Writing Pedagogy in Senior Primary Classes in Ireland: Teachers' Reported Practices

By

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Declaration

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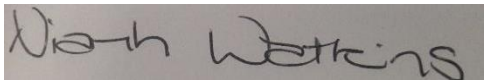
Signed: 

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Acronyms

BLF	Balanced Literacy Framework
DES	Department of Education and Skills
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity In Schools
DoE	Department of Education
EU	European Union
IEA	International Association for Evaluation and Educational Achievement
ILSA	International Large-Scale Assessment
MM	Mixed Methods
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NSLN	National Strategy for Literacy and Numeracy
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PD	Professional Development
PDST	Professional Development Service for Teachers
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PLC	Primary Language Curriculum
SES	Socio-economic Status
SoR	Science of Reading
SSE	School Self Evaluation
TCRWP	Teachers College Readers and Writing Project
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America
WA	Western Australia

Abstract

This doctoral thesis, an explanatory mixed methods study, explored the perspectives of Irish primary school teachers on approaches and methodologies for writing pedagogy. The study aimed to examine the influences of policy on pedagogical approaches to senior primary writing (ages 8-12 years old) and how the implementation of the Primary Language Curriculum (2015; 2019) has affected this. The study focused on current and historical policy documents that underpin literacy pedagogy in Irish primary schools, discussing the policy drivers, levers, gaps, and silences that have influenced this over the past decade. It aimed to address the influence of selected theoretical models and writing processes on curriculum design and explore policy factors determining teachers' pedagogical approaches to writing. The study employed a two-phase mixed methods design using quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative questionnaire findings in phase one (n=44) were explored with interviewees (n=5) in phase two of the study. The participants included teachers in Irish primary classrooms ranging from early career to more than twenty years of experience and across schools in areas of low socioeconomic status and non-low socioeconomic status. The approach to data analysis drew on thematic analysis. A central theme of the study is the implications of importing programmes and initiatives from other Anglophone countries into the Irish context, particularly the 'genre approach'. The study examined the pedagogical implications of 'reification' whereby writing genres are presented as static 'units of work'. The thesis challenges the efficacy of this approach in a 21st-century context and considers how a broader view of writing pedagogy for contemporary classrooms is needed. It addressed the deictic nature of writing, writing as production, and pedagogical opportunities for representation across multiple modes incorporating visual, spoken, and audio elements for various audiences.

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introductory comments

This chapter fulfils a triple function. First, it presents my motivation for conducting this study, drawing on my professional and personal experience. Secondly, it provides a comprehensive study outline, including the study's aims, rationale, research questions, and justification. Lastly, it presents an overview of the thesis structure, along with a concise summary of the content and purpose of each subsequent chapter.

1.2 Personal and Professional Rationale

I am an assistant literacy education professor at Dublin City University working in the initial teacher education sector. I teach undergraduate students enrolled in two programs - the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) and the Professional Master's in Education Primary (PMEP) for postgraduates.

Before my tenure at the university, I spent over a decade as a primary teacher in schools in low socio-economic areas (DES, 2005). During this time as a teacher in a senior boys' primary school (children aged 8-12 years old), my interest in writing developed. I witnessed firsthand the significant impact of cultivating the affective dimensions of literacy, such as motivation and engagement, increased children's participation, and achievement in literacy-related activities. I pursued a Master of Education (MEd) degree in 2014. During this time, I conducted an action research study for my dissertation, which aimed to establish a dialogic community of writers by implementing peer response groups to aid children's understanding of audience. The findings of my dissertation (Watkins, 2014) revealed that peer-led dialogic spaces effectively fostered boys' identities as writers, increasing their awareness of a reader or broader audience and ultimately enhancing their metalinguistic understanding of the craft and conventions of writing.

1.2.1 Implications of COVID-19 on topic choice

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the scope and objectives of my doctoral thesis had to be altered, resulting in the inability to conduct fieldwork or design-based research that required data collection in classrooms. Although I had initially planned to expand on the impact of a dialogic space on writing, circumstances beyond my control necessitated a change in direction. Consequently, my focus remained on further examining the realm of writing pedagogy to explore the pedagogical methods employed by Irish primary teachers, along with the factors that shape these approaches. Subsequently, I developed a keen interest in exploring the policy landscape, uncovering the policy drivers, levers, and influential factors behind literacy policy in Ireland and investigating how these policy drivers have precipitated substantial changes in the curriculum in recent times.

One aspect of literacy policy I have observed from my professional experience as a teacher is the historical tendency to address literacy 'shortcomings,' particularly in low socio-economic (SES) contexts, through initiatives and programmes from other anglophone countries. For example, through Professional Development (PD), I learned how to implement specific programmes and initiatives instead of developing my pedagogical content knowledge and knowledge of research-informed pedagogical approaches.

From a writing perspective, I have experienced how implementing a 'genre' approach to writing genres has led to rigid units of study, leaving minimal space for creativity. This experience has compelled me to probe the reasons behind this phenomenon and explore the broader policy factors that have influenced this understanding of writing in primary school settings.

This study's overarching aims and questions are outlined in the next section.

1.3 Aims and Research Questions

1.3.1. Aims

This study investigated Irish primary school teachers' perspectives on pedagogical approaches to writing in senior classes (ages 8-12 years old). It determines the factors that influence teachers' approaches and methodologies to writing. The study aimed to gain insight into Irish literacy policy, precisely policy over the past decade and a half that has

influenced writing pedagogy. Consequently, the study sought to ascertain how recent curricular reform - the Primary Language Curriculum (2015; 2019), its implementation and associated Professional Development (PD), influenced teachers' perspectives on their pedagogy.

1.3.2 The Research Questions

To gain insight into writing pedagogy in senior primary classes in Ireland, the following questions determined the inquiry.

1. How do Irish primary school teachers approach the teaching of writing in senior classes?
2. What influences teachers' writing pedagogy in the senior primary classes in Irish primary schools?
3. How has policy, specifically the new Primary Language Curriculum, changed/ challenged or influenced approaches to writing in Irish primary schools?

The rationale for this study is to address pedagogical approaches to the teaching of writing, given that there is little research into how Irish teachers approach writing in their classrooms. Across the Anglophone world, there is a dearth of research on writing *instruction* at classroom level, that is, how teachers approach the teaching of writing (Parr & Jesson, 2015). For example, from an antipodean perspective, such as in Australia, there are no large-scale surveys on writing pedagogy at primary level (de Abreu Malpique et al., 2022). Similarly, in England, there are no large-scale studies into writing instruction (Dockrell et al., 2016).

Globally, large-scale international assessments (ILSAs) focus on reading attainment. Similarly, at a national level, the National Assessments in Mathematics and English Reading (NAMER, 2023) from the Educational Research Centre (Gilleece et al., 2023) provide information on reading achievement in primary school children at both second-class and sixth-class levels (eight years old and twelve years old) and provide information on approaches and methodologies employed by teachers in a *reading* context. The only indication of progress in teaching writing comes from the Chief Inspector's reports, a summary of information from the inspectorate's findings in primary schools (Department of Education and Skills, 2022). The Chief Inspector's report provides an overview of observed

pedagogical approaches teachers employ at curricular level. Therefore, at a national level, there is no known or published research into teachers' pedagogical practices and the factors that inform the teaching of writing in primary schools.

More recent policy developments in Ireland, such as implementing a new Primary Language Curriculum (NCCA, 2019) -the curriculum for English and Irish languages- have yet to be reviewed. Thus far, it has not been determined if this significant curricular change has led explicitly to writing pedagogy improvements. When writing this thesis, there was no review of the current language curriculum and how teachers have implemented it in their classrooms. The following section outlines the structure of this thesis.

1. 4 The Structure of this thesis

Chapter Two: Policy Context

Situated in a policy context, chapter two provides an overview of Irish literacy policy, its drivers and levers. It addresses Irish policy from several perspectives. First, the historical factors that have influenced Irish education policy. Secondly, the economic drivers of literacy policy in Ireland and the influence of large-scale international assessments (ILSAs). The third perspective discusses how literacy pedagogy from other Anglophone countries, the United States and Australia, have shaped Irish literacy policy.

Chapter Three: Literature Review

Through a review of the literature in Chapter 3, the theoretical models and processes of writing are discussed, drawing on cognitive (Hayes & Flower, 1980; Berninger & Swanson, 1994), sociocultural and cognitive theories (Graham, 2018) and research on the affective dimensions of writing, such as motivation and engagement (Camacho et al., 2021). Chapter Three also addresses recent advancements in writing genres across various disciplines and writing for contemporary contexts. Additionally, the literature review offers a comprehensive analysis and evaluation of significant theories within the Irish context, such as Australian genre theory (Martin, 2000; Martin & Rose, 2007) and the process approach to writing (Emig, 1971; Elbow, 1987).

Chapter Four: Research Methodology

In chapter four, the methodology utilised in this study (an explanatory sequential, mixed-methods approach) is expounded upon and justified. The approach to analysis is described, including the rationale for the chosen methodology. The ethical considerations are also thoroughly discussed, and the philosophical underpinnings of the paradigmatic influences on this mixed methods approach are explained.

Chapter Five: Findings and Discussion

Chapter five of the study delivers the research outcomes across the three primary themes identified through data analysis. These themes encompass the uncertainty and confusion experienced by educators regarding the professional development and implementation of the Primary Language Curriculum (2019), the extent to which writing in the Irish context has undergone a process of reification, where writing is presented as discrete units of study rather than being driven by purpose, and the utilisation of digital tools in writing, where the theme of "text as text" and the "othering" of the digital context were identified. Chapter five comprehensively examines each theme, offering a critical discussion of the findings and relating it to the literature reviewed in Chapter Three.

Chapter Six: Recommendations and Conclusion

The final chapter of this study is dedicated to presenting the study's conclusions and recommendations. This chapter outlines the theoretical framework underpinning the research and explains how it was utilised to address the research questions posed. Furthermore, this section acknowledges the study's limitations and concludes with what I have learned as a researcher during this process.

The following chapter, Chapter Two, provides an overview of the education policy context in Ireland and the factors that have influenced primary literacy policy.

Chapter 2: Policy and Context

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the policy and curricular context and outlines the factors influencing Irish literacy policy over the past fifteen years. It begins by discussing the historical influences on Irish education policy and the extent to which other Anglophone countries – Britain and the United States have affected policymaking on these shores. It then examines the broader policy drivers and levers, specifically the economic drivers, and the role of international large-scale assessments (ILSAs) in creating literacy policy. This chapter elucidates the impact of research conducted in anglophone nations on formulating literacy policies. It delves into the influence of certain contentious matters and discussions, like "balanced literacy", on developing the present Primary Language Curriculum (2019).

The final section outlines the current literacy context in Ireland, how writing pedagogy is presented in the curriculum, and how historic professional development and initiatives have shaped this.

2.2 Broader policy influences: Levers and drivers

An outline of the historical factors that have influenced Irish education policy is presented in this section, along with a discussion on how the policy has historically mirrored that of Britain. The current policy drivers, levers, and economic factors that have brought about national policy changes are also highlighted and critically discussed.

2.2.1 Painting the post box green: 'Hibernicised' British policy.

Historically, there remains a strong influence of British social policy in Ireland despite becoming an independent country in 1922, officially in 1937, and given that Ireland has not been part of Britain's commonwealth since 1949. Limond (2010: 451) refers to the influence of British social policy on Ireland as a "legacy that can best be understood as a postcolonial hangover or shadow: an unusual receptiveness to aspects of British social policy".

In Ireland, the analogy of 'painting the post box green' (a reference to emulating the *Royal Mail* postal service) is used anecdotally to refer to how some aspects of British public policy are 'Hibernicised' to suit the Irish context.

From an education perspective, this, in recent history, has not necessarily been a *bad* thing. For example, free secondary school education was introduced in Ireland in 1966 following the United Kingdom Labour government's investment in second-level education (Hyland, 1996). From a primary education perspective, the Irish primary school curriculum (1971) was influenced by the Plowden report (1967), which underpinned the primary curriculum in England (Limond, 2010). Furthermore, Ireland's *National Strategy for Literacy and Numeracy* (2011-2020) (DES, 2011) is another example of emulating 'Anglo' policy practices.

There are several reasons Britain is particularly influential, which include geographical, cultural, historical, and economic factors. For example, geographically, as a small Anglophone country with a population of just over five million, Ireland has historical and cultural ties to Britain and the United States and operates 'within an Anglo-American zone of influence' (Lynch et al., 2012: 5).

Scholars in the policy field suggest that Irish education policy has followed a trajectory highly influenced by neoliberal practice and 'reform' in England (Simmie, 2012; Skerrit, 2019). In the economic era after Ireland's financial crisis in 2007, described as 'post-crash' (Riain, 2014), one of the significant hallmarks of education policy reform in Ireland mirrors that of the English educational system where education policy has been driven by neoliberal ideology (Pratt, 2016). For the purpose of this thesis, neoliberalism is conceptualised as an "ideology of economic reform policies which are concerned with the deregulation of the economy, the liberalisation of trade and industry, and the privatisation of state-owned enterprises" (Steger and Roy 2010:14)

In England, the influence of neoliberal policy has been well documented by sociologist Stephen Ball, where 'reforms' such as accountability and performativity, and more recently, debates in England around academy schools have been contemporary issues over the past two decades (Ball, 2003; Brown & Manktelow, 2016). These rapidly evolving neoliberal reforms have been evident in the Irish context but even more so in the past ten years, with Ball warning how neoliberal ideology is impacting Irish education policy and the extent to which three 'technologies' characterised as 'Market', 'Management' and 'Performance' are shaping

it (Ball 2016: 1049). In this chapter, these ‘three technologies’ are used as a lens to view Irish literacy policy. This is addressed in the following section, in which economic drivers on literacy policy are addressed.

2.2.2 Economic drivers

From an economic perspective, Ireland has followed a monetary policy focused on attracting multinationals and direct foreign investment, often from the tech sector (and supported by a low % corporation tax of 12.5%). As put forward by O'Callaghan et al. (2015), this has been a hallmark of its economic strategy since the early 1990s and during the years of the so-called ‘Celtic Tiger’, a term used to describe Ireland’s rapid economic growth in between the early 1990s and mid-2000s (O'Callaghan et al., 2015).

Economically, the global financial crisis 2008 led to severe cuts in educational spending nationally in a ‘post-crash’ economy, leading to austerity budgets across the public sector (Mercille et al., 2017). Further to this was Ireland’s average/below-average performance in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA, 2009), which became instrumental in the decision-making process that continues reverberating in Irish education policy. These assessments, which focus on reading and maths attainment for students aged fifteen, saw Ireland ranked 17th in reading and below average with a ranking of 26th in maths. Then, Labour education spokesperson and later Minister of Education Ruairí Quinn remarked how Ireland’s performance was a “shocking indication of how our education system fails to perform at the most basic levels" (Donnelly, 2010) and this poor performance was subsequently a catalyst for rapid policy change. The fallout of Ireland’s economic collapse in 2008, coupled with austerity budgets and low performance in PISA, became a key driver of literacy policy in Ireland.

Globally, the influence of international large-scale assessments (ILSAs) and their use in policymaking has been well documented (Addey et al., 2017; Lingard et al., 2015). Moreover, the shortcomings of PISA have been identified as limited in the information that can be retrieved. For example, in the Australian context, the consideration is “whether what PISA is designed to measure is a sufficiently broad or rigorous benchmark for academic performance to form the basis of policy” (Buckingham, 2012: 4).

The emphasis on PISA scores echoes the global interest as a hallmark of an educated workforce and a strong economy (Ball, 2016). High performance in these tests means market growth. This echoes what Ball (2016) describes as the 'market' technology - educational outcomes = economic development. The Irish Business and Employer's Confederation (IBEC) then CEO commented upon Ireland's poor performance in the PISA tests:

> It is particularly dramatic and is a wake-up call ... The mathematical results are disappointing because Ireland's aspiration to be a knowledge economy depends on a solid supply of engineers and technologists...
>
> (Education Matters, 2010)

Recent comments from Andreas Schleicher, head of education for the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, have drawn attention to Ireland's education system and how it delivers 21st-century learning. In an interview with the centre-left broadsheet the *Irish Times*, Schleicher commented:

> Ireland's education system is based on a 20th-century model of learning and needs to modernise to avoid producing "second-class robots" in a world of rapid technological change.
>
> (O'Brien, 2021)

Subsequent reforms to the leaving certificate at second level (12–18-year-olds) have been made based on these comments. The Minister for Education announced changes at a recent press conference reported by Radio Teilifís Éireann (RTE) education correspondent Emma O'Kelly. Here, Minister Foley remarked that:

> …the broadest spectrum of advice before deciding on these Leaving Cert reforms, including the OECD & business, which told her of the importance of the transference of skills. "That is what is driving our reforms"
>
> https://twitter.com/emma_okelly/status/1508786428796411909.

The impact of OECD and corporate entities on the reform of second-level curricula is apparent. Incorporating "twenty-first-century skills" into the curriculum can be attributed, in part, to the globalised standards and business-driven rhetoric. Furthermore, the emerging attention on performance did not stop at the secondary school level and subsequently cascaded down to the primary level with large-scale reform. For example, the outcome of the

PISA results propelled an inaugural national strategy- the *National Strategy for Literacy and Numeracy 2011-2020,* which aimed to improve outcomes in literacy and numeracy at both primary and second levels (DES, 2011). Subsequently, at primary level, this led to the development of a new integrated Primary Language Curriculum, developed across two stages, with an emphasis on Junior Primary (ages 5-8 years old) in the initial rollout (2015), followed by senior primary (ages 8-12 years old) in 2019. The *National Strategy* also had implications for the Initial Teacher Education (ITE) sector, with a three-year Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) programme increasing to a four-year programme to improve student teachers' literacy and numeracy outcomes. For practising teachers, the implications of the national strategy would be an emphasis on continuing professional development (CPD) in literacy and numeracy and an increase in the time allocated for teaching English, increasing to one hour per day from 50 minutes. Other measures the Department of Education (DES) implemented include requiring schools to report standardised test results to parents. One of the purposes of these test results was to drive School Self-Evaluation (SSE), an internal process in which school management communicates targets and objectives for improving test results (DES, 2011). Before 2011, there was no similar accountability structure. Standardised testing aimed to identify children who may need additional support, such as learning support in English and Maths education. A circular from the Department of Education (DES) outlined the role of standardised assessment "to inform national educational policy for literacy and numeracy and identify ways of improving the performance of the school system" (DES, 2011: 5). The past decade has seen some rapid change at primary level with the introduction of a new curriculum and as outlined in this section, national measures to improve literacy. This is discussed in the next section, in which I outline the current picture of literacy nationally.

2.2.3 Current Picture of Literacy Nationally

Ireland has demonstrated commendable performance in the Progress in International Literacy Study (PIRLS, 2023), an assessment that evaluates the reading proficiency of eleven-year-old primary school students. Compared to other nations, Ireland has consistently attained impressive average scores (Delaney et al., 2023). For example, in 2017, Ireland performed

well on these tests, ranked joint third internationally, with only the Russian Federation and Singapore achieving higher mean scores (Eivers et al., 2017).

In the most recent round of PIRLS (2021), Ireland remained in a high-achieving cohort of countries. However, these tests need a cautious reading when comparing reading scores across countries. Ireland was not included in the primary data. The rationale is that children were tested much later than in other countries because of the impact of school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic (Delaney et al., 2023). The most recent national large-scale assessment of reading attainment is also positive (Kiniry et al., 2023). Despite the impact of school closures throughout the pandemic, in which primary schools were closed for several months, reading achievement has shown a slight, nonsignificant decrease between 2014 and 2021 (Kiniry et al., 2023).

Conversely, for schools in low socio-economic areas (SES), known as "DEIS" (a word in the Irish language meaning opportunity and an acronym for Delivering Equality of Opportunity In Schools), the picture looks different. For example, there is a gap in achievement between pupils in DEIS contexts compared to non-DEIS schools (Nelis et al., 2023) in National Assessments of Mathematics Education and Reading (NAMER, 2022). However, like the non-DEIS context, there was no significant decrease in reading achievement between 2014 and 2021, which is remarkable considering the impact of COVID-19 on school closures. Schools in DEIS contexts receive additional funding to support educational disadvantage and improve school attendance, literacy, and numeracy outcomes.

Although the present scenario appears optimistic, the discrepancy in academic performance among children in DEIS settings is worrisome. On a larger scale, literacy development in Ireland has been significantly shaped by a diverse array of philosophies, theories, programmes, and initiatives from various English-speaking nations. In the next section, I discuss how these philosophies and programmes from other Anglophone countries have shaped literacy policy and how, similar to the policy context, there is a tendency to import pedagogical approaches without considering Ireland's unique context.

2.3 Influence of Other Anglophone Countries

In this section, I discuss the most influential pedagogical frameworks and philosophies prominent in Irish literacy curricula. Some of the more prominent pedagogical approaches in the Irish literacy context originate from the United States and Australia. This section

addresses how these approaches have been conceptualised, and in doing this, I deliberate on the broader consequences of importing pedagogy.

From an Irish literacy perspective, the most influential body of research underpinning the Primary Language Curriculum (2015) is the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA, 2012) commissioned report that underpinned the PLC (2015) at junior primary for children aged 5-8 years old, (Kennedy et al., 2012: 177). This report advocates for a 'Balanced Literacy Framework' (BLF) as a pedagogical structure, with components of this Framework illustrated in Table 2.1

Table 2.1

Components of a Balanced Literacy Framework (NCCA, 2012: 177)

Reading	**Writing**
Reading aloud (Adams, 1990; Goodman, 1994)	Shared writing (Holdaway, 1979)
Shared reading (Holdaway, 1979; Teale & Sulzby, 1986)	Interactive writing (Pinnell & McCarrier, 1994)
Guided reading/reading workshops (Clay, 2002; Routman 2000; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Calkins, 2001)	Writers' workshop (Atwell, 1987; Graves, 1994; Calkins, 1986)
Independent reading (Meek, 1988; Clay, 1991)	Independent writing (Bissex, 1980; Harste et al., 1984)

Balanced Literacy, a 'philosophical perspective' of literacy, emerged as a 'truce' to the so-called reading wars in the States in the late 90s/early 00s (Pressley, 2002). The 'Reading Wars' (Chall, 1983; Goodman, 1967), a historic unyielding debate about *how* children learn to read ('whole language' *or* 'phonics'), has been the key issue in this so-called 'war' for over 200 years (Castles et al., 2018). Originating in the United States, advocates for a whole language approach to reading can be traced back to the mid-1950s for example, with proponents of the whole language approach, such as Goodman, viewing reading as a 'psycholinguistic guessing game' using three cueing strategies- meaning, structural and visual (Veatch, 1960; Goodman, 1989). The three-cueing theory suggests that readers rely on

three distinct sources of information, or cues, to identify a word. This includes visual information, information related to syntax, and overall meaning, including illustrations to figure out the meaning of an unknown word (Davis et al., 2021).

In the Irish context, the term "Balanced Literacy" has undertaken a creative reimagining that differs from how it was conceptualised in 2012 (as illustrated in Table 2.1). In the research that underpins the *National Strategy for Literacy and Numeracy* (2022), balanced literacy is redefined and clarified as:

> Balanced in terms of attention to and systematic explicit teaching of constrained (e.g. phonics, letter knowledge, punctuation) and unconstrained (vocabulary, comprehension composition) skills according to children's assessed needs and stage of development; balanced in access to a wide variety of genres and 'texts' in reading and writing; balanced in terms of formative and summative assessment practices; and balanced in terms of attention to oral language, reading and writing recognising the reciprocal relationship and supportive processes existing between the forms of language. This means that a teacher must attend to both the explicit and systematic teaching of code-based skills (e.g., phonics) with the provision of meaningful opportunities to apply these skills when reading connected texts (connected texts are meaningful texts with multiple related sentences characterised by a coherent and cohesive structure) and when creating texts in a variety of genres and disciplines).
>
> (DES, 2023:3)

The evolution of balanced literacy in Ireland over the past several decades has been noteworthy. As a master's student in 2012, my understanding of the term was rooted in a balanced literacy framework that encompassed the elements outlined in Table 2.1. However, the current interpretation of the term may be subject to varying degrees of comprehension among teachers in Ireland. It would appear that the original concept of "balanced literacy" has been reimagined in a creative manner.

Like other Anglophone countries, "balanced literacy" has evolved, and definitions vary (Fisher et al., 2020). For example, in its initial conception, it was defined as:

> using both immersion in authentic literacy-related experiences and extensive explicit teaching through modelling, explanation, and minilesson re-explanations, especially concerning decoding and other skills (e.g., punctuation mechanics, comprehension strategies) Wharton McDonald et al., (1997:518)

This definition leans more into the philosophical dimension of balanced literacy in which 'balance' is deemed as important without prescribing specific pedagogical approaches.

Similarly, scholars Frey et al., (2005: 272) offer a definition that acknowledges the 'philosophical' dimension of this approach:

> Balanced literacy is often characterised in a comprehensive and complex way. It is a philosophical orientation that assumes that reading and writing achievement are developed through instruction and support in multiple environments by using various approaches that differ by level of teacher support and child control.

It is worth noting the development of balanced literacy, which has advanced from a theoretical stance that advocates for a harmonious blending of reading components, both directive and spontaneous abilities, among them writing. This progression can be discerned from the following definition, which exemplifies how the balanced literacy philosophy metamorphosed into a concrete educational approach.

> Balanced Literacy instructional practices are often enacted through specific instructional routines such as guided reading, shared reading, interactive writing, literacy centres and independent reading and writing.
>
> Bingham et al., (2013: 16)

Balanced Literacy as a pedagogical framework is a highly contentious term across the Anglophone world (Seidenberg, 2019). While there is little reference to 'Balanced Literacy' in the curriculum documents- the Primary Language Curriculum (2019), the non-statutory support materials (2020) refer to Balanced Literacy pedagogical approaches. These support materials- non-statutory curriculum documents were developed to support the introduction of the language curriculum and as explained by a spokesperson for the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA, 2022) through personal correspondence were designed to:

> Support teachers in planning for and using the Primary Language Curriculum and support the provision of enriching, high-quality teaching and learning experiences in Irish primary school classrooms. While the Primary Language Curriculum itself is a statutory document, the Support Materials differ, as they were developed to aid the introduction of the PLC to the system (As communicated by a spokesperson in the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.
>
> (NCCA, 2022)

The efficacy of balanced literacy instruction is one of the primary debates in the field (Goldstein, 2015), amplified in recent years on social and mainstream media in the US (Hanford, 2018). In the United States and Australia, it has been identified that the pedagogical supports recommended in a 'balanced literacy' approach are not rooted in an evidence base (Snow, 2020). As Snow explains, 'balanced literacy' 'does not align with the recommendations of the three international inquiries into the teaching of reading (National Reading Panel, 2000; Rowe, 2005; Rose, 2006)'. Moreover, it has not "improved reading achievement levels in nations where it has been embraced, such as the USA, Australia, and the UK" (Snow, 2020: 37).

Furthermore, the three-cueing system, promoted in a balanced approach, has become a significant talking point in the conversation on the 'reignited' reading wars, with scholars warning of how promoting these strategies takes away from decoding (Moats, 2014; Seidenberg, 2017; Snow, 2020). The 'reignited' reading wars has highlighted research from cognitive psychologists (Moats, 2014; Seidenberg, 2017) on how the brain learns to read, with Seidenberg arguing that:

> The three cueing approach is a microcosm of the culture of education. It did not develop because teachers lack integrity, commitment, motivation or intelligence. It developed because they were poorly trained and advised. They did not know the relevant science or had been convinced it was irrelevant. Lacking this foundation, no such group could have discovered how reading works and how children learn.
>
> (Seidenberg, 2017:304)

Seidenberg's observation regarding the inadequate guidance provided to teachers is well-founded. This is consistent with previous arguments that tend to view literacy as a comprehensive package rather than a collection of discrete skills. However, it is worth noting that viewing literacy as a set of specific skills can pose challenges, particularly in cases like England where the debate is not as contentious as it is in Australia or the United States. While the debate has received some traction in England, though not to the same extent, given that England's primary English curriculum has become more phonics-centric since the Rose Report (2006), which mandated systematic synthetic phonics instruction and phonics screening tests for children in key stage 1. More recently, a public debate about 'synthetic phonics' has been reignited with research from Wyse and Bradbury (2022) calling for more 'balanced instruction', citing Ireland's literacy curriculum as 'balanced'. The commitment to

this terminology, ill-defined and contentious across the Anglophone world, needs careful consideration, particularly when comparing literacy achievement globally.

In Ireland, the approach to looking towards other Anglophone countries is not limited to curriculum design. For example, in DEIS contexts, one very influential approach to the teaching of literacy has been the *First Steps* literacy programme from Western Australia (Education department of Western Australia, 2005). *First Steps*:

> is a literacy resource for teachers researched and developed in Western Australia. It comprises a range of literacy strands in Reading, Writing, Spelling, and Oral Language. It is designed for schools and jurisdictions looking for a practical resource to improve student literacy outcomes at primary level.
>
> (Professional Development Services for Teachers, n.d.)

