creating a case study database and maintaining a chain of evidence.

The various processes around preparing for the interviews and conducting observations are described in detail in Chapter 5. As outlined, these digitally recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim, the observation notes were collated, the video recordings were watched and notes taken, the reflection journals were read and the children's drawings were analysed. The tests conducted in Junior and Senior Infants were analysed and compared with previous years. This chapter presents the main findings and themes emerging from what the participants had to say and from my observations in class. The key themes emerging include the way in which Station Teaching influences the nature of literacy in the classroom and in particular print literacy. I analyse the themes from the perspectives of all the players – the teachers, pupils and parents.

Ultimately, there were nine themes that not only helped answer the main research questions, but also helped to allow a story to unfold. The themes are:

1. Enjoyment and motivation
2. Engagement and praise
3. Pupils' learning is extended
4. Working in small groups
5. Staff collaboration, professional dialogue and professional development
6. Making a difference to and enhancing teachers' teaching of literacy

7. Improvement in pupils' literacy skills

8. Pre and Post test results of literacy tests

9. Development of reading and writing practices from the pupils' perspectives and parents' perspectives

The following acronyms are used when referring to quotes from the participants:

JIT: Junior Infant teacher

SIT: Senior Infant teacher

SET: Special Education teacher

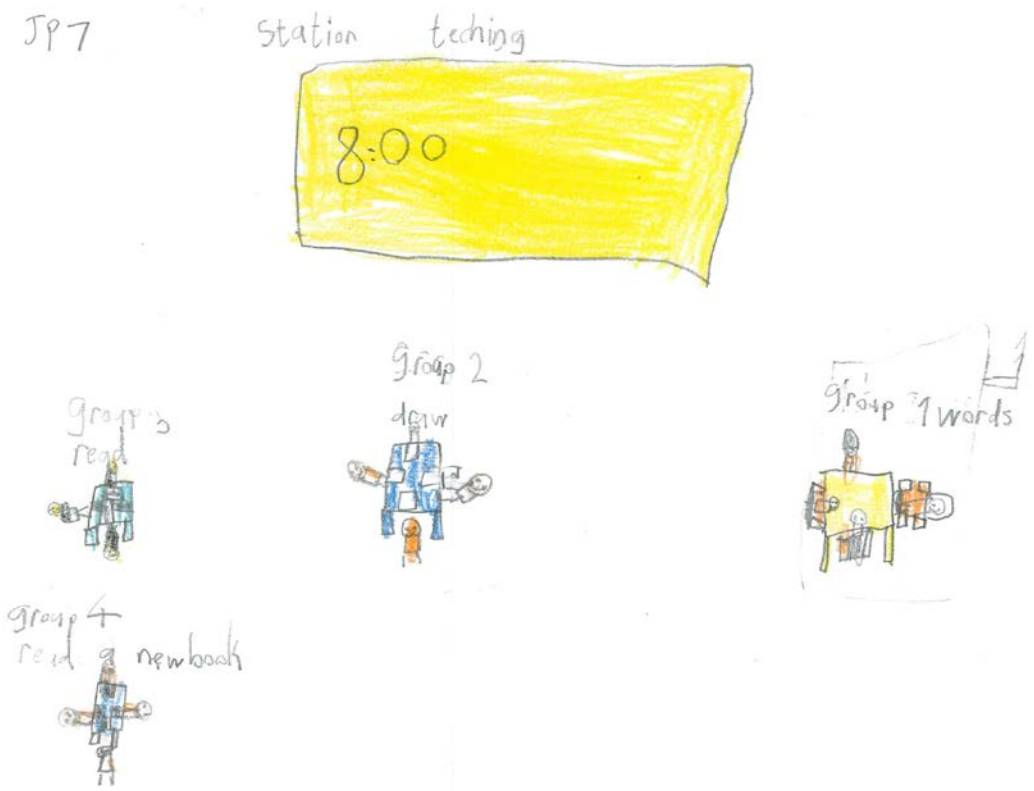
JIP: Junior Infant pupil

SIP: Senior Infant pupil

I also include seven Senior Infant drawings of Station Teaching in Figures 7A to 7G (27/06/2014).

The first drawing in Figure 7A shows the reader very clearly what Station Teaching looks like from the perspective of a boy in a Senior Infant class and provides an overview of ST.

Figure 7A: Pupil's Drawing 1: J.: ST – there's group 1 – reading group, group 2 – drawing group, 3 get to read a new book, 4 learning words. There's a timer there at the end each group moves. They're the tables and all the people on it. My favourite Station is the drawing one – cos you get to draw loads of pictures – sometimes we learn words as well.



7.2 Theme 1: Enjoyment and motivation

> *All learners should benefit from the opportunity to experience the joy and excitement of getting 'lost' in a book (DES, 2011, p. 43)*

The theme of motivation emanated from the quantitative research and one I pursued with the participants in my case study. Kennedy et al. (2012) identify the need to ensure that motivation and enjoyment of reading as one of the key aspects of the reading process. Hattie (2003) in outlining the attributes of teacher expertise, explained that when teachers motivate the students in learning this can have an influence on student outcomes. Louden et al. (2005) as outlined in Chapter 2.6, allege that a key component of an effective literacy programme should include a variety of motivating and interesting literacy experiences.

The National Strategy (DES, 2011) outlines its targets for improvement in literacy, one of which is to foster an enjoyment of reading among children. It also contends that the support of parents who are engaged in their child's learning has a significant positive impact on a child's educational achievement in literacy and numeracy and that the role of parents is critically important in the development of children's language and emergent literacy skills (DES, 2011, p. 19).

Firstly, all the parents I interviewed agreed that their children enjoyed Station Teaching. The parents of the children in Junior Infants reported that the children's reading had improved (17/06/13). The parents stated that the sounding out of words, the rhyming words and songs with the Phonics all help their children's reading and that now they are beginning to read books themselves. One parent explained how her child has to read his 'Station Teaching book' first thing when he comes in from school and that she didn't expect he would be able to read so fast. Another parent reported that her child is trying to read the newspaper, while another explained how her child's interest in reading has improved and that Station Teaching has improved her child's confidence in reading. All parents report that their children are much more interested in books and stories since commencing ST.

The parents of Senior Infants (19/06/14) reported how they can see the results of ST this year:

> It's unbelievable, ST has been a great success – A. is reading newspapers and things we don't want him to see – it has made a big difference (A)
>
> Her confidence in attacking anything has improved, B. doesn't mind picking up something and reading it, she would not do this before (B)
>
> C. took a book from the library and got sheets of pages form a copybook, she got staples and got her book – she has that much interest, there is so much learning, she is so proud, her confidence has improved, she is smitten, she said recently: 'I am grown up, I can read a book' only recently she is adding to it and putting pictures in it (C) (Focus group – 19/06/14)

These comments were reiterated by all the parents interviewed, the children's confidence in word attack skills and motivation to read more has been enhanced by ST. There were no

negative comments from parents in relation to pupils' enjoyment and motivation to read as a result of ST.

All teachers reported that the children are very excited about ST and look forward to ST every day. The teachers of Junior Infants reported how they prepared the class for ST by doing lots of rhyming and phonological awareness activities. Both class teachers had chosen to work at the Phonics Station, as they prioritised this in teaching reading. In particular they reported that the children love getting a new book every day and are so enthusiastic about reading these books. The teachers of Senior Infants are prioritising Phonics and consolidating correct letter formation. When teaching reading at the Stations at the start of Senior Infants, teachers have to guide the children on turning the page and putting fingers under the words, but during the year teachers can see progress and the children get more independent.

This is a sample of the range of comments from Teachers:

> ST is a great way of revising words in particular the high frequency words and there is a sense of achievement at the end of a set. It's great, it gives a chance for blending and it's a chance for other teachers to check reading (JIT1)
>
> The children all seem to love it, you focus on the children so much, they get so much out of it. At the New Reading Station they haven't seen the book before so they find it very interesting (SIT1)
>
> The children see ST as fun which makes the learning a lot easier. They look forward to it which makes a teacher's job much more straightforward (SIT2, Diary: 04/12/13)
>
> At the Listening Station we target prepositions and attention to listening, this should be used a lot as it is very beneficial, it really motivates the children, they have to focus on what the teacher says (SET1)

The pupil data confirm the evidence provided by teachers and parents. All the pupils agreed that they liked ST. A typical response from the Junior Infant pupils was:

> Yes, because you get to learn new stuff every day (JIP)
>
> Yes, because it's more fun (JIP)

> Yes, I liked it when we started it because every time we write on the white board (JIP)
>
> Yes, because I like sand trays and whiteboards (JIP)
>
> Yes, cos' I like writing and doing the other stuff (JIP)

As the pupils progressed in to Senior Infants all reported that they either enjoyed or loved ST except for two. One child when asked if he enjoyed ST said: 'Yes, but not the one in the corner near the door (Phonics Station)' (SIP). This pupil may not have liked the Phonics approach, he may be an auditory learner. Not all pupils benefit from learning words through a Phonics approach, perhaps a more visual approach would suit him better. This is why teachers need to use a variety of approaches when teaching pupils to read. The other pupil claimed she did not like the Writing Station: 'Not that much really, cos' you have to write everything – it's long, I'm six in September' (SIP). This girl had health issues and obviously got tired at the Writing Station. The time spent at a Station involves concentrated work and this girl found this Station tiring.

7.2.1 My observations of pupils' enjoyment and motivation in Station Teaching classes

I conducted monthly observations on two groups in two classes over the period of a year. In the Junior Infant classrooms, before the start of Station Teaching, the children were asking their teachers when ST was starting. The Junior Infant classes knew their ST commenced at 10.00 a.m. and after that they would have their little lunch. From my classroom observations you couldn't but be aware of the enjoyment the pupils displayed as they moved from Station to Station, creating positive energy in the room. This is an example from my observations of the interaction between children and teachers in the New Reading, Phonics and Writing Stations:

> Teachers asking questions and children answering very enthusiastically, children smiling and engaging with activities at the different Stations in particular the Phonics and Writing Stations (Observations, JI, 23/05/13)
>
> Very interesting going round with a group, children kept busy, all loved the Phonics games – children jumping off their chairs putting up their hands wanting to answer, great excitement with predictions in New Reading (Observations, JI, 18/06/13)

The children were not as motivated in the Familiar Reading Station in Junior Infants and did not seem to enjoy it as much.

In Senior Infants ST commenced in one class at 11.00 a.m. straight after their break and the second class commenced at 11.40 after which the pupils would have their lunch. The teachers felt this routine was very important for the children and all classes ran smoothly as a result. I provide examples from one observation of Senior Infants in March 2014.

It was very obvious as an observer that the children were enjoying ST. They were smiling as they moved from Station to Station. The children were actively engaged in the work going on in the Stations. They were putting up their hands when they wanted to answer or participate in an activity and were obviously enjoying themselves as portrayed in this example:

> New Reading Station (book – 'Jumbo') all children participating in making predictions and connections, illustrator, character, all enjoying this activity, discussion - Jumbo fanning himself (Observations, SI,13/03/14)
>
> In the Phonics Station lots of games – Bingo cards – 'ou' sounds; in pairs play a game – one person calls out 'ou' sound and partner puts cube on word; Go fish game – 4 words each – match these – lots of laughter (Observations, SI, 13/03/14)

You could sense the positive learning environment where children were actively learning. They loved the games in the Phonics Station. There was an atmosphere of calm in the classroom and a sense of teachers motivating the pupils to learn at their own pace. There was a variety of activities going on at the Stations and children had opportunities to participate and to be heard by the teachers:

> In Familiar Reading (book – 'Max rides his bike'), the teacher varies the activities – revision of flashcards, revision of story, punctuation and word work – rhyming words – bike/like; grass/glass, magic 'e'. Discussion on stabilisers (Observations, SI, 13/03/14)

The children seemed to enjoy the Familiar Reading Station better in Senior Infants than in Junior Infants particularly when the teacher varied the activities and motivated the pupils as above when they had a discussion on stabilisers for their bikes.

In the Writing Station the teacher started with discussion on when to use capital letters. Children copied sentences onto work sheets. The teacher encouraged the children throughout the lesson, for example:

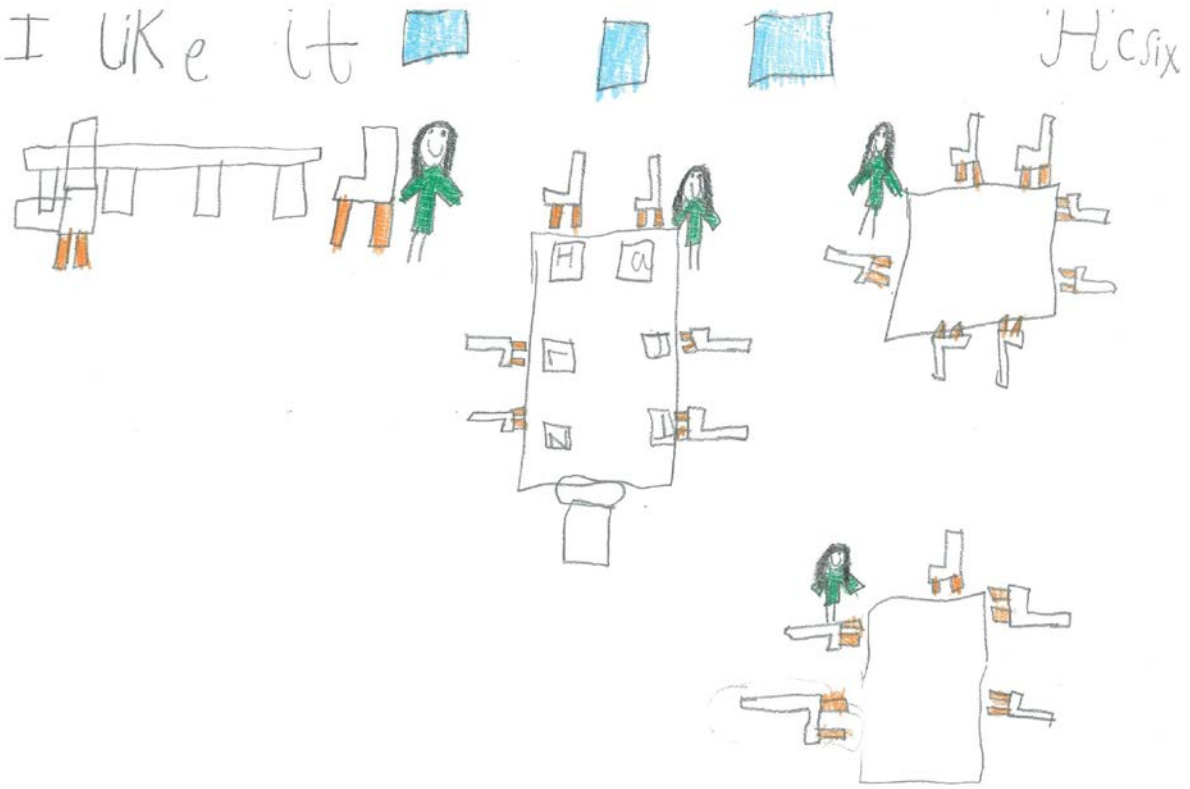
> 'see your free hand is holding the page'; 'the slower we go the better our writing'; 'look over your work and do the best you can'; 'are you finished? Now draw a circle around the ones you think are the best – check your own work and make repairs if you think you can do better'.. Extra work – word hunt for words on charts in room. (Observations, SI, 13/03/14)

The children worked away quietly; they enjoyed the writing and were motivated to do some extra work.

In the Senior Infant classes the teacher/pupil interaction was very respectful, mannerly and polite. The children were actively engaged in the work in hand. The small group situation lent itself to pupil enjoyment and motivation. Kennedy et al. (2012) allude to the key role in literacy learning of children's motivation and engagement and sense of self-efficacy as discussed in 2.2. This level of motivation and engagement was very evident in the classrooms. I explore the theme of engagement further in 7.3.

7.2.2 Pupils' drawings of Station Teaching

Figure 7B: Pupil's Drawing 2: H: those are the Stations we have in ST – that's the one where we write/read – for new books/ST where we read the old books and phonics. My favourite one is the writing one because I like writing



In November 2013 and in June 2014 the pupils in the Senior Infant classes drew pictures for me of Station Teaching. Following on from that exercise the pupils began to tell me about their pictures. Their comments were very positive in relation to Station Teaching and they relayed their stories around the Stations very enthusiastically. The Writing Station was a big favourite with the majority of the pupils:

> My favourite is the writing one cos' I love it – because you get to write pictures and stuff (SIP, 22/11/13)
>
> My favourite one is the writing and I really love writing. Sometimes you can do words and sentences – Yes I like writing (SIP, 22/11/13)
>
> I like the writing group – that's my favourite Station cos' we always do writing and colouring with markers. We write letters – j, o, m, c, s. (SIP, 22/11/13)
>
> My favourite it the writing Station – we always do colouring of pictures on Thursday. I like ST cos' we learn new things every day (SIP, 27/06/14)
>
> I like the writing group cos' I like writing and learning to write. I just like it. I like to write stuff (SIP, 22/11/13)

Pupils also like the reading Stations:

> My favourite Station is the reading with teacher because she's the bestest reading girl (SIP, 22/11/13)
>
> My favourite Station is the reading one, where we read, the one my teacher is at, because you can learn and you read new books (SIP, 22/11/13)
>
> They're my favourite Stations cos' I love books, new books and familiar reading. I love writing and reading. I have lots of favourite books – Working together, Tarzan books of things to spot in the jungle, Leap Frog, Brave books (SIP, 22/11/13)

Other pupils like the Phonics Station:

> My favourite one is Ms X cos' she does all sorts of games with us (SIP, 22/11/13)
>
> My favourite Station is the Phonics one. Sometimes you get to do writing, sometimes you get to do colouring and sometimes you get to do words (SIP, 27/06/14)

By the end of Senior Infants the children's drawings had become much more detailed and one could see very easily their understanding of Station Teaching. These are the drawings that I include in this chapter. The children drew the Stations very clearly. The different Stations were very obvious and the timer on the whiteboard appeared in many drawings. Station Teaching had become part of their routine in Senior Infants and it was obvious that the children enjoyed Station Teaching. The pupils were very motivated about their reading and writing and wanted to talk to me about this. They spoke about books they had encountered in ST and how they love the new books and wanted to read more. The same about the Writing Station – the pupils really enjoyed the activities at this Station and it motivated them to write more. One pupil summed up his perception of ST when telling me about his drawing:

> That's the one we were reading. This man was saying what was that book called? This man said you could be right, ha, ha. At this Station they were colouring, this teacher said you would be excellent at homework tonight. At this Station they say you are the best writer, I don't know how you do it. This man said you are the 'bestest' colourer and I don't know how you do it just like me. At this Station they are a colouring table, this man is saying he is dead, the other man said how would you write the books (SIP, 22/11/13)

This pupil showed how his imagination was working and he was motivated to see beyond the mechanics of reading and writing and experienced 'the joy and excitement of getting lost in a book' (DES, 2011, p. 43).

All the stakeholders – pupils, parents and teachers agree that pupils' enjoyment of ST and motivation to read have been enhanced by participation in ST. This is corroborated by Kennedy et al. (2012); Hattie (2003) and Louden et al. (2005) in their findings as discussed in 2.5, 2.6 and 2.8. Levels of motivation and engagement have been found to predict achievement (Baker & Wigfield, 1999) and as such they are key factors in determining children's academic success. In the next section I report on the themes of engagement and praise.

7.3 Theme 2: Engagement and praise

Motivation and engagement are closely linked, but I wish to focus on engagement in the process in this section as well as the importance of pupil praise. Hattie (2003) reflects on the optimal classroom climate where there is increased probability of feedback, error is welcomed and engagement is the norm. Many researchers report how praise is a vital part of engagement as outlined in 2.5 (Ruddell, 1995; Dolezal et al. 2003; Allington, 2002).

The drawing in Figure 7C clearly shows that this girl engages in all the activities in ST with enthusiasm and in particular enjoys reading with her teacher who is affirming and positive in her interactions with her groups.

Figure 7C: Pupil's Drawing 3: L: I liked ST. I love reading and drawing. I also like playing the games that they have. The thing about the reading is that there's lots of different things there. My favourite Station is the reading with our teacher. We go to every Station.

7.3.1 Junior Infant classrooms

In the Junior Infant classrooms I was dependent on my observation notes for a perspective on pupils' engagement and teacher praise. Pupil engagement varied from group to group and depending on how organised the teacher was. Generally pupils engaged well with the activities but some pupils found it difficult to concentrate on the task in hand. When one teaches Junior Infants one needs to be organised and well prepared for each lesson. The pupils will lose concentration very easily if the teacher does not engage them fully. Some pupils have a poor concentration span and found it difficult to remain in the same place for seven to eight minutes. If everything went according to plan in class the pupils' level of engagement was high but if there was the slightest interruption concentration was lost. For example on the day we were recording ST, one pupil got sand dust in his eyes at the start of the lesson and started to cry, so while the teacher comforted him, time was lost for the activity. Station Teaching is strictly

structured with a specific time allocated for each Station; if time is lost at a Station then all pupils in that group lose out on that activity for that day. This rigidity can be a negative factor in implementing ST. It does not allow for flexibility, whereas if this happened in the classroom during normal lessons the teacher can deal with the incident and then resume teaching. This is not possible during ST.

In Junior Infant classes I recorded these observations:

- New Reading: Extension activities: rhyming words, small words in big word, full stop, capital letter, discussion on elevator and escalator – oral language. Lots of praise. No prediction
- Phonics: Teacher instructions are very clear. Great interaction and teacher praise. Excellent use of resources – prepared sheets and cards, Elkonin boxes, playing games, all pupils on task at all times, each child got one to one attention
- Writing: excellent use of sand trays and whiteboards. Teacher moving around, children getting lots of help and affirmation, great instructions. Children actively learning – moving from writing on sand trays to whiteboards. Teacher helping the pupils with letter formation (Observations: 18/06/13)

Active learning was evident at the Stations, in particular the Phonics Station where they enjoyed sounding out the words. The children were actively involved in the activities. The structured nature of the activities at this Station and the structured focus of the teachers was a factor in the pupils' engagement. The pupils learned a lot at this Station; they learned their sounds and words really well. The class teachers had wonderful presence and control with the groups. The children certainly liked receiving new books every day and pupils were always deeply engaged at the New Reading Station. They enjoyed the praise at the New Reading Station but little was evident at the Familiar Reading Station. They also liked the sand and whiteboards at the Writing Station and showed high levels of engagement.