The *First Steps* literacy programme was implemented in the Irish context in schools designated disadvantaged to improve literacy outcomes as part of the government's strategy on improving outcomes for literacy in schools designated disadvantaged under the Delivery Equality of Opportunity In Schools (DEIS) Action Plan (DES, 2005). The Department of Education and Science chose *First Steps* as:

> Part of the multi-faceted support provided for urban schools in Ireland designated as disadvantaged under the Delivery Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) Action Plan (DES, 2005). These schools are asked to nominate staff members to train as *First Steps* tutors towards disseminating the practice throughout the school. The tutor attends a training course for which sub-cover is provided and receives these resources on training. Resources are supplied to the schools according to several class teachers, and schools are asked to implement the three *First Steps* literacy resources in line with the objectives of the English Curriculum for Primary Schools. Ideally, the three tutors collaborate at school level to develop an integrated approach to the three strands.
>
> (DES, 2005:10)

The significance of this Western Australian approach conceptualised in the *First Steps* (Education department of Western Australia) literacy was rolled out in DEIS primary schools in Ireland in 2005 as part of the Department of Educations and Skills' DEIS Action Plan (DES, 2005) with the Professional Development for this programme being delivered by the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST). The efficacy of this programme in the Irish DEIS context was never established prior to its implementation, nor was it evaluated after implementation. There is no published evidence as to how the programme was implemented in schools or if it had improved literacy outcomes for children in educational

disadvantage. The *First Steps* programme is no longer in use because it was surpassed by the implementation of the Primary Language Curriculum (NCCA:2019).

As indicated in section (2.2.1) of this chapter, because of Ireland's size, and it being a small anglophone country with historical ties to Britain and the United States, there is a tendency to emulate pedagogy and practice without a due critique of application or understanding of Ireland's unique context. This has been highlighted in the Australian context, where it has been put forward how tradition from other countries has underpinned the curriculum there. For example, as purported by Clary and Mueller (2021), it has been identified how, in a writing context, an assortment of pedagogies, approaches and resources have been introduced.

> without obvious due diligence about teacher expertise or objective consideration of applicability-and effectiveness-in the Australian context…due to early reliance-and later fascination with-literacy practices developed elsewhere, especially the United Kingdom and the United States (2021:1).

In Ireland, at curricular level, a similar pattern has involved importing pedagogical frameworks, such as the components of "balanced literacy" in influencing the Primary Language Curriculum (2019) and associated "Support materials for Teachers" (NCCA:2020). In its initial conceptualisation, Balanced literacy was seen as a 'philosophical perspective' that offered neutrality to the reading wars. However, it is more than just a philosophy in countries like the United States. For Calkins (an advocate of reading and writers' workshops), "balanced literacy" is commercialised and sold as *Teachers College Readers and Writing Project (TCRWP) Units of Study* (Calkins, 1994). In the United States, there are often competing curricula at state level, which can be lucrative when states or regions adopt specific curricula with huge monetary or financial gains. This commercialisation of theories and philosophies is not a recent phenomenon. As noted by post-structuralist critical theorist Luke (2018: 145), who self-describes as 'agnostic' when it comes to specific pedagogical frameworks, there exists a power/interest dynamic that has always been at the heart of literacy education:

> The history of literacy education thus is about power and knowledge…It is also about who in the modern state will be privileged in specifying what will count as literacy. This is partly because literacy has been tied up so directly with the distribution and consecration of capital and knowledge in Western cultures- as a way of regulating and monopolising access to principal means of production and modes of representation.

Luke's observations perceptively unveil the potent force that pervades the realm of education, particularly in the context of literacy, which is frequently intertwined with a status quo that privileges those who define the parameters of literacy. His remarks aptly illustrate how, despite the laudable intentions of educators, there exists a propensity to be constrained by elitist definitions of literacy, rather than examining its essence and practical application in the lives of individuals.

In the Irish context, as in Australia, it is important to exercise caution when adopting pedagogical approaches from other English-speaking nations, due to the tendency to replicate practices that may not be suitable for the Irish context. It is necessary to conduct a thorough evaluation of the implementation of the Primary Language Curriculum (PLC, 2019) and initiatives in DEIS contexts such as First Steps (Department of Education, Western Australia, 2005) in order to accurately assess the impact of such programmes and indeed pedagogical frameworks like 'Balanced Literacy'. Without such evaluation, there is a tendency to either perpetuate existing views of writing or attempt to layer on new definitions without a deep understanding of their practical implications.

Similarly, without trials or reviews around programme implementation, the consequences for pedagogy are a coalescing of theories and the reliance on research that is not only dated but also contentious. there is an opportunity here to say how this thesis has been borne out of the issues discussed and revisit your aims.

2.4 Conclusion

The policy context for Irish literacy policy and the influence of Britain on education policy has been outlined in this chapter. An overview has been provided on how the design of the Primary Language Curriculum (2015: 2019) and the associated Support Materials for Teachers (2020) have been influenced by the concept of "balanced literacy" from the United States. Furthermore, this chapter has identified contentious issues and ongoing debates surrounding balanced literacy. It has also discussed the literacy trends in Ireland and the impact of the *First Steps* literacy programmes from Western Australia on pedagogy in DEIS contexts. Chapter Three will undertake a critical analysis of the existing literature on writing genres, pedagogical approaches to writing, multimodalities, and reimagining writing for 21st century classrooms.

Chapter Three: Theoretical underpinnings and a literature review on writing pedagogy.

3.1 Introduction

The chapter examines the theoretical writing models that have considerably impacted Irish primary writing instruction. I evaluate writing pedagogy from process-focused and genre-specific viewpoints, stressing the integration of genre-based writing in the Irish context. It underscores the necessity of reassessing writing instruction to fulfil the demands of the 21st-century classroom.

In this chapter, through a critical review of the literature on writing pedagogy, I discuss some influential theoretical cognitive models and processes of writing on pedagogy (Hayes & Flower, 1980; Berninger & Swanson, 1994) and its implications for twenty-first-century contexts. I begin by discussing the importance of writing as a communicative function across several domains. I then address theoretical models and processes of writing that have informed writing pedagogy in the Irish context. Using the Anglophone context as a lens, I describe the national picture concerning the more recent policy changes, specifically the new Primary Language Curriculum (NCCA, 2019). I also explore pedagogical approaches utilised in the Irish context, primarily process and genre approaches. Subsequently, I redefine the approach to teaching writing by incorporating Graham's Writers in Communities model (2018). Furthermore, I explore the affective dimensions of writing, the interconnectedness of reading and writing, and how writing genres have evolved since it was implemented in the Irish context in the '00s. The aim of considering a contemporary context is to assess how these pedagogical approaches continue to remain applicable and meaningful. The following section discusses the communicative function of writing.

3.2 The communicative function of writing

Writing is a crucial means of communication and an essential tool for learning, regardless of whether one is a skilled novelist or a young student in primary grades (Graham et al., 2018). From an education perspective, the last five decades of research on the theories and processes of writing have illustrated the cognitive, emotional, and social demands of writing (see, for example, Hayes & Flower, 1980; Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987; Berninger & Swanson,

1994; Graham, 2018). Further to this is a body of research that has illustrated the importance of writing across various genres for a range of audiences (Martin, 2000; Rose, 2008), the communicative function of writing and the role of writing in supporting reading (Graham, 2020; Fitzgerald & Shanahan, 2000).

As one of the many ways most humans communicate, writing has changed expeditiously over the past fifty years, altered by the internet (Leu et al., 2016). The pedagogy of multiliteracies, as developed by educationalists and scholars such as the New London Group (Cazden et al., 1996), recognised literacy's fluid and evolving nature in the modern era almost thirty years ago. This pedagogy extends beyond a singular emphasis on conventional literacy skills, such as reading and writing, to encompass a broad spectrum of communication modalities, including visual, digital, and cultural literacies. The research conducted by scholars Kress and Bezemer (2008) has contributed significantly to understanding how multiple modalities have transformed the writing landscape. These necessitating explanations encompass social, pedagogical, and semiotic factors. The evolution of writing as a means of communication spans centuries, progressing from hieroglyphics to modern platforms such as SnapChat.

To be considered literate in today's world, one must possess the ability to comprehend and navigate various multimodal contexts that include oral, aural, and visual contexts (Yelland, 2018) with technological advances redefining what it means to be a writer (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003). Writing is rapidly evolving, and pedagogy in 21st-century contexts should evolve to meet these demands. As purported by Leu et al.:

> More than ever before, student writers need to learn not simply how to write specific texts and genres but more significantly, how to continually learn to write across this ever-changing constellation of technologies, modalities, and contexts.
>
> (Leu et al., 2016: 16)

Fillmore (1966) coined the term *deictic* to describe “words whose meanings change rapidly as their context changes” (Leu et al., 2013: 1150). Applying the word “deictic” to literacy, or more specifically, a writing context, is helpful as it acknowledges how quickly writing evolves and how writing, in its forms, evolves.

This section has described how the communicative function of writing has evolved over several decades. In the next section, I consider theoretical models and processes of writing that have underpinned this study.

3.3 Theoretical Framework Underpinning this Study

The theoretical framework for this study is a comprehensive structure condensing concepts and theories derived from existing tested and published knowledge. Here, I provide a theoretical foundation for data analysis and interpretation, enabling a deeper understanding of the significance embedded within research data (Kivunja, 2018). In this section, I present the theoretical framework underpinning this study, which draws on cognitive models of writing (Hayes & Flower,1980; Berninger & Swanson, 1994), Genre theory (Halliday, 1985) and Australian Genre theory (Martin, 2000; Martin & Rose, 2007).

The inclusion of these theories is crucial as they form the basis of a process-oriented approach to writing, which is informed by cognitive theories of writing and writing genre theory. This approach is the prevailing theory underpinning the Primary Language Curriculum (2015; 2019) and related curriculum documents, such as the Support Materials for Teachers. This theoretical framework has also guided past professional development initiatives in the teaching of writing in the Irish context.

The sociocultural influences are informed by sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978) in which the sociocultural dimensions of writing, such as audience and cultural contexts, are considered with specific reference to a pedagogy of multiliteracies (New London Group 1996; Street, 1995) and Graham's Writer(s) within Community model (2018). The reason behind incorporating the 'Writer(s)-Within-Community Model of Writing' is its ability to merge and enhance cognitive models (Hayes & Flower, 1980), genre theory (Bazerman, 1994), and socio-cultural theory. This model encompasses writing within a community, collaborators' impact, and communication's significance in the writing process (Graham, 2018: 258). Bandura's self-efficacy theory (1977) is also a critical theory underpinning the study in which the role of self-efficacy is considered. Within this self-efficacy theory (1977), I also draw on the affective dimensions of writing, specifically motivation and engagement (Camacho & Boscolo, 2020). Critical literacy (Luke, 2012), an extension of Freire's critical pedagogy (1970), is also central to studying relationships of power, interest, and dominant discourses. Table 3.1 provides an overview of the theories informing the study, which illustrates the theoretical lens through which the study was conducted and provides a rationale for its inclusion.

Table 3.1

Theoretical Framework

Theory	Rationale	Stage of the study
Socio-cultural influences Writing Pedagogy ➢ Evidence-based conditions ➢ Writing Genre theory (Bazerman, 1994; Halliday, 1985; Rose, 2006)	Sociocultural and cognitive influences on writing, the role of collaborators; *Writers Within Community* (WWC, Graham, 2018; Barton & Hamilton, 2001; Street & Street,199; Vygotsky, 1978). Multimodalities and the communicative function of writing (Cazden et al., 1996; Leu et al., 2016) Within this, theoretical models such as cognitive perspectives on writing (Hayes & Flower, 1980; Berninger & Swanson, 1994) Genre theory (Halliday, 1985; Rose, 2006) New developments in genres pedagogy (Derewianka,2015)	Literature review; methodology; analysis; presentation of findings; discussion of findings
Freirean Pedagogy ➢ Critical pedagogy ➢ Critical Literacy (Luke 2018)	Influence of critical pedagogy on the analysis of data study in which issues of power-voices that are missing/silenced/benefits. Interpreting where dimensions of power are visible in curriculum documents and support documents. Analysing where theories and philosophies have become static and where reification has occurred. Understanding whose voices are missing/silenced	Analysis: Policy Curriculum Non-statutory curriculum documents Professional development documents
Motivation and engagement Bandura (self-efficacy) Motivation and choice (Camacho et al., 2020) Role of interest in writing (Renninger & Hidi, 2020)	Theories self-efficacy Bandura (self-efficacy) Affective dimensions of writing, such as writing motivation and engagement and the importance of choice To what extent can interest be cultivated	Literature review; methodology; analysis; Findings Affective dimensions: Choice, collaboration; control Multimodalities Children's autonomy

3.4 Influential Theoretical Models in the Irish Context

This section explores the theoretical frameworks that have shaped the teaching of writing in Ireland, encompassing the cognitive model proposed by Berninger and Swanson (1994), as well as the Australian genre theory developed by Martin (2000) and further expanded upon by Martin and Rose (2007). Initially, it provides an overview of the impact of historical cognitive perspectives on our understanding of the writing process while also acknowledging their limitations in the present day. Subsequently, the discussion shifts towards Australian genre theory, exploring its origins and its significant role in enhancing writing pedagogy within the English-speaking world. The justification for providing a historical perspective is that the development of the curriculum is heavily influenced by these sources of information (Primary Language Curriculum, 2015, 2019; *Support Materials for Teachers*, 2020).

3.4.1 Cognitive perspectives

Hayes and Flower (1980) first introduced cognitive perspectives on writing in the early 1980s, later adapted by Berninger and Swanson (1994) to better suit the needs of younger writers (primary school age). The influence of cognitive psychology from the 1970s illustrated how writing develops from a product-orientated approach to a more process-orientated one (Hayes & Flower; Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987; Zimmerman & Risemberg, 1997).

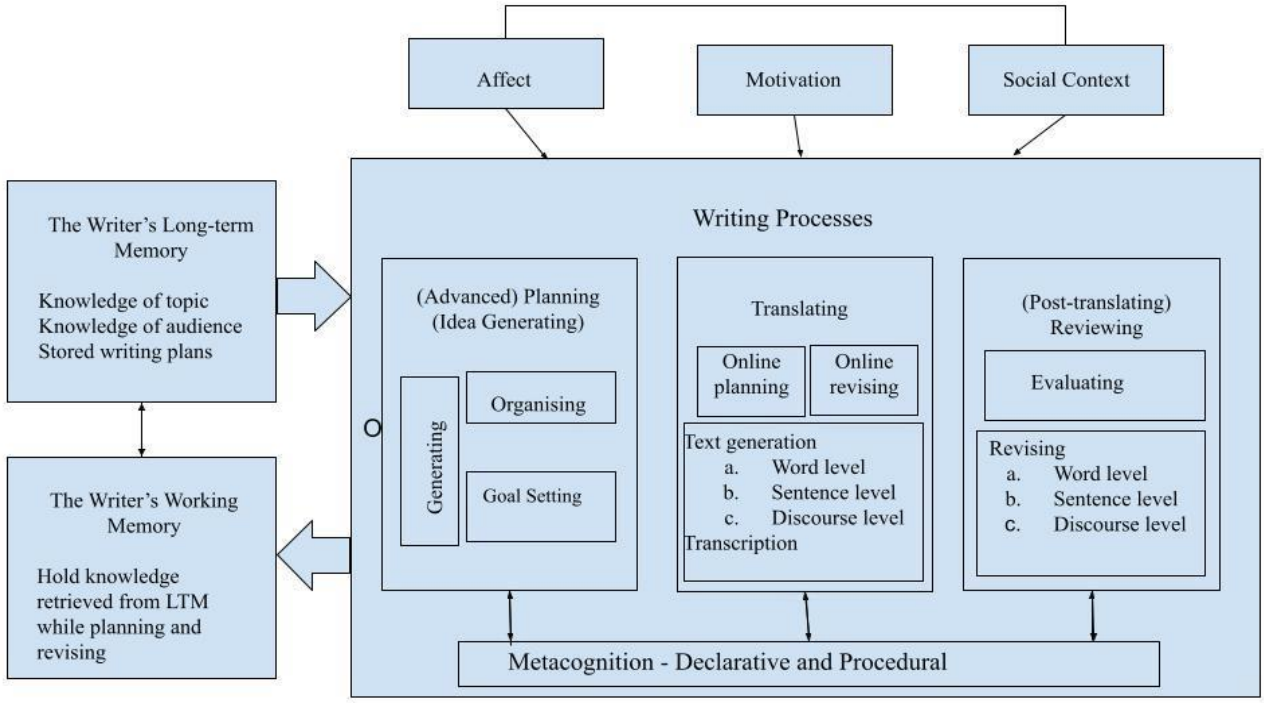
One of the significant studies that has contributed to knowledge of the cognitive demands of writing is from Hayes and Flower (1980), which illustrates the cognitive demands of writing and affective factors such as context and motivation. Initially, Hayes and Flower (1980) studied the mental processes of young adults, finding that the recursive processes of planning, translating, and reviewing occur in a writer's long-term memory within the task environment (Berninger et al., 1996). The seminal work of Hayes and Flower (1980) has significantly advanced the development of a cognitive writing model. This model has led to a deeper understanding of the specific demands of writing and how a writer's brain learns and adapts to these demands. The cognitive demands of writing as a process have been highlighted, revealing it to be a series of unique cognitive processes that writers coordinate while composing. These processes are organised hierarchically, with each process capable of being

nested within another, and are guided by the writer's evolving network of objectives, making composing a purposeful cognitive process. Writers establish their objectives in two fundamental ways: by creating overarching goals and corresponding sub-goals that reflect their developing sense of direction and occasionally by modifying primary goals or establishing entirely new ones based on insights gained during the writing process (Hayes & Flower, 1980).

This work influenced later theoretical models of writing, such as the Berninger and Swanson model (1994), which applied a cognitive perspective to children's writing, proposing some critical differences to Hayes and Flower (1980). This is presented in Figure 3.1, which illustrates the cognitive demands of writing and the role of a writer's long-term and working memory in engaging with the writing process. The rationale for the discussion of this research on the writing process is to illustrate how cognitive models have played a significant role in enhancing our understanding of writing performance, learning and development, individual differences, and instruction. Ongoing efforts in this field continue to contribute to our knowledge.

Figure 3.1

Cognitive Model of Children's Writing (Berninger & Swanson, 1994)



One of the most significant contributions of the Berninger and Swanson model (1994) to writing pedagogy was understanding cognitive load and the impact of writing on children's Long-Term Memory (LTM) and working memory. Long-term Memory is essential for knowledge of a topic. In contrast, the role of the writer's short-term memory is for organising information retrieved from the long-term memory, which, in terms of pedagogy, means that at primary level, children need explicit instruction in textual, sentence and word features if they do not have the capacity at cognitive level to attend to all three as they engage in the writing process (Flynn & Stainthorp, 2006). The model proposed by Berninger and Swanson in 1994 also accounts for the affective aspects of writing, such as motivation and the social context in which writing takes place. Although cognitive models have significantly contributed to our understanding of the writing processes in the young writer's brain, these models are not without limitations. As MacArthur and Graham (2016) emphasise, it is essential to integrate both social and cognitive perspectives in future research efforts to gain a

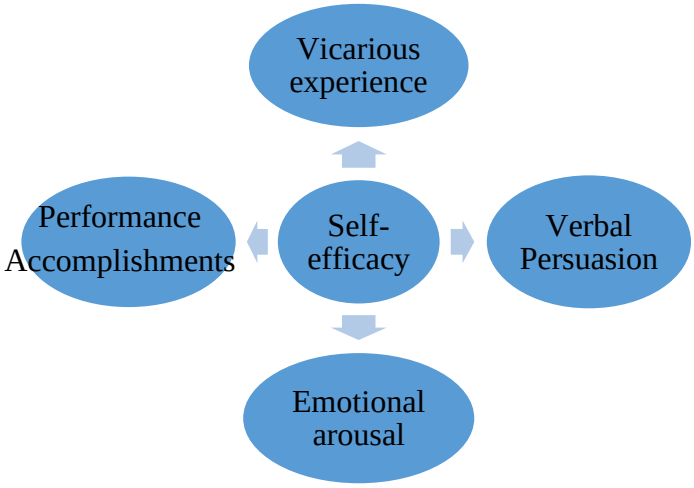
comprehensive understanding of writing and its development. From an educational standpoint, this involves recognising the role of teachers and supportive peers in providing feedback to children. Additionally, cognitive models fall short of fully considering broader affective influences, such as the environment, context, cultural, and social factors (MacArthur & Graham, 2016).

The contribution of affective dimensions, such as the classroom environment, is essential when delivering instruction in writing. The motivational factors of writing instruction, such as interest and choice, are also essential considerations because writing is presented as cognitively challenging (Berninger & Swanson, 1994), with more recent research documenting writing as motivationally challenging (Camacho et al., 2021). Camacho, Alves, and Boscolo (2021) investigated the relationship between motivation and writing performance. Through a systematic literature review, the authors identify the various ways in which motivation impacts writing performance. They conclude that pedagogical approaches such as Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SSRD) can significantly influence students' motivation and ability to write for real audiences and purposes. This intervention involves teaching students self-regulation skills, such as setting goals and monitoring progress, which can be applied independently. Additionally, the authors highlight the role of peers as collaborators and the value of peer feedback in enhancing motivation and writing performance.

Writing motivation is presented as a ‘multidimensional construct’ that includes aspects such as interest, the environment, and broader theories such as self-efficacy- a component of Bandura’s social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986; Pajares, 2003). Self-efficacy pertains to an individual's confidence in their capability to perform a task proficiently, encompassing various elements elaborated upon in this segment. In the context of this thesis, while writing is presented as cognitively challenging, self-efficacy plays a vital role in the writer's identity. Bandura’s Self-efficacy theory is “based on the principal assumption that psychological procedures, whatever their form, serve as means of creating and strengthening expectations of personal efficacy” (1977:193). In the context of primary school education in 2023, the term "writing accomplishments" refers to a writer's sense of proficiency in completing specific writing tasks. This is influenced by the role of teachers and peers in fostering writing skills and the opportunities for vicarious learning through observation of others performing writing tasks. The contribution of these factors to self-efficacy is illustrated in Figure 3.2

Figure 3.2

Bandura's theory of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977: 195)



Several factors have been identified as contributing to children's motivation for writing tasks, such as the ability to make choices, engage in activities that align with their interests, collaborate with others, face challenges, and connect with other classroom activities.

While choice has long been identified as a critical affective dimension of motivation and engagement (Pajares, 2003), interest also plays a vital role in motivating students to write. Interest is "a cognitive and affective motivational variable that is malleable and can be cultivated at any age" (Renninger & Hidi, 2020:12). According to Renninger and Hidi (2020), educational motivation is influenced by both situational interest, which pertains to environmental factors, and individual interest. Interest empowers individuals to demonstrate conscientiousness, perseverance, and resilience. This means that, in terms of this thesis, the importance of cultivating opportunities to write is driven by purpose and interest and acknowledging the social environment in which writing occurs.

In a study of interest development and writing tasks, Renninger and Hidi (2020) concluded that cultivating interest can enhance individuals' performance in tasks, activities, and assignments. According to Troia et al., (2012), interest is vital in providing pedagogical recommendations based on cognitive psychology for fostering interest. These recommendations include granting students the freedom to choose, using creative teaching

methods and assignments, connecting acquired knowledge to students' individual experiences, and utilising external rewards sparingly. These points are particularly relevant to this thesis as they are often lost when writing is driven by genre. In non-fiction writing genres, it is more challenging to facilitate choice in writing because topic knowledge is a crucial variable in writing performance in informational and persuasive texts, as is knowledge of genre or discourse knowledge (Olinghouse et al., 2015). Additionally, scholars in the field have emphasised the importance of an integrated approach to reading, writing, and language, which includes integrating reading and writing in meaningful and authentic contexts. The role of social and motivational elements in writing may lead to the evolution of genre beyond conventional forms, thereby challenging traditional notions of writing genres as they have been traditionally presented. This is explored in the section that follows.

3.4.2 Genre Theory

In this section, I give an overview of the origins of 'genre theory', its contribution to writing research and how it has been interpreted in the Irish context.

Historically, definitions of writing genre vary, similar to the writing process, with some earlier definitions of genre used to describe commonalities across structure, form and content (Chapman, 1999). Earlier definitions, such as 'The Sydney school' proponents in the 1980's define genre as:

> …genres have been characterised in this research tradition as staged, goal-oriented social processes: social since texts are always interactive events; goal-oriented in that a text unfolds towards its interactants' purposes; staged because it usually takes more than one step to reach the goal. In functional linguistics terms, this means that genres are defined as a recurrent configuration of meanings that enact the social practices of a culture. Such a social semiotic interpretation necessitates going beyond individual genres to consider how they relate to one another.
>
> (Rose, 2009: 154)

The discipline of genre study has made a noteworthy contribution to the corpus of research on writing. This is significant because it has highlighted the conventional emphasis on narrative and personal recounts in primary writing context when given the option to write about a topic. This has raised concerns about a deficiency in instruction in other writing genres (Martin, 1985; Rothery, 1996). Prior to a genre–study approach, a process approach (Clary & Mueller, 2021) to writing was dominant in the Australian context in which narrative

writing or ‘story’ writing was overly emphasised in schools with little time devoted to the teaching of non-fiction texts.

The process of identifying genres began in the 1980s when scholars identified the types of texts children were *required* to write at the primary level (Rose, 2012). Genre-based approaches include narrative, explanation, recount, report, and persuasive genres to embed language in a genre-based approach (Rose, 2008). The rationale for a genre approach is to teach explicitly both the structural and linguistic features of each genre. Including informational writing genres such as explanation, recount, report, and persuasive in writing pedagogy is essential as it identifies a range of genres children should be exposed to in the primary grades. For this study, genre refers to:

> ‘Genre’ refers to a selection of oral and written forms to recount, explain, entertain, inform, give instructions, narrate, persuade and justify opinions. Oral forms include but are not limited to, storytelling, drama, poetry, speeches, debates, film and digital media such as podcasts, videos, advertising, tv and radio broadcasts. More specifically, genres are multi-sentence oral or written texts that have become conventionalised for particular purposes. They have expected organisational patterns and language features related to register, e.g., narrative, informational, persuasive and multi-genre.
>
> (Primary Language Curriculum, 2019: 20)

The origins of genre theory date back to Australia in the 1980s (Martin, 2000; Martin & Rose, 2007). Australian genre theory has become synonymous with ‘genre theory’ with the terms used interchangeably. Scholars Martin (1985) and Rothery (1996) are credited with genre theory in what is referred to as the ‘Sydney School,’ The term ‘Sydney School’ was coined to acknowledge the work of linguists at the University of Sydney in developing genre theory (Martin, 1985). The background theory underpinning genre theory is informed by Halliday’s (1985) Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), an expansive and comprehensive theory that views language as a social process, offering a range of valuable tools for educational research. Notably, SFL acknowledges three meta-functions of language: the interpersonal function, which facilitates the establishment of relationships between individuals; the ideational function, which enables the interpretation of their perception of the world; and the textual function, which seamlessly integrates the interpersonal and ideational aspects to create meaningful discourse within a given context (Rose, 2016).

Historically, the influence of Bakhtin (1986) has been influential in understanding how language functions. Derewianka (2015) identifies how genre theory has contributed to the Australian primary writing context and notes the importance of genre theory in clarifying the

relationship between language choices and contexts. The writing genre approach was adopted in the Irish context in the mid-2000s (section 3.6.1). Section 3.5 addresses how writing is presented in the Primary Language Curriculum (2019).

3.5 Writing in the Primary Language Curriculum (2019)

Chapter One provided an overview of the policy context surrounding the Primary Language Curriculum (2015; 2019) and discussed the notable curricular transformation since 1999, including the main policy drivers and levers. The formulation of the Primary Language Curriculum (PLC) occurred in two phases, with the initial phase focusing on junior primary students (ages 5-8 years old) in 2015, followed by the subsequent phase for senior primary students (ages 8-12 years old) in 2018. This new English curriculum, the Primary Language Curriculum (2019), encompasses the domains of reading, writing, and oral language. From a writing perspective, two principal theories have influenced curricular design and pedagogical approaches to teaching writing in the Irish context. The first theory is the cognitive writing model (Hayes & Flower, 1980; Berninger & Swanson, 1994), which highlights the cognitive demands of writing and the affective dimensions, such as motivation and social context. The second influential theory of writing is, to some extent, Australian genre theory (Martin, 1985; Rothery, 1996) or rather a version of genre theory via the *First Steps* programme from Western Australia, which suggests the types of texts children should write at a primary level. In its initial conception, genre theory identified genres of writing that go beyond traditional narrative and recount. The pedagogical implications of this theory and the professional development of the *First Steps* programme have resulted in a genre approach to teaching writing, which requires teaching the structural and linguistic features of various genres.

The Primary Language Curriculum (PLC, 2019) is considerably extensive compared to other Anglophone countries. Specifically, from a writing perspective, the learning outcomes in the PLC are extensive. This is illustrated in Appendix A. The curriculum documents offer two essential definitions for text and genre.

For example, text in the Primary Language Curriculum (2019) is defined as:

> ‘all products of language use: oral, gesture, sign, written, Braille, visual, tactile, electronic and digital’ (2019: 20). Genre is also defined in broad terms as: ‘…a selection of oral and written forms in order to recount, explain, entertain, inform, give instructions, narrate,

> persuade and justify opinions. Oral forms include but are not limited to, storytelling, drama, poetry, speeches, debates, film, and digital media such as podcasts, videos, advertising, tv and radio broadcasts. More specifically, genres are types of multi-sentence oral or written texts that have become conventionalised for particular purposes. They have expected organisational patterns, as well as language features related to register, e.g., narrative, informational, persuasive, and multi-genre.'
>
> (PLC, 2019:20)

This definition encapsulates a wide definition of genre across its forms. However, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment commissioned non-statutory support materials to assist in implementing the PLC (2020), which promotes a workshop-based approach to writing instruction. This approach is exemplified in Figure 3.3.

Figure 3.3

Writing Genres as presented in the *Support Materials for Teachers* (2020:4)

Writing Genres
The teacher should plan approximately 6-8 weeks. Using the writing workshop as an instructional method, the key elements of a genre can be thought in mini lessons (see previous section on writing workshop)

Prior to the curriculum's implementation, the PDST recommended a structured genre-based approach, as shown in Figure 3. 4

Figure 3.4

Sample plan for implementation of a genre over a seven-week timeframe (2013: 35)

Sample plan for implementation of a genre over a seven week timeframe

Week 1:
- Familiarisation - showing the children lots of examples of this genre
- Discovery (direct model) - engaging in focussed talk and discussion, questioning, etc.
- Teacher models (teacher writes their own sample of that genre using their own ideas, not the children's)

Week 2:
- Familiarisation
- Discovery (analysing text) breaking down the text into its various subheadings, etc.
- Teacher models - highlighting the structure, the language features, grammar and so on.

Week 3:
- Modelled writing
- Shared writing-teacher writes the children's ideas

Week 4:
- Modelled writing
- Guided writing- using frameworks devised by teacher or the resource book

Week 5:
- Modelled writing
- Independent construction

Week 6:
- Modelled writing
- Independent construction
- to audience (reading it for different classes, hall display, school website, class book, parish newsletter, etc.)

Week 7:
- Independent construction
- Presentation to audience

It is challenging to determine the nature of writing pedagogy in primary classrooms without thoroughly evaluating the Primary Language Curriculum (2019) and its implementation by teachers. However, the Chief Inspector's Report from the Department of Education (DES, 2022) is essential for the most recent account on primary curricular pedagogy. This report, released every four years, compiles information from various Whole School Evaluations (WSEs) and unannounced school visits (DES, 2022) conducted in Ireland between September 2016 and December 2020. The report by the Chief Inspector in the Department of Education

(DES, 2022) provides insight into the teaching of writing at the primary level in Ireland over the past four years, which has summarised the findings of the teaching of writing as follows:

> Where a systematic and incremental whole-school approach to writing is followed, it supports pupils to develop writing skills progressively across a range of genres. The provision of constructive feedback and the enabling of pupils to revise their draft texts contributed significantly to the quality of published texts and was a feature of effective practice observed. Other features of good practice observed by inspectors included the enabling of pupils to engage in experiences such as shared writing and the Write a Book Project (Chief Inspector's Report, DES, 2022: 113)

Although the report broadly covers primary pedagogy, it also highlights certain aspects of writing pedagogy, such as the methods and approaches teachers use, that require attention.

This report suggests that incremental whole-school approaches to writing are favourable, as is the engagement with the writing process. Furthermore, whole school approaches have been highlighted from the Chief Inspector's report as positive when implementing a systematic approach to writing across genres from 'infants' (children aged five years old) to 'sixth class' (children aged twelve years old). Conversely, it has also been noted that:

> … Inspection findings also indicated that insufficient use was made of digital technology to facilitate both the revision and editing stages of the writing process
>
> (Chief Inspector's Report, DES, 2022: 113)

This perspective suggests a limited view of using digital tools in the writing process. It has been suggested that digital tools should be incorporated into the publishing phases of writing, utilising word processors and neglecting the multimodal nature of writing, encompassing podcasts, images, and videos to produce written content. Furthermore, the communicative function of writing is not adequately represented through the use of tools such as blogs, including writing, to socialise. This emphasis on traditional writing forms and primary genres results in an inadequate representation of micro-genres and a limited understanding of the wider application of writing across disciplines.

This section has presented how writing is presented in the Primary Language Curriculum (2019), with reference to Chief Inspector's Reports (DES, 2022) on pedagogical approaches to writing observed in primary schools. The following section discusses pedagogical approaches to writing.

3.6 Pedagogical Approaches to Writing

In this section, I critically examine the evolution of genre in the Irish context over the past two decades. By tracing the trajectory of how genre was introduced to schools in low-SES contexts, I explore the implications of a static view of writing genres. The following discourse pertains to examining a process-oriented approach to writing and its critique. This critique is contextualised within the Australian education system, where a historical tendency towards pedagogical trends and a propensity to look towards other Anglophone countries for inspiration in literacy have been observed (Clary & Mueller, 2022). This has led to a lack of focus on examining teachers' values and beliefs in the normative dimension of policy, which is a crucial aspect in the development of effective literacy practices.

3.6.1 Genre Approach in the Irish Context

Since 2005, writing genre theory has been crucial in informing writing pedagogy in low socioeconomic status (SES) contexts, alongside the process approach to teaching writing.

This was primarily because of implementing the *First Steps* programme in schools designated disadvantaged to improve literacy outcomes as part of the government's strategy on improving outcomes for literacy in schools designated disadvantaged under the Delivery Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) Action Plan (DES, 2005). *First Steps*

> is a literacy resource for teachers researched and developed in Western Australia. It comprises a range of literacy strands in Reading, Writing, Spelling, and Oral Language. It is designed for schools and jurisdictions looking for a practical resource to improve student literacy outcomes at primary level
>
> (Professional Development Services for Teachers, 2013).

The Department of Education and Science as chose First Steps as:

> part of the multi-faceted support provided for urban schools in Ireland designated as disadvantaged under the Delivery Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) Action Plan (DES, 2005). These schools are asked to nominate members of staff to train as *First Steps* tutors towards disseminating the practice throughout the school. The tutor attends a training course for which sub-cover is provided and receives these resources on training. Resources are supplied to the schools according to number of class teachers, and schools are asked to implement the three *First Steps* literacy resources in line with the objectives of the English Curriculum for Primary Schools. Ideally, the three tutors collaborate at school level to develop an integrated approach to the three strands.
>
> (PDST, 2013)

The selection of this programme is particularly notable due to the absence of any randomised control trials to assess its efficacy in the Irish context. Moreover, there is a lack of recognition for the expertise of teachers in implementing a genre approach, which is grounded in extensive research in genre theory. The salient point here is that genre theory has been an integral part of the Australian primary education system for several years (Jones & Derewianka, 2016). In contrast, genre theory was introduced into the Irish educational context without adequate consideration for the teachers' proficiency in the linguistic aspects of genre.

The linguistic features of genre are of great significance, as well as mode and tenor, as genre theory has its roots in the work of Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL, 1985). From my own professional experience, the Professional Development (PD) of *First Steps* did not attend to the linguistic features of genre but rather focused solely on its structural function, which is a cause for concern as the representation of genre is oversimplified.

The professional development of *First Steps* was delivered by the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST), a state-provided professional service that delivers professional development in Ireland. In their PD manual 'Writing Genre- A Structured Approach' (2013), writing genres were presented to include 'six main writing genres' as explained in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2

The Six Main Writing Genres

Genre	Features of each of these genres
Narrative	Narratives entertain and engage the reader in an imaginative experience. Narrative texts are organised according to setting and events leading to a problem and solution. The main features of narrative writing are defined characters, descriptive language, and past tense.
Recount	Recount tells the reader what happened, and this may involve the author's personal interpretation of events. There are different types of recounts including personal (my trip to the farm), factual (retelling an accident) and imaginative recounts (a day in the life of a puppy). Recount writing is organised by setting, events in chronological order and a concluding statement. The main features of recount writing are specific participants, action verbs and past tense
Report	Reports are written to describe or classify the way things are or seem to be. They organise and record information. Reports are organised by classification, description and summarising comment. The features of report

	writing are; generalised participants, impersonal objective language, timeless present tense and subject-specific vocabulary.
Procedure	Procedures are written to explain how something is done in a series of sequenced steps. They are organised by goal, material, method and evaluation. Features of procedural writing include detailed factual description, a reader referred to in a general way (draw a line), linking words to do with time, and tense is timeless.
Persuasive	Persuasive texts are written to argue or persuade. They promote the writer's point of view. Persuasive texts are organised with the proposition to be argued, arguments in logical order, and reiteration. The features of persuasive writing are generalised participants, passives to help text structure, linking words associated with reasoning, and nominalisation (actions become things), e.g. To pollute becomes pollution.
Explanation	Explanations are written to explain how something works or the process involved in actions, events or behaviour. E.g. How does a rainbow occur? Explanation texts are organised by: a definition or statement and a sequenced explanation. The features of explanation writing are non-human participants, cause and effect relationships, passives and timeless present-tense
Writing to socialise	Texts used to socialise help writers maintain or enhance relationships. These forms of writing can be formal or informal in tone, depending on the relationship between the writer and the audience. Different text forms used to socialise include apologies, thank you notes, invitations, greetings, notes and messages. The framework for this genre will vary depending on the form and topic but will include the orientation, body and prompt. Orientation: This will include a greeting, establish the purpose and may include the time and place. Body: The body of the text consists of the 'message', stating the details of communication. Prompt: This is often a call to action and involves instructions about what to do, e.g. RSVP. It may include how by when and where that information is to be passed on. If the prompt is not a call to action, it will most likely be a formal farewell, e.g. yours sincerely. Language features include: first and second-person pronouns (I, me, you), specific participants, questions or statements of inquiry, concise language, simple past tense, call to action, action verbs, signal words to show time, formal or informal tone and may include abbreviations or pictograms.

Table 3.2 shows the features of each of these six 'main' genres. In implementing a writing genre approach in the Irish context, schools were advised by the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) on the potential presence of writing genres across two academic years at a macro level, as depicted in Table 3.3. The PDST provided sample structures to show how writing genres could be incorporated throughout the school year emphasising explicit genre modelling and revision. A proposed model for how this may unfold over the

course of a school year is presented in Table 3.3, which highlights a cyclical approach to explicitly teaching genre with opportunities for revision at various points throughout the school year.

Table 3.3

Overview of sample First Steps writing plan

Year 1: Formal	***Revise***	**Year 2: Formal**	***Revise***
Recount	*Narrative*	Narrative	*Recount*
Explanation	*Procedural*	Procedural	*Explanation*
Report	*Persuasive (exposition)*	Persuasive (exposition)	*Report*

Note: This table illustrates a sample two-year framework for teaching genre throughout the primary school cycle from infant to senior classes. In year 1, formal, explicit teaching of three genres takes place with a revision of the genre previously covered and vice versa in year two.

This Western Australian approach to genre writing, conceptualized in the *First Steps* literacy program and introduced into DEIS primary schools in Ireland in 2005, was never trialled before its implementation, nor has it since been evaluated.

In a small-scale case study on the influence of the *First Steps* programme in Western Australia, Thwaite (2006) observes how writing genre 'in its original form did not aim to dictate the genres that should be used in schools, rather analyse what was there' (2006: 97). In Western Australia (WA), the approach taken to the implementation of Australian genre theory, specifically *First Steps*, according to Thwaite (2006: 98) 'have been very enthusiastically taken up, in particular the schematic structures or 'frameworks' of the genres.' However, Thwaite's critique of the model and particularly comments about writing genre in its original form lend to arguments about genre becoming more about *structure* rather than function. In its original conception, the rationale for a genre approach is explicitly teaching each genre's structural and linguistic features. Criticism has been levied against the genre approach in the Australian context, with some arguing that students are often taught the names and stages of a genre without first understanding its purpose. From a Bakhtinian perspective, genres are flexible models rather than fixed forms (Bakhtin, 1975). This emphasises the need for flexibility beyond mere macro-level presentations of genres. As

Christie (2013) notes, genre theorists do not invent genre but rather identify them through exhaustive lists. Therefore, it can be concluded that genres should not be viewed as prescriptive models of structured approaches in their original form.

Further critiques of this approach highlight that there is “little room for creativity and transgression" in a structured approach” (Janks, 2009: 132). Moreover, the potential of a critical literacy dimension of the writing genre is eroded when genres become more about *structure* rather than *function*. Luke (1996), when commenting on genre from a critical literacy perspective, asserts that:

> A salient criticism of the genre model is that its emphasis on the direct transmission of text types does not necessarily lead on to a critical reappraisal of that disciplinary corpus, its field or its related institutions, but rather may lend itself to an uncritical reproduction of discipline. (Luke, 1996:314)

Former children's laureate in the United Kingdom Michael Rosen also offers a critical perspective on the genre approach in the English context. In his blog post titled *'How Genre Theory Saved the World*?' Rosen (2013) raises concerns regarding genre theory within the English primary education system. He particularly questions its prescriptive nature and the effectiveness of studying specific genres like Recount and Persuasive through designated units of study. Indeed, Rosen's salient observation regarding genre and power is particularly relevant to the Irish context. Specifically, he posits that genre theory serves to aid children's comprehension of genre and broader messages pertaining to power dynamics. It is worth noting that more than a decade has passed since the implementation of 'genre-based' approaches. The implications of Rosen's insightful observations extend to the Irish curriculum, particularly in how 'genres' are perceived and taught by primary school teachers. Furthermore, the placement of 'genres' within 'units of study' raises pedagogical implications in how professional development programs focused on the structural rather than the linguistic aspects. Although *First Steps* is a research-driven methodology rooted in genre theory (1980), its execution in the Irish context has been difficult. Specifically, there have been issues with how the programme was interpreted and implemented during its rollout by the PDST. The current portrayal of genres in Ireland is overly simplistic, which suggests shortcomings in professional development and raises questions about the extent to which programmes are truly geared towards enhancing teachers' pedagogical content knowledge. Moreover, as Guskey and Yoon (2009) argue:

> the implementation of any new professional development strategy should always begin with small scale, carefully controlled, pilot studies designed to educators at all levels who need just-in-time, job-embedded assistance as they struggle to adapt new curricula and new instructional practices to their unique classroom contexts to test its effectiveness. Before embracing any new strategy or committing large amounts of time, money, and other resources to any new approach, that new strategy should be carefully examined in that context to determine if the promised effects in terms of student learning gains can be realized
>
> (Guskey & Suk Yoon, 2009: 498)

The necessity for rigorous trials, whether in the form of randomized controlled trials or alternative methods, is evident to assess the efficacy of the program and to determine its suitability for implementation. It is essential to acknowledge the importance of teacher expertise in linguistic features, which would require significant investment in professional development. Ireland, unlike Australia, does not possess a long-standing tradition of genre theory, making the need for comprehensive professional development even more crucial. Furthermore, a well-considered policy approach should have addressed the shortcomings in low SES schools before hastily implementing an unfamiliar programme.

The implementation of the First Steps programme shares similarities with other primary-level initiatives or 'solutions' that have been introduced over the past few decades. Due to the influence of the Anglo-American zone, there appears to be a tendency to import strategies without engaging in any debate or initial trial of their effectiveness in the Irish context. For instance, interventions like Reading Recovery (Clay, 1993) have been imported at a policy level without proper evaluation in Ireland. As a result, professional development primarily focuses on specific initiatives, such as Reading Recovery (Clay, 1993) and *First Steps* (2013), rather than encompassing a broader approach to literacy pedagogy. The idea could be put forward that Ireland places increased emphasis on testing and accountability for test results while simultaneously demonstrating a dearth of accountability for implementing programmes or initiatives, particularly those that have not been subject to review in the Irish context. This absence of programme evaluation is a source of concern, as it may result in a patchwork of pedagogical approaches that lack a comprehension of their origins. This situation can be likened to Chesterton's Fence, a quote from the British author G.K. Chesterton (1929) utilised in public policy to describe instances where things are dismantled without first understanding the reasons for their establishment. While it is essential to explore genre theory, which contributes to the comprehension of writing beyond conventional recount and narrative

forms, it is also critical for educators to remain abreast of the latest research in their field rather than relying solely on programmes.

In the non-statutory curriculum documents to support the Primary language curriculum (2020), the pedagogical approach advocated for is a 'genre' approach utilising a writers' workshop approach. This is illustrated in Figure 3.5, which shows how the implementation of a genre approach is recommended in the *Support Materials for Teachers*, which advises teaching a genre for 6-8 weeks using a workshop approach (2020:24)

Figure 3.5

Support materials for teachers in PLC (Fortune, 2020:24).

Writing Genres
The teacher should plan approximately 6-8 weeks. Using the writing workshop as an instructional method, the key elements of a genre can be thought in mini lessons (see previous section on writing workshop)

The inadequacy and flawed nature of the portrayal of specific writing genres and their implementation within designated timeframes or 'units of study' in non-compulsory educational resources, such as curriculum documents, supplementary materials, and instructor training manuals, can be discerned. Moreover, the presentation of writing instruction that explicitly teaches a genre using a process-oriented strategy over a duration of weeks is problematic because it isolates writing within the subject of English instead of examining how these genres function across the entire curriculum. The writers' workshop approach is built on 'explicit instruction' via teacher-led mini-lessons that serve as models. In this 'top-down' approach, while motivation and involvement (Camacho et al., 2021) are crucial factors, the contextualised nature of the writing becomes confined to a genre rather than a contextually meaningful activity (Beach et al., 2017). In this approach, the focus of writing is determined by genre rather than intent. This section has discussed the conceptualisation of genre in the Irish context, encompassing its origins and the conflicting portrayals thereof in professional development and non-statutory curriculum documents.

The next section explores a process-oriented approach to writing in addition to the genre approach mentioned earlier.

3.6.2 Process Approach

The process approach to writing has dominated the Anglophone world since the 1970s (Applebee, 1986; Graham & Sandmel, 2011). The writing process is difficult to define, as research from the US indicates differences in how teachers define and implement a process approach to writing (Troia et al., 2011), with teachers' beliefs and values contributing factors to how they teach writing. This is echoed by Graham et al. (2011), who, in a review of the literature, observes that while there is no agreed definition of the writing process, the processes of drafting, editing, and revising are all central to the process, as are conferencing and direct instruction. The absence of a mutually agreed-upon definition hampers the ability to accurately trace the extent to which a process approach has been implemented. For the purposes of this thesis, I will define the writing process as outlined in the Primary Language Curriculum (2015;2019) curriculum which is:

> The writing process involves the teacher explicitly teaching children how to work and learn actively as writers. Steps in the writing process include: • plan for writing by selecting topics and ideas with minimal help • compose text using appropriate text organisational structure • re-read text written to check it makes sense and meets its purpose • edit and modify the text by rewriting to add or delete details to clarify meaning • edit written work further in response to feedback from others. (2019: 59)

Historically, references to writing as a process in the Anglophone world emerged in the late '60s and early '70s (Emig, 1971; Elbow, 1987), it being advocated later by scholars Murray and Graves (1983;1994), who are seen as pioneers of the writing process. Before introducing the process approach, writing was taught in a more product-orientated approach (Matsuda, 2003), emphasising instruction at sentence and paragraph levels. The process approach is dominant across the Anglophone world. It is currently seen in curricula in the United States (Common Core State Standards, 2010), Australia (Australian Primary Curriculum 2022), Ireland (Primary Language Curriculum, 2019), and in devolved education systems in the United Kingdom (Department for Education, 2014).

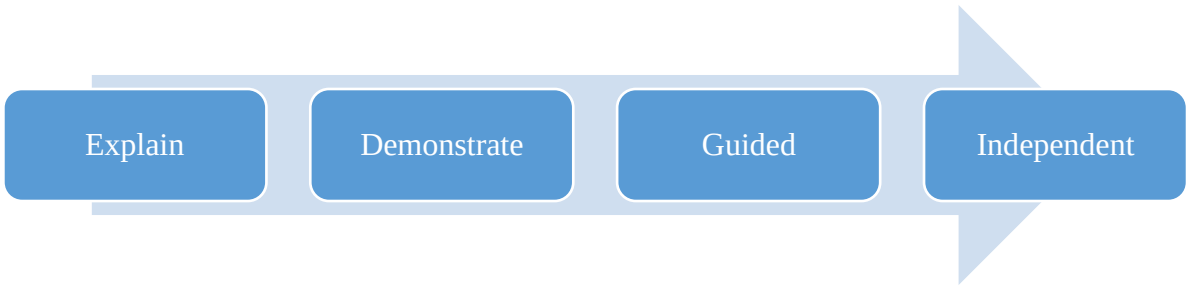
In Ireland, the process approach to writing informed writing pedagogy in the 1999 English Curriculum documents (DES, 1999). It is also the recommended approach in the non-

statutory curriculum documents developed to support the new curriculum (PLC, 2020), in which a process approach to teaching ‘six main genres’ (NCCA, 2020) is advocated. More specifically, the support materials (2020) recommend the use of a writers’ workshop, an instructional model for the teaching of writing (Avery, 1993; Calkins, 1994; Graves, 1994; Rotuman, 1996; Honeycutt & Pritchard, 2005). This is also endorsed by the Professional Development Service for Teachers (2023, 2022). The writers’ workshop approach involves the teacher explicitly modelling, children writing for extended periods, scaffolded by the teacher and opportunities to share utilising a ‘gradual release of responsibility’ (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983) as a methodology to model aspects of writing such as craft (how real writers write), as well as the conventions of writing (spelling, punctuation, grammar).

This is illustrated in Figure 3.4 below which shows a gradual release of responsibility across each of its components.

Figure 3.6

Gradual Release of Responsibility (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983)



The gradual release methodology, introduced in the 1980s, operates on the principle that teachers should model what they want their students to learn using a mentor text, a high-quality piece of children's literature, during the 'Explain' portion of the lesson. The drafting process is heavily reliant on the explicit modelling of writing techniques. A brief 10-12 minute 'mini lesson' is given during a writing lesson to explain the craft of writing.

In the demonstration part of the lesson, the teacher openly discusses the specific technique and how the author incorporates it. The children then work in small groups or pairs to apply this technique and create their own examples. Afterwards, there is an independent application where the children are encouraged to try implementing the technique themselves. Teachers are advised to record these examples on anchor charts, which are then displayed in the classroom for the children to see. During the independent lesson stage, teachers participate in

an Assessment for Learning (AfL) strategy known as conferencing. This strategy involves 80% of pupil and 20% teacher talk, focusing on their writing. The teachers also take anecdotal notes on individual children's progress, informing their teaching, learning, and planning.

Camacho et al. (2021) have emphasised the importance of feedback in the writing process, which gives children a sense of self-efficacy and where the broader affective dimensions of motivation and engagement are embedded. A 'Share session' at the end of the lesson allows children to share their work with others to develop a sense of audience.

3.6.3 Critique of process approach

A writers' workshop approach is the recommended approach in the primary toolkit support materials for teachers (PLC, 2020) and across other support materials from the professional development service (PDST, 2022). While research has indicated that a process approach to the teaching of writing is most favourable to allow children to engage with the processes of translating, revising, and redrafting a single piece over an extended period of time (Graham & Sandmel, 2011; Monteith, 1991; Scannella, 1982), the process approach is not without limitations. A comprehensive analysis of the process writing approach, as conducted by Graham and Sandmel (2011), has revealed that this method is preferred, yet it may necessitate experimentation. This may involve incorporating additional writing techniques, such as inquiry-based approaches, as well as merging conventional skills with sentence combination. Additionally, it is essential for children to have the opportunity to write about subject matter from various content areas, that is, throughout the entire curriculum (Bangert-Drowns, 2004; Hochman & Wexler, 2017).

Historically, critics of the process approach (Dressman, 1993: McCarthey (1994) have put forward arguments that the approach is overly focused on the individual and does not consider the broader "social, cultural, and authority dynamics involved in pedagogy and classroom interaction" (Scarbrough & Allen, 2014: 476). Moreover, as stated by Scarbrough and Allan (2014):

> a pedagogy built around giving students freedom over how they reveal themselves in writing does not adequately account for how strongly the classroom writing environment is mediated by, among other things, teacher norms for acceptable writing (McCarthey, 1994) and social relations among students that are inflected by social status, race, and gender.

This is echoed by Clary and Mueller (2021) in the Australian context, where a process approach was implemented without assessing teachers' expertise in the technicalities of the English language. Furthermore, as pointed out by Connors (2000), there is a lack of guidance in sentence-level exercises and the attention given to syntax in a process approach. Subsequent studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of sentence-level instruction in enhancing writing skills (Graham & Perin, 2007; Saddler & Graham, 2005). Recent research emphasises the need for more explicit instruction at sentence level and highlights the significance of curricular content in writing instruction (Hochman & Wexler, 2017). In their literature review on the process approach, scholars Graham and Sandmel (2011) recommend further investigation into practices like inquiry-learning within the process approach. The next section will explore how writing pedagogy needs to be reconceptualised for 21st-century contexts after having delineated pedagogical approaches that encompass genre-based approaches and process approaches.

3.7 Reconceptualising Writing for 21st-century Contexts

This section serves multiple purposes. It begins by discussing what writing means in a 21st-century primary school context. It then draws on a theoretical writing framework encompassing sociocultural and cognitive perspectives, known as the 'Writers within Communities' (WWC) model (Graham, 2018). This section explores evidence-based approaches to writing at primary level, concisely discussing essential elements to be incorporated into primary pedagogy. Additionally, this section critically summarises the research on the connections between reading and writing. It puts forward the latest advancements in genre theory and the utilisation of 21st-century tools in the writing process.

Twenty-first-century competencies are, in many ways, challenging to define. For this study, I draw on the work of the 'Partnership for 21-century Learning' known as P21, a not-for-profit organisation that, together with educators, academics, and business leaders, has defined 21st-century learning as critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity (Framework for 21st Century Learning, 2016). As put forward by Mirra and Garcia (2020: 464), the 21st century:

> sits alongside the *Renaissance* and the *Dark Ages* as a label that connotes much more than a chronological era; the 21st century exudes specific cultural resonances that far outweigh the mere passage of time.

In the context of this thesis, I take this to mean how the increase and consequent demands created by technological changes generate a more expansive view of what being literate means (Yelland, 2018), with broader definitions of literacy and what it means to be literate needed to meet these changes. Thus, it requires embracing a more contemporary perspective on writing; the process of composing and producing written work must be reimagined in primary school settings, given that digital tools have been shown to support literacy (Marsh et al., 2017). Furthermore, as put forward by Mondada & Svinhufvud, a focus on the 'production' of writing and not just on the final product makes for a "rediscovery of writing as a situated, dynamic, productive activity" (2016:3), which may require emphasising the communicative function of writing beyond its traditional forms.

This is important in primary writing pedagogy because it situates writing in a purposeful, meaningful activity with access to tools that allow multimodal compositions. The inclusion of more recent writing technology is welcome as it acknowledges the role of these tools in multimodal compositions. The New London Group (1996), which has advocated for a 'pedagogy of multiliteracies' for over thirty years, has documented the emergence of new communication practices, specifically new literacies. The inclusion of literacies and new literacies extends the view of literacy as requiring new literacies to meet the demands of the rapid change internet has brought (Street & Street 1995; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Lankshear & Knoebel, 2000; Leu et al., 2016). Growing from this is the need for a pedagogy of multiliteracies, which in many ways redefines perspectives on writing and acknowledges writing as composing and production using digital technologies. A pedagogy of multiliteracies acknowledges the significance of expanding traditional forms of reading and writing to encompass a plethora of communication modes, such as visual, aural, gestural, and spatial literacies. This approach is particularly relevant for the present study, as it underscores the need to emphasise the creation and comprehension of text in various forms.

For example, writing across modes, the multimodal dimension of writing, and the production of writing includes visual, digital, semiotic, and critical elements and, consequently, a deliberate choice in creating meaning (Jocius, 2018). A discussion of a suitable model is

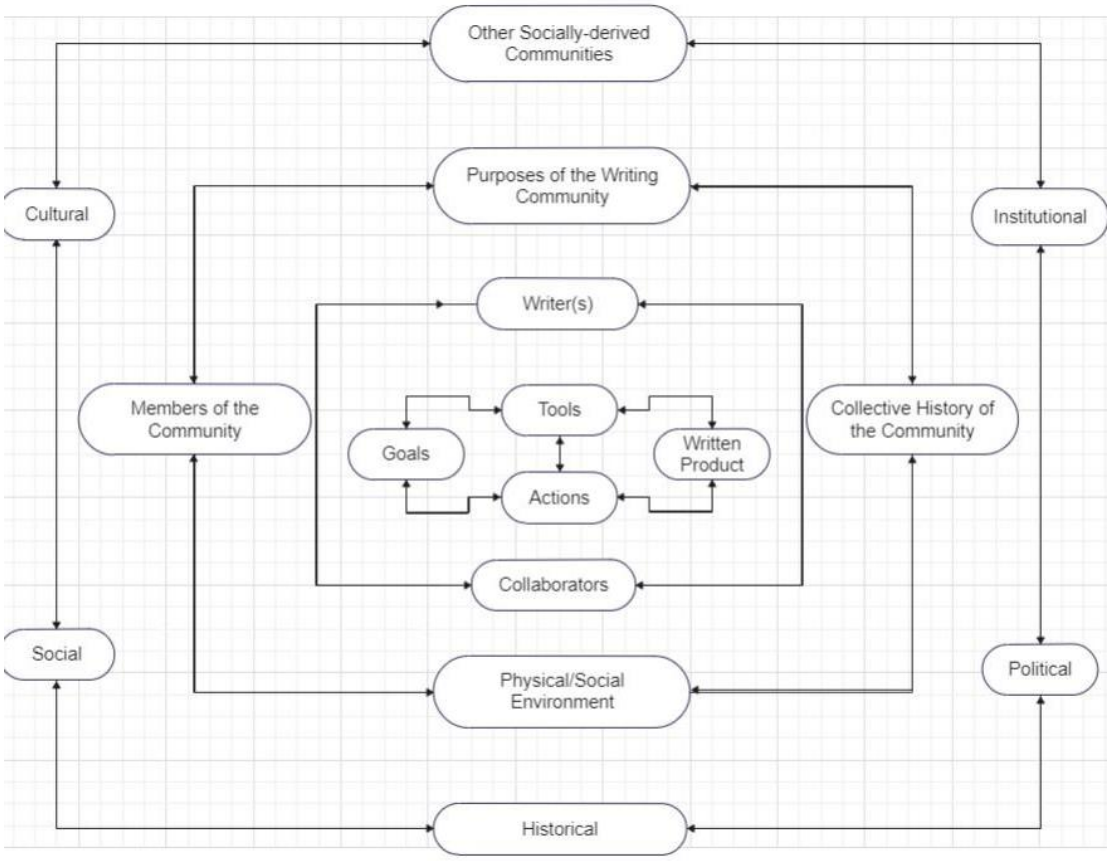
necessary to explain how writing can be reconceptualised for contexts in the 21st century. The following section draws on a ‘Writers within Communities’ model incorporating cognitive and sociocultural perspectives on writing.