On the whole there was great interaction between the teachers and the pupils and lots of teacher praise was evident particularly from the class teachers:

> Very good, good boy/girl (name added), lovely, great, lovely work – that's the job, excellent, I am so impressed with you, super stuff, flying it altogether, well done, brilliant, very clever, I love the way you made.., perfect, you're nearly there, good listening, fantastic, fabulous (Class and Support Teachers Junior Infants)

The weaker group was not as engaged as the stronger groups and teachers had to work hard to keep them on task the whole time!

The teachers of Junior Infants were responsible for the commencement of ST in their classes. They are aware of the range of abilities in the class and are conscious of catering for this when organising groupings. They differentiate for the groups and try to make the work more challenging for some pupils. For other children it is an achievement to stay on the page at the phonics Station. The teachers praise the pupils and put stars on their work (never an x). One teacher reported:

> The first week it was hard to get used to. I tried to have it organised as much as possible. There is a 'box' person at each table and they take away the box and clear everything off the table. A child is in charge of the timer, a child checks the timer. When everyone had a job it flowed better and the children were more engaged (JIT1)
>
> This is how I affirmed the pupils in their learning – I would say 'we'll have to get a star for that at the end'. For one child it could be a two letter word, for another it could be one letter (JIT2)

A Support teacher claimed that pupil engagement was pretty good overall but varies with the different groups. Another Support teacher agreed that the groups are so small you can praise those doing well:

> The children love the books in the New Reading Station so it is easy to engage them. The books are at a level appropriate to their age and the group is so small you could lead them on and encourage them (SET1).

The Support teacher further contended that the children are so eager to please teacher, they are very engaged and it is easy to praise them.

7.3.2 Senior Infant classrooms

In the Senior Infant classrooms there was a big leap forward with regard to work; the pupils were all well able to sit at tables, move around and follow instructions. In groups where you had children with behavioural issues it was difficult for teachers to keep the pupils engaged at all times. The ability and expertise of the teacher was a key factor here to engagement. A lot of praise was evident again in Senior Infants at all Stations. These are some examples of quotes from teachers:

> Well done, lovely work; Good boy/girl; Very good; Excellent; Fabulous; That's great; really good work; Super (Observational fieldnotes – Senior Infants, 2013/2014)

The pupils still loved getting the new books and the Writing Station was very popular. There were lots of activities happening, the classes were calm and peaceful and pupils moved in an orderly manner from Station to Station. As the year progressed some teachers varied the activities, which stimulated the pupils and helped to maintain a positive learning environment. All in all pupil engagement and teacher praise were very evident in the ST classes as noted in my observations on a group in one class in May 2014:

> New Reading: Very clear initial instructions – 'sitting properly now, right to the back of the chair, feet on the floor'. Predictions on title: 'Bugs for Breakfast' (PM, Level 9, book 1) Excellent predictions. Discussion on author and illustrator, magic 'e'. Questions on the story. Word work – can't/cannot. Children fully engaged. Praise: v.g (3); well done; an mhaith (v.g. in Irish); cailín mhaith (good girl in Irish).
>
> Familiar Reading: Teacher had to sort out a missing book and waited for pupil to come to the table. Children making up sentences with the word 'said': e.g. 'I said to my friend 'you are my best friend'. Teacher: 'Pupil X, sit up straight, sit up properly'. Discussion on whether or not they liked the book (non fiction: The sun, the wind and the rain – PM, Level 8, book 6). (They did not like the book because they had to look for rhymes). They re read the book and then did some word work: rhyming words, breaking up words, magic 'e' 'splish, splash'. 'Keep going, we have to be very quiet, we don't shout out, break this word up'. Praise: you're doing really well, well done (3), that's nice, v.g. (5).
>
> Phonics: teacher reinforcing sounds of the week. Resources: cubes, plastic cup with dice, laminated card – snake with words, hen and chicken, teacher had sellotaped out words they did this week onto laminated sheet – 'oo' words and 'ch' words: book, moon, look, hook, loop, wood, chill, lunch, chat, cheese. Teacher giving instructions on games – 3 pairs – 'let me see how good you are' – snake words. 'Put the cube at the start of the egg shell – shake the dice, if you land on a word and you can read it you

> jump ahead, if you can't read it you jump back'. One child says: 'I'm so good at this' – partner: 'I'm good as well'. One pupil shakes the dice really hard – partner fighting with her – 'she keeps moving me back' – 'give me my colour back' – Teacher: ' Pupil X come on, start again, choose a different colour'. Praise: v.g. (2), great.
>
> Writing: Activity – headline to copy on red and blue lined copies. Teachers' instructions very clear – 'let's read the headline together. On the first line write down that sentence once and on the next line write in your name instead of Jack's'. Teacher explained the use of the apostrophe – possessive noun, something belonging to a person. Teacher suggested to pupil X to move away from pupil Y and teacher sat there instead. Children worked away at a writing exercise while teacher moved around – she asked one pupil: 'what's wrong that you don't give yourself a capital letter?'; 'Start here next time and use two lines'. Discussion on capital letters for each child's name – 'use two lines for capital letter, 'g' goes down onto the grass – be careful with that'. Praise: 'X, I like your g's, they're beautiful', you're doing very good writing, good, v.g. (4)
>
> (Observations: 22/05/14).

It was very interesting to see how the pupils progressed in the last year. All in all there is great work going on. The children were highly engaged, happy and progressing well. The children were quite comfortable making predictions in the New Reading Station. The teacher instruction and teacher pupil interaction is very respectful and polite. The teachers were always encouraging, as evidenced in my observations above. There was some squabbling going on within some groups as outlined in the above quotes (Familiar Reading and Phonics Stations) but the teachers dealt with this effectively. The children did not like the book they were reading on this day. I would have substituted the book at this stage but that is where teacher experience comes in. Because the structure of Station Teaching is so rigid a teacher might not think they could do this. The children had great fun playing the games in the Phonics Station and were fully engaged in the activities. At that stage of the year (May) all of the teachers knew the pupils in the class and could predict situations happening if certain pupils sat beside each other so they intervened before an episode could occur (see Writing Station). Teacher praise, when used, was very effective and the children were beaming when they were praised, particularly in the Writing Station when the teacher was telling them their letters were beautiful.

The teachers of Senior Infants agree that the pupils are fully engaged in the small group during ST:

> They have good attention for the teacher, they have time to ask questions and give opinions, to predict what's happening in the new books so it gives them a good opportunity to speak (SIT3)

The teachers report that the time moves on quickly so the children don't get bored at any Station. The teachers explain that they vary what's happening at the Stations during the week and that at the writing Station they are teaching a particular skill and it is a practical activity. Teachers were all in agreement regarding affirming their pupils in their learning during ST:

> You do definitely, there is always time for praising them and encouraging them to show off their skills in front of peers, you can see how good a child is at reading in front of their friends. Games like 'Fast fingers' gives children a chance to show off how well they are doing (SIT1)

> Yes, the children are there in front of you, you are able to say 'well done' and you know that they are learning. With predictions they get a great kick if they are close and in the Writing Station you can pick out the best writer of the day. They recognise that their learning is appreciated (SIT2)

There is an element of competition here but in a positive way. The teacher always ensured that every child got to be the best writer on one day. Allington (2002) indicated that effective teachers evaluated students' work and awarded grades based more on effort and improvement than simply on achievement (2002, p. 746).This is where teacher expertise comes into play. Here are other examples of teacher praise:

> ST gives me time to praise each child for their efforts at my Station whether it be for great reading or just staying on task – praise just brings a smile to a child's face (SIT2, Diary: 04/12/13)

> Yes, I suppose that's constant – you are constantly evaluating and pushing them forward and encouraging them to do better. Generally pupil engagement is very high, there are always children who need to be reminded to focus and refocus (SET3)

> Some pupils in my group (Writing Station) are so well trained for ST, as soon as you assign work they do it. You can have a quick word with everyone – if some might not want to start at the margin you can remind them or give positive feedback if you can. During the 8 minutes you have an opportunity to spend one to one time at least once or twice and you give feedback on their work (SET1)

These comments back up Dolezal et al.'s (2003) findings that effective literacy classrooms have an ongoing 'rich talk between students and teacher' (p. 366). When teachers and pupils are actively engaged in the work in the classroom and the teacher takes time to praise pupils' efforts then real learning can occur.

As a way of enhancing the trustworthiness of my observational evidence I asked a doctoral colleague to conduct some observations. She conducted observations in both Senior Infant classes on 25/03/14. She noted the confidence of the teachers and the pupils and the effective strategies teachers demonstrated when dealing with the children:

> In the New Reading Station the teacher was very comfortable and flexible – the children were guessing their predictions and even though she had moved on to the next item, one of the children thought of something else and the teacher accepted his guess – the teacher listened and heard the pupils (Colleague's observation: 25/03/14)

The observer commented that the predicting was a beautiful idea and that the pupils can't be wrong – it was a very safe space to talk out their thinking, and children flourish under that regime.

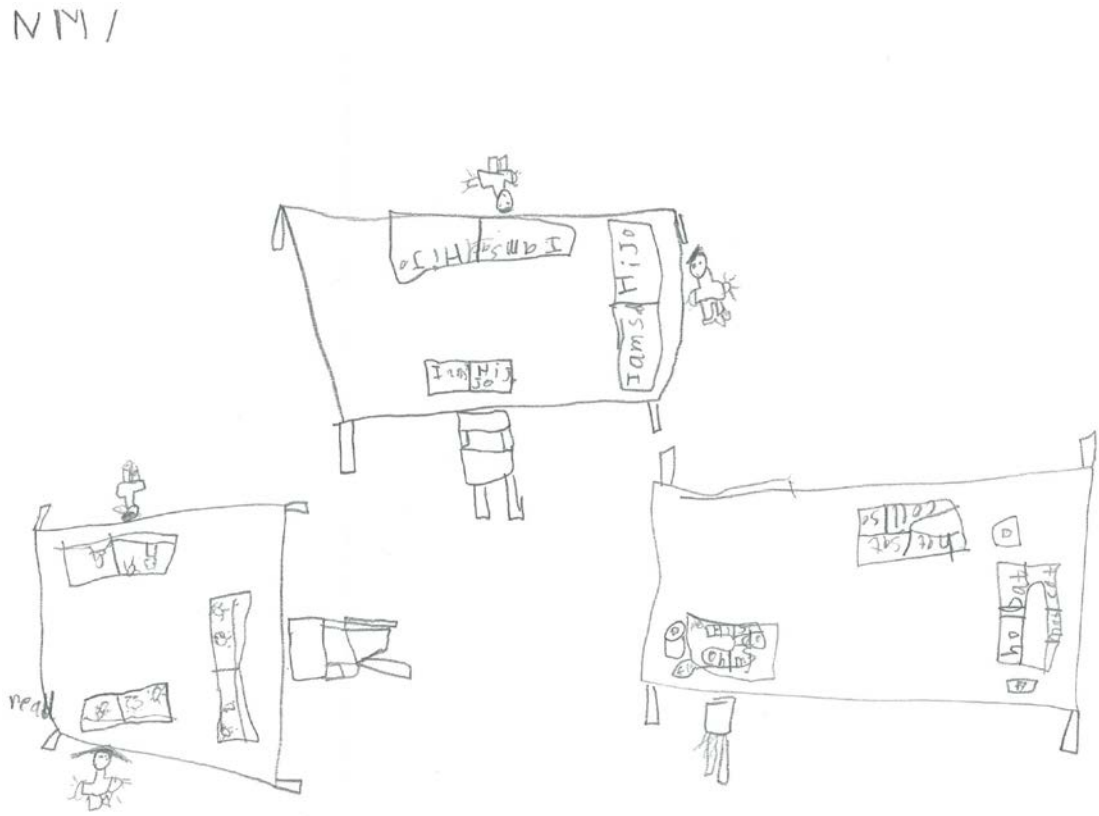
This girl's drawing in Figure 7D shows how much the children liked the reading Stations.

Figure 7D: Pupil's Drawing 4: S: People are reading and writing – these are just talking about how their day was. These ones are talking about 'yes' or 'no' – it's a game we play where you don't say 'yes' or 'no'. My favourite Station was reading with teacher. I love all the chapters and pictures in it

The children also enjoyed the Writing Station. At the Writing Station one pupil did something wrong and the teacher asked: 'what's causing that, is it the marker?' (Colleague's observation: 25/03/14). The observer thought that this teacher had a wonderful way of dealing with the pupil's error, there was no blame here and that 'it was a lovely tiny moment, the most human point of the whole morning!' (Colleague's observation: 25/03/14).

The boy who drew the picture in Figure 7E told how his favourite Station was the Writing Station.

Figure 7E: Pupil's Drawing 5: N: that's meant to be the writing group on the left, that's phonics on the right, that's teacher's one. My favourite is the Writing Station – we always do colouring of pictures on Thursday. Cos we learned new things every day



The National Strategy (DES, 2011) contends that engagement with parents should be a core part of literacy plans of schools and that schools should ensure the message about the relevance of literacy for their children's future educational development be strongly conveyed to parents. The parents I interviewed were all well aware of the importance of their children's engagement in reading practices and praise for their efforts. Most of the parents take their children to the local library and many buy books on a regular basis. They all claimed to read bed time stories to the children and agree that their children's interest in reading has improved since commencing ST and many said they are surprised at the progress their children are making.

These children commenced ST after Easter of Junior Infants and continued all the way through Senior Infants, at the end of which time I met the parents again. All parents agreed with how confident their children had become with reading and how the children just love the feeling of accomplishment when they can read a book. One parent reports how her child beams when the parent praises her reading. Most of the parents spoke of how their children want to write so

much – making books at home, writing shopping lists, menus and nursery rhymes. One parent reported that a teacher told her that if her child sees her reading at home then the child will read also; the mother was very happy with this and she now reads too.

In conclusion all comments were very positive in relation to pupil engagement in activities in ST and teacher praise. These comments confirm the literature as reviewed in 2.5 that praise is an important part of engagement in class. The children are often praised during ST and it was reported that they engage in the activities in ST in an enthusiastic manner.

7.4 Theme 3: Pupils' learning is extended

This theme emanated from the questionnaire survey when teachers reported that pupils' learning was extended during ST. The National Strategy (DES, 2011) in its targets for schools advises schools to set goals and monitor progress in achieving demanding and realistic targets for the improvement of literacy skills. The Strategy also advises schools to increase the percentages of children performing at Level 3 or higher in the National Assessment of English reading as discussed in 3.4. The Chief Inspector (DES, 2013) challenges schools to ensure that pupils benefit from excellence in teaching and learning and that differentiated reading materials are available to sustain interest in and to ensure progress in reading. NEPS (2012) advises teachers to ensure that students receive a balanced diet of literacy activities targeting individual needs of students. Spencer and Spencer (1993); Snow et al. (1998); Wray et al. (2002); Louden et al. (2005) and Kennedy et al. (2012) all report that effective teachers differentiate according to students' needs. They adjust groupings and explicitness of instruction according to individual needs. Vygotsky (1978) advises teachers to provide optimal challenge for children to move beyond their ZPD.

Extending the pupils' learning can be defined as providing optimal challenge towards moving children beyond their ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978).

In the Junior Infant classrooms I observed the class teachers extending pupils' learning very effectively. Perhaps this is because both teachers took the Phonics Station and knew their children so well at this stage of the year that they knew how to extend the pupils' learning. Both class teachers provided lots of extension activities. They used a wide variety of resources to extend the pupils' learning as shown in this example from my observations:

> Phonics Station: All pupils engaged – all had their own sheets or activities; Teacher sitting near all pupils – pointing to their sheets on tables; Teacher calling pupils' names if any pupil not concentrating. Teacher instructions very clear e.g. can you hear the sound of the letter – u, o, b, i, d? Lámha trasna (fold your arms in Irish), put your finger on the first dot in the box; A haon, a dó, a trí (1,2,3 in Irish) sound out the word – c-o-t; turn over the page, we don't have the help of the picture at the back; 1,2,3 sound out the words; tricky word – bed, teacher asked each child a word, I'll call out a sound and you write it down – cot, dog, fit; Transition Rhyme: rub a dub dub; children learning so many sounds and words, rhyming words – dog/log. Variety of resources in use – phonics sheets of words: cot, pot, fit, log, dog, pig, cup, bed; picture and words, dots for children to point to sound out, cvc words, matching activities – markers and blank laminated cards so children could write down words and then wipe off. Lots of praise: v.g., good, well done, excellent (Observations, JI: 18/06/13).

There were also examples of the pupils' learning being extended at the New Reading Station in one classroom. A Support teacher who had taught Infants previously demonstrated very clearly how to extend pupils' learning. She kept the pupils busy, they were very engaged in the Station and she moved on quickly, all the while praising the pupils' efforts and extending their learning as shown in this example:

> New Reading: (PM book – We dress up, Level 1, Book 5). Sitting up straight, cover the title – look at the picture and make a prediction, have your pointers ready. I see two people not ready, make a prediction. Is it the same picture as on the cover, 2 sentences, full stop – teacher reads and children copy – listening to teacher, why a scarf? Gach duine (everybody in Irish) let's read; bold print, capital letters, exclamation marks. Lots of extension work: Questions on the book – how do we know it's a man? Who is dressing up? Who can predict the next room? Rhyming words – hat/wipe your feet on it – mat. Teacher praising pupils: brilliant, very clever, good man, I love the way X uses his pointer, excellent reading, I agree with you. Extending learning: man/dad/sir/gentleman/gent; whole body; rhyming words – bat/cat/chat;

> chuckling/giggling, around your neck – scarf – girl's scarf feels soft/woolly/rough/smooth (Observations, JI: 27/05/13)

The other Support teachers were not familiar with the children or the programme and were reluctant to go 'outside the box' with extension ideas. This is where professional development would be advantageous and is one of the recommendations of the National Strategy (DES, 2011) and by Kennedy et al. (2012). It also links in with Halls' (2003) communities of practice and funds of knowledge as discussed in 2.3 (iii).

In my study the teachers have divided the classes into small groups of similar ability. The work is differentiated according to pupils' ability. However the teachers of Junior Infants reported that even though some children are at about the same level, at this stage the teachers are helping the pupils to settle into working in a group. They are trying to extend the learning but for some pupils this is difficult:

> You have a group and a child might have a short attention span, even though they have the ability to sound out the letter – it is a challenge giving each child enough time (JIT1)

> On a daily basis I try. I was trying to make 2 letter words last week – the third lot of letters from Jolly Phonics – g,o,u,l,f,b – one day I tried it with the top group and tried to make 'log' – I could see the progression – there is serious scope with sets of letters – pupils know the ring of some sounds and can really progress (JIT2)

One Support teacher cited time restraints as a hindrance for extending pupil learning – she feels they have to get through the book in New or Familiar reading Station and don't have time to extend their learning. Another Support teacher thinks the pupils learn from each other:

> Some children have a wealth of knowledge about a topic like sea animals and they share this with the others. We definitely look at words and play word detective – rhyming words, first word, last one, Mammy animals, lots of incidental learning (SET1)

At Senior Infant level there are more opportunities for extending pupils' learning. However the time factor came up here also:

> You do have limited opportunity, the time is tight, some questions you come up with and get to stop and discuss pages in more detail. There are great lessons to be learned

> from the PM books e.g. water safety so you try to work this into an oral language lesson (SIT2)

> With some groups you can talk about specific things like an exclamation mark – you could do that with one group early in the year, now you can do it with all groups – repeated learning (SIT3)

The Support teachers with Senior Infants had opinions on this topic. One discussed children monitoring themselves and self-evaluating how they have come on in the Writing Station. She encourages the children to go ahead and do extra work. At the Familiar Reading Station the teacher agreed that she definitely gets to extend the pupils' learning:

> Extend – yes, definitely. PM books might lead you off to talk about Geography or nature or a different subject, you ask the children to make a connection with their life and you really extend their learning (SET1)

Another Support teacher spoke about oral work and adding adjectives in sentences and when doing comprehension asking open-ended questions and higher order questions:

> One week the word was entertainment – the children didn't know the word – they had to list things they do for entertainment – not always playing – concert, fun fair, cinema, entertain themselves – art, picture at home (SET2)

The class teachers were guiding the work more and all the teachers met on a weekly basis to plan the next week's work. The class teachers both took the New Reading Station as they wanted to hear the children reading every day, but they also directed what work was to be done in the other Stations.

This worked very well, although some days the teachers just ran out of time for providing challenging activities. The children in Senior Infants are well settled and they work productively at this stage. I noted a big improvement in children's progress from February onwards (Observation, SI: 24/02/14). The Class teachers and Support teachers used the Building Bridges (2010) strategies very effectively in the New and Familiar Reading Stations with pupils really enjoying the prediction strategy and vocabulary development.

At the Phonics Station a plan was in place and the Support teacher here took this on board and researched many new ideas to supplement the sounds. As the year progressed the teacher did further research on a variety of games to reinforce and develop phonics skills. She produced some beautiful laminated sheets, cards, fans, dice games, envelopes of words and sentences, word wheels, fishing games and bingo cards.

However, extension of pupils' learning was not very evident at the Writing Station in Senior Infants. At the end of the year the children's writing had improved and they were enabled to write some sentences on their own when there was time. There was more consolidation of writing practice than opportunities for extension activities. This Writing Station merits discussion and one which could be developed. The time allowed in ST is too short to teach new skills in writing but works well for consolidation of existing skills. It is interesting to note however that the majority of the pupils claimed that the Writing Station was their favourite Station.