3.7.1 ‘Writers within Communities’

More recent models of writing, for example, the 'Writers within Communities' (WWC) model (Graham, 2018), conceptualise both sociocultural and cognitive perspectives. As indicated previously in section 3.4.1, some of the limitations of cognitive perspectives, such as those discussed by Berninger and Swanson (1994) and Hayes & Flower (1980), are that they do not adequately consider broader emotional influences, including the surroundings, circumstances, cultural, and societal aspects (Graham & MacArthur, 2016). This is important because writing is positioned within physical and social contexts. The social environment encompasses the writer and collaborators, such as the audience or readers, who play a significant role in the social aspect of writing (Graham, 2018). This is illustrated in Figure 3.7.

Figure 3.7

Writers Within Communities Model (Graham, 2018).



Graham's theoretical framework encompasses the interplay between social, cultural, and environmental factors in the context of writing. Its relevance to this thesis lies in its transcending conventional cognitive models by integrating the social dimension and encompassing a broader perspective that includes the environment in which writing occurs, the importance of the writing community and the tools at one's disposal in the writing community. Additionally, it recognises the significance of the writing community's purpose and the writer's identity as a community member, thereby acknowledging the wealth of knowledge, or funds of knowledge, that children bring to the educational setting (Graham, 2018; Moll, 2019).

Within the writing environment, individuals such as teachers, collaborators, and more experienced peers play a crucial role as writing community members. As Graham points out, by engaging within a community of writers, the writer develops their writer identity, thus learning about the audience and the purpose for which the writing is composed. Furthermore, they acquire a comprehensive understanding of how the writing community operates, including working with others and gaining knowledge on using specific tools for writing (Graham, 2018).

As students engage in a writing community, they typically develop one or more writer identities and gain a deeper understanding of their target audiences and the purposes for writing, including goals, norms, values, and stances. They also acquire typical behaviours or routines for completing writing tasks, improve their proficiency using specific writing tools, and learn to collaborate effectively with others on writing projects.

In addition, this model encompasses the political, cultural, and social aspects of writing that have been disregarded in cognitive models of writing, effectively merging the cognitive and contextual aspects of writing. Including the cultural dimension is most welcome as it is crucial to adopt culturally responsive and relevant approaches that value marginalised or underrepresented groups, their voices, identities, perspectives and culture (Kelly et al., 2020). It is imperative to create an inclusive environment in which the cultural viewpoints of children are taken into account including opportunities for them to write in their native languages while being cognisant of linguistic diversity and drawing upon storytelling traditions.

Furthermore, by incorporating the concept of the "collective history of the community," the model recognises the valuable funds of knowledge and funds of identity (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014) and the resources that children bring to school. Funds of knowledge are defined as “the historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual help, individual functioning and well-being” (Moll et al., 2001: 133). In terms of the teaching of primary English this means that children can share their personal experiences and narratives when teachers utilise culturally responsive teaching methods that embrace their linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Maitra, 2017). This inclusive approach to education aligns with the pedagogy of multiliteracies proposed by the New London Group (Cazden et al., 1996), which recognises the importance of cultural and linguistic diversity and various forms of communication. The significance of recognising the social aspect of writing is paramount within the sociocultural framework of "being writers or becoming writers" as expounded by Beach et al. (2016). This acknowledgement underscores the inherent social aspect of communication, as the sociocultural dimension of contextualised writing offers a significant context for the act of writing. Further investigation is necessary to determine the validity of Graham's WWC model in accurately explaining the dynamics of writing across diverse communities. To evaluate this model, it is important to note that it primarily focuses on writing as a written product without fully considering the production or composition dimension of writing. In the following section, the multimodal nature of

composition is explored, with a particular focus on how incorporating various modes of communication can improve the writing process. The next section will also address how expanding genres beyond their traditional forms can help embrace the multimodal dimension of writing.

3.7.2 Embracing the multimodal

Multimodal composition at a broad level involves integrating visual, digital, audio, and textual elements to create meaning. Additionally, the sociocultural aspect of writing must be considered, as the sociocultural aspect encompasses the relationships between individuals and the construction and reconstruction of meaning through social practices (Barton & Hamilton, 2001). The relationship with text is contingent upon interactions with other texts. According to Flint et al. (2020), incorporating multiple sources, such as popular culture and artefacts, empowers the writer to produce a new text, including images and sounds, that are connected and related to other texts (Flint et al., 2020: 241).

Hartman (1995) posited the concept of 'intertextuality' to elucidate the association or interconnectedness among various texts. For example, as readers and writers, we carry with us the prior knowledge of texts to the reading, writing, and composition of fresh texts and within this our relationship with others.

Ethnographers in the field such as Dyson (2018), emphasises the sociocultural aspect of writing, revealing connections between children's engagement in popular culture and their use of symbolic tools, like drawing, writing, and verbal communication. These connections are frequently observed in the relationships children have with their peers and the local childhood cultures to which they belong. Dyson (2020) also discusses the challenges of children's real writing particularly when writing is driven by a mandated curriculum with few opportunities to write in 'real' contexts or real writing purporting how ""Real" composing should not be simply an exercise—a fake practice" (2020: 125). This, sociocultural dimension is important for this thesis as writing in the Irish context, while approaches and methodologies are not mandated in the curriculum, teachers' pedagogical approaches have been informed by rigid structures and approaches. Leaning into more meaningful contexts in which writing is driven by its purpose and providing opportunities to write across the curriculum can be supported by this. This may also require a reframing of digital tools as

implements of production to reimagine the digital dimension of writing beyond the editing and publishing phase of the writing process. Incorporating micro-genres and utilising digital tools to adapt genres to the twenty-first-century context may require thoughtful reconsideration. This is discussed in the following section, in which expanding genres and their purposes are addressed.

3.7.4 Expanding Genres: Purpose

As discussed in section 3.5.2, writing genre in the Irish primary school context is situated at macro-level and includes the 'six' genres of narrative, recount, report, persuasive, explanation, and procedure. In the field of genre studies, Derewianka & Jones (2016), have identified limitations of this view of the 'six' genres at macro-level in the Australian context and purport how:

> Many teachers have not had opportunities to keep up with developments in genre theory, such as microgenres, the identification of phases and subgenres, and their application to multimodal and digital contexts. One outcome of this has been the reification of the prototypical genres as 'text types' that drive the pedagogy (rather than purpose and curriculum context) and where genre stages are taught as structures to be rigidly reproduced (2016:14).

There are parallels to be drawn with this and the Irish context where teachers in Ireland have not had opportunities to develop knowledge of writing beyond the so-called 'six' main writing genres.

In the Australian context, scholars have continued to research students' writing across the curriculum and have identified genre and associated sub-types beyond the more traditional view (Rose, 2006; Derewianka & Jones, 2012). An example of sub-genres and their purposes is shown in Table 3.4. The relevance of this to the Irish context is that it allows for a consideration of broader versions or notions of genres and intertextuality that exists within these genres. This table illustrates text type, associated genres within each text type and provides an overall purpose of their use.

Table 3.4

Genres in the school curriculum (Derewianka and Jones, 2012; Rose, 2006:186)

Text Type	**genre**	**Purpose**
Stories	*recount* *narrative* *exemplum* *anecdote*	Recounting events Resolving a complication in a story Judging character or behaviour in a story Sharing an emotional reaction to a story
Text response	*personal response* *review* *interpretation* *critical response*	reacting emotionally to a text evaluating a literary, visual or musical text interpreting the message of a text challenging the news of a text
Arguments	*exposition* *discussion*	arguing for a point of view discussing two or more points of view
Factual stories	*autobiographical recount* *biographical recount* *historical recount* *historical account*	recounting life events recounting life stages recounting historical events explaining historical events
Explanations	*sequential explanation* *factorial explanation* *consequential explanation*	explaining a sequence explaining multiple causes explaining multiple effects
Reports	*descriptive report* *classifying report* *compositional report*	Classifying & describing a phenomenon Classifying and explaining types of phenomena Describing parts of wholes
Procedures	*procedure* *procedural recount*	How to do experiments & observations Recounting experiments & observations
Recounts	*Personal recount* *Autobiography* *Empathetic biography* *Memoir* *Biography* *Historical recount* *Historical account* *Literary recount*	To tell what happened

The contribution of this to knowledge about writing is how writing can be comprised of a variety of genres. For example, linguists in the field who consider inter-related genres allude to how “in many social interactions, narratives, explanations, or procedures rarely stand alone; social activities tend to precede and follow these elemental genres” (Muntigl, 2006: 234). This highlights the intertextuality (Hartman, 1995) that is present in the interconnectedness of texts. In the Australian context, interrelated genres with more than one purpose have been identified by Jones and Derewianka (2016), who note that within a thematic unit of study there exists a number of sub-genres. Table 3.5 presents an example of

embedded genres in non-fiction contexts, where the writing is guided by a specific purpose rather than the macro-genre alone. This table employs an interdisciplinary thematic approach from a historical context to demonstrate how engaging in inquiry-based approaches within a discipline can lead to engagement with various sub or micro-genres, offering opportunities to employ different modes, such as audio and visual, while fostering critical literacy skills (Luke, 2018).

Table 3. 5

Macro genre in upper primary school: A depiction of inter-related genres in a unit of study using the overarching question on European exploration in the "New world".

What happened to indigenous populations in the '*New World'* after the European explorers arrived?

Sub-topic focus	**Embedded genres**	**Modes and lens**
European explorers	Factual explanation	Maps and timelines (modes)
The New World	Historical report	Maps and timelines
The impact on native American tribes	Historical recount/autobiographies/biographies	Critical lens: Identifying dominant discourses
Stories of individuals (native American/ European explorers)	Persuasive /Argument or debate	Critical lens: Dominant discourses- Whose voices are silenced/missing? (lens)
Exploration or colonisation	Persuasive /Argument or debate	Impact on the landscape/population growth

The contribution of micro-level genre is essential in making distinctions between genres and how the linguistic features work together in making meaning within a text that goes beyond the boundaries of a specific 'genre.' The implications for practice for this in the Irish context is to consider the demands of writing across the curriculum, which requires writing in a variety of genres when engaging with inquiry approaches in social studies. Furthermore, as in the Australian context, a more up-to-date review of text types at the primary level beyond the main 'six' is required so teachers can keep up to date with sub-types of genres.

It is also essential to consider how writing is integrated into the curriculum. For instance, inquiry-based methods and exposure to texts in various formats, such as multimodal and oral genres like podcasts, should be considered (Callow, 2013).

The portrayal of writing as a static entity through mono-representations of genre reinforces the idea of immobility. Furthermore, this oversimplification neglects micro-genres, genres that do not fit into a traditional 'one or the other' type (Derewianka, 2016). The next section examines evidence-based practices and the relationship between reading, writing, and language, this being the interconnectedness of these three stands.

3.7.2 Evidence-based practices

As Chapter One indicated, few large-scale studies across the Anglophone world indicate *how* writing is taught at primary level (de Abreu Malpique et al., 2022; Dockrell et al., 2016; Parr & Jesson, 2015). The canon of research on pedagogical approaches to teaching writing is vast, with research-based evidence to support specific practices. By reviewing evidence-based educational practices in the United States, Troia et al. (2013) identify several pedagogical practices to support writing with a solid evidence base. These are summarised in Table 3. 6 with a discussion below. The purpose of this study is to examine pedagogical approaches with a strong evidence base in the Irish context, in order to understand how a variety of approaches, rather than relying on one or two specific methods, can be beneficial.

Table 3.6

Evidence-based Pedagogical Approaches. Adapted from Troia and Olinghouse (2013: 349).

What is this column?	Evidence
Sustained writing time	Strong
Free writing	Strong
Process Writing Instruction: An instructional approach with a focus on writing processes that involve: 1. writing for real/authentic/multiple purposes and audiences (e.g., other than teacher). 2. engaging in cycles of planning, translating, reviewing, and 3. Personal responsibility and ownership of writing projects (e.g., student choice and student-directed decision-making).	Strong
Comprehensive Writing Instruction: An instructional approach focusing on the writing process plus strategy instruction, skill instruction, and/or text structure instruction.	Strong
Strategy Instruction: An instructional approach in which students are explicitly and systematically taught (through modelling and guided	Strong

practice with feedback) one or more strategies for planning, drafting, revising, and/or editing text with the goal of independent strategy usage.	
Teaching Prewriting/Planning/Drafting: Teach using activities (e.g., using graphic organisers, brainstorming ideas, strategies) that are designed to help students generate and/or organise ideas prior to writing and/or writing a first draft that later will be reworked	Strong
Creativity/Imagery Instruction: Teach students to use visual images or other means to enhance creativity in writing	Strong
Text Structure Instruction: Teach students how different types of texts are structured and formed. Utilising Text Models: Students read and analyse examples of one or more texts in order to recognise and emulate the patterns or forms in these examples in their own writing.	Strong

As highlighted in the table above, time is a crucial variable with strong supporting evidence that opportunities to write for extended periods of time is important when engaging in writing. This is an important observation for the purposes of this thesis as past professional development in writing instruction had recommended an once a week approach (PDST, 2013) and as illustrated in Appendix G. Pioneers of the 'writers' workshop' approach in the late 80s, early 90s, Murray (1989); Graves (1994), maintained that children should write on at least four days out of five (Graves, 1994: 104). The rationale for this is that children need time to think through the medium of writing. Later, scholars such as Graham (2015) suggested that there is no evidence to suggest a *specific* timeframe that should be given to the teaching of writing but rather that children should have opportunities to write for extended periods of time. Similarly, the '*What Works Clearinghouse'* (2012; 2018) recommended that 60 minutes per day should be devoted to writing. Nevertheless, what *can* be concluded from the evidence base is that while there is no *optimal* number of minutes for children to engage in writing, the view from research and policy documents is that children need to have the opportunity to write regularly, for extended periods. This involves spending time revising and redrafting single pieces of writing.

Further to the practices discussed, Camacho, Alves & Boscolo (2021) have identified how affective dimensions such as motivation and engagement contribute to writing instruction, the key issue for this thesis is the crucial role of choice in selecting topics to write about. Broader theories of motivation, for example, Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy, plays an integral part in understanding how a writer's identity and 'belief' in one's ability as a writer is

central to the task. The following section highlights the important connections between reading, writing and oral language.

3.7.5 Integration: The reading-writing-oral language connection

A potential disadvantage in teaching across various subjects or topics is that writing may become disconnected from practical application and devoid of context while reading and oral language are overlooked. The Primary Language Curriculum (2019) comprises three core strands: reading, writing, and oral language. This section presents a concise overview of research demonstrating the interdependent relationship between these components.

Scholars of writing advocate for a more integrated approach to the science of reading and writing (Graham, 2020). The reciprocal and mutually reinforcing relationship between reading and writing has been extensively documented in the literature (Shanahan & Fitzgerald, 2000; Graham & Herbert, 2011; Barrs, 2000). This relationship has also been emphasised more recently in England (Taylor & Clarke, 2021) and Australia by the Centre for Independent Studies (Carey & Mueller, 2021). Given the focus of this thesis, it is crucial to recognise and understand the interdependent nature of these three strands.

In a systematic review of the reading-writing connection, Jouhar and Rupley (2021) presented evidence that substantiates the reading-writing connection, showing definitive evidence of the influence of reading on writing. On the other hand, limited evidence supported the idea of writing influencing reading independently. Nevertheless, the findings of Jouhar and Ripley's review indicate that there is indeed a connection between writing and reading, with an individual's language proficiency level affecting this connection.

Studies have also indicated the crucial role of talk in supporting writing (Graham, 2018; Myhill, 2021). As indicated in Berninger and Swanson's (1994) revised model of Hayes and Flower's (1980) cognitive model of writing, the contribution of a writer's long-term memory (LTM) is essential in the writing process. Graham acknowledges that "LTM language resources writers use when composing are listening and reading. Writers use their knowledge of listening as they interact with others (e.g., collaborators, mentors, or teachers) as they discuss plans for writing and text produced, listen to source material such as an oral interview, or listen to the text as it is read aloud" (2018: 265). The value of talk, therefore, is helping in the planning and evaluating writing processes. This is echoed in studies by Myhill (2020) in the United Kingdom, which highlight the connection between dialogic approaches

to metalinguistic awareness and their implications for writing instruction. Myhill's research shows the advantages of explicitly teaching grammar that is functionally oriented in the context of writing instruction. The significance of verbal communication in aiding the development of young writers' comprehension of the impact of linguistic choices on the meaning of written texts is a topic of great importance. It is crucial to emphasise the role of "metatalk," which refers to the verbalisation of metalinguistic thoughts about writing choices, in facilitating the application of grammatical knowledge to students' writing. The use of collaborative dialogic approaches may be helpful in this context to allow children to share their ideas and consider more broadly how a community of writers can motivate children to write, the quality of their compositions and the type of language that is being used when they discuss their work and that of their peers. Presented as social persuasion and a component of developing self-efficacy, feedback from the teacher and others is crucial as "feedback on current performance is more effective than focusing on distant goals" (Bruning & Kauffman, 2016: 162). Studies such as this highlight the importance of sociocultural theory within a writing context.

3.8 Conclusion

It is challenging to determine the current state of writing skills among children in the Irish primary education system without national assessments of writing. From an educational standpoint, the *Support Materials for Teachers* in the Primary Language Curriculum (2020) promotes a conservative approach to writing pedagogy that emphasises a very traditional view of writing genres, emphasising a process approach to the teaching of the 'six' main genres. This approach emphasises structure over purpose, which may limit students' creativity and expression in their writing. Furthermore, writing through this approach is driven by genre rather than the purpose or goals of writing.

This chapter has explored various theoretical writing models that have significantly impacted Irish primary writing pedagogy. It has examined writing pedagogy from both a process and genre perspective, highlighting how genre-based writing has been implemented in the Irish context. Additionally, it has discussed recent research on how writing needs to be

reconceptualised to meet the demands of a 21st-century classroom. The next chapter, Chapter Four, will discuss the research methodology of this thesis.

Chapter Four: Research Methods and Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of the study, its aims, the research questions that underpin it, and the methods used. The philosophical underpinnings and the paradigmatic influences on this mixed methods approach are discussed. Broader philosophical assumptions about reflectivity, positionality, and associated assumptions and biases are addressed.

The second section reviews mixed methods as a methodology of literacy research with specific reference to an explanatory sequential design (Creswell, 2012). Here, I argue a rationale for this approach, identifying its efficacy in historical literacy research. Subsequently, I explain my reasoning for an explanatory sequential design for this study and describe its implementation across two phases to answer the research questions.

I then elaborate on the data collection methods utilised in each study phase, the tools employed, and the rationale behind their selection. The approaches to data analysis at each stage of the study are described and justified, with specific emphasis on thematic analysis (TA) (Braun & Clark, 2021; Nowell et al., 2017), the TA process employed in this study, and the steps taken to ensure the trustworthiness of the process (Nowell et al., 2017). Finally, the ethical considerations for the study are addressed.

4.2 Aims of the Study

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This study investigates Irish primary school teachers' perspectives on their pedagogical approaches to writing in senior classes (ages 8-12 years old). It seeks to determine how literacy policy has affected writing pedagogy at the school and individual levels over the past decade and a half.

4.2.1 Research Questions

The research questions are:

1. How do Irish primary school teachers approach the teaching of writing in senior classes (ages 8-12 years old)?

2. What influences teachers' writing pedagogy in the senior primary classes?
3. How has the new Primary Language Curriculum (2019) changed, challenged, or influenced approaches to teaching writing?

In the subsequent section, I explain the research paradigm underpinning this study.

4.3 Research Paradigm

Guba defines a paradigm as a 'basic set of beliefs that guides action' (1990: 17). A philosophical assumption is essential in acknowledging how beliefs influence the research goals and experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A research paradigm enables the researcher to inquire about the definition of quality research, the methodologies that facilitate such research, and the influence of ontology and epistemology on the answers to these inquiries (Hampson & McKinley, 2023).

The paradigm offers a framework or general worldview for research, including post-positivism, realism/critical realism, constructivism, interpretivism and pragmatism (Christensen, 2022). The philosophical worldview or paradigm for this study is situated in pragmatism. Pragmatism as a research paradigm "sidesteps the contentious issues of truth and reality, accepts, philosophically, that there are singular and multiple realities that are open to empirical inquiry and orient itself toward solving practical problems in the real world" (Feilzer, 2010:8).

A pragmatic stance for this study implies that it argues against a specific worldview in that there is no singular reality, as in the case of positivism, but instead multiple realities. Beliefs and habits socially construct and shape knowledge (Morgan, 2014).

Some scholars in the field are critical of a pragmatic worldview. For example, a pragmatic stance, situated in the philosophies of scholars such as Dewey, has historically been summarised, unjustifiably, as "what works" (Morgan, 2014). Critics of a pragmatic stance, such as Hampson and McKinley (2023), report how scholars in the field of MMR have used "pragmatism" to justify Mixed Methods Research (MMR), with a pragmatic stance being viewed as a paradigm of convenience. According to Hampson and McKinley, "using a paradigm of convenience would involve starting with the research we would like to do and

deriving a set of philosophical beliefs that permit that research" (2023: 6). Scholars suggest that adopting a convenient paradigm involves initiating research based on our preferences and formulating a set of philosophical beliefs that support such research. Although this viewpoint holds significance in mixed methods, the purpose of this study, which focuses on investigating teacher perspectives and approaches to writing pedagogy, is to employ a mixed methods approach that combines a methodology and philosophy. This approach aims to integrate quantitative and qualitative data to generate findings, as emphasised by Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2021: 14).

It draws on Kelly & Cordeiro's (2020) organisational approach to pragmatic inquiry to describe the application of pragmatism in designing the research questions, the types of questions asked in the survey, and how pragmatic inquiry was applied when consulting with interview participants on their lived experiences, and finally in the analysis of the data. The principles of pragmatism pertaining to this study are outlined in Table 4.1

Table 4.1

The principles of pragmatism in this study

Research Questions	How do Irish primary school teachers approach the teaching of writing in senior classes? What influences teachers' writing pedagogy in the senior primary classes? How has a policy, specifically the new Primary Language Curriculum, changed/ challenged or influenced approaches to writing?	Pragmatic inquiry: Desire to produce actionable knowledge/solve problems/ (Kelly & Cordeiro, 2020) Embedding inquiry into practical, everyday situations for teachers of literacy
Methodology	QUAN- Questionnaire QUAL- Semi-structured interviews; Analysis of documents	Desire to understand what pedagogical approaches are being implemented/ How much time is devoted to teaching writing, / How choice is facilitated. Desire to solve problems by consulting on the lived experiences of the interview participants and co-construct what has informed these lived experiences
Analysis	Thematic Analysis	Comparing the lived experiences of interviewees to develop themes and allows a story to unfold

The elements of this study's axiology, ontology, and epistemology are discussed below.

4.3.1 Axiological assumptions

The axiological assumptions, that is, the acknowledgement that research is value-laden, and biases are presented in this section. The values that shape this study are acknowledged in the opening chapter of this study, Chapter One, section 1.2, which outlines my positionality.

Axiology plays an essential role in selecting the topic to be researched, as well as the research questions that have underpinned the study. In pragmatic MMR, researchers tend to ignore questions about ethics and values as they strive to find what works (Biddle & Shafft, 2015).

My values and beliefs should inevitably be acknowledged, given my experience as a primary school teacher working in low SES contexts and having experienced professional development around genre approaches to teaching writing. As a teacher in 2010, I have incorporated various pedagogical approaches to writing based on my professional development. Specifically, I have been influenced by the 'genre approach' and, later, the process approach, as discussed in chapter two. These approaches have significantly shaped my teaching methods and strategies for writing instruction. Blending these two theories and their application in the Irish educational context is of professional interest to me and holds personal significance. I am interested in how these theories have been presented and implemented in the Irish education system. However, I need to maintain a certain detachment from these theories. While I acknowledge that axiology, the study of values, plays a role in shaping the design of the curriculum (Biddle & Shafft, 2015), my research questions were specifically designed to gain insights into teacher perspectives on writing pedagogy. I aimed to understand how policy and associated professional development have influenced teachers' approaches to teaching writing.

4.3.2 Ontological and Epistemological assumptions

Ontological issues, as defined by Creswell and Poth, "relate to the nature of reality and its characteristics" (2018:21). In this mixed methods study, the qualitative dimension means this reality is viewed in multiple ways. For example, themes were identified through data analysis, in which participants' perspectives were reported. As Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) put forward, taking a pragmatist paradigm means that my ontological position is not about 'arguing' a truth or a reality but demonstrating how the study's findings work in what it is being studied. Braun and Clark (2022:175) state that epistemological positions "reflect assumptions as what constitutes meaningful and valid knowledge and how such knowledge can be generated". Epistemology, or knowledge and the relationship to the research, requires the collecting and assembling of subjective evidence from individual participants. According to Creswell and Poth, "is how knowledge is known" (2018: 21).

The reason behind opting for quantitative data collection through a questionnaire in the initial phase was to facilitate the research process, which involved utilising a single strategy, the questionnaire, to address the research queries and then employing another technique, the

semi-structured interviews, to gain a deeper understanding of teachers' pedagogical approaches to writing (Hammersley, 1996).

4.4 Research Methodology

This section discusses Mixed Methods Research (MMR) as a methodological approach. It provides an overview of MMR designs and the suitability of this approach to the literacy research conducted in this study. It begins with a definition of MMR as a methodology and offers a critique of this approach and a rationale for its suitability to this study.

4.4.1 Mixed Methods as a Methodology

Researchers in the field of MM offer various definitions of mixed methods. For example, Creswell (2012) defines mixed methods as:

> A research design (or methodology) is one in which the researcher collects, analyses, and mixes (integrates or connects) both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or a multiphase program of inquiry (Creswell, 2012:535).

In their analysis of MMR, Johnson et al. (2007) examines various definitions of the concept put forth by scholars in the field. After careful consideration, Greene's definition resonated most with this study. Like Creswell's definition, Greene emphasises the value of utilising a mixed methods approach when exploring social phenomena.

> Mixed method inquiry is an approach to investigating the social world that ideally involves more than one methodological tradition and thus more than one way of knowing, along with more than one kind of technique for gathering, analysing, and representing human phenomena, all for the purpose of better understanding.
>
> (Johnson et al., 2007: 119).

Several MM designs, such as embedded and convergent parallel designs, were suitable for this study. Table 4.2 provides an overview of these designs and their respective features.

Table 4. 2.
Mixed Method designs in educational research and associated features (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011:224)

Design	Features
explanatory sequential design	Both qualitative and quantitative data are collected. In this two-phase cycle, the quantitative data is collected first, and the qualitative data is then collected to explain the results of the quantitative findings.
convergent parallel design	Both qualitative and quantitative data are collected. Both sets are equal sources and are then merged to give findings.
embedded design	The researcher prioritises one data set, and the second data set supports the first. Quantitative data is supported by qualitative.
exploratory sequential design	Qualitative data is collected first to explore the phenomenon. This is followed by quantitative data in the second phase of the study that explains what has been found in the first phase.
transformative design	One of the above designs is implemented, and an overarching lens is applied to view the results.
multiphase design	This approach uses an exploratory, convergent, explanatory and embedded design through various phases / separate studies.