Apart from the Writing Station this research demonstrates how the expertise of the teacher is key to success and extending the pupils' learning as discussed in 2.4, 2.5, 2.6 and 2.7 (Snow et al. 1998; Afflerbach, 2000; Allington, 2002; Wray et al. 2002; Hattie, 2003; Louden et al. 2005; Williams and Baumann, 2008). Teachers need to take ownership of the Stations and differentiate accordingly and not be afraid to extend pupils' learning.

The rigid structure of ST does not always allow for 'thinking outside the box'. Some teachers perhaps through lack of experience and knowledge, do not know how to extend the pupils' learning; they are concentrating too much on getting the book read or completing the task in hand. It takes an experienced teacher to know if a topic merits further discussion and how to extend the pupils' learning accordingly, be it oral language development, developing fluency, or comprehension strategies, spelling or phonics. In summary, as outlined by Louden et al.

(2005) in Table 2B, an expert teacher identifies: essential representations of the subject; guides learning through classroom interactions; monitors learning; provides feedback; attends to affective attributes and influences student outcomes (Louden et al. 2005, p. 21).

7. 5 Theme 4: Working in small groups

Snow et al. (1998) and Louden et al. (2005) refer to characteristics of effective literacy teachers and contend that teachers need to adjust groupings and explicitness of instruction according to individual needs. In Station Teaching in this school the pupils are divided into four groups of four to six children. The children rotate from Station to Station. The 4 Stations are: New Reading, Familiar Reading, Phonics and Writing (to include Listening activities one day a week in Senior Infants).

All teachers commented on how beneficial it was to work with small groups. They were very positively disposed towards this grouping.

The Junior Infant teachers were the first to group the children and spent some time varying the composition of each group to ensure engagement with each child. One teacher arranges the tables and chairs in L shape so that she can sit opposite or near each child to give each of them an opportunity to sound out letters and take part in the activity. Another teacher talks about the small group which enables you to see where the children are at:

> You can gauge who has a grasp of things, it is so quick and active, you can really see where the children are at (JIT1)
>
> With the small group you can work one to one, you can listen to each child sounding out words and they can practise reading with different teachers (JIT2)

I observed the difference between the groups in Junior Infants:

> Group 3 not as engaged as Group 1 in New Reading Station. It was hard to keep them on task the whole time – the teacher had to keep calling the pupils by name to keep them moving. (Observations, JI: 05/06/13)

I felt that the book being used was too difficult for the group – it was a non-fiction book (Level 1, Book 1, Making a rabbit) and it did not engage the children. The combination of pupils in this Station group did not work well making it difficult for the teacher to maintain their attention.

The teachers of Senior Infants can see the difference between the groups at this stage and how working in small groups benefits the pupils:

> You can see with children because they're grouped according to ability, you can fly with some children in some groups and with some you need to revise more – everyone can work at their own level rather than working at our pace (SIT1)
>
> The smaller groups allows me to pick up any troubles an individual may have, each child has strengths and places we can work on (SIT2)
>
> I feel that ST really targets the children at their level and the small group situation is exactly what the children need to succeed and progress. The small group setting has spurred them to become more knowledgeable in their literacy (SIT2. Diary: 04/12/13)
>
> Small numbers allow you to focus in on one aspect of writing and perhaps within reading – reading at own level, that each child gets a chance to speak at each lesson (SET1)
>
> Working with a group – a teacher can teach different strategies and skills. For assessment it is brilliant in a group (SET2)
>
> The small groups get better attention from teacher. You can really see who's struggling with something and who needs more attention. Children love the small groups, it gives them an opportunity – it's like a blitz in literacy every day (SET3)

When pupils are working in a small group and learning at their own pace with a teacher encouraging them to do their best they are being challenged to move beyond their ZPD as already discussed in 2.8 (Vygotsky, 1978; Wood, 1998; Read, 2004). I observed the scaffolding that was used during the intervention and how pupils were benefiting from this support, as highlighted by Hall (2013) in 2.5. Other researchers also found that successful literacy teachers often employed small-group instruction (Block et al., 2002; Taylor et al., 2000; Pressley et al., 1998).

Some pupils in Junior Infants could not name who was in their Station group whereas others were quite clear. One boy told me there were 'boys' in the group and another told me 'just me' in the group and another was able to list all the pupils and teachers at the different Stations. This shows the varying levels of ability in the groups and the levels of awareness of some pupils. The children know which group they're in themselves but some are not concerned about the others in the group. I noticed some children always tried to sit beside the teacher at a Station whereas others did not mind where they sat when they changed Stations.

In Senior Infants the pupils had a good understanding of what was going on in the different groups even though they could not necessarily name the title e.g. familiar reading or phonics. The children all seemed happy in their groups and at times during the year some pupils moved groups without complaint.

The Parents knew the children were in small groups moving around from Station to Station and that they were getting extra attention in the small group. They had seen the video of ST and were very happy with this method of intervention. The parents did not query whether the groups were mixed ability or not. As a teacher I fully expected this question from parents but no one asked it. To sum up I include this observation of a group in Senior Infants:

> Group 1 – At the start of ST, Teacher reminds class of using classroom voices.
>
> New Reading: Predictions of new book title (PM, Level 6, Book 6, fact, Speedy Bee), lots of oral language discussion on text: honey comb/flowers/what flowers need to grow; pointers used, questions on text; children reading individually, Extension – honeycomb, pollen, bluebells in woods; Lots of praise – well done (3) ok, ok, we'll see; excellent (3), reading that please X, go raibh maith agat (thank you in Irish)
>
> Familiar Reading: (PM book: Level 6, Book 4, Clever Fox). Teacher says she doesn't know the story and the children have to tell her the story. Discussion on title and story, questions on pictures, feelings of fox – confused/disappointed. Other questions – why, where, how? Pupils very engaged. Extension – clever/smart/brainy, country/field. Small words in big words – hiding; make up sentences, fox lives in burrow/set/cave/den. Fast fingers game – word begins with 'f'. Praise: well done, good boy (2), good, super (3).

> Phonics: oo sounds – song first: who wants to be a cuckoo? stretch the 'oo', picture of cuckoo clock, card with 'oo' words; individual plastic envelopes with cards in them. Work on 'oo' sounds – boot – sentence. Game with words on floor – line up ready to read the words – each child reading words individually – moon, food, loop, hoop – discussion on these. Play games in pairs – pick up 2 words – are they matching? Lots of extension activities with other 'oo' words and meanings. Praise: ok (3), good, v.g. (3) well done.
>
> Writing: Children copying their news from a whiteboard using copies, pencils and erasers. The children were getting individual attention in small group. Teacher moved one pupil so she had a better view of the whiteboard. The teacher moved around to each child telling them e.g. finger space – v.g. – teacher spoke very quietly to pupils about their writing – encouraging them all the time. When X was finished he drew a picture and teacher said you have time to do a little sentence for yourself. One pupil kept chatting to himself: why do I keep forgetting these things? Teacher said 'one of these days you'll remember them all'. Extension: very neat writing, using fingers for spaces, writing extra sentences e.g. my birthday is on 16 February; Look at me; I went down the field. Teacher praise: good, fabulous (2), lovely writing here, lovely, excellent (Observations, SI: 20/01/14)

I felt that this group worked very well together and happy in their small group. The pupils moved from Station to Station in a very orderly fashion. At the New and Familiar Reading Stations there were generous opportunities for predictions, oral language development and extension of vocabulary. The pupils were highly engaged in these Stations. Teachers used lots of praise and extension activities at the Stations. At the Phonics Station the pupils loved all the games and were engaged in learning in an active way. At the Writing Station the children benefited from the one to one attention in the small group situation. The teacher moved from one child to another on a continuous basis, encouraging and praising all their efforts. Overall I felt that these pupils enjoyed a great learning experience in their small groups.

7.6 Theme 5: Staff collaboration, professional dialogue and professional development

These themes emanated from the survey as reported in Chapter 6. My review of literature as discussed in Chapter 2 (2.4, 2.5, 2.6, 2.7 and 2.8) illustrates the importance of these areas also. Taylor et al. (2005) contended that in schools that were implementing the reform effort effectively teachers were found to be changing their teaching to use more high-level questioning. They also claimed that it was teachers' collaboration and teachers' decisions about what to study that made a difference in successful schools and this along with teachers engaging in reflective professional development resulted in growth of their students' reading achievement levels.

Engaging in professional development is recognised by many researchers as essential to up-skilling teachers in the knowledge of skills and methods required to foster children's reading (Snow et al. 1998; Afflerbach, 2000; Hattie, 2003; Hall and Harding, 2003; Louden et al. 2005; Gambrell et al. 2007; Dickinson et al. 2011). Kennedy et al. (2012) report on the characteristics of effective schools of literacy and recommend on-site customised professional development and staff collaboration in planning as key components of successful schools. It is one of the key targets of the National Strategy (DES, 2011). Kennedy and Shiel (2010) outlined the effectiveness of raising literacy levels with collaborative on-site professional development, as outlined in 4.2.2.

7.6.1 My observations on staff collaboration, professional dialogue and professional development

I conducted observations in both Junior and Senior Infant classes over the course of the year. The main observation point for me was the professional dialogue that resulted from engagement with ST. At Junior Infant level the class teachers were so busy organising the class and the Stations during the day, but in the evenings they got a chance to discuss how the Stations were going with the Support teachers. On 12/06/13, I recorded that the children in one

room in Junior Infants were ‘flying at the reading’ and on 18/06/13 ‘making great progress’ – the class teachers were thrilled when I repeated this to them! It was affirmation for them on how their class was doing. All teachers need affirmation and praise.

Officially the ST team in Senior Infants met once a week but in reality they chatted and discussed progress on a daily basis. I also saw staff becoming friendlier with each other as the intervention continued. The teachers read and researched articles to inform their teaching e.g. at the Phonics Station one Support teacher noticed that she needed more variety of ideas and really enjoyed sourcing new games that the children loved. I saw her growing professionally over the course of the year.

Early on in the intervention I completed an observation (15/10/13) and noticed the classroom was very noisy. The class teacher was aware of this and spoke to me about it. She realised that that there were two noisy activities going on in Stations beside each other which was distracting for all. Both teachers were speaking loudly so the teacher altered this to one group doing a writing activity and the other a listening one and she also moved the tables further apart. Sometimes it is useful for a teacher to have another professional in the room to consult with in relation to activities.

On 24/02/14 I brought a new Senior Infant class teacher into another Senior Infant classroom to look at the layout in the classroom for ST to get ideas for their own room; the teacher took this on board. This teacher saw that tables were cleared at the beginning of ST, children were seated around two tables for each Station and the teacher reminded the children about using their ‘quiet voices’ in ST. This could be considered on-site professional development. I noticed in both classrooms that all teachers were in full agreement with regard to pupil engagement. If any child did anything untoward they were gently but firmly reminded of the work. On 26/02/14, I recorded that ‘all teachers agreed in this regard; no one got away with anything!’

Staff collaboration is vital for the success of any programme in a classroom: all must sing from the same hymn sheet.

In one classroom, during a number of observations, I observed two pupils who manifested serious behavioural problems. After a team meeting it was decided that one pupil would be taken out of the room by a Support teacher for half of the session for one to one tuition and would return in time for two Stations. It was decided that the Class teacher would set work for the second pupil to do quietly at a work station after completing the New Reading Station and that the Support teacher would take that pupil out for the second half of the class. On 19/03/14 after only two days of this arrangement, I conducted an observation and agreed that the new arrangement worked very well. This was an example of how staff collaboration worked to enhance the learning for all pupils in this class. The Class teacher felt they were not alone and received wonderful support from colleagues in dealing with a difficult situation. This teacher also attended a professional development training day in the Education Centre on managing challenging behaviour, which provided support in the classroom.

The teachers of Junior Infants reported that they liked working with other teachers who could practise reading with the children and discuss pupils' progress with them. The Support teachers are fully aware of the planning and preparation on the part of the class teachers before the ST lesson starts:

> A lot of organisation goes on when the Support teacher is not there – the children are very mannerly and respectful towards us and the books, it's fantastic. The Class teachers organise the rooms and accommodate us when we come in. It is a pleasure to go into any of the teachers and anything suggested they take on board and vice versa – I can't say enough for the class teachers – they are so welcoming – a smile when you you're coming in to their room (SET1)

One concern that both the teachers of Junior and Senior Infants have is when a teacher is missing from a Station and a replacement has to be found, sometimes at the last minute. This

is frustrating and time is lost but on occasions a teacher is absent and no provision is made for a substitute.

Comments from a Support Teacher's reflective journal indicate that teachers were thinking of what works well and ideas they got from another teacher thereby engaging in professional dialogue:

> We have started ST with the Junior Infants. At the New Reading Station we started at Level 1 books with all of the pupils. These are some ideas from another teacher for ST: At an Oral language Station – the children can discuss their news and have questions and discussions in their small groups. Newspapers pictures/magazine pictures/photographs. The children could discuss what's happening in these and enhance their vocabulary. Nursery rhymes – and the children could make their own rhymes (SET2, Diary: 23/05/13)

At the end of the intervention in Junior Infants in June, the Support teacher at the Writing Station made these suggestions for this Station next year. She was moving from the Support position the next year and wanted to pass on the information to the teachers at this Station. This is great collaboration and sharing of good practice:

> Write the letter on the margin on the mini whiteboard; Keep an eye on pencil grip; Encourage using two hands for writing; Whiteboards are the best to check out how they are getting on; Make sure they use Peter Pointer for tracing over letters (not bunched fingers); Make the letters with Márla on laminated Caterpillar letters; Worth going over 'a' and 'd' for 2 days – the children really got it on the second day compared to the first day; Sit the children with short attention spans next to you; Sand a bit messy due to time restraint – 8 minutes to do lots of activities (SET3, 25/06/13)

The teachers of Senior Infants meet on a weekly basis to plan the work at the Stations and according to them this has made a huge difference to the lessons. They also agree that the children like having the different teachers. All of the teachers have attended professional development courses on literacy either in the school or the Education Centre and have brought this expertise to bear on the work in ST:

> From the workshops on literacy I have learned to focus on word attack skills and fluency in reading in my Station. First children need word attack skills to become familiar with words, then comprehension - if they are struggling with reading they will find it hard to comprehend (SIT3)

At the teacher meetings, all teachers made suggestions about activities that could benefit the pupils. Entries in a Support teacher's journal indicate reflective professional development:

> Dictation of short sentences is working really well. For the weaker groups I write the sentence after I call it out orally for them to copy down (SET2, Diary: 10/10/13)
>
> One child didn't know what a sofa was. Getting children to describe the illustrations on the front cover helps the children in their predictions of what the story may be about (SET2, Diary: 07/01/14)
>
> Children change their predictions when they see illustrations throughout the book (SET2, Diary: 14/01/14)
>
> By clapping out the words of dictation sentences with the children it is helping them to remember the sentences (SET2, Diary: 05/02/14)
>
> We made a list of rhyming words with 'dig'. This worked very well and also helped for assessment (SET2, Diary: 11/02/14)
>
> Dictation of sentences was a good challenge, some groups found it difficult. Children like reading the book backwards starting at the back and reading the sentences backwards. They don't realise that they are practising their words. Also good for assessment (SET2, Diary: 04/03/14)
>
> End of March started doing rhymes with the children. This helped in connecting rhyming words and they also did a worksheet on rhymes which they liked especially ones they would have known e.g. Little Miss Muffet. Some groups are finding the rhyming difficult. Giving weaker groups higher levelled books, although this is challenging their reading, it is working very well for vocabulary development (SET2, Diary: 31/03/14)

A Senior Infant Class teacher also kept a reflective diary on ST during the school year 2013-2014. She made many notes in relation to connections the children made in their reading and their vocabulary development e.g. fiction to real life connections. She records how after discussion with the team they have moved on to *Flying Start* books to give more variety (05/02/14). This team of teachers can have a professional dialogue and make and implement decisions as a result. In relation to collaboration, professional dialogue and development she noted:

> It is nice that the children get to interact with other teachers at ST as teachers have different ways of instructing and coaching the children (SIT2, Diary: 04/12/13)
>
> I am based at the New Reading Station and I have found that in the time frame that we have been doing ST so far that the children have gained a lot more interest and

> confidence in their reading. I feel that ST really targets the children at their level and the small group situation is exactly what the children need to succeed and progress. I love working with the other teachers (SIT2, Diary: 11/12/13)
>
> Today I changed around some children in groups after consultation with other teachers. I moved X from Group B to A, I moved Y from Group C to B and I moved Z from Group D to C. (SIT2, Diary: 05/02/14)

For the Class teachers, this consultation with fellow professionals who are working in their room with their pupils is invaluable so teachers are not making these decisions on their own.

All the teachers in this school had received professional development on ST; they had also visited a school where ST was in progress; they had seen ST videos in school; they had observed other teachers doing ST in school; they had attended Guided Reading sessions in the Education Centre and had attended on-site professional development workshops by Martin Gleeson on Building Bridges Comprehension Strategies (2010) and Brendan Culligan on Spelling and Handwriting (2009). All of this professional development certainly helped the teachers in their teaching of literacy in ST.

7.7 Theme 6: Making a difference to and enhancing teachers' teaching of literacy

I already discussed professional development in relation to teachers and up-skilling in their teaching of literacy. Station Teaching is a major part of their literacy programme and I was interested to see if it made a difference to or enhanced their teaching of literacy. All of the interviewees agreed that it had made a huge difference. They were very happy to engage in ST in their classes and were delighted with the help and support of Support teachers. There are many studies where interventions occur in classes and I reported on these in 2.5, 2.6, 2.7 and

4.2.1 (Pressley et al. 2001; Wray et al. 2002; Hattie, 2003; Taylor et al. 2005; Louden et al. 2005; Concannon – Gibney and Murphy, 2010; Kennedy and Shiel, 2010; Dickinson et al. 2011; Hall, 2013). Williams and Baumann (2008); Spencer and Spencer (1993) and Snow et al., (1998) contended that effective teachers employed various strategies depending on students' needs and could switch to a different strategy if necessary and are able to craft a special mix of instructional ingredients for every child they work with. Some teachers in this study could do this easily; an ability that comes as teacher confidence levels increase.

At the Junior Infant level one Class teacher reported:

> Without a doubt, it gives you that time, a short amount of time, time you can go to each child – you go to work with them, it's easier. You have a small group and it's one to one, you can listen to each child sounding out words, practising reading with different teachers, listening to them reading, practising putting fingers under words, going through concepts about print. At the end getting the children to write down words in their free writing copy, starter sentences on the wall, list of words, they can try to write (JIT1)

Another Class teacher agrees:

> I felt it was brilliant, you have the children one to one. I set out the groups – I was thinking where the children were at – when a child is sitting in front of you, you can hear the mistake. When testing back the letter sounds there was a huge improvement especially the pupils with EAL (JIT2).

One Support teacher who was working with Junior Infants reported that when weaker children read together it doesn't mean that much and you have to hear children reading individually. During the interview this teacher asked for suggestions to help her with the Familiar reading Station and approaches for working with the pupils at this Station. I gave her ideas and guidance on developing the reading with the groups.

A Support teacher commented:

> Now I've become aware of the words the children find more difficult and words they can easily mistake and reverse. Children are very clever and adept – they put in another word if they don't know it, they would astonish you. I tell them to take a picture of the word and I encourage them to look at the word as an aid in spelling. It is very important that they should be complimented if they add in another word, you tell them excellent but that this is the word. They are well able to give another word, they can give you that

> vocabulary. In normal conversation you don't get to use that vocabulary, looking at words aid in identifying it or derivatives of it (SET2)

The Senior Infant Class teachers agree that ST has made a difference to their teaching of literacy. They feel that there is a big improvement on different aspects of literacy for the whole class as the children are grouped according to ability. One teacher reports:

> There is a big emphasis for eight minutes at each Station – each child gets very hands on time at each Station. I target a child in each Station group every day because if the whole class does not have the same target – you can watch the children much closer at the Stations (SIT1)

A Class teacher claims that ST has focused her teaching and that the smaller groups facilitate picking up any troubles an individual may have. She contends that each child has their strengths and places you can work on.

The Support teachers of the Senior Infant classes agree that previously they may have missed some things like word study and the need for repetition especially in Senior Infants. Another claimed that ST has changed her approach and that now she gets the pupils to sound out words, using the same strategies you use in Junior Infants once the pupils have the phonics background. A third Support teacher now tries to prioritise the importance of phonics and a love of reading making it fun through rhymes and drawing pictures. She also thinks that the comprehension strategies of visualisation, predicting and making connections should become part of routine literacy lessons without the children realising.

One Support teacher summed it up:

> For that part of ST – doing a little reading, introducing a book, becoming more aware of what children see when they're reading – predicting and visualisation, makes the books more exciting. You can see the progress the children make. At the beginning there was lots of fun, the progress in the year is amazing. You go into the room and see how they have moved on. At the start of the year the logistics – turn the page, finger under the word, bit by bit they are more independent, you don't have to guide them to turn the pages – it's more natural (SET1)

Over the course of the year from my observations, I could see the teachers growing in confidence with the Stations and the groups of children. As they got comfortable they became more assertive with classroom management strategies and followed the lead from the class teacher, implementing the same rules.

The intervention in Junior Infants is only for six weeks at the end of term so it really is an introduction to Senior Infants. The Class teachers are very busy organising the groups and ensuring classroom management strategies are kept in place. Both Class teachers taught the Phonological awareness / Phonics Station as they wanted to reinforce the sounds with the pupils, as an essential prerequisite for reading. I felt involvement in ST focused the teachers and their priorities in literacy:

> At the beginning rhyming words - making it fun, learning of the letters, checking letter names and sounds regularly – to find out at the start who's having difficulty – sounding out words. I take the Phonics Station as I know exactly where the children are at. I can move ahead faster with a group, I will know who is well able to sound out words and who needs help.
>
> Without a doubt ST gives you that time, a short amount of time, time you can go to each child – go to work with them – easier. Small group – one to one, can listen to each child sounding out words, practising reading with different teachers – listening to them reading, practising putting fingers under words – going through the concepts about print. At the end I was getting the children to write down words in their free writing copy. They can try to write lists of words and use the starter sentences on the wall (JIT1)

Both Junior Infant class teachers prioritised phonological awareness and phonics. They also organised the writing activities at the Writing Stations and the Support teachers organised the reading Stations. I observed that there were no trips to the toilet during the Phonics and the Writing Stations (Observations: 12/06/13). The children were kept busy at both of these Stations and they were very engaged. The children also loved the New Reading Station but were less interested in the Familiar Reading Station in Junior Infants.

In the Senior Infant classes, both teachers chose to take the New Reading Station as they wanted to hear their children reading every day and gauge their progress better. It was lovely to see

how well the classes were doing and how ST was working well with all the groups. The Class teachers were very much driving the success of the lessons. Both teachers often reminded the pupils of the class rules and ST rules e.g. when moving to the next group 'please go quietly and walk slowly – there is no need to rush'. The children were all mannerly and work was productive in both classrooms. In my first observations in Senior Infants I provide this example of how well prepared the teachers were and how this influenced work in the Stations:

> Great progress from Junior Infants. All well able to sit at tables, move and follow instructions. Teachers well prepared and all books and resources ready. (Observations: 08/10/13)

In my final observation at the end of Senior Infants I reported:

> New Reading Station: PM Book - Level 10, Book 8: Rabbits' ears. Lots of teacher praise, children fully engaged in the reading. Teacher was very encouraging – 'we were very close with the predictions, try that again for me – you're nearly there, good job, good idea, good choices'
>
> Familiar Reading: revision of flashcards and re reading of book (PM book: Level 10, Book 7, Little Chimp and Baby Chimp). Flashcards: 'find something blue in room - make up sentences'. Revision of book – story, questions, speech and quotation marks. Lots of extension activities, discussion and teacher praise. Children were participating fully.
>
> Phonics: 'or' sounds – for, fork, Cork – song. Games: Go fish, in pairs ask each other what is the first/last sound in a word, what words have the same sound; odd one out – Cork, corn, horn. Use of variety of resources – cards with dots for 8 sounds and unifix cubes: for, fork, cork, corn, horn, storm, torch, short. Children had fun with word/sound Cork
>
> Writing: Writing captions. Teacher gives very clear instructions – 'have a look at the sentence, we're going to write a sentence, open up your pages – the right page. Teacher gives out markers – nice purple one for you – X – keep up the good work – very neat work, that's beautiful, all going below the lines with your 'y's, careful with your finger spacing'. Teacher marking the work – v.g. great – well done, great boy, what big news have you for me today? Follow up work: make up your own sentence with whiteboard and marker. 4 pupils wrote their own news e.g.: My sister made a new game; I went to Cork; Today is Wednesday, It is the 13th of May, The month is May (another copied hers!) and the last girl just started her sentence when the bell rang (Observations: 13/05/14)

It was very interesting to see how the pupils had progressed in the last year. There certainly was great work going on, the children were fully engaged and happy and were actively learning. The children were very familiar with Station Teaching and all moved easily from group to

group. They appeared confident in the groups and were eager to engage in extra work. At the end of the year their reading and writing had progressed and their eagerness to learn was obvious.

The expertise of the teachers was evident during the year and they took control of their own Stations as the year progressed. At the New and Familiar Reading Stations there was excellent use of predictions, connections and extension of vocabulary. Sometimes I observed that the children were getting tired at the last Station just before lunch in particular if it was the Familiar reading Station; they certainly were not as interested in reading the book again. Some teachers leave their classroom doors open during ST and anyone passing in the corridor can see the work that is going on; children are actively engaged at their Stations and there is real learning going on – for all to see. At the Phonics Station the teacher had introduced a wide variety of resources during the year to enhance the children's acquisition of sounds. There was evidence of pupil progress at this Station. Finally the teacher's confidence improved significantly at the Writing Station and she had developed an effective routine for each day.

The independent observer felt that the children were learning life skills – how to take turns and how to listen to each other especially at the Familiar Reading Station. The pupils have learned communication skills, organisational skills and have developed their analytical skills during ST. The pupils are learning these life skills without realising it and these life skills transfer to daily life.

Overall the observer felt that ST was very task oriented but that sometimes you could not hear the pupils' voices and felt that teachers should listen to what the pupils were saying. She acknowledged that there was a time issue but she wondered if there was any space at the end of ST when children could give their opinion and consolidate their learning.

In the next section I address the improvement in pupils' literacy skills over the course of the intervention.

7.8 Theme 7: Improvement in pupils' literacy skills

The *Growing Up in Ireland Study* as reported on by Williams et al. (2009); Greene et al. (2010) and McCoy et al. (2012) and as discussed in 3.9, provides evidence on literacy achievement of children. This, together with studies by Devine (1999, 2000), on pupil voice highlight the importance of pupil voice and I report extensively from my empirical research on this in relation to pupil progress in literacy.

All teachers of both Junior and Senior Infant classes are very happy with the implementation of Station Teaching in their classes and feel that the pupils have made great progress. In this section I will address Junior and Senior Infant classes separately.

7.8.1 Progress in Junior Infants

From my observations I noted that the intervention period of six weeks was quite short in Junior Infants but it was a great introduction for Senior Infants. The pupils did learn to work in a group and to move from Station to Station with relative ease after six weeks. The children certainly made progress as shown by the post test in Concepts about Print.

The Phonics Stations were excellent in both rooms. The children learned all their initial letter sounds and blends. Teachers' instructions were very clear. This is an example of the progress pupils made at the Phonics Station:

> Phonics: Varied use of resources – prepared sheets and cards, Elkonin boxes, playing games, all pupils on task at all times, each child got one to one attention. Very effective

> use of letter fans and sheets for blending 3 letter words and small cards. Great game at end – teacher shows picture and if pupils have the word they say it (Observations: 17/06/13; 18/06/13)

The Writing Station was also tightly structured and you could also see progress in this Station. The teachers' instructions again were very clear at this Station and the children were able to complete the activity easily; having moved from doing patterns at the start of the intervention to writing letters using proper letter formation:

> Writing: Sand trays and use of markers and whiteboards. Teacher moving around: Letter 'h' – remember to use 2 lines, starting at the top – down, half way up and around – don't take pen off the board - children getting lots of help and affirmation, great instructions, very active learning. When you're finished 'h', rub out the top line and think of a letter you find hardest to make and write that. Lots of teacher praise: excellent, perfect(5), great boy, excellent (4), well done, they're gorgeous (children smiling from praise) (Observations: 17/06/13; 18/06/13)

The New Reading Station was excellent in both rooms – experienced teachers of Infants were teaching at these Stations. The children had read all the books in Level 1, PM series both fiction and non-fiction and commenced Level 2 books. The children were making predictions easily, they could identify bold print, full stops, capital letters and exclamation marks as evidenced by the following example:

> New Reading: PM book: Level 2, Book 2, My clothes. Extension activities: rhyming words, small words in big word, full stop, capital letter, discussion on elevator and escalator – oral language, predictions – did we make a good prediction? Lots of praise. Pupils well extended with predictions, bold print – very important word – say it louder, exclamation marks – how is he feeling – happy – use exclamation mark (Observations: 17/06/13; 18/06/13)

With regard the Familiar Reading Station it depended very much on the teacher teaching the Station. Some teachers were less competent and they were somewhat unsure of the process at the Station. There were many trips to the toilet on the part of the pupils at this Station; a sure sign of lack of engagement. This proves the importance of an effective teacher of literacy. In one room a student teacher was working with the pupils but she did not have the knowledge or expertise to either engage with or enhance the learning of the pupils. However once the teacher

was given a little guidance great progress was made and children were referring to rhyming words and speech marks as a matter of course! Generally the children were not as interested in the Familiar Reading Station; they had seen the book the previous day so there was no element of surprise there. This is an example from my observations of progress in the Familiar Reading Station:

> Familiar Reading: PM book: Level 2, Book 2, My little cat. Teacher unsure of which group she had when she started, 2 pupils not on the right page – teacher didn't say which page. Lots of extension activities – good use of questioning – where is the cat, what is he doing in there, what do we use a bucket for – children volunteering answers freely, rhyming words – with cat, bag; word beginning with letter 'T', small words in big words – flowerpot, basket, cupboard, drawer; different word for little (Observations: 17/06/13; 18/06/13)

At the end of the intervention certainly there was an improvement in pupils' literacy skills.

These are examples from my Field notes following observations:

> The pupils worked very well in both classrooms in particular at New Reading. There was great excitement with predictions and lots of engagement with the new books. I felt the teacher could have done more with the book in Familiar Reading Station. Her instructions were a little erratic and the children lost interest. The Phonics Stations were run so well, there was great interaction between the teacher and pupils and lots of learning taking place. The Writing Stations were excellent, the pupils obviously loved these Stations and were fully engaged (Field notes: 17/06/13; 18/06/13).

I was very impressed at the pupils' progress in both classes in such a short space of time and it shows how effective an intervention can be. In Junior Infants one class teacher feels that ST in last term of Junior Infants gives a great lead into Senior Infants and that you know exactly how your pupils are getting on and you can share this information with the Senior Infant teacher. She feels ST is a great way of revising words and gives an opportunity for Support teachers to check reading:

> ST is a great way of revising words especially the high frequency words – there is a great sense of achievement for themselves at the end of a set. It's great, it gives you a chance for blending, it's a chance for other teachers to check reading. I am always into sounding out and blending words at the end of Junior Infants like Brendan Culligan (1997, 2009) says (JIT1)

The other Class teacher claims that in a small group you can really see where the pupils are at, you can gauge who has a grasp of concepts and that the Stations are so quick and active that children can't get tired and they're learning. She also comments that the children get a break from the class teacher as they have an opportunity to work with other teachers. The teachers of Junior Infants can really see an improvement in the children as supported by the Concepts about Print tests:

> When we are sounding out letters – I tell them to turn on their sound buttons on the sheets with picture cards and dots under each letter – when they press the button they touch the dot – e.g. p-i-n makes the sound 'pin' – I'm assessing while we're doing it – I'm ticking and playing a game. ST is fabulous, there is a huge improvement especially with the pupils with EAL. From what I've seen ST is great and I hope to continue it in my career. We tested before and are testing now and I can see the improvement (JIT2)

A Support teacher of Junior Infants likes the active learning involved and that it is not just based on reading, that vocabulary and comprehension development are part of it. She also comments on the importance of children recognising rhyming words:

> It is very important that they recognise words that rhyme in a sentence. For 'bat' they say 'big'. In nursery rhymes they find it difficult to pick out rhyming words – children don't learn nursery rhymes at home anymore. There is trojan work being done in ST – with the fine motor skills the children get a chance to cut and use pattern books – these are laminated. Anyone with pencil grip issues can do cutting and write in sand and use márla- that's back to the old stuff – you can't beat the márla especially nowadays when they don't play with any of that at home (SET1)

Without a doubt the teachers of Junior Infants can see an improvement in the pupils' literacy skills and one teacher summed it up by saying: 'I hope it continues at this time of year for Junior Infants every year' (JIT1).

The Support teacher in her diary entry recorded:

> Junior Infants have really improved in just a few weeks with group-work, pencil grip, writing and reading. It is very good to start them at Station Teaching at the end of the year so they are prepared for what it is like in Senior Infants. They seem to really enjoy it as well (SET2: Diary: 21/06/13)

7.8.2 Progress in Senior Infants

I conducted twice monthly observations in both classes during Senior Infants – from September 2013 to June 2014. A doctoral colleague also corroborated my observations when she undertook an observation of both classes on 25/03/14. I also took photographs and video recorded Station Teaching in the classes during the year.

Certainly the pupils' literacy skills improved over the course of the year. All groups progressed up through the levelled readers beginning at Level 2 in the PM books and continuing up to Level 6 for the weakest group, Level 9 for one group and to Level 10 in fiction and non-fiction for two groups. In both classes the Station Teaching classes ran smoothly in a strict routine. The team of Support teachers worked in one class from 11.00 to 11.40 a.m. and then in the next room from 11.40 – 12.20 p.m. every day from Monday to Thursday. There was no deviation from this plan and ST happened regardless of anything else going on in the school; it was top priority. On some occasions I stood in if a teacher was absent to ensure continuity and this worked very well. It also gave me an insight into running a Station in eight minutes! I have many observation sheets and notes on file but for the purposes of this section I will report on the final observation on 22/05/14 in both classes.

New Reading Station:

In both rooms the Class teacher taught at this Station and in both classes it was excellent. The use of predictions and connections was very beneficial to the learning of the pupils. There was great engagement and enthusiasm on the part of the pupils; great use of praise by the teachers and use of extension activities with vocabulary development. In fact I wrote in my notes that this Station was 'perfect'! My doctoral colleague thought this Station was lovely and that the children were flourishing at this Station.

Familiar Reading Station:

There was great consolidation of work happening at this Station in both classes. The children were not that eager to re-read the same book the second day so the teacher had to work extra hard with this. The use of praise and encouragement worked well here. Opportunities for vocabulary development and predictions were used effectively as well as finding rhyming words and small words in big words. I felt as the year went on the teacher structured this Station very well with the use of flashcards and putting words in to sentences. My colleague also commented on the fact of children going to the toilet during Familiar Reading Station, same as in Junior Infants. She felt that 'the task was pretty intensive' meaning that the teacher was perhaps too focused on getting the work done in the time slot and not giving the children time to answer and participate.

Phonics Station

This Station improved over the course of the year as the teacher became more familiar and did more research on a variety of games to play with the children to reinforce their phonics skills. She produced some beautiful laminated sheets, cards, fans, dice games, envelopes of words and sentences, word wheels, fishing games and Bingo cards. The Station was more structured and this worked very well. The teacher has a lovely singing voice and the children loved singing the songs about sounds with her. This was very stimulating and motivating for the pupils.

Writing Station

At the start of the year the teachers had decided to put a definite plan in place for the Writing Station and incorporated a Listening activity on one day a week. This Listening activity aimed at developing listening skills and involved the pupils following instructions from the teacher and filling in an activity sheet. The other three days had a very tight structure about them –

writing activities – copying words and sentences. The children all loved this Station; perhaps it was the fact that they could physically do something and they liked the practicality of it.

There was lots of individual attention and praise for each child at this Station with an emphasis on capital letters and full stops. The children could circle their best letter and make repairs if necessary! There was a lovely atmosphere at this Station and no pressure on the children. The teachers were very encouraging. My colleague noted:

> This Station was lovely. The pupils wanted to keep on with the task when the time was up. The teacher praised the pupils and she meant it – you could see the pupils blossoming under it (Colleague's observation: 25/03/14)

In my notes on 28/05/14 I noted that 'I felt overall that the children were progressing very well – lovely atmosphere in the room – lots of progress – children very comfortable and really doing well'.

The Senior Infant class teachers are very happy with ST and can see a real difference in pupils' literacy skills, not just reading but also writing:

> Small groups are a big plus as well as grouped ability. You can differentiate your questioning between the stronger and the weaker groups. You get to target several areas of literacy in 40 minutes, it is a very intensive time, you get to zone in and target each of the kids – it does focus them and gives teachers a chance to pick out areas to work on because it is difficult to see all the children (SIT1)

> The benefits that have come out of ST are huge e.g. one of the English work books we have for English does not have enough for the children to do – the children are too advanced and some pages are a waste of time. The questioning – we only ever started it after Christmas but with ST we are doing so much more and such abilities – you could see a big change. They have so much repetition with letter writing. Even writing set for homework and doing dictation this year has brought on the class – what they are trying to write and wanting to write sentences with help – it's the first time having this (SIT2)

One Class teacher voiced a concern about the Writing Station where sometimes quantity overcomes quality when you have eight minutes to do a page of writing the children are inclined to rush it. A Support teacher remarked that a strength of ST is the small group setting and that it is very important for pupils to get a chance to speak as this may not happen in the large class

setting (Toller, 1999; Devine, 1999, 2000; Hargreaves, 2004). She recommends spending more time on phonics, oral language and stories:

> We need to do a lot of rhymes and phonics – going back to loads of oral rhymes and phonics, it is very beneficial and it builds language – there is lots of hidden vocabulary. We need to do loads of story time e.g. Chicken Licken and The Enormous Turnip – stories really make an impact (SET1)

Another Support teacher discusses the lack of time at each Station and that you would love to do more with the pupils but acknowledges that this is the life of teaching, that you never have enough time. She can really see the benefits of ST and that the pupils are well prepared for Guided Reading in First Class. She also spoke about moving pupils up groups and that the weaker pupils excelled when they were moved up because they felt it was a challenge. However with regard to moving pupils down a group, she felt this would be very difficult for a child's confidence and wondered could it be done without them knowing. This is a dilemma for any teacher. All Support teachers suggested increasing the time spent at each Station from eight to nine minutes halfway through the year and that maybe the teachers could rotate at this stage also. One Support teacher summed up ST this way:

> Children love the small groups, they get a blast of phonics, new reading, familiar reading and writing every day. In schools that don't have it, it takes up the whole day to tackle all elements of literacy. It's like an injection of literacy – short and snappy lessons, it holds their attention - regular and often, teachers can really see the child who is struggling. I have definitely seen an improvement in children maturing over the year. For a school this size teaching literacy is tackled head on! (SET3)

Two teachers kept a reflective journal during the school year 2013/2014. The Senior Infant Class teacher recorded the following:

> As the classroom teacher it gives me the chance to hear each child read every day. Through discussion of the books I am able to assess the children's phonics, comprehension, word identification skills, fluency – the list goes on as you can examine so much through the use of the books (SIT2, Diary: 04/12/13)

> I can see that Station Teaching has impacted on the children in my class in a positive way as they are repeating their sounds/phonics daily, reading two books daily and writing, all in a small group setting which has spurred them to become more

> knowledgeable in their literacy. The children don't see ST as a chore, they see it as fun which makes the learning a lot easier (SIT2, Diary: 21/05/14)

During the course of the year the Class teacher made notes on pupils' learning in her diary.

SIT2 Diary entries:

> Children learning so many new words and their meanings: photography (05/12/13); facial expressions (29/01/14); reflection (05/02/14); magic 'e' (24/02/14); New vocabulary: introduction, tree blossoming (01/04/14); figs (03/06/14) evaporation, hibernating, bulldozer (07/04/14);
>
> Making real life connections – Katie's caterpillar who doesn't like going to school because some people were not nice to her like what happened to this boy in Junior Infants, and the word permission as ducks had not asked to go playing at the river (04/03/14); making connections between swans using mud to stick nest together and humans using cement, using 'an' before a vowel because we are reading about 'an animal' (16/06/14)
>
> Letter writing using 'Dear', following directions e.g. to Pet Shop (28/04/14) (SIT2 Diary entries)

The Support teacher also recorded observations during the course of the year. She also recorded new vocabulary the children were encountering along with predictions and connections.

SET2 Diary entries:

> At the start of the year I worked at the Writing Station. You can really see where children are going wrong and can help them – you cannot do this with a full class. ST is brilliant for developing writing, the children learn to do letter formation, proper pencil grip. You really notice some children who are quicker than others at tasks and you can help them to extend their news. The most important thing for children is to have an audience and you can praise and encourage them (SET2: 10/10/13).
>
> I work at the Familiar Reading Station, doing words, reading the book from the day before and developing their reading – sound out words, break up words, encouraging the children in their reading so they get confident. Their reading has improved brilliantly. You can focus in and see which children are struggling. You could spend a longer time with some groups. Writing and phonics are central in Senior Infants (SET2: 30/05/14)
>
> You get to work on predictions and connections and the children really improved with these as the year went on. Predictions: Autumn, building a tower – bigger blocks at the bottom (07/01/14); older people, sad, season (14/01/14); I asked the children for a new title for the book – 'Rain is water' – Rain comes down from the sky/clouds/Rain helps plants to grow (12/05/14); I asked the children about the sea – one child said that Ireland is an island so it is surrounded by the water and the sea (11/06/14). Making connections: lion/cubs and cat/ kittens, brakes – bikes but nobody mentioned a car; budgies/hens/insects (04/03/14) Questions – what is the difference between a boy and a man? A man is older than a boy/ a man is big and a boy is small/ men work and boys

> play/a man drives a car/ when a boy is finished college he turns into a man (SET2: 05/02/14)
>
> You get opportunities to work on new vocabulary: Dogs eating bones – they do not swallow them and the bones also clean dog's teeth (10/10/13); Children come up with 'P' words; Book – Tad grows up – pupil says Tad is a good name for a tadpole because tad is in tadpole (10/02/14); What does the word 'safe' mean? – 'nobody can get in' and 'no danger can happen' (SET2: 11/02/14)

Finally the Support teacher recorded some discussions she had with the Senior Infants on books and also a conversation about their first day in school.

SET2 Diary entries:

> Discussion on books: Why did you like this book? Because it was cool and it was boys versus girls/Because there was football in it/Because they all played together in the end (26/02/14). Do you remember your first day in school? I was shy/I was really shy and I met Aoife and we became friends/I was peeking in the door/We had fun time and no work (SET2: 26/02/14)

These comments give a flavour of the work going in the Familiar reading Station and the lovely discussions on vocabulary they encounter. The teacher is also challenging them in their learning and they are learning to make connections and predictions. They are working in the small group situation and any prediction is quite acceptable – it is a safe place for the children to guess and all guesses are respected. The Support teacher also recorded that after doing Station Teaching for so long the children are very good at working in groups. This will prepare them for Guided Reading groups in First class when they will be working independently some of the time.

All of this evidence is qualitative but to add rigour to my research in the next section I present hard data on testing of the pupils during the intervention. It is difficult to measure the success or otherwise of an intervention but I address the testing procedures and results of literacy tests in Junior and Senior Infants.

7.9 Theme 8: Pre and Post test results of literacy tests

The goal of any intervention is to ensure an improvement in pupil outcomes. The National Strategy (DES, 2011) as discussed in 3.4.1 outlines targets to improve outcomes at primary school level. The intervention Station Teaching aims to improve pupil outcomes with regard to their literacy levels. Furthermore the Chief Inspector's report (DES, 2013) advises schools to ensure that there is a cohesive and explicit teaching of reading skills and availability of differentiated reading materials to sustain interest in and ensure progress in reading (DES, 2013, p. 45). Station Teaching encompasses all these elements of a literacy programme.