4.4.2. Rationale for Mixed Methods

Literacy research scholars such as Onwuegbuzie and Hitchcock (2019) propose an equation of 1+1=1, meaning both qualitative and quantitative data combine to create a broader picture of the researched phenomenon. Fetters (2015) applies mathematical equations to convey the advantages of mixed methods research using qualitative and quantitative data sources in educational and social sciences. In the "1+1=3 integration challenge" (Fetters & Freshwater, 2015), one plus one equals three reflects the idea that 'one methodology, that is, qualitative, plus one methodology, quantitative, add to three, that is, a whole greater than the sum of the individual part' (Fetters, 2018: 263). This equation has been subject to criticism in the field, most notably by Onwuegbuzie and Hitchcock (2019), who purports that it "represents the low end of the integration continuum. And because this formula "reifies a quantitative–qualitative dichotomy that can undermine a fuller and more seamless kind of integration" (Onwuegbuzie & Mallette, 2021: 270). The following section, 4.5, describes the research mode, a mixed methods explanatory design.

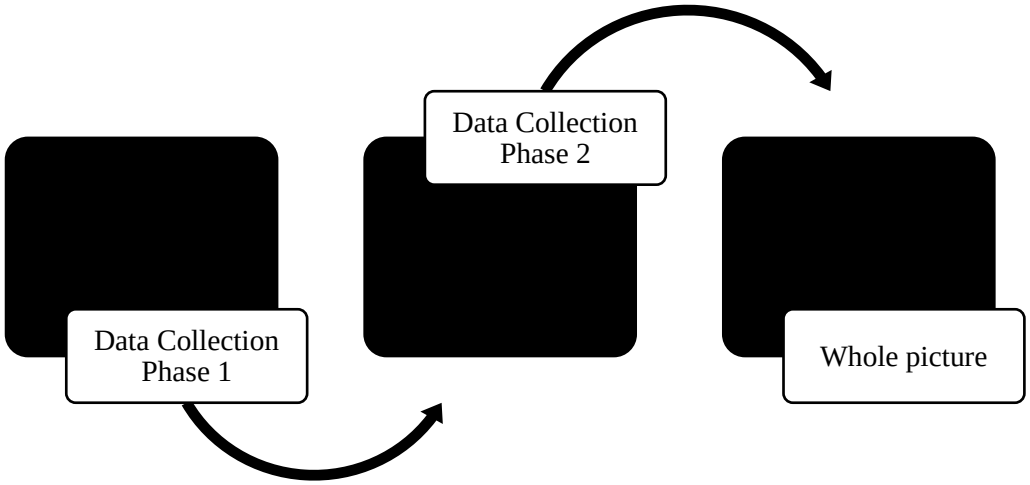
4.5 Research Mode

The research methodology employed in this study is an explanatory sequential design, a mixed methods (MM) inquiry approach. The main objective of this section is to analyse the 'Explanatory MM design' and explain why it is suitable for this study (Creswell, 2015). In this section, I will justify using this design in this study. I will also discuss the process of constructing the research questions and the crucial decisions made while creating the questionnaire and conducting interviews (Cohen, 2007).

The "1+1 =1" equation, depicted in Figure 4.1, illustrates how combining quantitative and qualitative data sets provides a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

Figure 4.1

Phases of mixed methods explanatory sequential design applying a 1+1=1 equation



4.5.1 Rationale for Explanatory Design

Initially, I had opted for an exploratory sequential design. Still, due to the impact of COVID-19 on data collection, I decided that an explanatory sequential design would be a more suitable approach for this mixed-methods research. Further, I concluded that an explanatory sequential design would better facilitate discussing the broader literacy policy and related factors, including professional development.

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), the government body responsible for policy making, advocate for teacher agency. As Chapter Three outlines,

teachers are encouraged to be agentic in their decision-making. Consequently, the outcomes in the Primary Language Curriculum (2019) are quite broad compared to other Anglophone countries. Furthermore, the effects of COVID-19 on the Professional Development for the Primary Language Curriculum (2019) varied among schools, making it essential to gather teachers' perspectives on their unique experiences with professional development and explore the factors that influence different approaches and methodologies.

In this study, I considered whether the quantitative data in phase one would be more suitable than the qualitative data collected in the second phase. The design of this study follows a 'Follow-Up Explanation Design' (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2016), which, as outlined by Creswell, allowed the researcher to "explore views by listening to participants rather than approach a topic with a pre-determined set of variables" (2012: 544). In phase one of this study, data were gathered using questionnaires. Subsequently, specific themes were identified that required further elaboration and clarification. To address this, semi-structured interviews were conducted in the second phase.

4.5.2 Constructing the Research Questions

The methodology for classifying mixed research questions follows Tashakkori and Creswell's typology, which suggests that "mixed methodologists have repeatedly placed mixed methods on a continuum that includes qualitative, quantitative, and mixed approaches rather than using the dichotomy of qualitative or quantitative" (2007: 207). In the case of my study, this means generating questionnaires in Phase One to determine practices related to writing pedagogy. As these questionnaires were anonymous, I and respondents were distanced from each other. In phase two, the lived experiences of the interview participants are vital in presenting their reality in enacting a new curriculum framework and the factors that influence their writing pedagogies in the classroom.

In the following section, I describe the design of the questionnaire and the decision-making processes involved in each phase of the study.

4.5.3. Phase One Design of Questionnaire

Drawing on Cohen's 'fourteen stages of survey planning' (2007), I decided the type of survey most appropriate to the study was a cross-section questionnaire to generate a 'snapshot' of a current situation (Boeren, 2018) I wanted to focus on teachers' experiences, and their current teaching context considering the Primary Language Curriculum (2019). Considering the implications of COVID-19 on school closures (see section 4.8.1), the surveys included twenty-two closed questions and two open-ended questions to generate a general overview of teachers' approaches and methodologies, frequency of approaches and integration, which I could discuss in detail with the interview participants in phase two. (See Appendix B)

I drew on Cohen (2007) to make critical decisions related to questionnaire design. I considered the nature of each question, including how it was phrased and whether it was presented in plain language that was easy to understand. Additionally, I considered the format of the questions, such as the use of Likert scale checklists, the order in which they were presented and whether it was appropriate to include open-ended questions.

These critical decisions and a rationale are outlined in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3

Critical decisions about constructing the questionnaire.

	Consideration	**Rationale**
	Closed questions with the option for two open-ended questions. 27 questions in total 25 closed 2 open	Types of approaches; Frequency; use of digital tools The open-ended questions were related to the Primary Language Curriculum (2019) and how this curricular change has affected pedagogy
2. **Question formulation**	The wording of the question is considered. Plain language is used throughout.	This aimed to gain insight into an indication of approaches and methodologies and consider frequency. It was also to gauge how the PLC has impacted teaching.
3**. Format**	A mix of question formats: ✓ Likert scale questions in which respondents would Strongly agree/ Agree/ Neutral/ Disagree/ Strongly disagree. Checklists in which respondents indicate approaches or methodologies used	The rationale for this was to explore frequency and factors such as time, choice, approach, and integration, as well as the influence of the PLC
4. **Sequencing of questions**	Informed consent at the beginning of the survey, followed by information about the respondents. This included: ✓ School setting. Urban or Rural ✓ DEIS or Non-DEIS ✓ Number of years of experience	To understand the profile of the respondents and their experiences and correlate findings to experience and context

The timescale of the research is outlined in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4

Timescale of the research

Timescale	Action
March 2021	Seek ethical approval from the University of Sheffield.
April 2021	Draft/Pilot questionnaire
June 2021	Questionnaire Draft of the interview schedule
July/August 2021	Semi-structured interviews with participants
January/February 2022	Transcribing of semi-structured interviews

4.5.4 Phase Two: Interviews

During the second phase, five participants were interviewed using a semi-structured interview format. The decision to select five interview participants was made to thoroughly examine the experiences and insights of teachers. As a former teacher, I place great significance on teachers' values and personal experiences, and providing an in-depth exploration of these perspectives was warranted. Given the focused nature of the research questions, it was deemed appropriate to utilise a smaller sample size to effectively address the study's specific objectives.

These interviews aimed to explore specific topics related to the phenomenon being studied while allowing participants to provide new insights and perspectives (Galetta, 2013). To ensure the interviews were effective, careful planning was undertaken to develop questions encompassing the broader policy context, such as the Primary Language Curriculum (2019), and other macro-level factors, like the school plan's contribution to a consistent approach to teaching writing. It was also important to acknowledge the significant role of teachers as agentic practitioners. The research interviews were conducted synchronously online. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the growing reliance on technology, online interviews have become increasingly popular in social science research for gathering data (Lee et al., 2017; Wakelin et al., 2024). This study utilised the Zoom platform for synchronous (real-time)

online interviews. This platform, equipped with video technology, aimed to replicate the experience of a traditional face-to-face (FTF) interview (Lobe & Morgan, 2021).

Research demonstrates that online interviews provide both benefits and drawbacks. According to studies, one advantage of conducting interviews online is increased flexibility, as participants can join from diverse locations (Deaken & Wakefield, 2014). Moreover, the online format often creates a more relaxed atmosphere, making interviewees feel more at ease and open to sharing information (Hanna & Mwale, 2017; Deakin & Wakefield, 2014). According to Denscombe (2003), the quality of responses obtained through online research is reportedly comparable to those obtained through more conventional methods. However, it is crucial to recognise that online interviews may have limitations, particularly in capturing nonverbal cues, such as body language, essential for establishing rapport and building a personal connection with the interviewee (Hart, 2021; Jenner & Myers, 2019). Similarly, the interviewee's comfort with being recorded may impact the online interview experience (Hay-Gibson, 2009).

Furthermore, the ethical aspects of the synchronous interview, as outlined by Deaken and Wakefield (2014), are of paramount importance. These considerations include concerns about privacy and the use of cloud recordings for data storage. In this study, the interviewees were informed before the interview that it would be recorded, and their verbal consent was obtained (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014). The guidelines set forth by the University of Sheffield were strictly adhered to, ensuring that the cloud recordings were encrypted and securely stored, thereby respecting the privacy rights of the interviewees.

The interview questions are outlined in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5

Interview schedule

Policy/Professional development	To what extent has the Primary Language Curriculum (2019) informed the teaching of English? To what extent has the professional development of the Primary Language Curriculum (2019) informed your practice?
Writing Pedagogy Macro-level factors: Policy/Professional development)	Typically, within a week, how often is writing taught? What informs these approaches/methodologies? (professional development/the Primary Language Curriculum (2019)/other? To what extent does the school plan inform teachers' instructional approaches? What approaches/methodologies are used?
School planning/Collaborative approaches/incremental approaches	Teacher as agentic practitioner: How much flexibility or autonomy is there when deciding on instructional approaches to teaching writing? What approach is used in your school? /What informs this approach? /How much flexibility is there? How is a process approach/genre approach facilitated?
Opinions/preferences	What are your opinions on the writing genre? Pedagogical preferences and challenges
Affective dimensions: Motivation and engagement	How is choice facilitated?
Curricular integration	How are digital tools utilised, and what are the associated advantages and disadvantages? How is writing integrated across the curriculum? Standardised testing and writing

4.6 Data Collection

4.6.1 Sampling

Before embarking on the sampling process, two critical factors were carefully evaluated. Firstly, the nature or type of sample to be collected, and secondly, the appropriate size of the sample. Multi-stage selection was considered initially when sampling the questionnaire participants in the initial phase (Ornstein, 2013). Multi-stage sampling requires surveying schools from different regions and identifying schools with similar demographics within

these regions, for example, Urban or rural; DEIS or non-DEIS, Single sex or Co-Ed. Contemplating these constraints, I considered two main factors: firstly, the timing of the survey being conducted in June 2021, and secondly, the influence of COVID-19 on schools, including school closures and its impact on teachers' well-being. Consequently, it was my observation that morale among teachers was generally low.

Considering that this research was small-scale- the opportunities for random sampling were limited, and non-probability sampling, specifically purposive sampling, was the approach taken (Boeren, 2018). Schools were identified from a database accessible to the public through the Department of Education. The schools in this database were categorised as senior, encompassing students aged 8 to 12. I utilised Qualtrics, an online survey tool distributed via email to collect questionnaire data. Ethical considerations were considered by the university's policy on informed consent, ensuring the participants' anonymity and confidentiality (Preissle et al., 2015). The survey responses are accessible to the researcher only to protect the data. The use of Qualtrics made the survey more accessible. After conducting the survey, I determined that it was suitable for gathering data that could be used to establish initial themes.

4.6.2 Piloting

Pilot studies serve as preliminary investigations conducted before more extensive studies, aiding researchers in enhancing the overall quality of the primary survey (Williams-McBean, 2019). It is widely recognised in the field of quantitative research that pilot studies are indispensable for the purpose of testing and refining questionnaires utilised in surveys (Babbie, 2013; Creswell, 2014) and for pretesting experiments (Creswell, 2014).

The survey was piloted initially using a critical friend. As Sotiropoulou et al. (2023) put forward, the primary objective of essential academic friendship is to foster mutual personal and professional growth in a safe and non-threatening environment. This concept emphasises the importance of cultivating constructive criticism through prompting reflection and self-evaluation. At the design's early stage, there were many open questions. The questions were then modified to create more closed ‘to the point’ questions, with open-ended questions expanding on teachers’ opinions and experiences.

4.6.3 Gaining Access

The University of Sheffield ethics approval committee approved the study. The consent form was built into the questionnaire in which respondents were invited to take part. A copy of this consent form is in Appendix C.

The respondents eligible to participate in the study were primary school teachers in senior classes in Ireland or primary teachers with prior experience teaching in a senior class. Before proceeding with the questionnaire, the respondents were requested to carefully read the consent form, which provided information about the research objectives, purposes, and the potential consequences of their involvement in the study.

The profile of the participants is presented in Table 4.6. The names, experiences, professional contexts, and current roles and responsibilities are outlined here. All names are pseudonyms.

Table 4.6

Profile of the Participants ***

Name	Experience	Context	Qualifications
Fatima	More than 30 years of teaching experience	DEIS context	Undergraduate Bachelor of Education degree Experience in Special Educational Needs (SEN)
Sarah	12 years' experience	DEIS context – senior classes	Undergraduate Bachelor of Education degree
Anastasia	Six years' experience across DEIS and non-DEIS	Mainstream class teacher Non-DEIS	Undergraduate Bachelor of Education degree Masters in Literacy
Rachel	16 Years' experience in Primary education	DEIS context	Post-graduate diploma in education Experience in Teaching English as a Foreign Language Literacy advisor with the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST)
Michelle	17 Years' experience	Mainstream class teacher Non-DEIS	Undergraduate Bachelor of Education degree

**All names are pseudonyms*

The primary school teachers, who were the participants, were asked to participate in an interview by selecting an option after the questionnaire survey. These participants are experienced teachers who have worked in regular classrooms at the senior primary level. Four of the five participants were unfamiliar to me; I had a casual acquaintance with the remaining participant through literacy professional development, but we did not have a professional connection.

The five teacher-participants had volunteered to take part in one interview that would be no more than 45 minutes in length at a time that was convenient to them. Informed consent was obtained by participants in advance, as required by the University of Sheffield (see Appendix E).

Due to the impact of COVID-19, the one-to-one interviews were conducted online using Zoom, which all participants were familiar with. The interviews were recorded with the participants' permission. The theoretical framing for the semi-structured interviews was based on social constructivism. As a theoretical framework in a study, social constructivism places importance on actively engaging with participants to capture and explore their perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes (Brown, 2018). This means exploring interview participants' views of curricular change, associated professional development, beliefs, and attitudes on writing pedagogy.

Before the interviews, I piloted the interview schedule with a critical friend whose comments were used to revise the questions. Purposive sampling was the approach taken to collect the quantitative data. The participants (n=5) selected for the interview indicated through the survey their intention of taking part in the semi-structured interview. The following section describes the approaches to data analysis drawing on Braun and Clark's approach to thematic analysis (2022).

4.7 Analysis

In this section, I present the methodology employed for data analysis. Initially, I provide an overview of the analysis conducted on the questionnaire. Subsequently, I discuss the approach taken to analyse the data obtained from the semi-structured interviews, utilising thematic analysis as proposed by Braun and Clark (2022). Furthermore, I incorporate insights from the research on the reliability of thematic analysis and elucidate its application in my study, as Nowell et al. (2017) outlined. Additionally, I explore the utilisation of joint displays to demonstrate the integration of both data sets and how the information gathered from the questionnaires in phase one influenced the inquiries posed to participants in phase two. Lastly, I expound upon the thematic analysis approach employed in identifying themes.

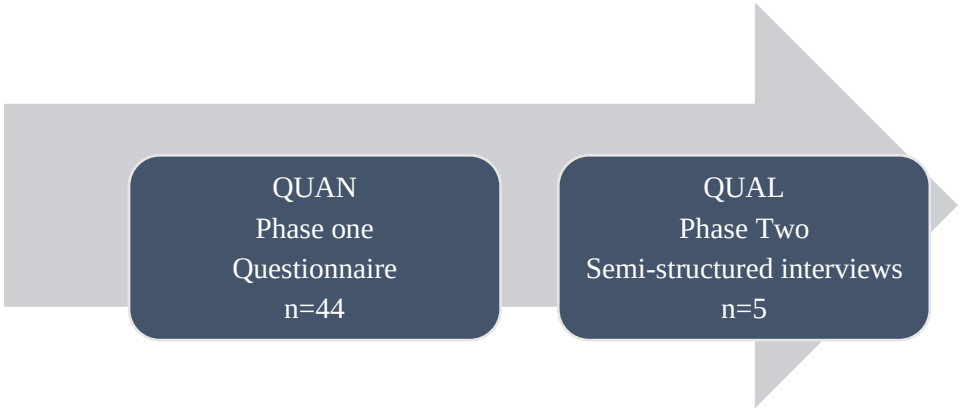
4.7.1 Analysis of Questionnaire

The questionnaire-survey data were collected and analysed in Qualtrics. Of the 27 questions on the survey, two questions were open-ended. The rationale for the open questions was to understand respondents' views of the Primary Language Curriculum (PLC, 2019).

The responses to the questionnaire (n=44) were analysed for descriptive information, that is, the types of approaches, frequency, integration, and multimodalities. The functions in the software Qualtrics allowed for descriptive analysis, summarising the data in graphs and charts.

Figure 4.2

Phases of the study



The primary aim of implementing questionnaires in the initial phase was to capture teachers' methodological approaches, pedagogical techniques, and the factors that impact their writing instruction. Subsequently, semi-structured interviews were conducted in phase two to elicit the participants' perspectives and gain insight into their lived experiences. The study's qualitative phase provided an opportunity to recognise and validate the participants' experiences as educators and respect their professional autonomy. By using semi-structured interviews in phase two, I aimed to investigate through dialogic inquiry teachers' experiences of literacy pedagogy and consider the broader policy implications at a national and local level that influence these approaches, such as the integrated primary language curriculum (2015; 2019).

4.7.2 Analysis of Semi-Structured Interviews

The approach to data analysis of the qualitative sets of data was thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006). Braun and Clark define thematic analysis (TA) as 'a method for developing, analysing, and interpreting patterns across a qualitative dataset, which involves systematic processes of data-coding to develop themes' (2022: 4). This process is illustrated in Table 4.7 in which I draw on the process of reflexive TA.

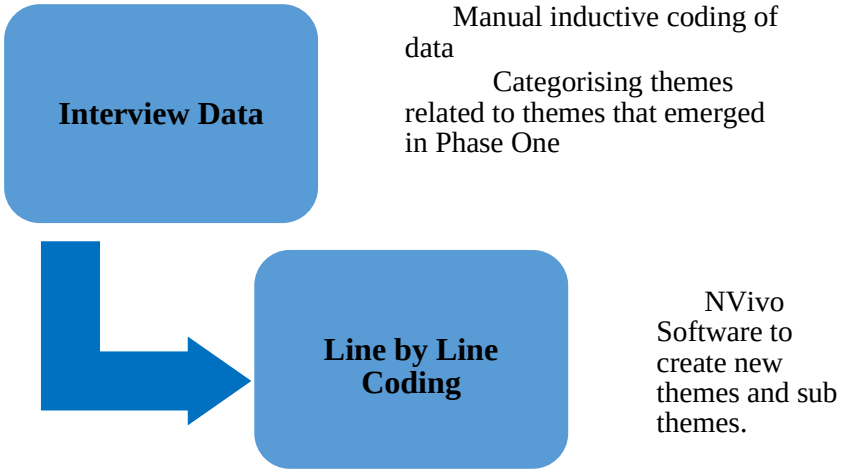
Table 4.7

Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006: 87)

Phase	Description
1. Familiarisation	Reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas. **Manually rereading and rereading interview transcripts. Noting ideas and colour coding these. Creating a list of emerging ideas**
2. Generating initial codes	Coding interesting features of the data systematically across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code. **Using NVivo software to create codes. These codes are called 'Phase One open coding' in which several themes emerged.**
3. Searching for themes	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each likely theme. **Using NVivo software to deduce codes and find themes to create more concise codes. These themes are referred to as 'Phase two axial coding' in which the initial codes were presented in a more concise way that identified common ideas.**
4. Reviewing themes	Checking if the themes work about the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis. **Using NVivo software to create themes. These codes were then reviewed and referred to as 'Phase three themes'.**
5. Defining and naming themes	Ongoing analysis will refine the specifics of each theme and the overall story the research tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme. **Further analysis of themes created through NVivo. These themes were analysed further and redefined**
6. Producing the report	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, definitive analysis of selected extracts, relating the analysis to the research question and literature, and producing a scholarly report.

The codes were amended as sub-codes, and new themes were developed throughout the analysis procedure. The first phase was manual inductive coding and creating themes related to the emergent themes from phase one. This is illustrated in Figure 4.3 and discussed in the following section.

Figure 4.3 *Data Analysis Procedure*



An example of the data analysis procedure and how I applied to this study is illustrated in Table 4.8.

Table 4.8

Data analysis procedure in generating themes.

Data	**Codes**
Fatima (Interview 1) Okay, well, when I was teaching a class, I would look into just two kinds of aspects, well, three or four aspects. I mean, there's the handwriting, and I think that has to be done. And to be honest, it was usually done when I wanted to give them independent work. So that was kind of a separate thing. That's handwriting. I also like to give them time to do just free writing. I think that's really important as a way to kind of communicate with me. So I always gave a little bit of time to that independently. But what I tried to do was based on the school plans, like say, if we were doing narrative, say, I would have tried to do a lot of work on that orally first and maybe show them examples. So we've done lots of pre-work in language and reading first. And then I started to try and do a project over six weeks whereby they'd start writing a story, say, based on something, and we do several drafts of it. And the whole idea was that by the finish they had something to display that they were proud of. So that would have been probably, I would say six weeks or possibly with an eight week project. Yeah, sure, I would start them off with giving them lots of examples and building vocabulary based on it and letting them read examples. And then maybe introduce the whole idea of a story, getting them to write stories and kind of redrafting it and finishing up with the finished product.	Writing as product Communicative function of writing Teacher-pupil relationships Drafting- The 'Process' of writing Whole-school approach Cycle of writing genre-unit of work Writing as product

Anastasia (Interview 2)	Daily
Again, I use the Writers Workshop, so I try if I can to do it every day. But sometimes in a week, I'll probably get three times a week if I can, because there is a school plan in English in our school, and you know, there are books and certain programmes that need to be covered. And, you know, which, you know, and I know, we have about an hour a day to teach English, but sometimes I don't really want to compact, you know, the Writers Workshop into just a half an hour, 40 minutes, and we'd like to spend the whole hour on it. So about three times a week, I get a chance to do the Writers Workshop.	Workshop approach- Writing as a Process Whole-school approach Literacy requirements 'needing to be done'

Here, generating initial themes required the 'clustering' of similar codes. In the example above, interviewees spoke of 'getting writing done' through either following their own plans of the school or engaging children in the writing process, by which, by the end, there would be an end 'product'. This required further exploration before a defined theme was named. The process of establishing the trustworthiness of thematic analysis is discussed in the following section.

4.7.3 Establishing Trustworthiness of Thematic Analysis

While TA is a common approach to qualitative data analysis, the approach is flexible, and this flexibility may be unpredictable (Holloway & Todres, 2003). To ensure that the flexibility of TA in this study was consistent, I ensured that a high level of trustworthiness would be maintained (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) by following a trustworthiness criterion outlined by Nowell et al. (2017) across both stages of the data analysis. Table 4.9 presents how each stage of trustworthiness was established in this study. In this table I outline the trustworthiness criteria offering a simple definition of it and describe how this was achieved in this study.

Table 4.9

Maintaining Trustworthiness in Thematic Analysis (Adapted from Nowell et al. 2017)

Trustworthiness criteria	**Simple definition**	**How this is achieved**
Credibility	Respondents' views and researcher's interpretation of them	Prolonged engagement with QUAL data; data collection and researcher triangulation
Transferability	How the study is generalised	Thick descriptions of findings
Dependability	Research process is documented	Audit trail
Confirmability	How findings are coming from the data	The rationale for methodology and analysis is explained at each stage of the study.
Audit trails	Evidence- records of raw data	Records of data stored in accordance with University of Sheffield policy

4.7.4 Joint displays

In this mixed methods explanatory study, the purpose of integrating qualitative and qualitative data was to increase the validity of the findings from phase one questionnaires and for developmental purposes, using one method to inform the other. Integrating two data sets contributes to the 'inferential transparency' of the study (McCrudden et al., 2021). Inferential transparency in mixed methods research refers to the clarity and openness in the process of drawing inferences from both qualitative and quantitative data within a study. Inferential transparency is crucial in ensuring the rigour, credibility, and trustworthiness of the inferences drawn from mixed methods studies.

Joint displays (Guetterman et al., 2015) were employed during data analysis primarily as an organising framework. A joint display is "a table or figure that can be used for organising mixed data collection and analysis" (Fetters, 2020:194).

The type of joint display illustrated in this chapter is an 'interview prompts display' (Ogilvie & McCrudden, 2017) employed to illustrate the connection between the questions asked in phase one and the open-ended questions in the second phase. This method allows the merging of two data sets (refer to Table 4.10). Table 4.10 displays inquiries related to time as a factor in both stages of data gathering. Except for two questions on the survey, the inquiries were

structured and focused on variables like frequency and statements that necessitated agreement or disagreement. In phase two, the inquiries were open-ended to explore the participants' perspectives.

Table 4.10

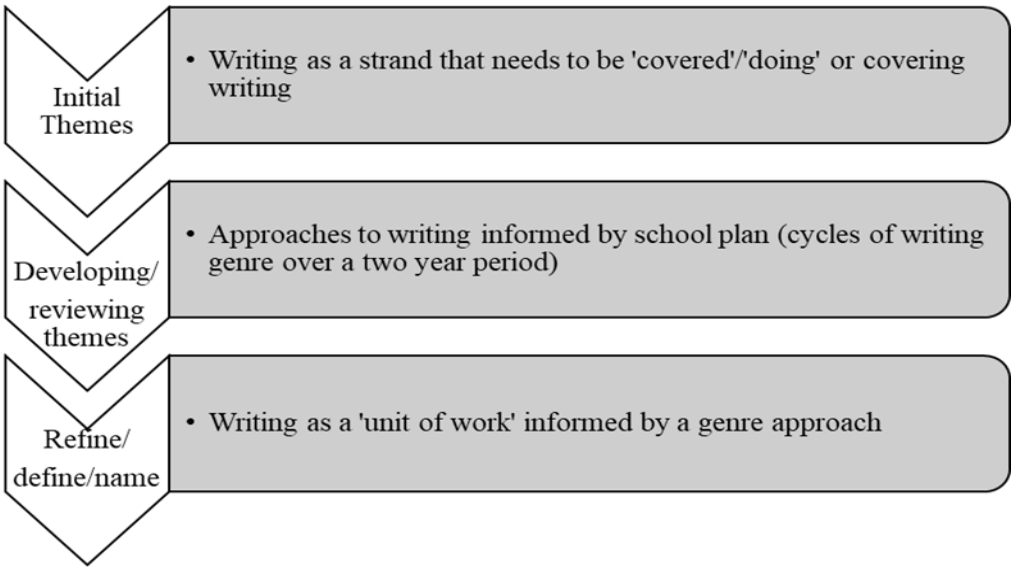
Interview Prompt display

Category	Questionnaire survey items	interview prompts
Time as a variable	How much time is given to writing daily?	What informs the time given to writing? Is this a school-wide approach?
Macro-level factors (the school plan) Teacher as an agentic practitioner	How much time is given to teaching writing weekly?	How much autonomy/flexibility do you have with this? Do you think the time devoted to the teaching of writing is sufficient?

Figure 4.4 depicts the process by which the themes were defined, which entailed the development and evaluation of themes to identify and designate a particular theme.

Figure 4. 4

Refined and defined theme labels and the decision-making process



The ethical considerations pertaining to the study are outlined in the following section.

4.8 Ethical Considerations

Extensive research has been conducted on ethics in educational research (Head, 2020; Mertens & Ginsberg, 2009). Nevertheless, Preissle et al. have highlighted several ethical considerations that apply to mixed methods studies (2015: 146). These considerations encompass the ethical aspects of research objectives and methodology, participant selection and sampling, researcher-participant relationships, data collection and analysis, and the accurate representation and reporting of findings. In this section, I discuss ethical approval and informed consent and how anonymity and confidentiality were determined throughout the study. In the first instance, ethical approval was sought from the University of Sheffield, in which the protocols and procedures were followed. This required transparency about the nature of the study and its design. The ethical protocols, as required by the University of Sheffield, were always followed throughout the duration of this study.