In Chapter 4, I have outlined the essential literacy skills as well as developing concepts about print in 4.3.1 as defined by Snow et al. (1998) and all the elements which should form part of an effective programme for reading instruction in 4.5 based on research by The National Reading Panel (NRP) (2000); Scammaca et al., 2007; Singleton, 2009; Kennedy et al., 2012; Eurydice Network, 2011. These elements include:

- Phonemic awareness and the teaching of phonics
- Decoding and word studies including the learning of sight vocabulary
- Language development including vocabulary development
- The explicit teaching of comprehension strategies
- Meaningful writing experiences
- The development of fluent reading by reading and rereading familiar texts
- A wide range of reading materials
- Opportunities for both guided and independent reading

In my observations I noted the teaching of these skills and I will report on these. However in the Junior Infant classes I begin with concepts about print, letter names and sounds.

7.9.1 Concepts about Print in Junior Infants

The intervention Station Teaching ran for six weeks at the end of third term in Junior Infants from 13 May to 22 June 2013. Firstly in the Junior Infant classes the teachers examined the

pupils' concepts about print before and after the intervention using Marie Clay's checklist (2000). The Print Concepts include:

- Concept of a book – cover and title
- Concept of text – print tells a story
- Concept of a word – show where book tells the story, point to words, point to two words that are the same, matching words
- Concept of a letter – show a letter, name letters
- Directionality – beginning at the front and finishing at the back, left to right in a sentence, concept of top and bottom, left to right page turning, return sweep, concept of first, last and middle
- Mechanics – capitalisation, punctuation, point to full stop, question and exclamation marks (Clay, 2000)

Both classes completed these tests by 03/05/13 and again by 25/06/13. The tests were conducted on a one to one basis and took a number of days. The pupils were tested on 25 items. The results of these tests are shown in Table 7A.

Table 7A: Pupils' scores in Concepts about Print Pre and Post tests

Class: Junior Infants N. of pupils = 44	25 items Concepts about Print Pre test	*N. of pupils* = 44	25 items Concepts about Print Post test
2 pupils	25	20 pupils	25
11 pupils	24	10 pupils	24
10 pupils	23	6 pupils	23
5 pupils	22	4 pupils	22
6 pupils	21	1 pupil	21
3 pupils	20	1 pupil	17
1 pupil	19	1 pupil	15
1 pupil	18	1 pupil	12
1 pupil	17		
1 pupil	16		
1 pupil	13		

1 pupil	11		
1 pupil	9		
Average score	21.43	Average score	23.43

`

There were two classes of 22 Junior Infant pupils in the school year 2012-2013, a mixture of boys and girls. The Concepts about Print was a new test for the teachers to use so there was no pre teaching involved. Class 1 were taught by an experienced teacher and this class showed higher scores on this test. I presume this teacher had taught these concepts during the year while the less experienced teacher had not taught them. The results of this test prove the importance of an effective teacher of literacy as discussed in 2.4 and 2.5. (Snow et al. 1998; Allington, 2002; Louden et al. 2005; Williams and Baumann, 2008; Kennedy et al. 2012; Hall, 2013). In both classes there were pupils with special educational needs and this is reflected in some of the low scores.

In Class 1, 20 pupils out of 22 scored between 20 and 25 points in the pre-test and this increased to 21 pupils in the post test. In Class 2, the initial scores in the pre-test were lower overall, 17 pupils out of 22 scored between 20 and 25 points in the pre-test and this increased to 20 pupils in the post test which showed that these concepts about print were taught specifically during the intervention period in Class 2.

In summary, whereas only 2 pupils scored a full 25 at the start of the intervention, at the end 18 pupils scored 25, 10 pupils scored 24, 6 pupils scored 23, 4 pupils scored 22 and the remaining from 12 to 21 items. The average score of both classes increased from 21.43 to 24.63.

The teachers also checked the pupils' knowledge of letter names and initial letter sounds pre and post intervention. With regard to knowledge of letter sounds and letter names the results showed a marked improvement post intervention as portrayed in Table 7B:

Table 7B: Pupils' scores in knowledge of letter names pre and post tests

Class: Junior Infants N. of pupils = 44	Knowledge of 26 letter names pre test	*N. of pupils* = 44	Knowledge of 26 letter names post test
25 pupils	26	34 pupils	26
5 pupils	25	6 pupils	25
5 pupils	24	1 pupil	24
2 pupils	23	2 pupils	19
2 pupils	22	1 pupil	13
1 pupil	21		
1 pupil	20		
1 pupil	17		
1 pupil	10		
1 pupil	8		
Average score	23.65	Average score	25.20

The scores in this test showed in Class 1 that 15 of the pupils knew all 26 of their letter names pre intervention and the remainder knew up to 22 letter names. After the intervention these scores improved with 19 knowing all their letter names and the remaining 3 knew 24 or 25 letter names. In Class 2 the results again were more varied. Ten pupils knew all their letter names in the pre-test with the majority knowing between 17 and 25 letter names. In the post-test 15 recognised all 26 letter names and 4 recognised 25 letter names, two knew 19 and one pupil knew 13. This class showed a marked improvement in recognition of letter names post intervention.

Overall the average score of both classes increased from 23.65 to 25.20.

The final test was to determine the pupils' knowledge of initial letter sounds and these results are shown in Table 7C:

Table 7C: Pupils' scores in knowledge of initial letter sounds, pre and post tests

Class: Junior Infants N. of pupils = 44	Knowledge of 26 initial letter sounds pre test	*N. of pupils* = 44	Knowledge of 26 initial letter sounds post test
19 pupils	26	34	26
11 pupils	25	3	25
5 pupils	24	5	24
6 pupils	23	1	13
1 pupil	18	1	12
1 pupil	8		
1 pupil	7		
Average score	23.63	Average score	24.63

In this final test on initial letter sounds Class 1 again scored very well. Thirteen pupils recognised 26 sounds and the remaining 9 recognised between 23 and 25 initial letter sounds. This increased to 21 pupils recognising 26 letter sounds and one pupil recognising 24 letter sounds post intervention.

In Class 2, 6 pupils knew 26 initial letter sounds while 13 pupils knew between 23 and 25 sounds, with one recognising 18 sounds, one knew 8 and one knew 7 sounds. These scores increased post intervention. Thirteen pupils recognised 26 sounds, with 7 recognising 24 or 25 sounds and one knew 13 and one knew 12 sounds.

Both classes showed progress post intervention but in particular Class 2 who had more to make up, made great progress as shown by the post intervention tests. The average score of both classes increased from 23.43 to 24.63.

7.9.2 Middle Infant Screening Test in Senior Infants

Both classes proceeded into Senior Infants and the intervention ran all year from September 2013 to June 2014. In March 2014 the teachers conducted the Middle Infant Screening Test (MIST) (1993) with 42 pupils. The MIST is a formal assessment test administered annually in pupils' fifth term in primary school (usually second term in Senior Infants). This test has five sub-tests:

- Listening Skills
- Letter/sounds identification
- Written vocabulary
- Three phoneme words
- Dictation

I did not have a control group so it is difficult to compare this class with another. However Table 7D shows the scores for the Senior Infant classes in the years 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014.

Table 7D: MIST scores 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014

Sub-test	Maximum possible score	Cut – off score	Mean score 2011 (n = 47)	Mean score 2012 (n = 46)	Mean score 2013 (n = 35)	Mean score 2014 (n = 42)	Is there a noticeable difference?
Listening skills	15	10	11.40	12.47	13.37	11.95	Higher than 2011
Letter sounds	26	20	23.21	24.95	25.42	21.59	Lowest in 4 years
Written vocabulary	No max.	6	13.93	14.41	16.2	14.33	Higher than 2011
Three phoneme words	30	15	25.63	27.58	28.85	24.88	Lowest in 4 years

Sentence dictation	36	18	25.17	27.56	30.37	27.42	Higher than 2011
Referral to Forward Together Programme: Pupils who score below cut off point on three sub tests			9 pupils	1 pupil	0 pupil	3 pupils	Much better than 2011

On first examination of these results the pupils in the study group did not perform better than pupils in Senior Infants in 2012 and 2013, but much better than pupils in 2011. Out of 42 pupils only 3 scored below the cut-off point on three sub scales and therefore were recommended for the Forward Together Programme. This programme is part of the MIST test and includes intensive support on Phonics for these pupils for a number of weeks. However apart from these pupils all the other scores showed that all the pupils still scored well above the cut-off point for each sub scale.

The average score for Listening Skills was 11.95 out of a maximum score of 15. The average score for letter sounds was 21.59 out of a score of 26. At the end of June 2013 in Junior Infants this group scored an average of 24.63 in initial letter sounds. In March 2014 when the pupils completed the MIST test their scores on letter sounds had decreased from 24.63 to 21.59. So, what happened in the meantime? In June 2013 the pupils were tested individually on the Concepts about Print which included letter names and sounds. The MIST test on the other hand is a class administered test and pupils had to listen, follow instructions and complete the answers in the correct box. There is a big difference between answering the teacher individually and completing a written test especially for Infants.

In Written Vocabulary the average score was 14.33 with no maximum. This item allowed children to write any words they knew. It was a higher score than in 2011, slightly lower than in 2012 and nearly 2 points lower than in 2013.

The results of the Three Phoneme words test were disappointing considering all the time and work spent on Phonics. The average score was 24.88 out of a maximum of 30. It was the lowest score in 4 years. In Sentence Dictation the average score was 27.42 out of a maximum score of 36. This score was higher than in 2011, slightly lower than in 2012 but nearly 3 points lower than in 2013. I had observed that the pupils were learning correct letter formation and lots of handwriting but had not much experience of writing sentences themselves. Perhaps the pupils were being spoon fed too much during the Writing Station and not being encouraged to write independently.

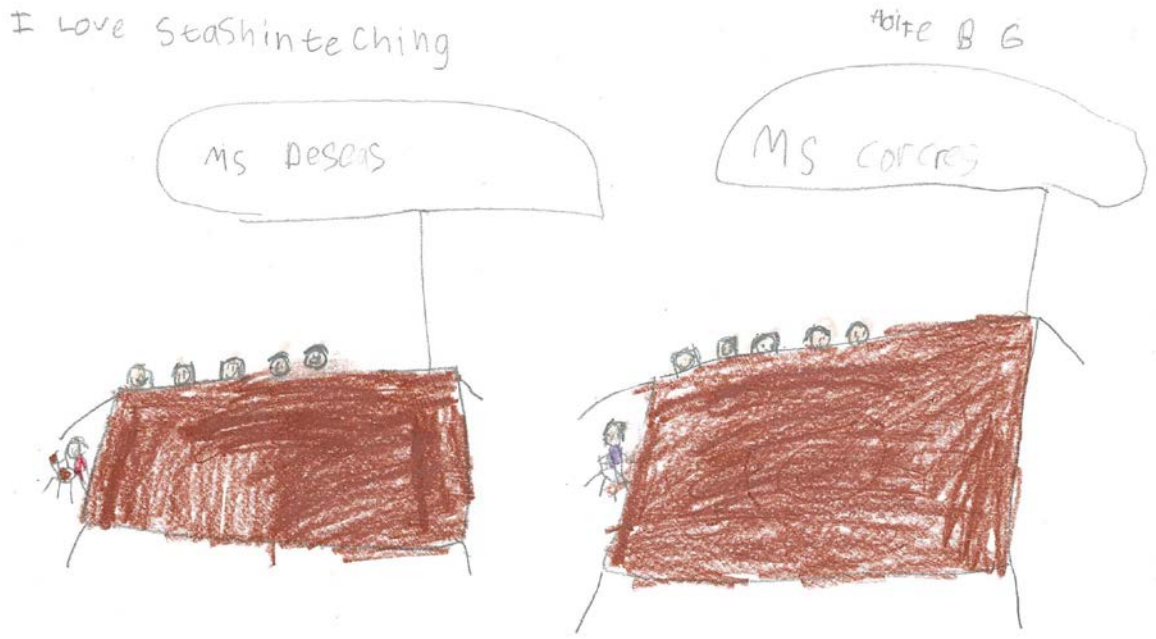
One cannot draw decisive conclusions from this study as it is not an experimental one. When one examines these results one has to take into account the size and composition of the classes. In the school year 2012/2013 both Senior Infant classes only contained 35 pupils compared to 42 the following year. In the school year 2013/2014 both classes contained six pupils with diagnosed special needs and these children's scores are included in the table. This number of pupils with special needs far exceeds the number in any classes in the previous three years. 12 out of the 42 pupils also have English as an additional language which is a higher percentage than the previous three years also. All these points have to be taken into account when assessing pupils' progress. When you look at the overall scores you can see a big jump in particular for Class 2. The question can be posed – what would these pupils' scores have been if they had not engaged in Station Teaching? The pupils in this class would have lost out hugely in a whole class teaching context. They would not have received the same attention from the teacher as part of the larger group and would not have experienced the intensive blitz of literacy every day.

When you look back at the essential elements of an effective reading programme according to research as outlined, one realises that there is no standardised test available to test pupils in Senior Infant classes on these elements. The MIST gives a rough guide as to the pupils' progress but it relies heavily on phonics. However it does not test pupils' language development or comprehension strategies, their fluency of reading or their independent reading. This quantitative section is still extremely important in my study as it provides hard evidence and not just based on perception of progress. I also include a section on pupils' perspectives and parents' perspectives to supplement the MIST results. The perceptions are important too especially those of the children themselves.

7.10 Theme 9: Development of reading and writing practices from the pupils' and parents' perspectives

The drawing in Figure 7F by a girl in Senior Infants chooses her two favourite Stations to draw and claims a preference for the Writing Station.

Figure 7F: Pupil's Drawing 6: A: ST: we were sitting down doing lessons and writing news. This one is the Phonics one and this is the Writing. The Writing is my favourite one – we could stick things onto stuff and it was kinda fun. I like writing.



In this section I address the development of reading and writing strategies from the pupils' perspectives. I conducted individual interviews with the pupils at the end of the intervention in Junior Infants and again at the end of Senior Infants. I report on these separately.

7.10.1 Junior Infants – pupils' perspectives on reading and writing

All the pupils really enjoyed Station Teaching. The Junior Infant pupils could tell me what they had learned during ST. Firstly I asked them why they needed to learn to read and write and activities they engaged in the Writing Station. Next they described words they had learned and they could relate word attack skills and games they had played when learning sounds and the names of some books they had read.

When I asked the pupils (07/06/13 and 25/06/13) why they think we need to learn to read these are some of their answers:

- Because when you're older you'll be reading books, you won't know how to read books you'll be reading
- Cos' then we wouldn't know how to read when we're bigger – when we're grown up
- Cos' when you're older you read to – read when you go into the big school
- So you can read to your brother
- To get bigger
- So you can read like a grown up and read grown up books (Pupil interviews: 07/06/13, 25/06/13)

These pupils have a real sense of the importance of reading and how you will need to be able to read when you're grown up! The pupils could list off words they had learned during ST: The, the, and, you, we, am, to, too, Look at me, in, water, is, small, are, see, lost, find, jump, he, not, toys, at, can, here, up, down (Pupil interviews: 07/06/13, 25/06/13).

I also asked the pupils why they needed to learn to write and here are their responses:

- So you can write in workbooks in Sixth class like my sister
- Cos' we can know how to write letters
- Cos' you won't be able to write – to write a message to someone
- Cos' I want to do it
- So we can be better at writing
- So when you get to a bigger school we can do all words and stuff (Pupil interviews: 07/06/13, 25/06/13)

The pupils are very conscious of being able to write when you're older and their comments are lovely and refreshing. They like writing letters on the sand trays and on the whiteboards at the Writing Station. One pupil reported 'I especially like writing. I made a story at home, you can write stories at home, you can write stuff down on a piece of paper' (L: 25/06/13). One pupil only claimed that she didn't like writing because she thinks it's really boring!

In relation to word attack skills the pupils were able to tell me what they had learned. When they come to a difficult word this is what they do:

- Sound it out
- Fast fingers – when teacher says 'fast fingers' you have to find the words
- You can tell the teacher, you have one or two goes trying to know the words
- Letter fans, songs, we learn the water one, some summer ones I think
- We sound our sound buttons, we make a sound when we press the dot at words and c-a-n is can (Pupil interviews: 07/06/13. 25/06/13)

The pupils were a little reticent about the names of some of the books they had read but most could name the books they had read either that day or the previous day:

> Tall and Small; Big and Small; Up and Away; There's a helicopter one; Up in the Sky; Up and Down; The Little Hippo; Dressing Up; Flowers; Cat; Aeroplanes; Babies; Winnie the Witch (that's my favourite one); Make a dinosaur; Make the rabbit; Going on holidays; Balloons (Pupil interviews: 07/06/13, 25/06/13)

The children definitely learned a lot of literacy skills during ST and their knowledge of concepts about print improved.

7.10.2 Parents' perspectives on reading and writing at the end of Junior Infants

I interviewed the parents of the pupils in a focus group at the end of Junior Infants and again at the end of Senior Infants. They were all amazed at the progress the pupils had made both years. At the end of Junior Infants they made comments like this:

- They have made huge progress – I can't believe in one year, I didn't think it would be so fast
- X is sounding out words, finding words in a passage or story that he knows and is reading those
- ST has given her confidence to read – sounding out words e.g. the word 'worm' – she wouldn't have the word but sounds it out w-o-r-m, it's coming together
- The Phonics and rhyming words, songs with all the words with her teacher – ST has made a difference – her interest has improved – she is happy to read ST book from school – has to read it first thing
- He comes home and reads the book – he says 'I can read it myself' – that is progress! (Focus group - 17/06/13)

The parents also spoke about reading bedtime stories to their children after the presentation I gave on helping your child to read and how their children are now reading for their younger siblings!

7.10.3 Senior Infants: pupils' perspectives on reading and writing

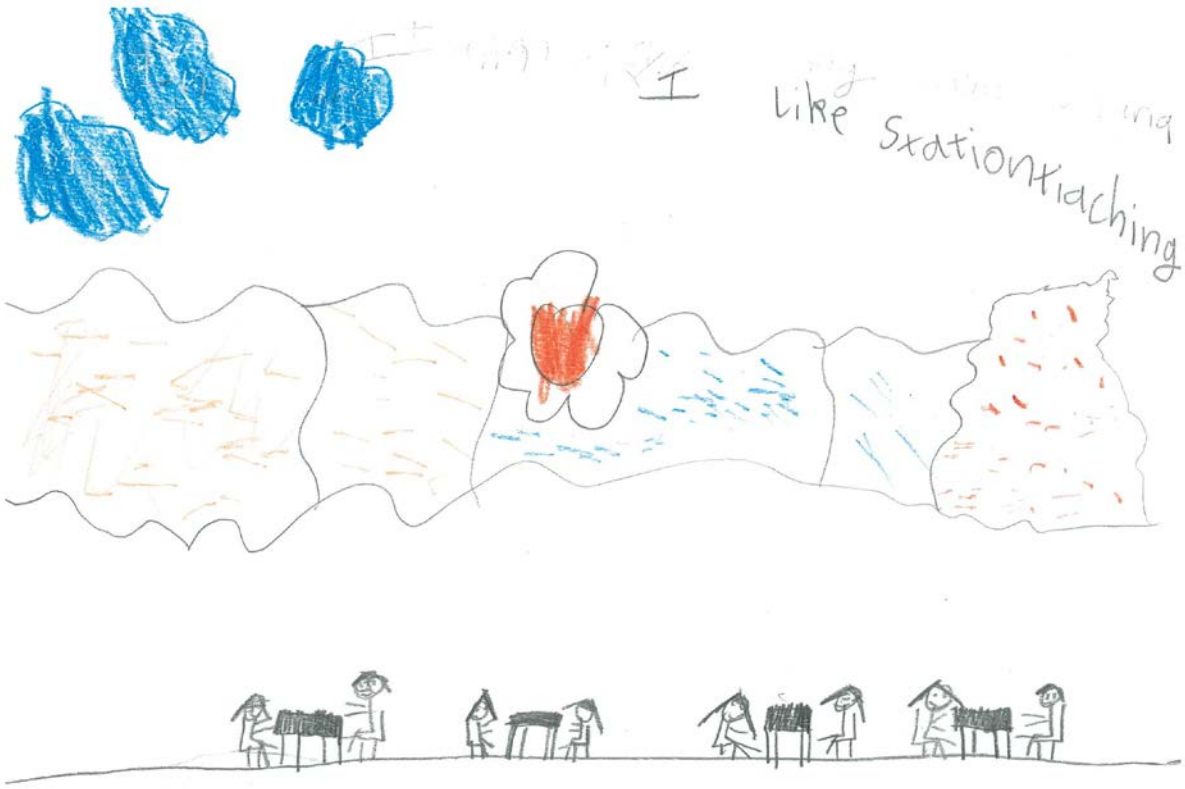
I interviewed the pupils individually at the end of Senior Infants. In November 2013 and June 2014 the children drew pictures for me of Station Teaching and also told me about their pictures. From the interviews and children's drawings it was evident that the pupils in Senior Infants were well able to give an account of ST in their room, what was going on in the different Stations, who was in their Station group. They could tell me what they had learned at Station Teaching in relation to Phonics, the Writing Station and what books they had read. Their comments on why you needed to read showed a progressive development from when they were in Junior Infants:

- Cos' if you're doing study, when you're in an older school we need to read instructions and for important exams – lots of words you have to read them
- Because we need to learn some other things
- Because it helps us – our brain to work
- So when we're older we can write and we won't have to learn, going over to peoples' house if we don't have time we can write letters, or thank you cards – My Mom did those for my baby sister
- So then if you're a chemist or something you can read things, it's good to read, you'll know a lot of stuff
- Because you have to discover new words, when you discover new words you can make them up into your own sentences cos' when you make them up, you can make bigger words and stuff like – discover, containers and stuff (Pupil interviews: 13/06/14; 16/06/14)

The girl who drew the picture in Figure 7G is a pupil with EAL and obviously enjoys Station teaching. Her drawing shows a very orderly linear sequence of pictures and the sunshine may

be an indication of her happiness in class. She obviously like structure from the precise way she draws all the Stations.

Figure 7G: Pupil's Drawing 7: D: My name is D. I like Station Teaching. We're reading the books and writing.



In Senior Infants again I asked the pupils why we need to learn to write and these are some of their responses:

- So then if you're writing a letter you could write it and post it, if you were doing a text you can write it
- Because if we get, when we're grown up – you have to get everything right and you get a card and you have to send it to the right person and the right message
- Because when you get old, it's like when you want to do, when your child goes to school and you have to give them some letters – you must put your address on them
- Cos you can learn new words and get your writing better. Tonight we'll have a homework book and we'll do handwriting. When we're done our handwriting we go on to sentences in our book – we get 3 sentences to do – words you make a sentence with that book like – My Dad put oil in the car / I saw a big bird / My house is very very big like a hotel.

- So we'll be able to go into First Class and do joined up writing
- Cos we need to do writing. I think writing is the most important thing you do – draw pictures – we might be writing loads of things in the big school
- Cos it helps our brain – that's the same as the other question (Pupil interviews: 13/06/14; 16/06/14)

The children in Senior Infants have a real sense of the importance of being able to read and write in particular in preparation for the 'big school' and becoming adults. They speak about reading harder books when they get older and know they need to practise. You can hear the voice of adults echoed in these comments. The pupils also see the relevance of being able to write which is great in relation to the digital world we live in.

In relation to books the children have read they had a list. Firstly I asked them which books they read at school during Station Teaching and this is their list:

> The Little Chimp and Baby Chimp. About the garden, The bat rescue, Fun run, Max rides his bike, The Skipping Team, Sally and the bats, Sam goes to school, Sam's party, Dilly duck gets lost, Little cub, Brown mouse plays a trick, Bingo goes to school, Sam plays swingball, Two little ducks get lost, The little white hen, Teach me how, Tom's ride, Mother tiger and cubs, Fire on Toytown hill, Kitty cat, The fat cat, When the sun comes up, Brown mouse gets some corn, Little Bear climbs a tree (Pupil interviews: 13/06/14; 16/06/14)

The children were quite competent at remembering the names of these books, most of them were books they had read in the previous two weeks. Next I asked them the names of books they read at home and here is their list:

> Dinosaurs, Chapter books – books with chapters – Heidi and Little Women, Baby Bear's hiding place, My Marvel books, Mr. Men, Diary of a Wimpy Kid, Little Miss, The Space Buddies, My car books, Roald Dahl, Milly Molly Mandy, The snake and the drake, The fox in the box, My world cup book, Army books and garda books, Jack and the beanstalk, Danny, Grandma's secret, The evil robot in space, Charlie and the chocolate factory, Fantastic Mr. Fox, The insects, Little Red Hen, Snowbear surprise, My lego book, Supermen, Fairytales, Tinkerbell, Tractor book, First readers, Pinocchio (Pupil interviews: 13/06/14; 16/06/14)

7.10.4 Senior Infants - Parents' perspectives on reading and writing

At the end of Senior Infants I conducted a focus group interview with the same group of parents and asked them what they thought of Station Teaching. They all agreed that their children enjoyed ST. They were all very complimentary about ST as indicated by these comments:

- Can see the results. It's unbelievable, ST has been a great success - A is doing intense reading
- B is really into it – happy out to sit and read books at home. At bedtime I have to sit and read every second word – she wants to be in charge
- C – he writes a book and reads it to his sister going to bed – he reads it then – it's his thing – he's very proud
- D – writes and draws pictures – he is brilliant – so happy – he takes a book at bed time to read – going to bed and loves it – he really enjoys it – anything he sees on telly – he sees a couple of words and reads – he is tuned in to everything
- E – would know it's on (ST) – 4 teachers – he doesn't tell that much – you do not hear much from the boys – but it's fine he says – define what fine meant! (Focus group 19/06/14)

I then asked the parents if they felt ST had improved their children's reading:

- For sure a lot
- Without a doubt – huge difference from where he started reading – a big jump – last year getting the words – now no word seems to be a problem – confidence now (Focus group – 19/06/14)

The parents remarked how their children enjoy reading ST books at home, that they are easy and they are well able to read them. In the beginning the children were giving all the books 5 stars but now they are down to one star or no star!

I also asked the parents what other books their children read at home and these are their responses:

- Julia Donaldson – The Gruffalo – lovely songbirds – rhyming words
- The fox and the ace
- Top Cat – has books at home – half gone up the levels – bed time story – go back over
- Ladybird books – Little Red Hen, Tom Thumb, Thumbelina – pictures are nice
- X likes buying books. – we get a lot of books in the library – we take 4 books each – black and white books and picture books – at home and in the bath – we have all the older books and the younger ones like the black and white ones – Grandad and the lawnmower, the UFO. In the children's section he feels his sister is still only 5 and you're nobody if you're 5!

- He has a story every night – library books, back to Mr. Men and Little Miss
- In the Evening Echo every Thursday they have pictures for children to colour and the book of the week and DVD, Little Miss. – loves bedtime stories – a calendar book for each day and a story – he picks a story for December – he doesn't know words – he skips or asks Mom – everything and anything – mostly about animals and children
- Bedtime story – Cinderella and the 3 Little Pigs, he reads page by page – part by part. He loves the 3 Little Pigs. – School tour – kittens
- Practise your Phonics with Julia Donaldson's songbirds – by the author of the Gruffalo, Top Cat
- The odd pet, The ox and the yak, The scrap rocket
- Where is the snail? Tadpoles, My cat, Leroy, Where were you Bert? (Focus group - 19/06/14)

I also asked the parents if ST had made a difference to their children's writing. They all feel that their children's writing has improved but if the children are not in the mood it can be messy. Last year they said the writing was on two lines, this year it's on one line and that they finger out the spaces between words. The parents spoke about the types of writing their children now do at home:

- A loves doing other writing – he takes all my paper for the computer for photos – he has the fridge full of drawings and writing and he changes them every week. Last week it was the sounds: i,o,e and he draws pictures for me, he changes the pictures, it depends. I keep everything - Mother's Day cards. On Monday he brought home his copy of his News from September – some child had a baby sister – then Daffodil day and Valentine's Day. Over the summer holidays he will get a great kick out of reading them and colouring and writing
- B found last year's bag and got a great kick going over and saying wasn't I silly! In 2 years what they grasp in such a short space of time. He is mad for writing – he is always doing something – writing the books – punctuation – saying that's an inverted comma. He is big into lego pictures – writing anything to do with lego, always on the go
- C goes outside with chalk and she is writing everywhere – 4+1, sums, anything. She likes writing and entertains herself – scribbling on any piece of paper. I have a notebook and write notes – pick up nephew, go to chemist. She writes these and also the days of the week, she watches when I'm shopping and asking what I'm doing while she's in school. She is tuned into everything. School is for next year – what books will I need – she went through the letter from school – nothing goes past her
- D doesn't like writing as much as the reading and sounding out of it. I get second hand books in the local book shop and 3 for 2 in Easons. James and the Giant Peach – I'm reading that to him. I shop on line and edit to suit him. He got a present of Milly Molly Mandy – a real old book – father, mother, Grandpa, grandmother all

live in a cottage and go to the local shop and get something for all of them. He asks is that in the olden days when Mom was young and Granny was small. There is a little picture of the village and a cabbage patch with a fence and rails. He is fascinated that there is no t.v.

- E - If he is in the mood for a book he goes off happy out. If he's in a good mood he reads the newspaper and then he takes his book, if it's too hard and he's interested in it, he goes through page by page and looks at the pictures.
- F – I am delighted with this ST, they are so privileged, it will make such a difference to them. The teacher told me if they see you reading at home then they will – I'm happy, I'm very happy
- G - In the class they are tuned in and the writing is brilliant in school – at home it can be rushed and they need that help. The colouring for homework can be ridiculous and I say miss will think that – but child says I colour properly in school! Everything has to be perfect! (Focus group - 19/06/14)

The parents spoke very positively about ST and asked if the children could do Maths this way in school as well.

7.10.5 Supporting children's literacy skills

Thirty seven of the forty two children reported that they visit the town library either regularly or sometimes. The school sponsors a free library card for the local public library for every pupil in the school but their parents have to bring them there! Some children explained that their Auntie or Mom or babysitter or grandparents bring them to the library and some spoke of their parents reading some of the above books to them. This also corroborates the interviews with the parents who listed the books their children read at home, either by the children themselves or by the parents to the children. The National Strategy (DES, 2011) recommends encouraging pupils and parents in the use of the libraries and in particular the public libraries to 'both support the acquisition of literacy skills and help foster children's love of reading amongst children' (DES, 2011, p. 21). This school has done this in a practical way. The Strategy (DES, 2011) also encourages parents, grandparents, extended family and other members of the community to work in partnership with schools to contribute to children's learning of literacy (Des, 2011,

p. 20). It is great to hear children referring to other members of the community either taking them to the library or reading with them.

The findings from my research resonate with McCoy et al.'s (2012) report on the influences of home and children's performance in school as discussed in 3.9 and the importance of parents supporting their children's literacy development. In Chapter 3 of the National Strategy (DES, 2011) this is also developed and outlines how the support of parents who are engaged in their children's learning has a significant positive impact on their educational achievement, also supported by The National Assessments of English Reading and Mathematics (2014). The Strategy (DES, 2011) encourages schools in their important role in empowering, engaging and supporting parents in developing their children's literacy. The various interventions in place in school as well as the presentations for parents all support this objective.

7.11 Conclusion

This case study contributes to the literature outlining effective strategies for the teaching of literacy in the mainstream classes as summarised in Tables 2A – 2D. From my observations of Station Teaching in Infant classes all of the essential elements of effective literacy teaching already alluded to are taught in ST lessons. The study demonstrates very clearly that Station Teaching can be implemented successfully in the Infant classes. It tells the story from the teachers', the parents' and the pupils' perspectives. Pupils enjoy participating in ST and are motivated; they engage in lessons and teachers use praise extensively. Generally pupils' learning is extended but there is scope for improvement in the Writing Station. The pupils

benefit from working in small groups. Staff collaboration, professional dialogue and professional development are very evident in this project. As teachers are up skilling themselves during the project there is an associated improvement in the lessons. ST is making a difference to and enhancing teachers' teaching of literacy. There is an improvement in pupils' literacy skills during the intervention and pupils and parents are in agreement with regard to development of reading and writing practices.

As part of ST teachers use scaffolding and gradual release of responsibility when doing guided reading and this aligns with the socio-cultural perspective (Vygotsky, 1978). Pupils are following the stage model when learning to read in ST with an emphasis on word recognition, phonological awareness and an emphasis on comprehension which align with the cognitive-psychological perspective (Hall, 2003).

The Class teachers are taking responsibility for the intervention in their own classes and this is the way forward to ensuring all children's needs are met in a classroom situation. This aligns with the literature which outlines how an effective teacher of literacy is the most important ingredient to ensure pupil progress.

Chapter 8: Conclusions and Implications

8.1 Introduction

This final chapter draws the thesis to a conclusion. It summarises the main findings from the literature and the empirical evidence as well as integrating the two sets of literature while answering the three Research questions:

- *How is Station Teaching implemented?*
- *What is the experience of the intervention Station Teaching from the participants' point of view: teachers, pupils, parents?*

- *What notion of literacy is Station Teaching facilitating?*

This chapter also draws out the implications of the findings for the various audiences: practitioners, policy makers, researchers and contribution to literacy theory. Finally it recognises the limitations of the study and it offers some reflections on my research journey.

8.2 Background

This research study began with a definition of literacy as defined in Aistear, (NCCA, 2009) which acknowledges the importance of multiple modes and representations in literacy. This definition is consistent with the definition in the National Strategy (DES, 2011) which recognises the importance of conceptualising literacy to include reading, writing, communication and oral language in both print-based and digitised formats.

Teachers need to be familiar with the different perspectives on teaching literacy and choose which one suits the particular child they are teaching. Hall (2003) argues that teachers begin with children and their needs, not methods or resources as discussed in 2.3. Teachers need to use a 'broader range of teaching strategies from direct explanation and explicit teaching to modelling, scaffolding, facilitating and guided participating' (Hall, 2003, p. 192).

There is extensive research on 'good' teachers and effective teachers of literacy. My main emphasis in this research is on identifying the most effective ways of teaching children to read and I outlined characteristics of effective teachers of literacy in 2.5 and Tables 2A and 2B. Hall (2013) outlined how exemplary teachers do not adhere to one particular method of teaching. They teach language conventions within the context of interacting with whole texts; they integrate reading, writing and oracy; they collaborate and share texts effectively; they use every minute productively and offer timely and focused feedback (Hall, 2013, p. 529). In my

empirical study, teachers demonstrate a wide variety of skills, as recommended in the research literature in Chapters 2 and 4.

In Table 2E I have compiled a synthesis of the strategies effective teachers use in the teaching of literacy in the early years, based on the reviews of literature.

The PISA (2009) results indicated that literacy levels had plummeted in Ireland, not only for disadvantaged pupils but for pupils of all backgrounds. Murphy (2015) suggests that the legacy of PISA 2009 was to put literacy on the national agenda for all schools and a focus on improving key aspects of literacy pedagogy. The National Strategy (DES, 2011) as discussed in 3.4.1, sets out ambitious targets for improving literacy in schools from 2011 to 2020. Schools were instructed to implement five areas for immediate action: improved professional development for teachers; increasing the time available for teaching literacy and numeracy; improving arrangements for assessment of children's literacy and numeracy achievement; better arrangement for reporting children's progress and co-operating with the administration of national and international assessment studies. Much progress has already been made in these five areas. The revised Integrated Language Curriculum at primary level will strengthen Kennedy et al.'s (2012) proposals to strengthen oral, reading and writing skills by promoting language development, reading acquisition and comprehension development. The *Growing Up in Ireland Study* provides us with very rich data on pupils' perceptions of schooling and the reading interests of boys and girls which schools need to be cognisant of when choosing texts and more active teaching approaches.

I explored current practice by teachers in teaching literacy in Irish primary schools, in particular in DEIS schools, and I detailed essential skills and strategies required for effective literacy teaching in Chapter 4. These include: developing concepts about print, phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension (Snow et al. 1998). I also discussed

assessment in reading and early interventions for struggling readers as recommended by NEPS (2012). In Ireland the following strategies are in use to improve literacy: Peer Tutoring; Reading Recovery; Co-teaching; Station Teaching and Guided Reading. I am particularly interested in literacy in the early years and early intervention. I was keen to explore what intervention schools could implement in the infant classes in primary schools in Ireland.

I chose to conduct a study on the implementation of Station Teaching as an intervention for improving literacy in the infant classes in primary school.

8.3 Summary of the empirical study

I chose a Pragmatic Parallel Mixed Methods Design as recommended by Mertens (2010) in researching my topic and I detailed this in Chapter 5. The quantitative data were collected from a questionnaire survey issued to 21 schools in Ireland. 115 teachers completed the questionnaire survey, which gave me a response rate of 75%. I used Excel as a data management package and I displayed the data using 5 charts, 4 diagrams and 11 tables. I also collated responses from the open ended questions, I analysed them and reported these responses in prose form under themes. The questionnaire survey data presented a picture of what was happening nationally with regard to Station Teaching.

I then used an ethnographic case study approach as suggested by Stenhouse (1985). This allowed me to explore in depth the implementation of Station Teaching as a literacy intervention and to relate the experience of the participants involved in the intervention in one school. Mertens (2010) indicates that the researcher should spend enough time in the field to avoid premature closure and suggests conducting ‘prolonged and persistent observation’ in the field (2010, p. 256).

I conducted extensive observations of class activities. This involved 38 formal observations of ST classes of 40 minutes each over the course of a year, amounting to over 25 hours in total. I adapted an observational checklist from Sylva et al. 1999; Taylor et al. 1999; Beard, 2000 and Murphy, 2002 (Table 5A). The value of the observational evidence was how it complimented the other sources of evidence and added to the validity and reliability of my claims and conclusions.

I also conducted interviews with Class (Junior and Senior Infants) and Support teachers, pupils and parents. Two teachers kept a reflective diary during the intervention. I compiled field notes, collected drawings of ST by the pupils in Senior Infants. I took photographs of ST in operation and video-recordings of classes as recommended by Mertens (2010). I also conducted pre and post tests in the classes to add rigour to my data. Mertens (2010) suggests that when the 'researcher has confidence that themes and examples are repeating instead of extending, it may be time to leave the field' (2010, p. 257).

Table 8A details the themes which emanated from the survey and the case study and I reported on these in detail in Chapters 6 and 7.

Table 8A: Summary of themes emanating from the survey and case study

Questionnaire Survey Themes:	Case Study Themes:
Organisation of ST	Enjoyment and motivation
Focus of literacy activities in ST	Engagement and praise
Resources teachers use in ST	Pupils' learning is extended
Assessment approaches	Working in small groups
Teachers' Perceptions of the effectiveness of ST	Staff collaboration, professional dialogue and professional development
CPD for teachers	Making a difference to and enhancing teachers' teaching of literacy
Pupils' engagement with ST	Improvement in pupils' literacy skills

Factors hindering and enhancing implementing ST	Pre and Post test results of literacy tests
How ST can be improved.	Development of reading and writing practices from the pupils' perspectives and parents' perspectives

8.4 Research Questions

This section will deal with each question individually and offer responses based on the findings from the literature and the data analysis.

Question 1: How is Station Teaching implemented?

Firstly in my review of literature in 4.7; 4.7.1 and 4.7.2, I outlined how Station Teaching is implemented theoretically. In Chapter 6, I presented the evidence from the questionnaire survey around how ST is implemented nationally. The case study in Chapter 7 focused on the implementation of ST in the Infant classes in a primary school.

I presented the evidence from the questionnaire survey under nine themes: Organisation of ST; Focus of literacy activities in ST; Resources teachers use in ST; Assessment approaches; Teachers' Perceptions of the effectiveness of ST; CPD for teachers; Pupils' engagement with ST; Factors hindering and enhancing implementing ST and How ST can be improved.

In the schools surveyed, Station Teaching occurs mainly in Senior Infants, First and Second classes with four groups of five or six in each group. In half the schools the teachers physically move from Station to Station. The most common Stations are: New Reading; Familiar Reading; Phonics; Writing and Word work/vocabulary. Table 6I details the resources teachers use at the Stations, the main ones being Levelled readers in the junior classes and novels in the senior classes, Jolly Phonics programme, mini whiteboards and markers, handwriting copies or

laminated sheets, magnetic letters and sand trays or sandpaper letters. All teachers use Teacher observation and a majority use Standardised tests as an assessment approach to select pupils for groups in ST. The National Strategy (DES, 2011), as discussed in 3.4.1, instructs schools to improve arrangements for assessing children's literacy achievement and the teachers in this study prove they are already complying with this recommendation.

In relation to criteria that teachers use to judge the success of ST, the majority of Class teachers place enhanced decoding skills and enhanced engagement with books in their top three choices.

All teachers in the survey agree that ST covers all the relevant aspects of literacy for the pupils but that oral language and comprehension strategies need to be addressed at a different time as time is limited in ST sessions. Some teachers reported that they would like to have a supervised writing station rather than an independent one. Teachers feel that ST facilitates small group work and that it is easier to notice pupils who are struggling. Teachers also feel that ST is beneficial as it promotes teamwork and an increased interest in literacy in the school. The majority of teachers seemed to learn about ST from other teachers and that ST has improved the standards of literacy in their school. Pupils love ST, they feel they can achieve in these classes as they are reading at their own level and can experience success. One hundred per cent of teachers felt that pupils' learning is extended during ST, that ST provides an opportunity to praise pupils for their achievements and that staff collaboration is vital for ST to succeed. The majority of teachers report that pupils engage in meaningful tasks during ST, that they can see an improvement in pupils' literacy skills since implementing ST and that ST provides opportunities for social skills training. All of these comments support the research literature which outlines characteristics of an effective teacher of literacy, as discussed in 2.5.

In relation to how ST can be improved, teachers requested that they have a longer block of ST in classes each year; that more time, more staff and resources are needed to implement ST; that

children should be grouped according to ability; that training should be available for teachers for ST and that planning and organisation are vital. Improved professional development for teachers in teaching literacy is the first area of action set out in the National Strategy (DES, 2011) and increasing the time available for teaching literacy is the second action. It is interesting that teachers in this study also requested these actions. Teachers also highlighted that it can be difficult to set up ST due to the cost of purchasing levelled readers and resources and having the availability of Support staff.

Question 2: What is the experience of the intervention Station Teaching from the participants' point of view: teachers, pupils, parents?

Chapters 6 and 7 both offer the perspectives of teachers and Chapter 7 furnishes us with a detailed report on the experiences of the pupils and parents of ST.

The analysis of the qualitative data generally supported the findings from the quantitative analysis. I presented the data from the case study under 9 themes: Enjoyment and motivation; Engagement and praise; Pupils' learning is extended; Working in small groups; Staff collaboration, professional dialogue and professional development; Making a difference to and enhancing teachers' teaching of literacy; Improvement in pupils' literacy skills; Pre and Post test results of literacy tests and Development of reading and writing practices from the pupils' perspectives and parents' perspectives.

The case study allowed for a more detailed examination of the implementation of Station Teaching in infant classes. I was mindful of Barbara Comber's question in the introduction: 'If

you only knew about literacy from being in this classroom what would you think it was for?' (Comber in Hall, 2003, p. 194). I hope my case study answers that question in that it details Station Teaching in the Infant classes and portrays how literacy is taught in those classes. The observational and interview data provide in-depth description of the experiences of all the participants: pupils, teachers and parents.

Teachers and pupils all enjoyed participating in ST. The children were motivated to learn and they were engaged in all the activities in the Stations. They enjoyed working in small groups and teachers reported that it was easier to notice any children who were struggling and to differentiate accordingly. Teachers felt that pupils' learning was extended at the Stations but my observations showed that there was little evidence of challenging the pupils in the Writing Stations in Senior Infants. I felt that the work being done was enjoyable for the pupils but presented no challenge for them and if they were finished their task there were no extension activities on offer.