4.8.1 Ethical Approval

Before initiating the research, the University of Sheffield was approached to obtain ethical approval, as detailed in Appendix D. The procedure adhered to the guidelines set forth by the university's ethical approval committee. The ethical approval document outlined the study's objective, which initially aimed to investigate teachers' pedagogical methods in writing and oral language. However, I refined the focus to writing alone and subsequently obtained informed consent from the participants for this focus.

4.8.2 Informed Consent

Informed consent was built into the design of the survey in phase one. The consent process was conducted in plain language, whereby the research aims were clearly conveyed to the respondents, and their decision to participate was voluntary. Anonymity was guaranteed for all responses, and the survey data were identifiable only through a code. In the second phase of the study, the participants in the interviews voluntarily opted to take part and provided their informed consent before the commencement of the interviews. They were free to discontinue their participation at any point during the study. To protect the participants' privacy, their names were replaced with pseudonyms. To avoid influencing the results, I

exercised caution in framing the questions, refraining from probing into the participants' methodologies and allowing them to express their views freely, as revealed in the study's first phase. Creswell and Poth (2018) emphasise the importance of obtaining informed consent by contacting individuals who can facilitate access to the research site and contribute to data collection. In this study, the participants were asked to devote their time and generosity to completing the questionnaire and volunteering for the interviews. To ensure that the participants were fully informed about the study, I adhered to the specific steps outlined by Creswell and Poth (2018). This entailed informing them of their right to withdraw from the study at any time, clarifying the purpose of the study, and detailing the procedures employed in data collection. Furthermore, measures were implemented to ensure confidentiality throughout the study, which was integrated into the questionnaire. An informed consent form was emailed to the interviewees, which they completed and returned to me (see Appendix E). As outlined in the University of Sheffield protocols, the data will be securely stored for up to a period of five years. After that, all data related to the study will be destroyed.

4.8.3 Anonymity and Confidentiality

As outlined by Creswell and Poth (2018), maintaining confidentiality and anonymity are essential elements of research ethics, as they are vital in ensuring the safety and well-being of participants and preserving the credibility of the research process. Confidentiality involves the researcher's obligation to safeguard the information provided by participants and restrict its accessibility only to authorised individuals. Anonymity entails the complete concealment of participants' identities, achieved through the use of codes, pseudonyms and omission of identifying information. The participants were duly informed about the confidential use of the information gathered during the study. Pseudonyms were allocated to the participants to safeguard their identities. Moreover, identifying details such as school names and references to colleagues, for example literacy coordinators and school principals, were also substituted with pseudonyms. The interviews were conducted online and securely stored in the drive of my university email account. These recordings are protected by encryption and can only be accessed by me. In chapter five, when presenting the data, all information is anonymised to guarantee the continued anonymity of the interview participants.

4.9 Limitations

4.9.1 Impact of COVID-19 on the study

The COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 to 2021 had significant implications for the design and implementation of this study. The study in the very early stages was initially conceived as design-based research with an innovation designed to examine the role of 'talk' and discussion on writing pedagogy and how dialogue contributes to children's metalinguistic awareness (Myhill, 2016; Myhill et al., 2013). In March 2020, all schools and universities in Ireland were required to close. Some schools pivoted to online teaching during this period; however, this was not a requirement from the Department of Education, as schools must have their own policy on the delivery and implementation of online teaching (DES, 2020). At the beginning of the 2020/21 academic year, schools were open and in-class instruction resumed, but research was not permitted in schools due to the ongoing risk of the virus. I anticipated at this point that the initial research on the impact of dialogic approaches and talk and discussion on children's metalinguistic awareness would take place online in early 2021. Following the increase in cases in December 2020, Irish schools closed again in January 2021 and remained closed until the Easter break in 2021. It was not possible at this point to pivot the study to a virtual mode as the approaches to online teaching varied from school. At this late stage of my doctoral studies, I decided that the use of a mixed methods approach, specifically an explanatory sequential design would be most appropriate to conduct in a virtual mode. This allowed me to conduct the survey online. To ensure against a low-response rate (considering the impact of the virus on school closures and how it affected teachers' morale) I invited participants in a Professional Development (PD) course I was leading to complete the survey.

One of the major limitations to the study was undertaking it during the COVID-19 pandemic. In its original conception the study as research-based design with an innovation in primary schools. The intermittent school closures affected children's education and the delivery of teaching between March 2020 and January 2021. As indicated in a previous section there was no formal requirement from the Department of Education and Skills (DES) to facilitate online learning during this time. Therefore, the study was redesigned as a Mixed Methods

Explanatory study using data gathered through an online questionnaire survey and online teacher interviews.

The response rate to questionnaire-survey was low (n=44). There was a *sense* of low morale in schools over the course of the eighteen months of school closures because of the pandemic and the government's approach to school closures. For example, the expectation for schools to remain open differed to other public services. Schools remained open from September 2021 to December 2021 during which time which all, but essential services continued to work from home. If morale was low, I felt should be sensitive to creating an extra burden on teachers I asked to complete the questionnaire or indeed to engage in any type of research which could, understandably, be met with discontent. Overall, and with the benefit of hindsight, this may have influenced the low response rate (n=44) to the questionnaire. That and the timing of the survey (June 2021) may also have been a contributing factor. Indeed, I had anticipated a more substantial response rate, considering the survey's design was intentionally concise to mitigate the potential for respondent fatigue. Moreover, given the survey's direct relevance to the professional practice of teachers, I believed its relevance would significantly impact the response rate.

A further issue which could explain the low response rate was that there had been no uniform approach to professional development with the PLC (2015; 2019) since its rollout in 2019. The approach to the implementation of the PLC (2019) was sporadic and that was indicated in the questionnaire responses and when explained by interviewees. Given the contentious curriculum design and delivery, the questionnaires have a perceived response bias. Teachers' motivation for the PLC was low to begin with. Therefore, approaches to PD nationally across each school were not consistent.

4.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented and justified the research methods and methodology employed in the study. It has explained the philosophical foundations of pragmatism and delved into each one. Furthermore, it has discussed the rationale behind adopting an explanatory approach for a mixed methods study and the data collection methods associated with this approach. The

chapter has also outlined the rationale for utilising thematic analysis (TA) and provided a comprehensive description of the analysis process. Additionally, the ethical considerations and limitations of the study have been addressed. In the subsequent chapter, the analysis and findings of the study will be presented.

Chapter 5: Findings and Discussion

5.1 Introduction

The fourth chapter presented the research methodology employed in this study, a mixed-method explanatory approach. Additionally, chapter four discussed the research mode, the approach taken towards data analysis, and the study's ethical considerations.

This chapter presents the primary findings and discussion of this study. This is presented in the following three sections. The first section (Section 5.2) comprehensively summarises the questionnaire respondents, including their years of experience and teaching contexts, such as disadvantaged, urban, and rural. In the second section, I present an overview of the findings divided into three major themes and their corresponding subthemes. Theme One identified ambiguity and confusion with the professional development of the Primary Language Curriculum (2019). This is followed by discussing the Primary Language Curriculum (PLC) and accompanying professional development in determining writing instruction. It traces the historical development of the PLC as a responsive curriculum document. It examines the broader policy factors that have shaped its trajectory, such as the impact of international assessments on curricular change and the influence of performativity. Furthermore, the section underscores the necessity for policy-level curricular accountability and delves into the pedagogical ramifications of a responsive curriculum. This chapter explores the notion of "experience-driven pedagogy" and its relationship to curricular professional development (PD). Additionally, it investigates the uncertainty and vagueness associated with the execution of the curriculum and provides a rationale for pedagogical methods. By leveraging the supplementary resources allotted to educators, the chapter outlines the trajectory of the broader impact of writing pedagogy, offering a comprehensive view of the factors that shape writing pedagogy from a policy perspective.

Section Two examines the theme of the reification of writing genres. This section presents a rationale for this phenomenon and explores its challenges and implications for modern classrooms. It discusses the limitations of a genre approach as static units and the limitations of how the writing process is presented and implemented in non-statutory curriculum documents. The section also challenges some of the theoretical models and processes of writing that have underpinned pedagogy in the Irish context. It raises the question of how this has developed in the Irish context, given that the Primary Language Curriculum (2019) is

relatively recent. Here, I draw on the ‘writers within communities’ model (Graham, 2018) to discuss tools for writing and the composition and production of writing. This section addresses writing as production incorporating modes of writing, multimodalities, and representation.

Section Three explores Theme Three, which focuses on ‘Text as Text’ and the extent to which the digital context is “othered”. This theme explores various aspects, including the multimodal dimension and how this is employed in writing. Additionally, it presents and discusses the findings on how digital tools are utilised in the publishing phase of the writing process. The final section of this theme highlights the disparity between how writing is presented in the curriculum and how teachers practice it. It also emphasises the need to reconsider and reimagine writing pedagogy to address the demands of the 21st-century context and the critical linguistic features of different genres.

5.2 Section One: Study participants

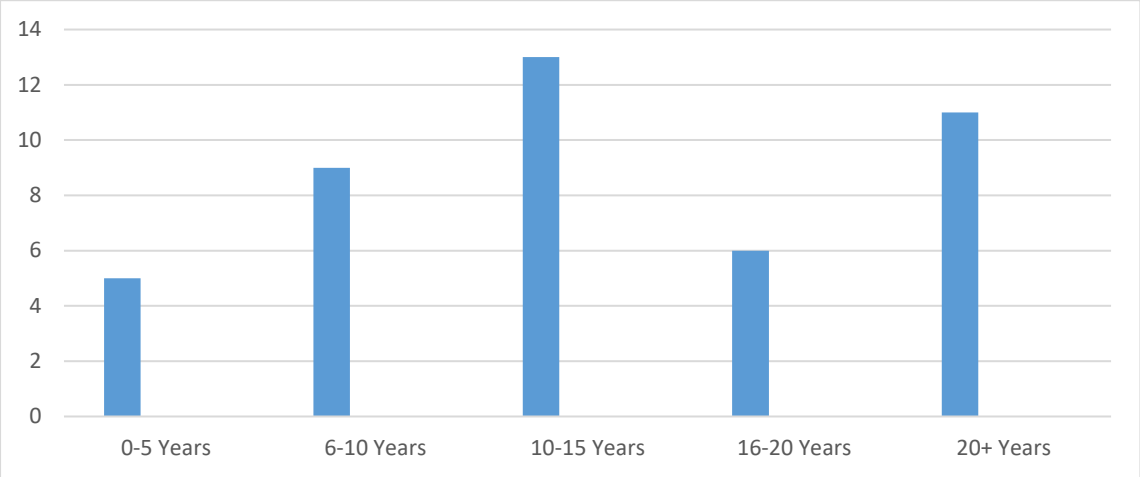
This section provides an overview of the profile of questionnaire respondents, their teaching experience, and their school contexts. The present study included 46 participants with diverse years of experience. The sample comprised individuals at the inception of their careers, possessing up to five years of professional experience, and those with extensive experience spanning over 20 years.

5.2.1 Overview of the profile of questionnaire respondents

This distribution is shown in Figure 5.1. below.

Figure 5.1.

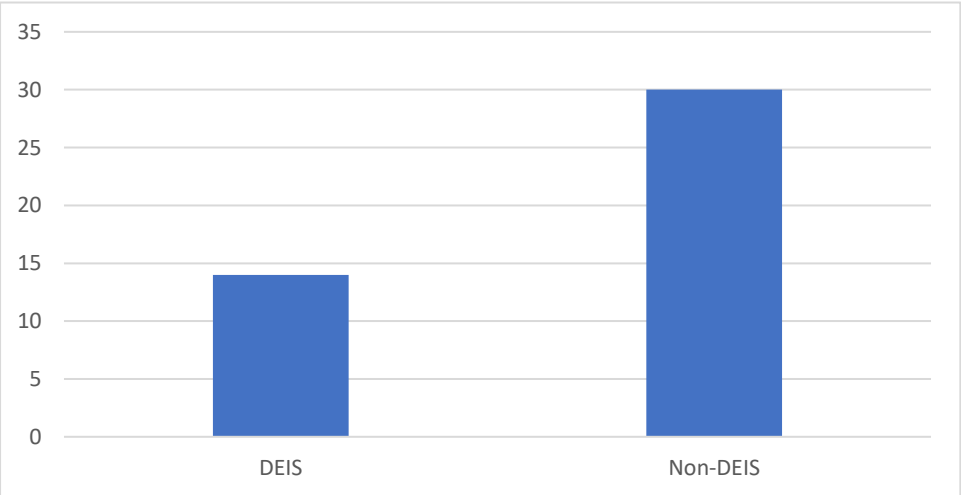
Years Experience of Questionnaire Participants



Respondents indicated if their school setting was in an Urban or Rural setting. The majority of respondents (30) were from Urban school settings. In addition to the Urban or Rural setting, respondents indicated if the school is designated 'disadvantaged' (denoted by the acronym DEIS meaning Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) or non-DEIS. Two-thirds of respondents (30) worked in non-DEIS settings. This is represented in Figure 5.2.

Figure 5.2

Type of School setting: Disadvantaged or Non-disadvantaged.

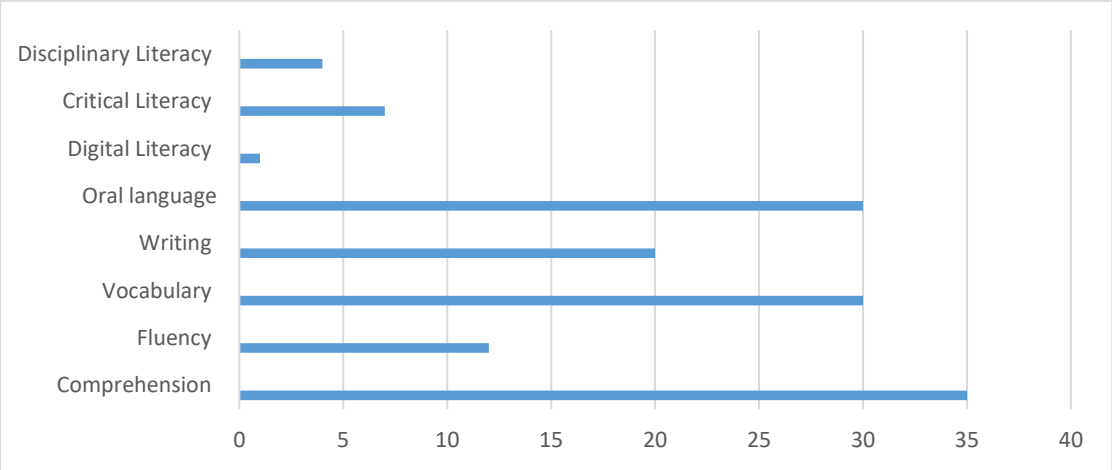


Respondents were asked to indicate their confidence level in teaching the ‘skills’ of the English curriculum (Primary Language Curriculum, 2019).

According to the Primary Language Curriculum (2019), the respondents expressed confidence in teaching various literacy skills. Among these skills, comprehension had the highest confidence level, scoring 35. Oral language and writing followed closely, with scores of 30. Critical literacy, disciplinary skills, and digital literacy were scored 7, 4, and 2, respectively. It is worth noting that teaching writing ranked as the fourth highest-scoring skill, scoring 30 behind comprehension, oral language, and vocabulary. This is illustrated in Figure 5.3.

Figure 5.3

Teachers’ Confidence in Teaching Specific Literacy Skills



5.3 Presentation of the findings

In this section, I present the findings of this study. An overview of these themes holistically in Figure 5.4 illustrates the main themes and associated subthemes.

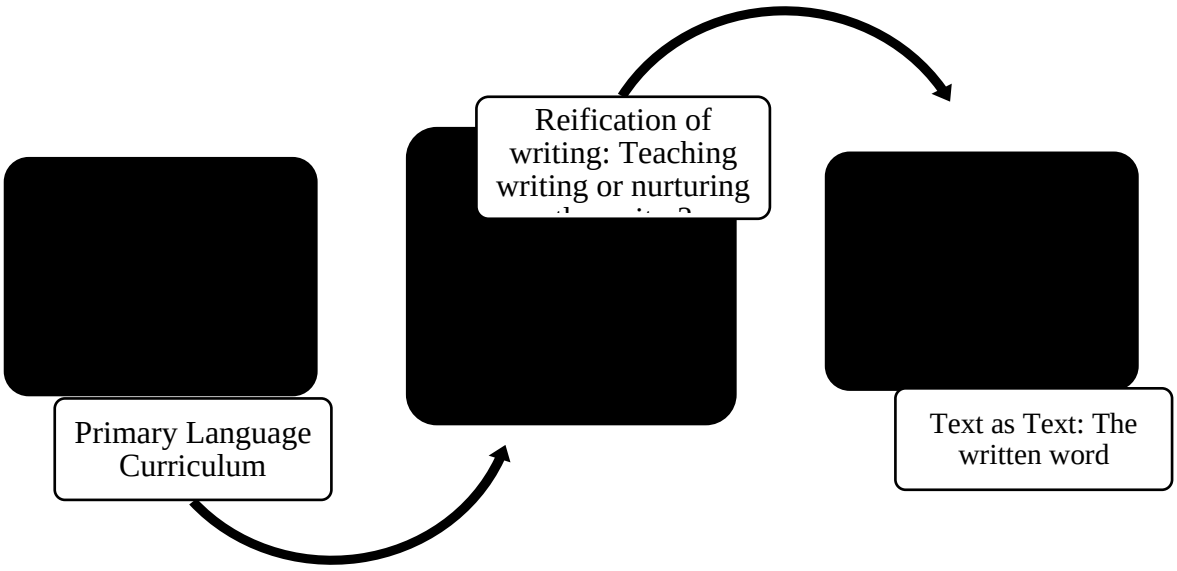
The initial theme recognised is the ambiguity in how the professional development of the **Primary Language Curriculum** (2019) was conducted and the perplexity teachers felt regarding the planning requirements. A secondary theme arises from this is the degree to which the participants' professional experiences influence their teaching methods rather than relying solely on curriculum materials.

The **reification of writing genre** is the second theme that has been identified. This theme explores how a genre approach has resulted in fixed 'units of study,' focusing on planning and teaching multiple genres throughout the school year. The subthemes identified in this context included the perception of writing as a product, the level of support provided for choice, and the critical affective dimension of writing pedagogy. This includes examining children's opportunities to choose topics and genres.

The last theme, **text as text**, examines the digital environment and its differentiation from the literacy environment. The subtopics that arise from this include the availability of digital tools; for instance, teachers have reported insufficient resources and training in utilising digital tools. Additionally, it explores how writing is perceived as the creation of text that incorporates digital tools during the publishing or typing stage of the writing process instead of viewing writing as the creation of text, videos, images, and blogs. The following sections outline each theme as explained in the preceding section. The initial theme pertains to implementing the Primary Language Curriculum (2019) and the accompanying professional development of literacy pedagogy. This theme was divided into two parts. First, the survey results are presented, followed by interviewees' accounts of their experiences with professional development related to the language curriculum. This information is presented in section 5.4 below.

Figure 5.4

Overview of the Findings Organised Across Three Themes.



5.4: Theme One: Uncertainty and Ambiguous Professional Development of the Primary Language Curriculum (2019)

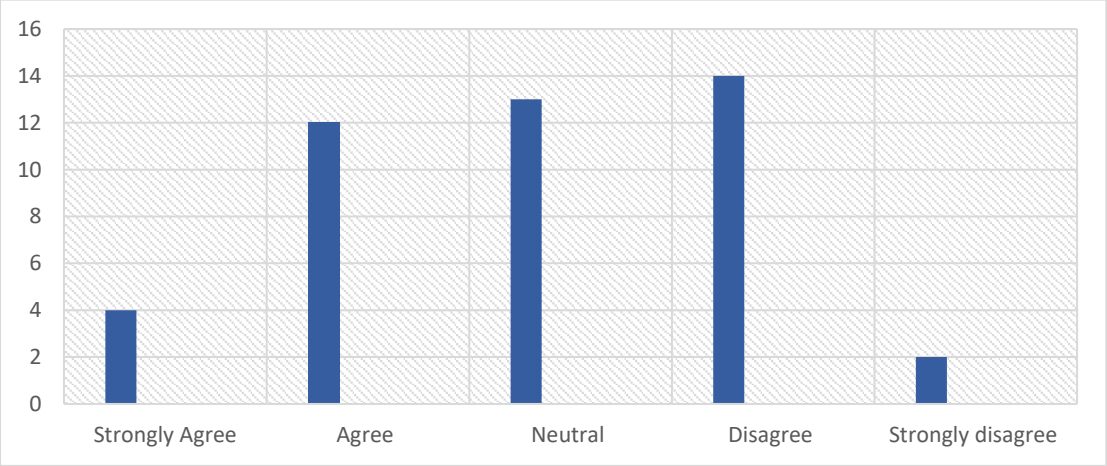
This section summarises the themes identified from the two datasets and discusses the impact of the Primary Language Curriculum (2019) on pedagogy. This theme is further divided into three components.

5.4.1 Ambiguity and Confusion

The initial component focused on implementing the language curriculum as a catalyst for pedagogy, with survey respondents and interviewees reporting different levels of professional development. The participants explained that their pedagogical approaches were influenced by their experience and previous professional development rather than the curriculum document. Responding to a Likert-scale format question, followed by an open-ended question, participants in the questionnaire survey expressed their opinions on how the Primary Language Curriculum (2019) impacted pedagogy. Figure 5.5 presents the participants' perspectives on whether the PLC influenced pedagogy, revealing mixed responses. For example, an equal number of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the PLC has been influential, with 16 individuals stating that the PLC (2019) has influenced pedagogy, and 16 disagreed or strongly disagreed with this viewpoint. The remaining 13 respondents expressed a 'neutral' stance.

Figure 5.5

Influence of the Primary Language Curriculum on Literacy Pedagogy (2019)



The second query about the PLC solicited participants to elaborate on how the Professional Learning Community (PLC) has impacted pedagogy by answering an open-ended question. Four participants indicated that they "strongly agreed" on the curriculum influencing pedagogy, citing the incorporation of progression continua or milestones, which aids in informing instructional planning. One respondent said:

> *I feel I have a more unified approach to teaching English and am more aware of linkage within the curriculum. The new curriculum has encouraged to upskill in my literacy instruction. The Progression Steps are very useful to identify where particular students lie on the continuum (R3. Q7).*

A further 12 respondents noted that they 'Agreed' with this statement; two typical responses were:

> *By following the Learning outcomes, I work by planning my methodology and then seeing what learning outcome it aligns with. (R10. Q7)*

A similar response also alluded to the learning outcomes correlating to methodologies as indicated in this response:

> *I use the learning outcomes to ensure that they correlate to the methodologies that I'm using. (R13. Q7)*

As indicated by one survey participant who disagreed that the PLC has influenced pedagogy, it is remarked how:

> *It has not informed it very much so far as the input has been minimal, and it has not been properly implemented within my school setting. (R14. Q7)*

Similarly, respondents who disagreed (16), commented on how the Primary Language Curriculum (2019) has made planning more difficult:

> *The PLC has made planning more difficult. I find I have to spend a crazy amount of time looking through each strand and element to 'find' the work that would be done under a particular genre. It would be more beneficial if the PLC was designed based around a genre approach to teaching English and Irish.* (R37. Q7)

This was echoed by Anastasia (Interview 3) in phase two of the study, who also commented on paperwork and planning. As Anastasia reported, the rollout in the initial phase focused on planning, which created confusion:

> *I remember initially, there was a little bit of confusion over it. I remember, you know, people didn't know how many objectives they had to include. And I think that kind of*

> *panicked me initially, when I didn't know how to plan for the curriculum. I think the NCCA were quite good in telling people not to panic and just plan based on your practice.* (Anastasia. I3)

The theme of 'inconsistent rollout' emerged from this question, with one respondent reporting that they "*haven't gotten to grips with it yet*" (Response 17). Further to this is the emphasis on paperwork (progression continua and milestones) in the initial rollout of the curriculum, which created a lot of ambiguity and confusion. As explained in Chapter Two, schools did not have the same experiences when implementing the PLC (2019), as the professional development varied across each school setting.

Neutral survey respondents indicated how a lack of professional development and training has meant it has not been impactful, with one respondent commenting on the professional development focusing on critical thinking and picture books.

> *I have found the Primary Language Curriculum quite tricky to get my head around. To date, I have focused on extending the children's vocabulary through picture books linked with my SESE themes and bringing that vocabulary into my oral language sessions.* (R18. Q7).

Rachel echoed this in interview four, who had the experience of working as a facilitator of the language curriculum. She described how the professional development of the language curriculum emphasised oral language in the initial phase:

> *Well, I suppose the initial rollout was very much about oral language development. And I think kind of within the system, I think teachers were really concerned about oral language and vocabulary, even though that hadn't maybe been articulated very well. So, I think there was a kind of a sense of relief, because the oral and the CPD for oral language was the one that came out first.* (Rachel. I4)

Rachel elaborated on this and described how, in her experience, the PD was focused on oral language to the extent that teachers referred to the PLC as "*the oral language curriculum, because that was, you know, what all the CPD was about"* (Rachel. I4).

Fatima also described how her experiences with professional development emphasised critical thinking and book talk. She reported how this and opportunities for collaboration across the school community were a positive experience.

> *We're concentrating on critical thinking and book talk. And we've shared resources, shared plans, that's all been very, very positive.* (Fatima. I1)

Rachel described how the disjointed nature of the curriculum rollout contributed to the confusion.

> *…the waters were very muddied by some of the messaging around, you know, progression continua, and whether children should be plotted on a scale or, you know, how this is going to look…there was a lot of confusion and fear around just I think it was unfortunate looking back, but I can, I can see why it happened in terms of policy, policy and fear and deadlines.* (Rachel. I4)

5.4.2 Discussion of the theme Ambiguity and confusion

Broadly, one could say that several factors have contributed to the confusion and ambiguity surrounding the implementation of the Primary Language Curriculum (PLC, 2019). One of the main factors is the timeframe within which the curriculum was developed. The PLC (2015; 2019) was conceived and developed to respond to Ireland's poor performance in the PISA assessments (2009). As noted in Chapter Two, section 2.2.2, the primary policy driver behind the development of the PLC was Ireland's PISA results and the subsequent "shock" that led to the implementation of the *National Strategy for Literacy and Numeracy* (2011-2020) and the Primary Language Curriculum (2015; 2019).

Addressing the shortcomings of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) has significant implications for policy and curricular reform. In other jurisdictions, such as Australia and England, studies have identified several drawbacks to using international assessments, such as PISA, to shape policy (Addey et al., 2017; Lingard et al., 2015; Buckingham, 2012). The potential for governments to adopt short-term, simplistic approaches to educational policy reform is one of the main concerns expressed by academics and other scholars who have studied the policy effects of PISA (Volante & Klinger, 2023).

In the context of Ireland, the swift curricular alteration has resulted in the development of the Primary Language Curriculum (2019) in two stages, in 2015 and 2019. Although this has led to an expansion of the curriculum's emphasis on the subject of English, the lack of clarity among educators regarding the professional development of the curriculum has engendered uncertainty. At a practical level, it is easy to trace this trajectory. First, the PD for the writing dimension of the PLC was minimal. The PLC (2019) was developed across two stages: stage one, which focused on Junior primary (2015), and stage two, which focused on senior

primary (2019). There was no review of the literature to support literacy in senior primary (ages 8-12 years old) with the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) commissioning reports on the components of literacy in senior primary, such as 'writing pedagogy in senior classes' *after* the rollout of the curriculum. As explained by Rachel, the PD was very much about the language dimension of the curriculum in the initial PD seminars, where she mentions her own experience with this:

> *"When I was with Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) and we were talking about the curriculum, teachers would call it the oral language curriculum, because that was, you know, what all the 'Continuous Professional Development' (CPD) was about".* (Rachel. I4).

Moreover, the emphasis on planning and engaging with the curriculum document as a tool for planning, that is, the 'progression continua' and associated administrative processes at the initial stages, led experienced teachers, such as Fatima, to wonder if there is a need for it:

> *I mean, it just seems I don't know. I didn't find it as user friendly, perhaps as other people. I've had the book and I've used it to do my plans, but I haven't probably used it as much as I should. Maybe it is because I've been teaching so long that I don't know. I just don't feel the need for it* (Fatima. I1).

The findings presented in the section above identify a theme of confusion and ambiguity experienced by teachers during the initial implementation of the Primary Language Curriculum (PLC, 2019). Teachers reported inconsistencies between the PLC's professional development (PD) and its varying nature across different schools. While the PLC's initial PD emphasised oral language and picture books, writing pedagogy did not receive equal attention.

As documented in chapter one, the literature underpinning the primary language curriculum (2015) for junior classes was informed by research called 'balanced literacy' (NCCA, 2012). Definitions of balanced literacy vary across the anglophone world; however, specific instructional practices are associated with this term's definition. For example, balanced literacy, is presented by Bingham & Hall-Kenyon as instructional practice:

> …often enacted through the use of specific instructional routines such as guided reading, shared reading, interactive writing, literacy centres and independent reading and writing (2013:16).