Staff collaboration was vital for ST to succeed and there was evidence of professional dialogue. Teachers met on a regular basis to plan the programme and this along with CPD organised by the local Education centre and by the school all contributed to teacher professional development and enhanced their teaching of literacy.

Teachers felt that the pupils' literacy skills had improved and this was backed up by the post test results in Junior Infants. However in Senior Infants the MIST results were not as positive. One has to bear in mind that the MIST test has five sub-tests, all heavily reliant on phonics: listening skills, letter/sound identification, written vocabulary, three phoneme words and dictation. Of the 42 pupils tested only three scored below the cut-off point on three sub scales. In Senior Infants there were six pupils with diagnosed special needs and 12 with English as an additional language, all of their scores are included in the test results. The MIST test does not

test pupils' language development or comprehension strategies, their fluency of reading or their independent reading. However teachers reported that they could see a big improvement in the children's acquisition of literacy.

In Table 8B I present a summary of the combined outcomes from the questionnaire survey and the case study.

Table 8B: Summary of combined outcomes from questionnaire survey and case study

- ST occurs mainly in Senior Infants, First and Second classes
- Four groups with 4/5 pupils in each group
- Stations: New Reading; Familiar Reading; Phonics; Writing
- Resources: Levelled readers/Novels; Jolly Phonics; Mini whiteboards and markers; Handwriting copies/Laminated sheets; Magnetic letters; Sand trays and sandpaper letters
- Teachers use Teacher observation and Standardised tests as assessment approaches to select groups
- To judge success of ST, teachers choose: enhanced engagement with books and enhanced decoding skills
- ST covers all aspects of literacy but oral language, writing and comprehension strategies need to be addressed at a different time also
- ST facilitates small group work and teachers can notice pupils who are struggling and praise pupils for their achievement; pupils are motivated to learn
- Pupils' learning is extended in all Stations but extension activities need to be addressed in the Writing Station; pupils engage in meaningful tasks during ST; ST provides opportunities for social skills training
- Teachers and parents felt that pupils' literacy skills had improved with ST – this was backed up by post test results in Junior Infants but the MIST results in Senior Infants did not reflect this

- Teachers and pupils all enjoyed participating in ST
- Staff collaboration is vital for ST to succeed. Teachers mainly learned how to do ST from other teachers. Planning and organisation are essential to setting up ST
- Teachers requested a longer block each year for ST; they would like more staff and resources, they also called for training to be available for teachers for ST

Pupils and parents were very positive about the success of ST and how the pupils had progressed with reading and writing. One cannot overemphasise the key role of the teacher in leading the learning in ST. At times when a student teacher worked at a Station it was very obvious that key skill sets were missing. What this study shows is that teaching reading is not a simple task. Even though one may have all the plans and resources in place for teaching literacy it is the teacher who mediates this in the classroom (Hall, 2003). No one teaching approach is 'best' and teachers have to work with the class they have and differentiate accordingly.

Question 3: What notion of literacy is Station Teaching facilitating?

The third Research question is around what notion of literacy is ST facilitating. This question is more nebulous and both the quantitative and qualitative data indicate teachers' views on this. Station Teaching is a literacy intervention that teachers are adopting to suit their own situations. However it is quite prescriptive and has a tight enough structure which allows teachers to divide their classes into four or five groups of pupils and with the help of Support teachers facilitate literacy activities at four or five different Stations. The types of Stations vary but from my research the predominant Stations are: New Reading; Familiar Reading; Phonics and Writing. The main disadvantage of teaching literacy using the Station Teaching approach is that the time slot at each Station is predetermined and teachers have to teach a group within a certain time

slot. Station Teaching does not suit all learners and teachers have to take cognisance of this. Teachers also have to be aware that not all their literacy programme can be taught at Station Teaching time. However ST does support Kennedy et al. (2012) when they identified a number of components that need to be considered for effective teaching of reading: the establishment of a varied and rich vocabulary; the development of phonological processes; the provision of a framework for teaching comprehension strategies; a need to ensure that motivation and enjoyment of reading are key aspects of the reading process and a renewed focus on reading fluency. ST does facilitate this notion of literacy.

ST also forms part of a balanced literacy framework which is recommended by Kennedy et al. (2012) and this requires high levels of teacher expertise. Teachers must provide a print rich environment; give pupils choice and control to select books and topics; facilitate collaboration in literature discussion groups; set tasks at a moderate level of challenge; differentiate according to child need; use a metacognitive approach to strategy instruction; incorporate a wide range of formative and summative assessment data; provide substantial blocks of time for literacy and have expert classroom management (2012, pp. 180-182). ST facilitates the implementation of this balanced literacy framework but schools will need on-going professional development to help them to engage in self-evaluation and to implement the balanced literacy framework as posited by Cowen (2003) in 2.8.

It was obvious from the data from the case study that teachers were recognising children's out-of-school literacy practices and were building on them in the classroom during ST. This links in with Vygotsky's (1978) ideas on how children learn and how this supports acquisition of literacy, as discussed in 2.8. Socio-cultural theories of literacy emphasise the role that culture plays in the development of literacy, the social nature of learning and the way in which literacy practice is situated within a wider social, economic and political context. These are two supporting comments from Support teachers:

> We have started ST with the Junior Infants. At the New Reading Station we started at Level 1 books with all of the pupils. These are some ideas from another teacher for ST: At an Oral language Station – the children can discuss their news and have questions and discussions in their small groups. Newspapers pictures/magazine pictures/photographs. The children could discuss what's happening in these and enhance their vocabulary. Nursery rhymes – and the children could make their own rhymes (SET2, Diary: 23/05/13)

> Extend – yes, definitely. PM books might lead you off to talk about Geography or nature or a different subject, you ask the children to make a connection with their life and you really extend their learning (SET1)

Scaffolding which Bruner (1983) describes as the 'process of setting up the situation to make the child's entry easy and successful and gradually pulling back and handing the role to the child as he becomes skilled enough to manage it' (1983, p. 60) is also evident in ST. In Station Teaching this can be compared to the teacher's gradual release of responsibility as evidenced by this teacher's comments:

> For that part of ST – doing a little reading, introducing a book, becoming more aware of what children see when they're reading – predicting and visualisation, makes the books more exciting. You can see the progress the children make. At the beginning there was lots of fun, the progress in the year is amazing. You go into the room and see how they have moved on. At the start of the year the logistics – turn the page, finger under the word, bit by bit they are more independent, you don't have to guide them to turn the pages – it's more natural (SET1)

Among the characteristics of effective teachers of literacy are that they: foster student independence; hold high expectations for all students in their acquisition of literacy and they provide explicit instruction which includes direct explanation, modelling, guided practice and independent practice (William and Baumann, 2008). ST facilitates these opportunities for effective teachers of literacy to excel.

8.5 Limitations of the study

Firstly, I have to acknowledge the limitations of the questionnaire survey. It was confined to schools I knew around the country so I privileged response rates over possibly a representative sample. I was interested to hear what schools were doing at the macro level so I did not restrict my questions to the infant settings but on reflection this would have given a more detailed response to implementation at Infant level.

Station Teaching is a new concept in schools in Ireland and is most prevalent in DEIS schools where it is called Literacy Lift Off, but this is only generally implemented in classrooms for one block of six-eight weeks in the year. The survey gives a snapshot of current thinking and practice in schools in Ireland at a point in time. There is scope for further research in all primary schools in Ireland to give a more accurate picture of how ST is being implemented.

The case study was conducted in one non-DEIS school in rural Ireland. There is scope for more extensive research around the implementation of ST not only in different schools but also in different classes. My study focuses on implementation in Infant classes. ST takes on a different dynamic in middle and senior classes and obviously the main focus would be different. However there are still plenty lessons to be learned from the data in the questionnaire survey and the case study. Every study has limitations and in the case study I was concerned with the absence of a control group and the movement of teachers and I addressed these in 5.3.11.

With regard to the case study I have to acknowledge my role as a researcher in this setting while also being the principal. I was very conscious of this dual role and I tried to separate the two roles. My doctoral colleague's observations corroborated my evidence from the observations and added rigour to my research. The pupils certainly liked my visits to the classrooms and often asked if I was watching them, they were very comfortable with these observations. McCarthy (2011) reported that 'when a number of teachers are working together in a classroom involved in group-work or station teaching, principals' observation visits appear

less threatening which contrasts with observation visits of the classroom where the teacher works in isolation' (2011, pp. 236, 237). The teachers seemed to welcome my research and often discussed ST with me and sought my advice on literacy.

8.6 Implications for practitioners, policy makers and researchers

I will treat each of these stakeholders separately in relation to the implications of my newly furnished empirical study on the implementation of ST in Infant classes.

Implications for practitioners

All the teachers who were involved in this study were very positive in relation to the implementation of ST in primary schools. While the case study focused on ST in literacy in the Infant classes the questionnaire survey provided data from teachers of all classes.

In practice teachers require professional development with regard to the implementation of Station Teaching which should be organised nationally by the Department of Education. At the moment the professional development seminars on Guided Reading are run by the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) in the evenings in the local Education Centres but there are none on Station Teaching. What I recommend is that teachers are provided with in-school in-service on the theory behind Station Teaching and then that they are afforded an opportunity to observe a team of teachers teaching groups in Station Teaching in a school. With the introduction of the New Integrated Language Curriculum there is an opportunity for professional development training but it has to be convenient for teachers to attend. NEPS (2012) published an excellent document on strategies for struggling readers and PDST (2013) published a manual for teachers on the Reading process. I suggest that both of these manuals

be sent to every individual primary teacher in the country. I know these manuals are available on line but a more effective strategy would be to hand every teacher a copy and to follow up with in-service on effective literacy strategies.

A key finding from this study is the importance of early intervention in Infant classes to improving literacy acquisition for children. Teachers have to ensure that this occurs in the Infant classes and this study of the implementation of Station Teaching provides an opportunity for teachers to familiarise themselves with the initiative.

Another key finding from my research is how teachers are differentiating for children while still practising inclusion in Station Teaching. The children are grouped mainly according to ability but even within that grouping teachers are targeting children individually. This is brilliant for children, to be part of a group but getting the extra help without being withdrawn from the class as evidenced by these comments from two Support teachers of Senior Infants:

> You can see with children because they're grouped according to ability, you can fly with some children in some groups and with some you need to revise more – everyone can work at their own level rather than working at our pace (SIT1)
>
> The smaller groups allows me to pick up any troubles an individual may have, each child has strengths and places we can work on (SIT2)

Implications for policy makers

To facilitate the implementation of Station Teaching in schools the Department of Education needs to issue grants to fund resources enabling schools to proceed. These funds are necessary for the purchase of levelled books and novels as well as mini whiteboards and markers which are essential for the teaching of literacy in Station Teaching as evidenced in my research. Presently DEIS schools receive funding for initiatives to improve literacy but this needs to be extended to non-DEIS schools. A Support teacher summed up very clearly how schools need

this funding to implement Station Teaching in 6.11.6, when she alluded to 'begging borrowing and stealing' to set up ST in their non-DEIS school.

I also suggest that the Department of Education considers employing a Classroom Assistant for the Infant classes – this person could help and support Station Teaching in the infant classes. A Classroom Assistant could play a key role in the delivery of an in-class programme but would need training. Early intervention is the key to literacy acquisition and the government presently is discussing the importance of the early years. If we are to be realistic about the implementation of literacy interventions in the infant classes we have to provide extra staffing. Alternatively an extra Support teacher could be employed in the Infant classes – perhaps the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) might consider this suggestion in their review of education provision for children with special educational needs. In the questionnaire survey teachers requested this extra help:

> ST works really well but requires a huge amount of organisation and timetabling to cater for all changes in the school. It requires a lot of input from SNAs and Special Education teachers and this can be hard to organise (Class teacher)
>
> I feel that Class teachers/SNAs who lead a Station have to be properly 'trained' (SET)
>
> A school-wide approach to the development of literacy skills is essential. In order for ST to be worthwhile and effective teachers need to believe in this strategy-perhaps more organised training would help teachers especially in terms of confidence and engaging in ST (SET)

In relation to implications for parents, The National Strategy (DES, 2011) suggests actions to enable parents and communities to support children's literacy and numeracy development as outlined in 3.4.1. I have two suggestions to make here that would help involve parents with improving their children's literacy skills.

Firstly I suggest that all children in primary schools would have free access to the local library. In the case study school, as already outlined in 7.10.5, the staff sponsors a free library ticket

for each pupil in the school. This could be implemented in all primary schools in the country, either by the staff, the Parents' Association or by the Department of Education, thereby facilitating easy access to books for children. In interviews with the pupils and parents it was reported that 37 out of 42 children in the case study attend the library regularly.

Secondly I suggest that the government sponsor a free book per month for every child up to the age of five, similar to what is done in Nottingham with the Dolly Parton Imagination Library – a book gifting scheme for under-fives (Hall and Jones, 2015). This way every child, regardless of income, gets a new book every month and this will certainly encourage parents to engage in reading with their child and isn't that what we all want – for children to be enthusiastic about reading? Then the teacher can harness that enthusiasm and motivation and bring it into the classroom when teaching their pupils and encouraging them to read. Hall (2003) posits that the way children are 'taught reading conveys to them powerful messages about what reading is and what it is good for' (2003, p. 194). Effective teachers of literacy utilise a range of strategies to improve the literacy achievement of their pupils.

Implications for researchers

There is scope for further research on the future direction of ST in primary schools. Perhaps what is now needed is a funded national study on Station Teaching and its operation in schools throughout the country.

It would be interesting to conduct a case study in other classes in other schools to examine the implementation of ST in those contexts. In this study I researched literacy but some teachers implement ST in Mathematics classes so this could be another area of research. In my study the parents asked if Mathematics could be taught through Station Teaching.

I think that the area of children's voice is a very important part of research – if we really want to know what is happening in class we should ask the children. This is apparent in this study as well as in the *Growing Up in Ireland Study.* Perhaps children could be asked about the implementation of ST in the *Growing Up in Ireland Study*.

Station Teaching could be introduced as a module in pre-service training in the Colleges of Education and as a module in the National Induction Programme for newly qualified Teachers. Further research can also be done on literacy activities at the different Stations with lists of suggestions for teachers on effective literacy teaching strategies.

All of the literacy experts agree that there is no one 'best' way of teaching literacy but Station Teaching is one intervention that can be carried out in a classroom. It is not a panacea for all ills but it provides a starting point. In my research I noted that children did not particularly like the Familiar Reading Station as they had read the book the previous day. This makes me think of all the pupils in classes around the country who are all reading from the same book every day even though many of them will have read the whole book on the first of September. How boring is that for them, what extension of learning is afforded to these pupils?

8.7 Contribution of this work to literacy theory

In my literature review I explored literacy teaching from four different theoretical perspectives: psycho-linguistic; cognitive-psychological; socio-cultural and socio-political perspective. However on the basis of the distinction across those perspectives I claimed earlier in 2.3 that Station Teaching as a literacy programme aligns strongly with a cognitive-psychological perspective. This claim was justified on the basis of the individual focus on such skills as phonemic awareness, phonics, word recognition, fluency and comprehension, that is, on the

individual acquisition of the skills of literacy. This is so, I suggest, despite the added emphasis on small group work, collaboration and discussion which are features of a Vygotskian and socio-cultural perspective. At this point, having explored the enactment of Station Teaching, I can further claim that ST as an intervention in this case study also aligns with the socio-cultural perspective.

Theoretically, as a literacy intervention, I feel justified in claiming that it straddles two perspectives in a way that is not contradictory, but complimentary. In its enactment in the case study, it has both collaborative and individual dimensions: it is individual student-focused and it is small group-oriented. This means that in practice it allowed individual interactions that tuned into individual learner needs, especially in relation to assessment, while at the same time allowing for peer and joint engagement around literacy tasks and events. It is appropriate to elaborate a little further on this claim here.

A cognitive-psychological perspective suggests that pupils follow a stage model when learning to read, that word identification is key to comprehension and prime importance is accorded to decoding. For reading the key cognitive-psychological pre requisite is phonological awareness (Hall, 2003) and this can be enhanced by direct teaching using oral rhyme and rhythm games which are taught in Station Teaching. Station Teaching, as practised in this case study aligned in relation to stages and progression of literacy tasks.

The cognitive-psychological perspective on reading is one in which word recognition is central. Principles and procedures in this perspective which have proved to be effective for teaching struggling readers who have difficulty decoding are evident in ST lessons, for example:

- Determining the child's instructional level
- Finding reading material that is of personal interest and significance to him
- Foregrounding comprehension by informally discussing stories as they are being read

- Establishing the child's word recognition skills.

Phonics is a key word identification strategy. Phonological awareness and phonic knowledge are inherent in reading acquisition and phonological processing has been one of the most productive areas of inquiry in terms of advancing our scientific understanding of the reading process (Hall, 2003). Hall (2003) contends that we can give credit to the cognitive psychologists for furnishing us with this understanding (2003, p. 84). Teaching phonics in association with children's literature maximizes learning opportunities. There is conclusive evidence that the most effective literacy teachers use a balance of approaches to the development of literacy and to reading in particular (2003, p. 97). This approach is an integral part of ST. The other important aspect of reading to which cognitive psychologists made a significant contribution is comprehension. The idea behind more explicit teaching of comprehension is that it can be improved by teaching pupils to use specific cognitive strategies and this was evidently a strong feature of the practice of ST in this case study.

At the risk of repetition, I would argue that the influence of a cognitive-psychological perspective on the content of the literacy curriculum is evident in ST in two key respects. Firstly it is evident in the emphasis on word recognition, and within that on phonological awareness and secondly it is evident in the emphasis on comprehension in the text-level work.

As demonstrated in the review of literature a cognitive-psychological school implies that reading is a cognitive skill and that it is the ability to decode and comprehend written language. This school of thought focuses on the 'child-as-individual', on pedagogy and on school literacy. A socio-cultural perspective on reading shifts the emphasis from the individual *per se* to the social and cultural context in which literacy occurs. The social dimensions of learning are brought to the fore and literacy is discussed in relation to culture, to context and to authentic activity (Hall, 2003, p. 134).

The socio-cultural perspective views literacy as a social practice that is shaped by cultural, economic and historical factors and implies that teachers should acknowledge children's out-of-school literacy practices and build on these in the classroom. I explored socio-cultural concepts of literacy in 2.8 and drew on the work of Vygotsky (1978) and how language learning is influenced by social contexts in which children are immersed. Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD and Bruner's (1983) scaffolding are essential components in Station Teaching. The teacher guides the children through their ZPD. The goal of guided reading in two of the Stations in ST is to enable learners to become independent and to be able to read, understand and appreciate texts without teachers' help (Wood, 1998). The learners develop problem-solving skills through working with a more knowledgeable 'other' who mentors, guides, scaffolds, and structures the task for the learner and incorporates familiar experiences into each lesson (Rogoff, 2008).

The essential skills and strategies for effective teaching of early literacy are best taught within a research-based balanced literacy framework and this can be accomplished in Station Teaching in contexts that are meaningful and which capitalise on the 'funds of knowledge' (Moll et al., 1992) that children bring from home. Hall (2003) highlights how 'understanding the nature of literacy interactions and practices in the home is critical for maximising literacy learning opportunities in school' (2003, p. 138).

All of this was evident in the empirical study as teachers engaged in assessing pupils and developing a programme based on their needs and interests to ensure progress in literacy acquisition in the Infant classes. Collaborative approaches like those used in ST are highly consistent with socio-cultural perspectives on learning and as such acknowledge the significance of context, home environments, interests and the learner's meaning-making in literacy events (Hall, 2003).

Hall (2003) advises that a knowledge of the different perspectives highlights the fact that the teacher has to 'design teaching and learning environments that fit the needs of specific children' (2003, p. 194). Teachers have to begin with children not methods or resources or programmes but learners have to understand and believe that reading is important for them in the here and now of their lives. The way children are taught conveys powerful messages to them about what reading is and what it is good for (2003, p. 194). In this regard, it is important to say that while ST is a programme and an approach or intervention for supporting literacy, its effectiveness depends entirely on the quality of its enactment which in turn is dependent on the teachers' competence and skill in using it.

The final word goes to Hattie (2003) who believes that we should be focusing on 'the person who gently closes the classroom door and performs the teaching act' (2003, p. 3). The importance of the effective teacher of literacy is paramount in any classroom and the implementation of any intervention is dependent on the effectiveness of the teacher.

8.8 Conclusion

In this final chapter I have discussed the outcomes of the research in effective literacy strategies and I have offered a summary of the overall research while answering the research questions posed in the Introduction. I consider the limitations of the study and I present a series of recommendations to be considered by school practitioners, policy makers and researchers. Finally I outline the contribution this study makes to literacy theory.

I conclude with the key findings from the literature and my newly furnished empirical study.

Key Findings

- The expertise of the teacher is key to improving the literacy achievement of pupils and developing excellence in teachers should be our priority
- Early intervention in the early years is essential to pupils' acquisition of literacy
- Teachers and pupils enjoy participating in ST. Pupils are motivated to read and engage in meaningful activities during ST.
- ST facilitates small group work and teachers can differentiate accordingly while including all pupils in the groups
- Pupils' learning is extended in ST but extension activities need to be addressed in the Writing Station
- Staff collaboration is vital for ST to succeed
- More training should be provided for teachers on the implementation of ST and more funding for resources should be available to schools

Finally I include two diary entries from a Senior Infant teacher who gives a very clear insight into the implementation of Station Teaching in her class:

> I am based at the New Reading Station and I have found that in the time frame that we have been doing ST so far that the children have gained a lot more interest and confidence in their reading. I feel that ST really targets the children at their level and the small group situation is exactly what the children need to succeed and progress. I love working with the other teachers (SIT2, Diary: 11/12/13)
>
> I can see that Station Teaching has impacted on the children in my class in a positive way as they are repeating their sounds/phonics daily, reading two books daily and writing, all in a small group setting which has spurred them to become more knowledgeable in their literacy. The children don't see ST as a chore, they see it as fun which makes the learning a lot easier (SIT2, Diary: 21/05/14)

8.9 A Brief Reflection

Engaging in this research was truly a work of passion – passion in improving the literacy outcomes for pupils particularly in the infant classes. I was aware of pupils escaping the net in the junior classes and not being caught until mid-way through Senior Infant class. I was anxious to research ways of implementing an early intervention programme and my research brought me on this fabulous journey.