Historical definitions of balanced literacy, such as Wharton McDonald et al., (1997:518) have included authentic experiences in their definition and explain 'balanced literacy' as:

> using both immersion in authentic literacy-related experiences and extensive explicit teaching through modelling, explanation, and minilesson re-explanations, especially with respect to decoding and other skills (e.g., punctuation mechanics, comprehension strategies)

Some critics of balanced literacy, for example, Snow, point out how balanced literacy:

> does not align with the recommendations of the three international inquiries into the teaching of reading (National Reading Panel, 2000; Rowe, 2005; Rose, 2006), but most importantly, has not resulted in improvements in reading achievement levels in nations where it has been embraced, such as the USA, Australia, and the UK (2020: 37)

In the Irish context, definitions of balance has shifted over the past decade. In the NCCA research report (2012) that underpinned the Primary Language Curriculum (2015), a Balanced Literacy Framework was represented as including the components illustrated in Figure 5.6:

Figure 5.6

Components of a Balanced Literacy Framework

Reading	**Writing**
Reading aloud (Adams, 1990; Goodman, 1994)	Shared writing (Holdaway, 1979)
Shared reading (Holdaway, 1979; Teale & Sulzby, 1986)	Interactive writing (Pinnell & McCarrier, 1994)
Guided reading/reading workshops (Clay, 2002; Routman 2000; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Calkins, 2001)	Writers' workshop (Atwell, 1987; Graves, 1994; Calkins, 1986)
Independent reading (Meek, 1988; Clay, 1991)	Independent writing (Bissex, 1980; Harste et al., 1984)

The most recent definition as outlined in the research that underpins the National Strategy for Literacy and Numeracy (2022) defines balanced literacy as:

> balanced in terms of attention to and systematic explicit teaching of constrained (e.g. phonics, letter knowledge, punctuation) and unconstrained (vocabulary, comprehension composition) skills according to children's assessed needs and stage of development; balanced in access to a wide variety of genres and 'texts' in reading and writing; balanced in terms of formative and summative assessment practices; and balanced in terms of attention to oral language, reading and writing recognising the reciprocal relationship and supportive processes existing between the forms of language. This means that a teacher must attend to both the explicit and systematic teaching of code-based skills (for example. phonics) with the provision of meaningful opportunities to apply these skills when reading connected texts (connected texts are meaningful texts with multiple related sentences characterised by a coherent and cohesive structure) and when creating texts in a variety of genres and disciplines).

The uncertainty and confusion surrounding the new curriculum may stem partly from the lack of a clear definition of literacy at a national level. Notably, the commitment to "balanced literacy," whether in its original form as outlined by the NCCA in 2012 or as reimagined in the report to underpin the National Strategy for Literacy and Numeracy 2022, remains contentious internationally. The commitment to “balanced literacy” also highlights the tendency in the Irish context to import pedagogical approaches, such as the instructional framework of balanced literacy, from the United States without due consideration to teacher expertise and professional development. However, without a full review of how the curriculum (2019) was implemented in schools, it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which teachers have implemented a “balanced literacy” framework or approach to literacy. Undoubtedly, great caution must be exercised when adopting practices from other countries and replicating them in our own context. While it may be tempting to emulate the approaches of nations such as the United States or England, it is essential to recognise that the Irish context is distinct and that such strategies may not prove suitable for our local needs. Additionally, the term "balanced literacy" is a subject of much debate and controversy, and it would be wise to avoid committing to it, as doing so may only further exacerbate existing conflicts and divisions. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that literacy has undergone significant shifts in focus over time, swinging from a concentration on decoding to other areas. There is a paucity of evidence available to explain Ireland's performance in international assessments on a global scale, such as PIRLs.

The comments made by Andreas Schleicher, the chief of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), on Ireland’s education system, as reported in the *Irish Times*, have suggested that:

> Ireland’s education system is based on a 20th-century model of learning and needs to modernise to avoid producing “second-class robots” in a world of rapid technological change
>
> (O’Brien, C., 2021).

The present situation presents a paradox, as policy changes have been motivated by PISA, an assessment tool developed by the OECD. Despite the pressing need to implement a new language curriculum, the urgency led to a missed opportunity to engage in robust, evidence-based literacy curriculum reform. This could have been drawn from various sources, including the Science of Reading, recent advancements in genre theory, and digital frameworks relevant to the twenty-first-century context.

Educators must recognise the reciprocal relationship between curricular reform, implementation, and evaluation in the curriculum context. This can be achieved through professional development (PD) support. Without this understanding, any initiative will be fruitless. Considering the evaluative dimension and teachers' values, professional agency, and desire to participate in evaluations and have their voices heard is imperative. Furthermore, from a professional development perspective, the major implication of a reactive curriculum is the time given to professional development. Scholars of PD, such as Guskey and Yoon (2009: 498) highlight how:

> at all levels of education, those responsible for planning and implementing professional development must learn how to critically assess and evaluate the effectiveness of what they do. This means that discussions about the specific goals of professional development, what evidence best reflects the achievement of those goals, and how that evidence can be gathered in meaningful and scientifically defensible ways must become the starting point for all planning activities.

The overriding issue in the Irish context concerns the factors that have led to the current situation. Various explanations have been put forward for this, including the historical legacy of importing policy from other Anglophone countries and the associated economic factors. Irish education policy has followed a trajectory influenced by neoliberal practice and 'reform' in England (Simmie, 2012; Skerritt, 2019). The second explanation is the importation of literacy pedagogy from other Anglophone countries, such as the example of balanced literacy and the body of research informing it on the curriculum.

Participants provided feedback on the efficacy of the *Support Materials for Teachers* in implementing the curriculum. As previously mentioned in Chapter 1, these materials are not mandatory curriculum documents and include specific strategies and methods, such as a guide to writing genres, guided reading, vocabulary, and writers' workshops. The *Support Materials for Teachers* are intended to aid in implementing the PLC (2019). However, there was also some confusion among interviewees who used the term 'support materials' interchangeably with the curriculum document. For instance, in the example below, the respondent referred to the 'prescribed' approaches mentioned in the support materials in the following response.

> *I think the PLC has prescribed some brilliant practices which weren't being used previously e.g., writers' workshop, but it can be overwhelming to try to do everything- there are only five days in each week!*
> (R31. Q 7)

Anastasia referred to the strategies and techniques mentioned in the non-statutory curriculum documents (Support materials for teachers) and highlighted her familiarity with certain approaches, such as utilising a workshop approach for teaching writing.

Similar to the survey respondents, there is some confusion between support materials for teachers and the curriculum document:

> *I know the Writers Workshop has been around for a long time, but I just felt in Ireland, and especially all the teachers aren't using it. So, when we did finally switch to the primary language curriculum, I found that I was kind of doing all of that stuff already. You know, especially when we had to go to the education centres to be informed about the primary language curriculum. I found that a lot of the advice that they were giving us was stuff that I had already known before, and I was using in my classroom already.*
> (Anastasia. I3).

In addition to the sub-theme of experience as a driving force in pedagogy, the sub-section below addresses the influence of time as a variable in determining the frequency with which teachers teach writing.

In the subsequent subsection, I present the subtheme identified within this pertaining to experience as a driver of pedagogy. Upon further inquiry with the interviewees, they discussed how their experiences catalysed their pedagogical practices. Subsequently, I analysed the interviewees' perspectives on the impact of their professional experience on their teaching, in which the theme experience as a driver of pedagogy was identified. As indicated by the participants in phase two, their professional experience, in-house expertise, and historical professional development in a writing genre approach significantly shaped their writing pedagogy. This was particularly evident for teachers working in low-SES contexts, the DEIS context, in which the *First Steps* programme from the Department of Education in Western Australia was implemented in 2008. The implications of this are discussed in section 5.5, which identified genre reification as a theme.

5.4.3 Experience and previous professional development as a driver of pedagogy

Within this theme of confusion and ambiguity with the Primary Language Curriculum (PLC, 2019) is the issue of how teachers' professional experience, agency, flexibility, and historical

professional development impact pedagogy. Teachers' experiences, professional agency, and historical professional development were identified as important in informing pedagogy as opposed to the professional development of the language curriculum and the curriculum document. For example, in phase one, questionnaire respondents indicated how collegiality influences their practice.

> *It has very little influence. I follow my own ideas and those of colleagues and what I have learned from research.* (R11. Q7).

In phase two, the investigative nature of this phase facilitated more comprehensive discussions with interviewees regarding the curriculum's impact on pedagogy. Like the questionnaire respondents, interviewees conveyed diverse perceptions of the implementation of the curriculum. They provided in-depth explanations as to why there was confusion and vagueness surrounding it as a curricular document during the initial stage of the rollout. Interviewees were questioned about how the curriculum influenced pedagogy, and they spoke about their own teaching experiences and the significance of literacy leadership within the school as determinants of pedagogy instead of curriculum documents and professional development opportunities. Fatima emphasised that her practical experience is the driving force behind pedagogy rather than the specific content of the curriculum.

> *Maybe it's because I've been teaching so long that I don't know. I just don't feel the need for it.*
>
> (Fatima. I1)

Fatima emphasises the importance of her three decades of teaching experience in shaping her approaches and methods rather than solely relying on the "new" curriculum. She also discusses the pivotal role of the school's literacy coordinator in making the curriculum more accessible to a diverse range of students:

> *To be honest, I have engaged with this, I've engaged with it more because Martina* (the school's literacy coordinator) certainly has helped bring it to light. But to actually relate it to my plans? I've done it more because I've had to then because I needed to…I didn't find it as user friendly, perhaps as other people, even though Martina really helped out with that. But to be honest, I haven't. I've had the book and I've used it to do my plans, but I haven't probably used it as much as I should. Maybe it's because I've been teaching so long that I don't know? I just don't feel the need for it.*
>
> (Fatima. I1)

For interviewees with less than ten years of experience, such as Sarah, a teacher at a DEIS Band One school where the *First Steps* literacy programme was implemented before the

implementation of the Primary Language Curriculum (2019), her previous experience with the *First Steps* programme enabled her to draw analogies between the curriculum and *First Steps*. She explained how the process of tracking progress across progression continua was similar in both programs. Based on this, she proposed the following hypothesis:

> *Yeah, you see, like I said, we were quite familiar with the strategies. And we have what we're doing… I can't remember what we used to call… it was called tracking. Yeah, tracking their writing. And so we had the, you know, the different stages. And we used to track three children four times a year. So when that element was introduced, like we were all quite familiar with, and obviously, it was introduced first with oral language. And first with the junior end, and I, for most of my career have been in the senior end. I would find that the primary language curriculum has just made me more kind of cognisant of the genres and the links, especially between things like bearla agus gaeilge (English and Irish)*
>
> (Sarah. I2)

Questionnaire respondents expressed how the lack of implementation of the PLC has meant that it has little impact on pedagogy. Questionnaire respondents indicated how the Professional Development (PD) varied from school to school, and consequently, it has not been fully implemented. As one respondent noted:

> *It has not informed it very much so far as the input has been minimal, and it has not been properly implemented within my school setting.*
> (R14. Q 7)

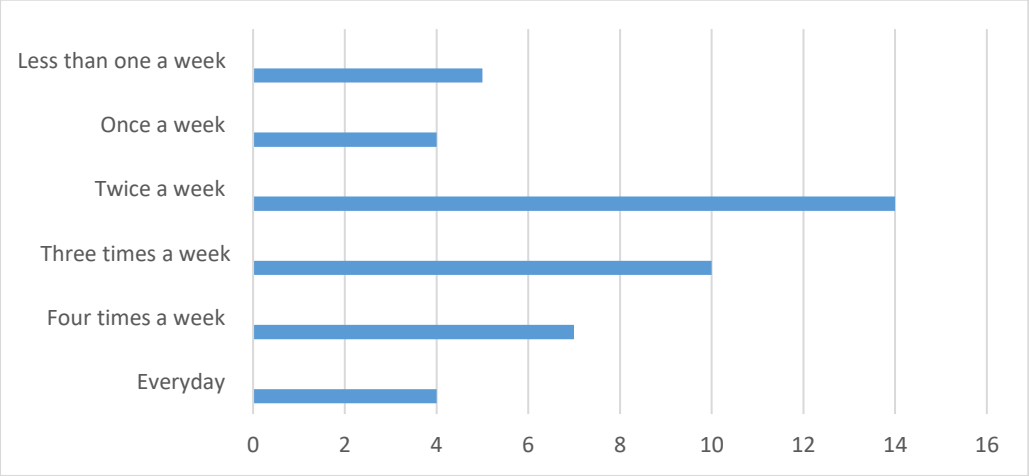
5.4.2 Variety in the time devoted to teaching writing

As part of the *National Strategy for Literacy and Numeracy (2011-2020),* the allocated time for teaching the subject of English increased from fifty minutes per day to one hour per day. Teachers documented distinct applications of time concerning writing instruction.

Factors affecting writing instruction, such as the time devoted to writing and how writing is viewed compared to other stands on the curriculum, reading and oral language, were posed to survey respondents and interviewees. Figure 5.7 indicates that 14 respondents reported teaching writing twice weekly. The variation across questionnaire respondents is illustrated in Figure 5.7.

Figure 5.7

Time Allocated to Writing Instruction.



In the context of DEIS, the impact of the historical professional development of writing through the First Steps programme on the allocation of time for writing instruction for teachers weekly has been substantial. For instance, Sarah, a teacher in a DEIS context, dedicates time to explicitly model writing and encourages regular free writing. Sarah characterised the amount of time she provides to teaching writing as follows:

> *So, every day, but have a focus lesson, once a week of writing process or, or using the First Steps like models, examples, guided groups independence, and what they would write, like, they would have some sort of a writing lesson every day, whether it was a mini writing mini lessons, or a free writing session or integration. But then, usually kind of, maybe a full hour of First Steps writing lessons once a week would be the way I do it.* (Sarah. I2)

In a DEIS context, Rachel adopts a once-a-week approach, which mirrors Sarah's experience with the *First Steps* program facilitated by the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST).

> *Well, it was one writing genre a term over two years. To be honest, I think it was once or twice a week in most instances. And that might have been a disadvantage of doing one over a term*
>
> (Rachel. I4)

In a non-DEIS context, Anastasia follows a workshop approach and dedicates time to writing daily. Anastasia is an early career teacher who draws on her undergraduate experience in

informing her approach. She explains a process approach to writing genre implementing a writers' workshop:

> *Again, I use the Writers Workshop, so I try if I can to do it every day. But sometimes in a week, I'll probably get three times a week if I can, because there is a school plan in English in our school, and you know, there are books and certain programmes that need to be covered. And, you know, which, you know, and I know, we have about an hour a day to teach English, but sometimes I don't really want to compact, you know, the Writers Workshop into just a half an hour, 40 minutes, and we'd like to spend the whole hour on it. So about three times a week, I get a chance to do the Writers' Workshop*
>
> (Anastasia. I3)

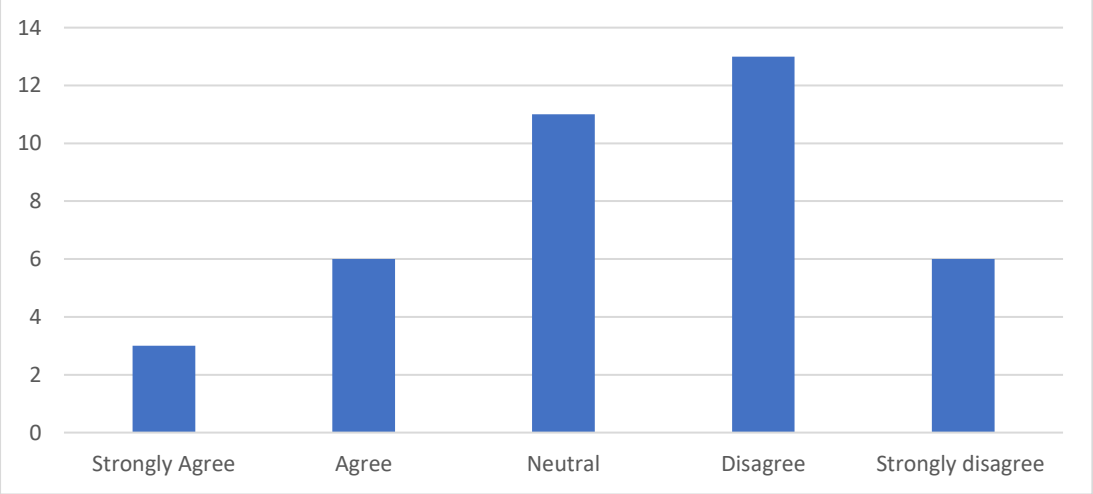
For Michelle, other curricular factors sometimes influence how much time is dedicated to writing; she cites the constraints of having to teach so many curricular areas as a rationale for teaching writing sporadically:

> *A few times a week, okay. Sometimes it can go by the wayside. Sometimes there's so many things brought in… too many kids get pushed to the wayside.*
>
> (Michelle. I5).

Survey participants recognised that the curriculum's limitations and the significance of reading and evaluating reading skills contribute to the reduced time allocated for writing instruction. The results were mixed when asked about the influence of standardised tests and assessments on writing time, as illustrated in Figure 5.8.

Figure 5.8

How Standardised Tests Affect Time Allocated to Writing



This investigation's results were inconclusive, as 9 respondents expressed agreement or strong agreement, while 11 remained neutral and 19 disagreed or strongly disagreed. Upon closer examination of the responses, a diverse range of opinions became apparent, with those who agreed or strongly agreed calling for a greater focus on reading instruction.

I tend to spend more time on reading than writing (R27. 8)

Considering why more time is devoted to reading than writing, one respondent indicated that the rationale is that writing is not assessed:

Lack of emphasis on writing due to it not being tested on standardised tests (R 31. Q8)

Elaborating on this when interviewed, Fatima expresses concern on how poor reading assessments can be demotivating and feels that the results of these assessments are reflective of her capacity as a teacher:

> *I suppose standardised testing. I'm feeling a bit negative about them at the moment because we got very poor results recently and it really brought everybody's spirits down. I was really down about the results, but I saw it as a reflection of my teaching of them the year before as well. So for us we started to go down the rabbit hole of how can we improve them? But understandably though as they were out of school for such a long time?*
>
> (Fatima. I1).

Adding to this, she discusses a feeling of pressure on teachers for children to perform well in reading assessments. Here she refers to children's STen scores. STen refers to a score in ten which is how standardised tests results are reported to parents.

> *There was pressure on everybody, because you kind of feel I mustn't have done my job properly. If these results are so poor when you see children who drop two or three STens as a teacher you can't help but question, was it something that I did? Or should I have emphasised something more? Did I use the time properly? I don't mean to sound negative, but I think a lot of teachers felt that way.*
> (Fatima. I1.)

From a writing perspective she speaks about how writing instruction does not improve reading and therefore the focus for improvement is on reading instruction:

> *And then, you know, the worry, I suppose writing is not going to really improve standardised reading tests. We think about it, unless it's motivating the children to read. I think it's important to get the information and to know where the children stand. But at the end of the day, writing is really important. The kids need to be able to speak and they need to be able to read examples of what they've read and they need to be able to engage with what they've been reading before they can write. But it's really important when I see poor standardized testing, when they start thinking about writing straight away, it is more like, oh my God. we need to get them to read more and more.*
> (Fatima. I1)

For Michelle, a teacher in a non-DEIS context, she also speaks about feeling pressure, from other teachers and parents when it comes to reading assessment. She mentions that children's writing abilities are not taken into consideration in standardised assessments.

> *And there is definitely pressure there. And I know teachers in our school would actually practice cloze tests with the children before they are given the test. It's a stressful time in school for the teachers, for the children, because they know the test is coming up. And yes, and I find that there's an emphasis on the teachers practicing close reading tests with them, what they miss out on other skills or strategies. And parents become very focused on these numbers. And they don't understand that it's not a true reflection of the children. And you know, they may have displayed excellent oral language abilities, or excellent, you know, creative writing abilities. It doesn't take any of that into account.*
>
> (Michelle. I5)

For Rachel, the focus in her school out of the three strands of the curriculum (reading, writing and oral language), is reading:

> *But I suppose maybe there has been a tradition there of focusing on reading more than anything else. I haven't considered that question before. But it's something that I should consider, maybe given that our writing is the weakest of maybe the three big skills*
> (Rachel, I 4).

Based on the feedback received from the 11 neutral participants regarding the influence of assessment and standardised tests on the time allocated for teaching writing, it was determined that there was no discernible effect. However, a portion of the allotted time is spent practising specific test components, including cloze activities, a feature of standardised reading assessments in Ireland where students fill in missing words. This observation was shared by one of the respondents.

> *I don't let it affect my teaching; I do however tend to give the children more practice on cloze tests close to the time of their tests. This prepares them for their test to a certain degree.* (R14. Q8)

Another respondent who reported a ‘neutral’ response commented on how standardised tests do not measure all components of literacy:

> *It upsets me that it doesn't measure all the literacy skills that we teach the children. If we only prepared for that test we would teach vocabulary and how to answer questions.* (R 18. Q8)

For respondents who indicated (19), that standardised testing does not affect writing instruction, responses were brief with comments such as: “*They do not”* (R 4. Q 8) and “*It does not”* (R 11. Q8)

When interviewed, Anastasia, a teacher in an affluent area, indicates how these tests do not affect her teaching of literacy.

> *I don't feel that my standardised testing that it really affects my teaching of literacy at all, you know, okay. Yeah, I just, you know, the school that I'm in is Church of Ireland, it's quite well off, a lot of the children will be getting STens like of high average. So, and that's something we've actually recognised in the whole school and the new homeschool plan, we've made up that, you know, a lot of our children actually come in with a really good standard of oral language and of reading as well. So, it's not really, I find that in our school, we tend to kind of push more of the higher order critical, I suppose skills, it's just in our school anyway, we just find that the children …and we're quite good at oral language and reading skills.*
>
> (Anastasia. I3).

Elaborating on this, Sarah commented on how she understands why teachers feel pressure to devote time to reading because of standardised tests, but is not influenced by standardised scores:

> *I do like understand why people worry about the tests, but then you just have to sit back and remember, it's, it's one day out of the year, I don't think you should let it affect you, affect that much*
>
> (Sarah. I2)

The findings regarding the influence of the Primary Language Curriculum (PLC, 2019) on pedagogy remain inconclusive due to variations in professional development and an initial focus on paperwork, causing confusion. Although there are some positive aspects of PD for the PLC, such as the emphasis on critical thinking and oral language through picture books, the development of the writing aspect has not been given equal attention. Additionally, there is a broader question regarding the time allocation for writing instruction and other assessment factors that may influence this. The findings do not provide a clear answer, with

some teachers attributing the pressure of testing as a factor while others do not consider it an issue. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), which consists of policymakers and curriculum designers, promotes teacher agency in the extensive learning outcomes of the Irish primary curriculum. The current allocation of one hour per day for teaching English in the curriculum does not provide specific guidelines for utilisation. The following section presents the second theme: Reification of writing genres as units of study.

5.5 Theme Two: 'Reification' of genres as units of study: Teaching Writing or Nurturing the Writer?

The data analysis uncovered a second prominent theme: the reification of writing genres as discrete units of study. This phenomenon is rooted in the writing genre's historical professional development stemming from professional development in writing genres in Irish primary schools in the mid-00s. The reification of genre suggests that writing is primarily driven by genre rather than purpose, as Derewianka emphasises (2015:17). Whole-school plans that are implemented annually are structured to cover a specific writing genre within a designated time frame. Survey respondents were asked about their instructional approaches to teaching writing and the factors that shape writing pedagogy. During the interviews, the impact of writing genres was examined in depth, specifically how genres were incorporated as units of study over a sustained period. Although the approaches taken by the interviewees varied, there was a shared understanding of what constitutes the so-called 'six' main writing genres (see Appendix D).

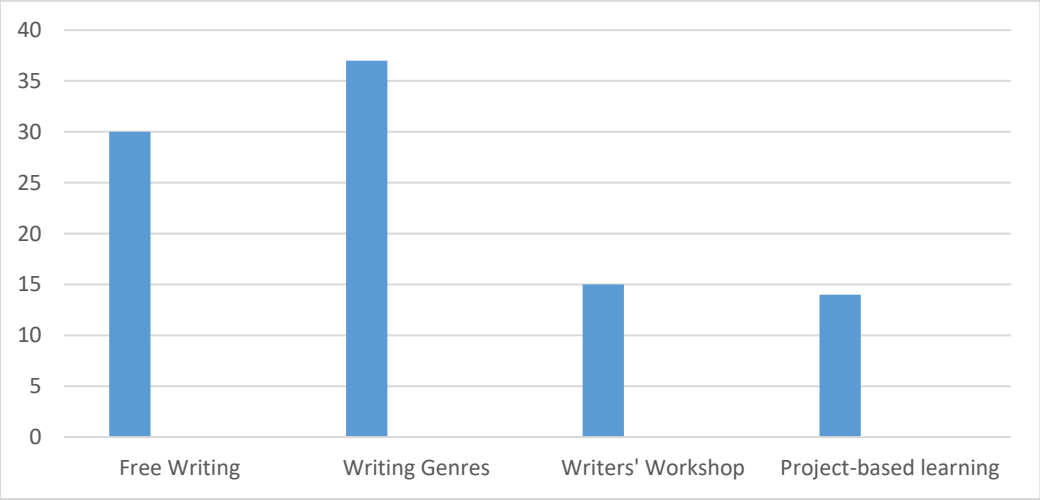
In this section, I present this finding of genre reification and the factors that have informed this approach. The findings emerging from this shed light on teachers' views on how broader policy and professional development have influenced this structured approach and how the approach varies between teachers in DEIS and non-DEIS contexts. Further to this is the role of choice in writing and how choice is facilitated across topics and genres.

5.5.1 A genre approach

In Phase 1 of the study, teachers indicated several pedagogical approaches to teaching writing. These include free writing, a practice in which children are encouraged to write freely; a writing genre approach in which genres are explicitly taught; a writers' workshop approach (sometimes synonymously referred to as the writing process); and other approaches such as project-based learning in which a few genres are addressed in a single unit of study on a topic. This is illustrated in Figure 5.9.

Figure 5.9

Approaches to Writing Instruction



Writing instruction encompasses various methodologies, such as "free writing" and "writing genres." The analysis revealed a predominant theme in the impact of writing genres on writing instruction, as most respondents (37) reported adopting this particular approach.

Interviewees referred to a 'whole-school approach' and/or 'school plan' in which writing genres are timetabled over a specific timeframe. While this approach varies from school to school, some genres are covered over a two-year cycle in line with the two-year cycle of the curriculum. Here, the interviewees discussed how writing genres are planned in a block of time, and this is informed by a whole-school approach set out in the school's whole-school plan for English.

Sarah, a teacher in a DEIS school, described how a writing genre approach is taught over a two-year period as outlined in her school plan. She described how this works in her school context:

> *Yeah, so we were doing a yearly timetable after the CPD days we had, I think we had a PDST facilitator as well. We moved for over a two-year period. So over two years. Like they'll get a recount and narrative every year. And then the other genres will be every second year. And two months, two months for the genre, five genres a year.*
>
> (Sarah. I 2).

The factors influencing this genre approach include historic professional development from the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST). Rachel, also a teacher in a DEIS context, described a similar approach. However, in her case, the genres are covered over a term. She put forward how this is planned for in her context and offered:

> *Well, it was one writing genre, a term over two years. And to be honest, I think it was once or twice a week in most instances. And that might have been a disadvantage of doing one over a term*
>
> (Rachel. I4)

Fatima, also a teacher in a DEIS context, follows a similar approach to Rachel and described the approach in her context:

> *It was probably Martina (literacy coordinator) Well, we conversed over genres we want to cover? And then they were sort of put in a block, we divided them between the two years and then tried to link them in with the literacy and the oral language.*
>
> (Fatima. I1)

Anastasia characterised her approach and methodology as more adaptable. As a teacher in a non-DEIS setting, she indicates that although writing genres are emphasised, the approach is less rigid compared to the other interviewees who discuss a school-wide focus. There is a certain flexibility in terms of planning, and she incorporates her past experiences of attempting to focus solely on the writing into a more comprehensive approach. Anastasia explained her perspective on genres as follows:

> *I tried to do my planning in terms rather than in years. I found that previously, I would have my genres, you know, in each month, and I try and take a month to do it but I just found it was quite overwhelming after a while that I was trying to hit each genre. And you know, like the likes of procedural writing. And that takes, you know, you don't need a*

> *month on procedure, sometimes even two weeks can be enough if you're doing the Writers Workshop. So, I tried to plan more in terms rather than over a year. And, again, I tried to think about, you know, how I can tie it in with other themes as well.*
>
> (Anastasia, I3)

For Michelle, also a teacher in a non-DEIS context, her approach is to cover three genres per year. She described this as:

> *I would teach probably three over a year, and I begin my planning around my picture books or newspapers or my particular genre.*
>
> (Michelle. I5)

When discussing the broader policy influences on what has informed this approach, the subtheme of historic professional development emerged with past experiences of implementing a genre approach informing the rationale.

The factors determining a genre approach to teaching writing are similar among interviewees. For example, for Rachel, Fatima and Sarah, teachers in DEIS contexts' historical professional development in writing have influenced their approach. They also cite school plans and the school's agreed approaches to determining how they teach genres.

In phase two, when explaining the factors that determine a cyclical approach to genres, that is, over a term or a two-year cycle, Rachel explained what has informed a 'cycle' of genres. Here, she cited the influences of the genre approach with specific reference to the *First Steps* programme (2005) and the Professional Development Service for Teachers support document (2013) as influential in planning for writing.