I learned all about the characteristics of an effective teacher of literacy and I also learned how important it is to stand back and view all the evidence and analyse the data before making judgements. I immersed myself in the data and loved every minute of analysing the data and realising the importance of this exercise. To me the implementation of a literacy intervention Station Teaching is essential in the infant classes and my empirical study bears testament to this.

I conclude with two comments from two pupils in Junior Infants and in Senior Infants on Station Teaching because after all the pupils are the most important people in any school. Their answers are to the questions – why do we need to be able to read and write?

- Because when you're older you'll be reading books, you won't know how to read books you'll be reading (JI, interview, June 2013)
- 'Cos you won't be able to write – to write a message to someone (JI, interview, June 2013)
- 'Cos if you're doing study, when you're in an older school we need to read instructions and for important exams – lots of words you have to read them (SI, interview, June 2014)
- 'Cos we need to do writing. I think writing is the most important thing you do – draw pictures – we might be writing loads of things in the big school (SI, interview, June 2014)

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Appendix 1

UCC
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh, Éire
University College Cork, Ireland

Oifig an Leas - Uachtaráin Taighde agus Nuálaíochta
Office of the Vice President for Research and Innovation

Urlár 4, Bloc E,
Áras na hEolaíochta Bia,
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh,
Bóthar an Choláiste,
Corcaigh, Éire.

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

Dympna Daly,
Education

28th March 2013

Dear Dympna,

Thank you for submitting your research (project entitled The implementation of Literacy interventions (Station teaching) in junior classes in a large Irish primary school and the impact on staff and pupils) to SREC for ethical perusal. I am pleased to say that we see no ethical impediment to your research as proposed and we are happy to grant approval.

We wish you every success in your research.

Yours sincerely,

S Hammond

Sean Hammond
Chair of Social Research Ethics Committee

Professor Anita R. Maguire BSc PhD CChem MRSC
Vice President for Research and Innovation

Ollscoil na hÉireann, Corcaigh
National University of Ireland, Cork

Appendix 2

Questionnaire to ascertain teachers' views and experience of Station Teaching in primary schools

Thank you for participating in my research on teachers' opinions of Station teaching in primary schools. Please answer the questions based on your own experience. The responses you give are confidential. No personal information will be disclosed.

Please return the completed questionnaire to:

Dympna Daly

****************N. S.,**

********, Co. Cork**

Questionnaires should be returned in the stamped addressed envelope by Friday 22 November 2013

TEACHERS' VIEWS AND EXPERIENCE OF STATION TEACHING IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Section 1: School Information

Please answer each of the following questions by ticking or numbering the appropriate box.

1. Are you -

a. Principal ☐

b. Class teacher ☐

c. Learning support / Resource teacher? ☐

2. Number of teachers on staff

(including principal, class teachers, Support teachers) ____

3. (a) If a class teacher what class do you teach? _____

(b) How many pupils are in your class? _____ **girls** _____ **boys**

Section 2: Implementation of Station Teaching as a literacy intervention

Station Teaching is also called Literacy Lift Off, Literacy Hour or Power Hour.

1. Who co-ordinates Station Teaching in your school? (Please tick)

Class teacher ___

Support teacher ____

Principal ____

2. Please tick which classes engage in Station Teaching as a literacy intervention in your school?

Junior Infants ____

Senior Infants ____

First Class ____

Second Class ____

Third Class ____

Fourth Class ____

Fifth Class ____

Sixth Class ____

3. How long does the intervention last in each class? Please tick relevant box for each class.

	6/8 Weeks	1 term	2 Terms	All year	Other
Junior Infants					
Senior Infants					
First Class					
Second Class					
Third Class					
Fourth Class					
Fifth Class					
Sixth Class					

4. How many adults are involved in Station Teaching in one class at one time? (Please tick) 2 ____ 3 ____ 4____ 5____

5. Are SNAs involved in Station Teaching? Yes ____ No ____ If yes please state how many in each class

6. How many pupils usually in each group for Station Teaching? (Please circle)

3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

7. Which Stations do you have in a class? Please tick box for each class involved

	New reading	Familiar reading	Phonics	Writing	Word work/vocab	Listening	Independent	Comprehension	Other (Please specify)
Jnr.Inf									
Sen.In									
1st Cl									
2nd Class									
3rd Class									
4th Class									
5th Class									

6th Class									

8. How many minutes do pupils spend at each Station? ____

9. How long is a Station Teaching class? **30 minutes** ____

40 minutes ____

50 minutes ____

60 minutes ____

10. Do the teachers teach at different Stations during the intervention? _____

If yes how often do they change Station?

Weekly ____ Monthly____ Termly ____ Other_____

11. Do the pupils physically move from Station to Station? Yes ____ No ____

Section 3: Selection of groups, resources and teaching approaches

1. Identify the assessment methods that help you to divide the pupils into groups for Station Teaching. (*Please tick all that apply)*

(a) Teacher observation ____
(b) Teacher made tests ____
(c) Standardised tests e.g. Belfield, MIST, Micra T, Drumcondra Tests ____
(d) Checklist or rating scale ____
(e) Concepts about print ____
(f) Running record on pupil's reading level ____
(g) Random ____

2. Are the pupils in the Station groups –

of similar ability in literacy competence _____

of mixed ability in literacy competence _____

3. Are all pupils in the class engaged in Station Teaching? Yes_____ No_____
If not please explain_____

_____

4. **Please tick the resources you use in Station Teaching in your class**

	Jun Inf	Sen Inf	First	Second	Third	Fourth	Fifth	Sixth
PM readers								
Big Cat readers								
Oxford Reading Tree								
Flying Start books								
Sails books								
Novels								
Jolly Phonics								
Jolly Grammar								
Mini whiteboards and markers								
Handwriting copies								
Handwriting books with laminated pages								
Sand trays								
Sandpaper letters								
Listening activity book								
Others – please state								

Section 4: Your views of Station Teaching and literacy development

1. **Do you think that Station Teaching covers the relevant aspects of literacy for your pupils?**

2. **What aspects of literacy do you think are especially well catered for in Station Teaching?**

3. **Are there any aspects that are neglected or limited in Station Teaching? Elaborate as you wish:**

4. **How did you learn how to do Station Teaching?**

5. **Identify the criteria you are using to judge the success of Station Teaching in your class.**

   Please rank the following from 1 to 6 where 1 is the most important

   (a) Enhanced decoding skills _____
   (b) Enhanced comprehension skills _____
   (c) Enhanced engagement with books _____
   (d) Progress in their writing _____
   (e) Enhanced letter knowledge – names and sounds _____
   (f) Enhanced motivation for literacy activities _____

6. **Do you think the pupils enjoy Station Teaching? Please elaborate:**

7. **Please indicate your view of each of the following statements by ticking the box that best reflects your opinion**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
ST is easily organised in junior classes					
ST provides opportunities for social skills training					
Pupils engage in meaningful tasks during ST					
Staff relations are strengthened during ST					
I see an improvement in pupils' literacy skills since implementing ST					
ST affords the opportunity to see how colleagues teach					
Engaging in ST has helped to improve my teaching of literacy					
In our school we do not have sufficient resources for ST					
I do not like Station Teaching					
ST makes me anxious about my teaching skills					
Pupils' learning is extended during ST					
ST provides an opportunity to praise pupils for their achievements					
It can be very noisy in the classroom during ST					
Working with other adults in the classroom is challenging					
ST makes me anxious about my disciplining skills					
ST involves a more public display of teaching					
Staff collaboration is vital for ST to succeed					
I feel very tired at the end of a ST class					
I have benefited from having the opportunity to see how other teachers teach					
ST has provided an opportunity for professional dialogue with colleagues					
I have had ample opport to learn how to do ST					

8. **Do you feel that Station Teaching has enhanced your teaching of literacy? Please elaborate:**

9. **Would you prefer to use another method? Please specify:**

10. **What other teaching practices do you find effective for teaching literacy in your class? Please list them:**

11. **To what extent do you find that these other teaching approaches complement ST? Please tick:**

A lot_____ A little_____ Not at all_____

12. **Any additional comments you might have about Station Teaching and the teaching of literacy in your classroom would be most welcome**

You can place the completed questionnaire in the enclosed white envelope and return to your principal for mailing. Thank you very much for participating.

Appendix 3: Letter of transmittal

****

****

Co. Cork
11 November 2013

A Chara,

I am currently studying for a PhD in education in University College Cork and am also principal of **********N.S. in *****. I have chosen to examine Station Teaching (also called Literacy Lift Off) for my doctoral study in U.C.C. and I hope to systematically collect and analyse teachers' views and experience of Station Teaching as a method of supporting pupil literacy.

In the case of any new initiative that is introduced into schools and classrooms, it is important that the views and experience of the professionals are taken into account and are used to inform future policy and practice developments.

I would be most grateful if you would assist me by completing the attached questionnaire. It will take approximately 10 – 15 minutes to complete. Please use the enclosed stamped addressed envelope to return the questionnaire to me by Friday 22 November 2013.

I can assure you that confidentiality in this study will be paramount. The name of any participating school or teacher will not be identified in any reports of the study.

If you would like to discuss any issues relating to the questionnaire, you may contact me by telephone on 086-81***** or email me at dalydympna@eircom.net.

Your co-operation in this research is greatly appreciated and highly valued.

Dea ghuíthe,

Dympna Daly

Appendix 4: Informed consent

**********N.S.,

******,

Co. Cork

30 April 2013

Re: Informed Consent

Dear Parents,

I am the principal of ********** National School and I am also a student on the Cohort PhD in Education Programme in University College Cork. I am passionate about teaching children to read. As part of this course I will be undertaking research on the implementation of Station teaching as a literacy intervention in the junior classes in our school.

Station teaching is a new way of teaching children to read. The class is divided into four groups of pupils and they receive intensive literacy work at four different stations in the classroom. In our school we implement this strategy in the last term of Junior Infants, all of Senior Infants and first two terms of First Class.

My research will involve observing literacy lessons in the Junior Infant, Senior Infant and First classes over the course of the next year as well as conducting interviews with pupils, parents and teachers. I will also photograph and video record the classes once during the project. I will work with the present Junior and Senior Infant classes from April 2013 to June 2013 and from September 2013 to April 2014 when they will be in Senior Infants and First classes.

The enclosed information sheet should clarify any questions you may have. It is a necessary and ethical aspect of the research process that I obtain your informed consent. I would appreciate if the attached consent form could be filled out and returned to me by **Friday 3 May.**

I thank you in advance for your and your child's co-operation and participation in this research. I hope that the research will benefit all the members of our school community.

Yours sincerely,

Dympna Daly

Information Sheet

Purpose of the Study. As part of the requirements for PhD at UCC, I have to carry out a research study. The study is concerned with the implementation of literacy interventions – Station teaching and the impact on staff and pupils in Junior Infants, Senior Infants and First Classes in ********** National School.

What will the study involve? The study will involve classroom observations, photographs and video recording of Station Teaching and interviews with some teachers, some parents and some pupils from April 2013 – April 2014.

Why have you been asked to take part? You have been asked because you are a member of the school community and have valuable contributions to make regarding improving literacy in the school. This will provide relevant data for my study.

Do you have to take part? Participation is voluntary. If you are willing to participate I would like you to sign a consent form. You can keep the information sheet and a copy of the consent form. You have the option of withdrawing before the study commences or discontinuing after data collection has started. Where data are identifiable (e.g. from interviews yielding qualitative data), I will allow for afterthoughts by letting you withdraw within two weeks of participation and allow you to have your data destroyed.

Will your participation in the study be kept confidential? Yes. I will ensure that no clues to your identity will appear in the thesis. Any extracts from what you say that are quoted in the thesis will be entirely anonymous.

What will happen to the information which you give? The data will be kept confidential for the duration of the study. On completion of the thesis, they will be retained for a further six months and then destroyed.

What will happen to the results? The results will be presented in the thesis. They will be seen by my supervisor, a second marker and the external examiner. The thesis may be read by future students on the course. The study may be presented at an education conference and published in a research journal.

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? At the end of the interview [/procedure], I will discuss with you how you found the experience and how you are feeling. If you subsequently feel you would like to discontinue involvement you may withdraw from the project.

Who has reviewed this study? This study has been approved by the Board of Management of ********** National School and also by the School of Education in UCC .

Any further queries? If you need any further information, you can contact me: Dympna Daly,027-***** or **********@eircom.net

I would be grateful if you agree to take part in the study and can you please sign the consent form overleaf

Consent Form

I……..parent of …….agree to participate in Dympna Daly'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 and my child's interview with Dympna Daly to be tape-recorded.

I give permission for my child to be photographed in the classroom during Station teaching.

I give permission for my child to be included in a video recording of Station teaching in the classroom. These photographs and video may be shown to parents, teachers as well as to fellow researchers in University College Cork and at Education conferences.

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 ensured 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 ☐

I do not agree ☐

Signed……. Date…….

Appendix 5: Information note on Resources teachers use in ST

Collins Big Cat: www.collins.co.uk/page/Collins+Big+Cat

Elkonin Boxes Resources: http://bogglesworldesl.com/elkonin_boxes.htm

First Steps Literacy – The Department of Education:

www.det.wa.edu.au/stepsresources/redirect/?oid=MultiPartArticle-id

Flying Start books: http://flyingstartbooks.com

Jeffries, H.H. and Jeffries, R. D. (1991). *Auditory Processing Activities: Materials for Clinicians and Teachers.* (Youngtown, AZ): ECL Publications.

Jolly Phonics, Jolly Grammar: www.jollylearning.co.uk

LDA: Learning and Development Aids: www.ldalearning.com/products/Literacy

Lloyd, S. (1992). The Jolly Phonics Handbook. Jolly Learning Ltd. Essex, United Kingdom

Orchard Toys. MTA: Modern Teaching Aids: www.teaching.com/au/catalogue

Oxford Reading Tree: www.oup.com./oxed/primary/oxfordreadingtree

Pearson-Sails Literacy Series: www.pearson.com./au/educator/primary/english/sails-literacy

PM readers: Nelson Cengage Learning: Oxford University Press

Red Rocket readers: www.redrocketreaders.com

SmartPAL@Sleeves. www.eaieducation.com/category212/SmartPAL_Sleeves.aspx

Sounds O.K. Book, Folens: www.folens.ie/books/sounds-ok

Yellow Box – SRA Reading Materials: www.mcgraw-hill.co.uk/sra/readingboxes-yellow.html

Appendix 6: Resources teachers use in Station Teaching

% of total respondents	Jun Inf	Sen Inf	First	Second	Third	Fourth	Fifth	Sixth
No.of trs who resp	81	81	82	82	45	39	32	25
PM readers	13	13	13	18	17	14	17	12
Big Cat readers	2	4	4	4	4	5	3	4
Oxford Reading Tree	2	3	4	5	9	5	6	9
Flying Start books						3	3	4
Sails books	4	3	1	1	1			
Red Rockets	1	1	1	1	2	3		
Novels			3	3	9	27	25	28
Jolly Phonics	11	9	8	8	7	3	3	4
Jolly Grammar		3	5	8	4			
Mini whiteboards and markers	15	16	15	14	19	10	9	8
Handwriting books with laminated pages	1	2	1				3	
Specially prepared blank handwriting copies/free writing	1	3	3	6	2	3	3	
Sand trays	2	1						
Sandpaper letters	6	2	1					
Listening activity book/ Oral lang	6	4	5	5	7	5	3	4
Phonics games	2	2	1					
Phonics sheets		2	1	1				
Magnetic letters/board	10	10	9	4				
Smart Pals	1	1	1	1				
Elkonin boxes	2	3	3	2				
Rhyming / Stories	6		1					
Tricky words	1	2	3	3				
Punctuation booklets			1					
First Steps writing	1	1	1	1	5	4	3	4
Differentiated worksheets		1						
Grammar book						3	3	4
Big Yellow Box			1	1				

Appendix 7: Information note on assessments teachers use to select groupings

The Belfield Infant Assessment Profile (B.I.A.P.) is suitable for teacher use across Junior and Senior Infants, it allows teachers to address learning difficulties, compile accurate pupil and class profiles, and develop detailed development plans (Folens publishers).

https://www.folens.ie/.../belfield-infant-assessment-profile-biap

The Middle Infant Screening Test (MIST) helps to identify early literacy difficulties. Results from the MIST give an overall picture of the pupil's performance and their learning strategies in functions which are related significantly to early reading and writing (ETC Consult publishers). It is standardised in terms of its administration only. It is criterion-referenced, diagnostic test. Children are considered to be at risk if they score below the cut off points in three of more of the subtests. The subtests are: listening skills, letter sounds, written vocabulary, three-phoneme words, sentence dictation and reversals. It is administered at the start of the fifth term in school.

www.etcconsult.com/.../middle-infant-screening-test-mist-pupil-booklets

The MICRA-T (Mary Immaculate Reading Attainment Test) is a leading standardised reading test, its purpose is to provide teachers with accurate information on the reading levels of pupils in their classes. There are 4 levels for pupils from First to Sixth Classes. The tests enable teachers to compare the reading performances of their pupils with reading standards nationally and are only available from the publisher, CJ Fallon. www.cjfallon.ie

The Drumcondra Primary Reading Test – Revised (DPRT – R) is a group-administered test of achievement in reading. There are Reading Vocabulary and Reading Comprehension subtests at all six levels – from the end of First Class to the end of Sixth Class. The tests are available from the Educational Research Centre in Drumcondra. www.erc.ie

The Concepts About Print Assessment should include: book orientation knowledge, understanding of principles involving the directional arrangement of print on the page, the knowledge that print, not picture, tells the story, understanding of important reading terminology and understanding of simple punctuation marks (Gillett and Temple, 1994, p. 70) The Concepts About Print is based upon the research of Clay, M. M. (2000).

Running Records capture what children know and understand about the reading process. Marie Clay designed this very effective tool. A Running Record is not just the recording of right and wrong words but also requires observing all behaviours children are using as they read the text. A Running Record provides a teacher with a playback of the entire oral reading conference, including the smallest details on the reader's attitude, demeanour, accuracy and understanding (Clay, M. M. (2001).

Appendix 8: Criteria class teachers use to judge the success of Station Teaching

Table 1: Criteria Infant teachers use to judge the success of Station Teaching

Criteria	1st choice	2nd choice	3rd choice	4th choice	5th choice	6th choice
n = 22	% of trs.	% of trs.	% of trs.	% of trs.	% of trs.	% of trs.
Enhanced engagement with books	24	29	14	4	13	13
Enhanced decoding skills	40	18	11	10	10	10
Enhanced motivation for literacy activities	14	9	31	31	13	13
Enhanced comprehension skills	-	22	22	14	18	18
Enhanced letter knowledge	18	13	13	13	37	8
Progress in their writing	4	9	9	28	9	38

Table 2: Criteria Teachers of Middle classes (First, Second, Third) use to judge the success of Station Teaching

Criteria	1st choice	2nd choice	3rd choice	4th choice	5th choice	6th choice
n = 21	% of trs.	% of trs.	% of trs.	% of trs.	% of trs.	% of trs.
Enhanced engagement with books	38	28	14	14	5	5
Enhanced decoding skills	38	-	14	19	14	19
Enhanced motivation for literacy activities	14	9	14	20	20	24
Enhanced comprehension skills	5	35	30	14	9	9
Enhanced letter knowledge	5	19	14	14	28	19
Progress in their writing	-	9	14	19	24	24

Table 3: Criteria Teachers of Senior classes (Fourth, Fifth, Sixth) use to judge the success of Station Teaching

Criteria	1st choice	2nd choice	3rd choice	4th choice	5th choice	6th choice
n = 11	% of trs.	% of trs.	% of trs.	% of trs.	% of trs.	% of trs.
Enhanced engagement with books	10	36	28	18	10	-
Enhanced decoding skills	45	-	18	18	10	10
Enhanced motivation for literacy activities	-	10	18	28	26	18
Enhanced comprehension skills	45	26	-	18	10	-
Enhanced letter knowledge	-	18	18	-	26	36
Progress in their writing	-	10	18	18	18	36

Appendix 9: Teachers' views on Station Teaching

Items	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
	% of Teachers	% of Teachers	% of Teachers	% of Teachers	% of Teachers
Station Teaching (ST) is easily organised in junior classes	17	33	30	20	
ST provides opportunities for social skills training	36	51	9	4	
Pupils engage in meaningful tasks during ST	74	25	1		
Staff relations are strengthened during ST	48	40	12		
I see an improvement in pupils' literacy skills since implementing ST	71	26	3		
ST affords the opportunity to see how colleagues teach	35	41	14	10	
Engaging in ST has helped to improve my teaching of literacy	49	43	7	1	
In our school we do not have sufficient resources for ST	8	7	7	53	25
I do not like Station Teaching				39	61
ST makes me anxious about my teaching skills	1	1	4	39	55
Pupils' learning is extended during ST	64	36			
ST provides an opportunity to praise pupils for their achievements	71	29			
It can be very noisy in the classroom during ST	8	62	14	13	3
Working with other adults in the classroom is challenging	2	13	10	54	21
ST makes me anxious about my disciplining skills	3	3	4	51	39
ST involves a more public display of teaching	9	57	13	17	4
Staff collaboration is vital for Station Teaching to succeed	71	29			
I feel very tired at the end of a ST class	11	31	11	44	3
I have benefited from having the opportunity to see how other teachers teach	37	47	9	6	1
ST has provided an opportunity for professional dialogue with colleagues	44	51	5		
I have had ample opportunity to learn how to do ST	28	52	11	9	

N = 115 teachers