When asked how the writing genres are adopted in her school, she explained:

> *We didn't have a sense of a coordinated approach to writing. But we did have in our school to plan the writing genre that would be covered in each term over a two-year period. So, you know, we felt that at least then we would be covering different writing genre. Then we were kind of looking at the writing genre from First Steps, and then the writing genre from the PDST documents, and they weren't quite the same? And then we were thinking, do we really have to do all these genres?"*
>
> (Rachel. I4).

The contrast between the writing genre as depicted in the *First Steps* programme (2005) and the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) document on '7 steps to teaching a writing genre' (2013) was emphasised by Rachel in this discourse. While the former includes writing for social purposes and poetry, the latter provides a more limited

perspective. The manual published by the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) does not explicitly identify poetry as a writing genre, nor does it acknowledge it as one of the six main writing genres in the educational resources provided for instructors. Rachel, expanding on her preceding remark, explained the selection of writing genres:

> *So we latched onto genres, thinking that it was going to be a really helpful thing. However, there was absolutely no measurable improvement in writing across the school since we started.*
>
> (Rachel. I4).

She was thoughtful about writing genre and commented on the effect of this in her school with specific reference to poetry:

> *"And then poetry became …poetry had always been something that was really well done in our school, but poetry got thrown in there as a genre that was done once every, you know, writing poetry was done one term every two years, and there was actually a lot more poetry writing happening before we had our everything parcelled up into these blocks. Okay, of course, it was never meant that teachers felt that they only had to do that; that was never meant. But that's an effect of what happened."*
>
> (Rachel. I4).

The development of writing pedagogy in low-SES (DEIS) schools was impacted by the *First Steps* Programme in 2005. The Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) provided professional development on the '7 step approach to teaching writing genre in 2013 (Appendix G). Furthermore, the support materials for teachers, intended to aid in implementing the curriculum, emphasise the significance of teaching writing genres and provide a suggested timeframe (See Appendix I). Additionally, these support materials refer to specific instructional approaches, such as 'The Writers' Workshop'

The interviewees spoke of how this approach is flexible. For example, when following the Professional Development Service for Teachers' (PDST) handbook, children begin writing independently in week three or four as discussed with Sarah, who acknowledged flexibility but also described how she is inclined to get the writing "done":

> **NW:** *Okay. So like in the PDST handbook it (*introducing a writing genre happens*) over a few weeks, the children will be writing independently in week three or week four?*
> **Sarah:** *Yeah, yeah. Week three or four. Exactly. Yeah.*
> **NW:** *Okay, how much flexibility would you find that you would have with that?*
> **Sarah:** *As in that, I wouldn't feel under pressure to get it done? Yeah, like so if you're following a kind of like structure in the school plan and what your facilitator has brought*

> *in, can you deviate away from that a little bit? I could, but I'm a very organised person. So, I would, I would just get it done in time"* (Sarah. I3)

Michelle offers that there is a lot more flexibility in her context, non-DEIS. On the professional development for writing for the primary language curriculum, she states how:

> *I don't know if there was any in the area of writing.*
>
> (Michelle. I5).

She also mentions how there is not a structured approach, and both teacher creativity and flexibility are encouraged by the school principal:

> *We don't have a structured approach. Phil (school principal) is great in this way; he promotes and tries to be creative with different ideas.*
>
> (Michelle. I5).

The structured approach of having teachers or schools lead the writing process raises whether the focus is on teaching writing or teaching the writer. This topic will be further explored in section 5.6. The following section provides a discussion on the reification of writing.

5.5.2 Discussion of Theme Two: Reification of writing genres

In this section, I discuss the second finding, which involves the "reification" of writing genres in the Irish context. I examine the rationale behind this approach and trace its trajectory. Additionally, I argue for the need for a more expansive definition of writing, highlighting the limitations of relying solely on theoretical models and processes from the 1980s. I also discuss the dynamic nature of writing, emphasising the importance of staying informed about changes in writing genres, which are often oversimplified in the Irish context due to the emphasis on structure rather than function. Lastly, I discuss the sociocultural aspect of writing and how it should function within specific contexts driven by purpose.

The "reification" of genre, as identified by Jones and Derewianka (2016) in the Australian context, refers to the process through which abstract or conceptual ideas take on a tangible or physical form. In their historical review of genre pedagogy in the English curriculum of Australia, Jones and Derewianka (2016:14) observed that this phenomenon has resulted in the prioritisation of "text types" over educational objectives and the rigid reproduction of genre stages as structured components of instruction. A comparison between Australia and Ireland,

where a genre-based approach has been widely embraced, can be drawn. However, it is necessary to clarify the meaning of genre and the historical context in which it has been understood in order to make meaningful comparisons between the two contexts.

Writing pedagogy exists very much within a 'genre' approach. In the Primary Language Curriculum (2019), the term Genre is presented as:

> "… a selection of oral and written forms in order to recount, explain, entertain, inform, give instructions, narrate, persuade and justify opinions. Oral forms include, but are not limited to, storytelling, drama, poetry, speeches, debates, film and digital media such as podcasts, videos, advertising, tv and radio broadcasts. More specifically, genres are types of multi-sentence oral or written texts that have become conventionalised for particular purposes. They have expected organisational patterns, as well as language features related to register, e.g. narrative, informational, persuasive and multi-genre".

However, there are some words of caution needed here. It would be disingenuous to suggest that genre theory is problematic in the Irish context. First, what is described as 'genre' in Ireland is not necessarily reflective of 'genre theory' (Martin, 1986) in its original form. Genre in the Irish context, particularly in DEIS contexts, is a diluted version of genre theory, a reimagined or misinterpreted version of the *First Steps* programme emphasising genre structure rather than the function of genre.

The rationale for implementing a writing genre approach emerged in schools in low SES, the DEIS context, adopting the *First Steps* programme in the mid-00s. In its initial conception, *First Steps* advocated for writing to be taught daily. In tracing this trajectory, there appears to be a misinterpretation of genres by the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) in their publication in 2013, which presents writing genres as very rigid text types. For example, a seven-week step-by-step process for genre implementation.

Furthermore, what teachers in low SES contexts interpret as the *First Steps* Programme is not an accurate portrayal of the programme devised and developed in Western Australia (WA) in (2005), which has evolved over the past two decades in WA.

The concept of agency presents a paradoxical situation. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) promotes agency as "the ability of teachers to make choices and judge the most desirable option based on the wider purposes of their practice" (Lord, YEAR: 141). However, the focus on professional development programmes and initiatives like First Steps, instead of pedagogical content knowledge, hinders the development of agency. Without the necessary pedagogical content knowledge, it is extremely challenging for a

teacher to critically evaluate resources and make informed decisions about their use. Furthermore, the purpose of *Support Materials for Teachers* is called into question when they are presented alongside rigid structures and limited support. Thus, while agency is promoted, these constraints limit its practical applications.

In the Irish context, through the non-statutory curriculum documents the '*Support Materials for Teachers*', it is suggested that a genre of writing is taught across a block of 6-8 weeks. This is illustrated in Figure 5.10. below.

Figure 5.10

Suggested approach to teaching writing genre in the Support Materials for Teachers (PLC, 2020)

Writing Genres
The teacher should plan approximately 6-8 weeks. Using the writing workshop as an instructional method, the key elements of a genre can be thought in mini lessons (see previous section on writing workshop)

The Support Materials for Teachers as defined by (through personal correspondence with a spokesperson) of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), are explained as follows:

> The Support Materials were developed to support teachers in planning for and using the Primary Language Curriculum and support the provision of enriching, high quality teaching and learning experiences in Irish primary school classrooms. While the Primary Language Curriculum itself is a statutory document, the Support Materials differ, as they were developed to aid the introduction of the PLC to the system (NCCA)

Additionally, a broader concern of creating and professionally developing a curriculum in such a short timeframe is the need to develop 'non-statutory' curriculum documents in the form of '*Support Materials for Teachers'* to aid them in enacting the curriculum.

These documents may be creating more ambiguity and confusion for the participants in this study. For example, these documents are referred to synonymously as 'curriculum' as indicated by one survey respondent:

> *I think the PLC has prescribed some brilliant practices which weren't being used previously e.g., writers' workshop, but it can be overwhelming to try to do everything- there are only five days in each week!*
>
> (R31. Q7)

Similarly, there is a sense of 'doing' the curriculum already, particularly for teachers in DEIS contexts such as Sarah, who felt comfortable with the progression continua and milestones:

> *Yeah, you see, like I said, we were quite familiar with the strategies. And we have what we're doing… I can't remember what we used to call it was called tracking*
>
> (Sarah, I2)

Anastasia echoed this in Interview Three and alluded to a workshop approach as part of the curriculum.

> *I know the Writers Workshop has been around for a long time, but I just felt in Ireland, and especially all the teachers aren't using it. So, when we did finally switch to the primary language curriculum, I found that I was kind of doing all of that stuff already. You know, especially when we had to go to the education centres to be informed about the primary language curriculum. I found that a lot of the advice that they were giving us was stuff that I had already known before, and I was using in my classroom already"*
>
> (Anastasia. I 3).

Rachel offered a similar view to Anastasia and referenced a workshop approach as a specific curricular approach.

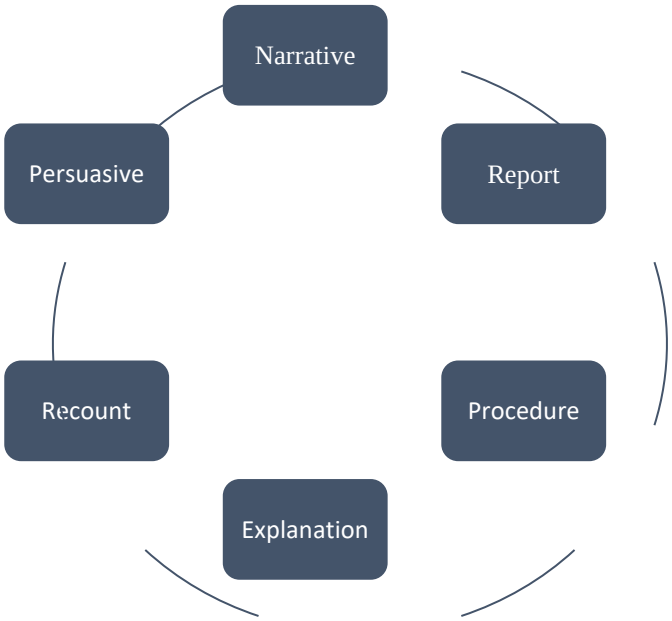
> *So in the curriculum, we have the Writers Workshop with genre approaches and motivation and engagement in the writing outcomes. But it's a bit mish mashy. I don't know if that's actually a word.*
> (Rachel, I4)

The suggestion, as in the *Support Materials for Teachers*, that writing genre be taught through a workshop approach is misleading. Furthermore, this approach cements the 'reification' of genre, omitting its purpose and function. It also has implications for writing within a C21st context and writing as production.

The curriculum presentation of genres acknowledges the oral and digital dimensions of spoken text form. In the non-statutory curriculum documents, the support materials for teachers, 'six' main genres are defined. This is illustrated in Figure 5.11.

Figure 5.11

The 'six' main genres as defined in the 'Support Materials for Teachers' (2020).



There is, as illustrated in the examples above, discrepancies with how genre is interpreted or presented in the curriculum document and the support materials for teachers.

In an attempt to figure out how writing genre is viewed by teachers, Rachel in Interview 4, offered the following explanation:

> *The writing approach was definitely very much writing genre, which, you know, emerged from the use of First Steps in the, in the DEIS schools, and then the PDST and other support agencies may have looked at the First Steps approach. So that was the kind of the writing education, that was very much influenced by that.*
>
> (Rachel, I4).

Historically, the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) manual on *Writing Genre- A Structured Approach* (2013) has informed this approach. In the opening pages, the manual is referred to as providing:

> …guidance on how schools may approach the teaching of a number of writing genres. While the focus is on seven genres, this list is not exhaustive (2013: 2)

The manual includes the six main genres illustrated in Figure 5.11 with the addition of 'writing to socialise'. For some unexplained reason, poetry is notably absent in this genre interpretation. In interview 4, Rachel explained the constraints of working within the remits of six or seven genres informed by historic professional development on the First Steps programme in DEIS schools. Here, she reminisces on the effect of this on poetry and how working within these remits- a block of time devoted to teaching each genre- may be a reductionist view:

> *Poetry had always been something that was really well done in our school, but poetry got thrown in there as a genre that was done once every, you know, writing poetry was done one term every two years, and there was actually a lot more poetry writing happening before we had our everything parcelled up into these blocks. Okay, of course, it was never meant that teachers felt that they only had to do that that was never meant. But that's an effect of what happened.*
>
> (Rachel, I4)

The broader pedagogical implications of viewing genres through this lens of the 'six' main genres have contributed to what Jones and Derewianka (2016) call the 'reification' of writing. However, this reification of genres was never intended by Australian genre theorists. As indicated by Christie, an Australian genre scholar, 'genre theorists did not invent any genres; they identified them by exhaustive lists' (2013:1). This is echoed by Thwaithe (2006:97), who, in a small-scale study, purports how writing genres "in its original form did not aim to dictate the genres that should be used in schools, but rather to analyse what was there."

There are parallels to be drawn between Irish teachers' experiences of this and the international context, such as in Australia, where writing genre theory was first conceived. For example, in Australia it has been noted how teachers have not had the opportunities to keep up with developments in genre theory such as microgenres, the identification of phases and subgenres, and its application to multimodal and digital contexts. One outcome of this has been the reification of the prototypical genres as 'text types' that drive the pedagogy (rather than purpose and curriculum context) and where genre stages are taught as structures to be rigidly reproduced (Derewianka & Jones, 2016).

Closer to home in neighbouring Britain, specifically in the English context, this uncritical reproduction or process of reification has been highlighted by Michael Rosen, who has questioned the prescriptive nature of writing genres. He describes the genre approach as:

> For over ten years now, children spend massive amounts of their 'literacy' time in schools being taught different ways of writing. This is done according to certain schemes which say that this or that way of writing has a name e.g. 'Recount' or 'Persuasive Writing' and the children learn what Halliday might have called its 'grammar'. The children then do 'recount' or 'persuasive writing' for e.g., two or three weeks and then move on. These are often called 'units'. So, presumably, the disadvantaged are now...er...less disadvantaged? er...less underachieving? Genre Theory having now run in schools for well over ten years should really have saved the world.
>
> (Rosen, 2011, para.10)

A broader issue with this in the Irish context is how the *First Steps* programme was never trialled nor reviewed. As Rachel in a DEIS context in Interview four, put forward:

> *So we latched onto genres, thinking that it was going to be a really helpful thing. However, there was absolutely no measurable improvement in writing across the school since we started.*
>
> (Rachel. I4)

Emerging from this, the subtheme of teaching writing or nurturing the writer was identified. This is discussed in the subsequent section.

5.5.3 Teaching writing or nurturing the writer?

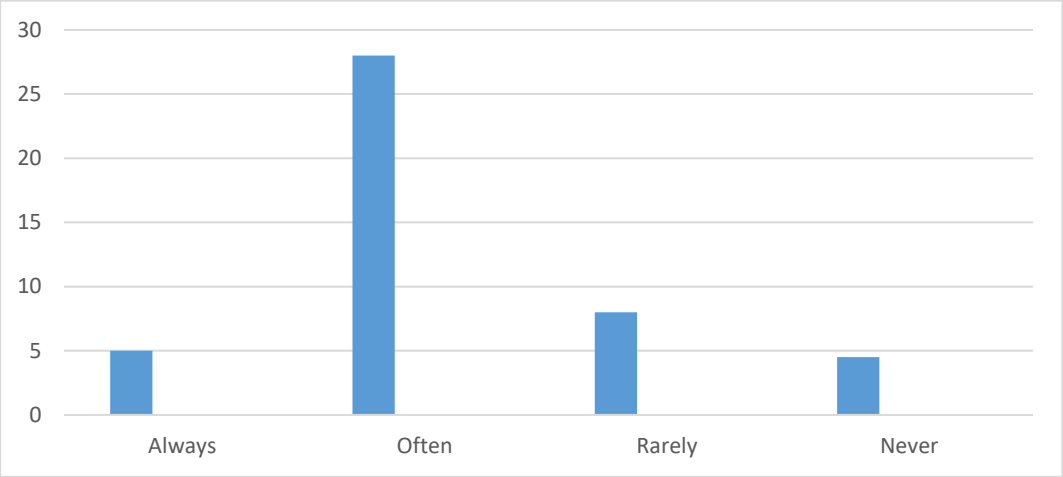
The sub-theme identified in theme two pertains to the implications of a reification writing genre in which the "Child as Writer: Teaching Writing or Nurturing the Writer?" was identified. In this section, I will discuss how the key findings derived from both sets of data suggest that teachers primarily concentrate on instructing in writing rather than fostering the growth of the individual child or writer. Children's autonomy, adaptability, and innovativeness serve as critical affective and motivational factors in teaching writing (Camacho et al., 2020). Although children are granted flexibility and autonomy in choosing the topics they write about, this liberty is not as significant in a genre-based context where teachers dictate the genre in which the children must write.

Therefore, the finding identified is how writing is teacher-led rather than child or writer-led. This section also addresses how writing is viewed as a product, that is, a published piece of text, and there are some limitations in how text is viewed, with few opportunities for multimodalities in presenting text visually and/or orally. In phase one of the study, two questions about choice were asked to survey respondents. The first question addressed the choice of topic. Teachers were asked about the extent to which children were afforded the

opportunity to select topics for written composition. A total of 5 questionnaire respondents indicated that such selection was commonplace, while 28 teachers reported that children frequently choose the subject matter for their written work. Furthermore, four respondents indicated that choice was rarely facilitated, and four stated that it never occurred (see Figure 5.12).

Figure 5.12

Children choose topics to write about



Analysis of the interviewee responses shows that the concept of choice is integral to teaching writing. Moreover, the interviewees provided insightful perspectives on the challenges of facilitating choice in this context. One such challenge is the difficulty faced by children who struggle when writing, to generate ideas independently. For example, Sarah described how children have a choice with 'free writing' and elaborated on some barriers to facilitating choice, such as children having difficulty generating their own ideas:

> *So, they have choices all the time in their free writing sessions. Okay. So, that is important. And then, like, this year's class, I found that they were very, very slow to think of new ideas in their free writing. But they were very poor at coming up with ideas.*
>
> (Sarah, I2)

Fatima explained how choice is easier to facilitate in a narrative genre and children generally choose topics to write about themselves. She discussed constrained choice, where children choose a topic from a couple of potential topics.

> *I'm talking about what I might have done by giving them two or three ideas. And you pick an idea. I think that's what I used to do. I mean, with storytelling, it's different, because they could pick and I definitely did give them choices.*
> (Fatima. I1)

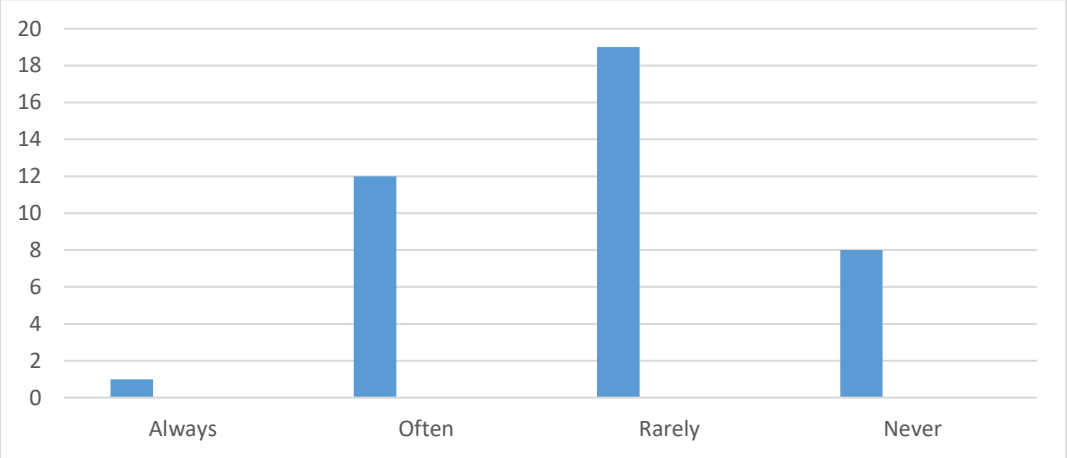
She offered how this is a challenge, particularly for children with special education needs (SEN):

> *I would have probably let the more able children off on their own that the children who were very weak, that I wanted them to achieve something and the Special Educational Needs (SEN) teacher would have worked with them. And it was more like a gradual process. I forget the term, but it was more sort of, we wrote it together called shared work but in their own personal work. But basically, the structure of what they came up with was all the same, because that's all they were able for. And it was just more to give them the feeling of success. So what they put up on the wall would look equally as good as the others, but they just got much more support.*
>
> (Fatima. I1).

In addition to providing participants with a selection of topics to write about in the questionnaire, they were also asked if children typically choose a specific genre in which to write. Figure 5.13 shows that, interestingly, 27 respondents indicated that children rarely or never choose the genre to write in.

Figure 5.13

Frequency in Which Teachers Facilitate Choice in Which Genre to Write



The selection of the genre in which children are to write is a decision made by the teacher. This is consistent with the prior theme of genres being units of study that are planned in advance as part of the whole school plan and individual yearly/termly plans. In this theme, the significance of choice in selecting a genre is examined, with interviewees discussing the challenges of choice. For instance, Fatima addressed the concept of "constrained choice" (choice within a limited range). She explained how choice may not be appropriate for children who lack proficiency in a particular area:

> *But sometimes too much choice can be a problem and it depends on the situation. Do you nearly need something to go by? But I was going to ask, and then more able children, you could definitely let them off and do their own work. I don't know whether this is right or wrong.*
>
> (Fatima. I1)

Sarah also commented on children's ability as a factor when facilitating choice:

> *this year's class, I found that they were very, very slow to think of new ideas. But they were very poor at coming up with ideas. I didn't know what it was.*
>
> (Sarah. I2).

Anastasia commented on how choice is difficult to facilitate from a classroom management perspective:

> *I think if you give them too many genres, you know, you'd have a child over here writing a narrative piece, a child in the back doing reports and a child up the front writing something else, and I just think it will be too difficult as a teacher to manage that. And at the same time, I feel that I have certain children in my class… they're good at narrative, and they want to write narrative all day long, but they won't get those experience then of how to write you know, you know*
>
> (Anastasia. I3)

Anastasia expanded on this and comments on how it is important to expose children to a variety of genres, particularly in senior primary classes, as children are expected to write across a number of genre in secondary school:

> *when they get to secondary school, how are they going to write a report? How are they going to, you know, write down their list for geography, you know, so I'm kind of really conscious of that, but I don't want them just writing narrative and poetry all the time. I really do think they need that*
>
> (Anastasia. I3)

Similar to the theme 'reification of writing' Michelle makes the point that the genre are planned and therefore choice isn't a factor in non-fiction pieces:

> *I would have a plan and we're going to start off with a narrative which the children don't question. I feel, again, there's so much in the narrative between, you know, teaching them all the different points of climax and subplots that you don't even have enough time to really get into the narrative too. But no, they don't have a choice in the genre, because I would have had it planned*
>
> (Michelle, I5).

As discussed in chapter three, through a systematic review of the literature on motivation and writing, Camacho, Alves & Boscolo (2021) identify how motivation affects writing performance. While writing is presented as cognitively challenging (Berninger & Swanson, 1994), the affective dimension of writing as motivationally challenging needs attention (Camacho et al., 2021). Aspects of this include interest and choice.

The child as writer and the broader affective dimensions of literacy such as motivation and engagement need consideration when framing writing pedagogy. These affective dimensions, which also acknowledge the central roles of interest and choice, are crucial considerations when viewing the child as writer. For example, as indicated by research in motivation and choice, an important aspect is to create an environment in which children choose topics to

write about and choose genres in which to write (Renninger and Hidi 2020; Troia, Shankland, & Wolbers, 2012). Scholars Renninger and Hidi (2020) in a study of interest development and writing tasks purport how:

> Interest development benefits the quality of individuals' work with tasks, activities, and assignments. Interest enables people to be more conscientious, able to persist, and ready to work with negative feedback; when students exhibit these characteristics, this makes teaching rewarding
>
> (2020:11)

There are distinctions, of course, between interest and choice. However, when the genre is teacher-led and the genre drives pedagogy it makes interest development more challenging. Choice, as indicated in the findings in chapter four, is either constrained or unconstrained. For example, choosing topics to write about is unconstrained and can be facilitated more easily in in a narrative context and in 'free writing.' Moreover, in 'free writing' choice is an integral part of this approach. There are a number of variables pertaining to this. As put forward by Sarah, the "ability" of the class determines freedom of choice:

> *So, they have choices all the time in their free writing sessions. Okay. So, that is important. And, then, like, this year's class, I found that they were very, very slow to think of new ideas in their free writing. But they were very poor at coming up with ideas.*
>
> (Sarah, I2)

When choosing the topic to write about, both Michelle and Anastasia allude to the challenges of facilitating choice. As Michelle indicates, here, the genre is determined by her planning:

> *I would have a plan and we're going to start off with a narrative which the children don't question. I feel, again, there's so much in the narrative between, you know, teaching them all the different points of climax and subplots that you don't even have enough time to really get into the narrative too. But no, they don't have a choice in the genre, because I would have had it planned*
>
> (Michelle. I5)

To some extent, this relates back to the points made in the earlier section about writing becoming 'curriculumified' or indeed the reification of genre. Providing choice across genres is seen as difficult from a classroom perspective. For Anastasia, classroom management was a factor as to why choice is constrained and not facilitated across genre:

> *I think if you give them too many genres, you know, you would have a child over here writing a narrative piece, a child in the back doing reports and a child up the front writing something else, and I just think it will be too difficult as a teacher to manage that.*
>
> (Anastasia. I3)

In summary, the format of writing genre for teachers has historical roots in professional development, is informed by the school plan and while teacher agency is encouraged there is also a sense of ‘getting writing done’. The next section presents the findings and discussion on theme three, which is text as text, the written word.

5.6 Theme Three: Text as Text: The Written Word

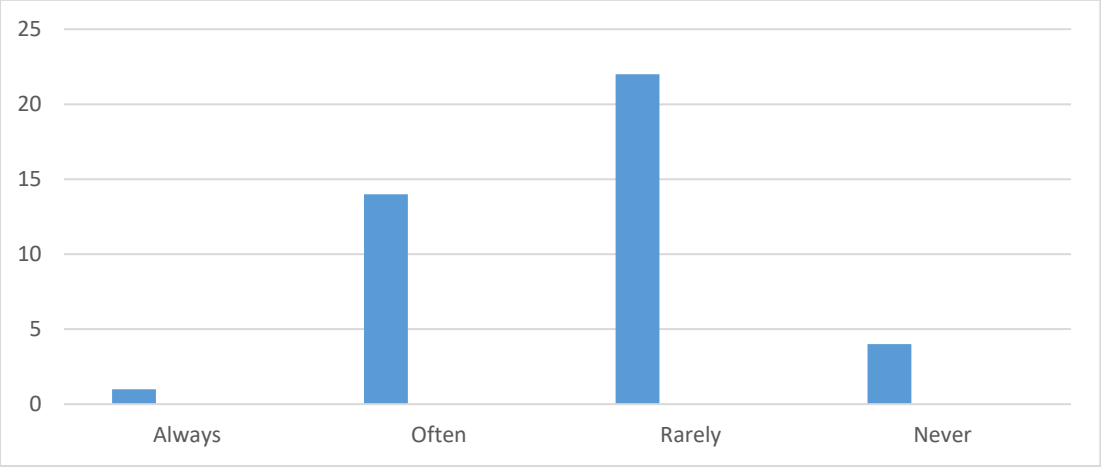
In this section, I explore the topic of "Text as Text: The Written Word." As defined in the Primary Language Curriculum text encompasses “all forms of language use, including oral, gestural, sign, written, Braille, visual, tactile, electronic, and digital forms” (2019:59).

The findings of my study reveal that the digital context in which digital literacy exists is often "othered," meaning that it is viewed as distinct from a writing context. Additionally, my research shows that in teachers' reported practices, text is generally understood to refer to the physical act of writing, using pen and paper or digital tools during the editing and publishing phase of the writing process.

In Phase One of the study, questionnaire respondents were asked about using digital tools in writing. Figure 5.14 shows that 22 respondents reported that digital tools are rarely used, with four indicating that digital tools are never used.

Figure 5.14

Frequency Digital Tools are Utilised in Writing



The integration of digital tools into writing was investigated through participant interviews. Although there are instances of sophisticated digital literacy practices across the curriculum, the interviewees do not consider the use of tools such as creating podcasts or videos as inherently "writing." Writing is traditionally viewed as physically producing written words. The participants discussed various obstacles to incorporating digital tools, including the need for improved access and professional development. They indicated that digital tools are employed in the "publishing" phase of the writing process and that the composition stage of writing is still associated with the traditional pen and paper method.

The subthemes identified from this include access and accessibility to digital tools and the 'othering' of the digital context. The subtheme related to access is discussed in the following section.

5.6.1 Access and Accessibility

When exploring how digital tools are utilised in literacy with interviewees, Fatima alludes to a 'lack of experience' and 'access' to using tools. Here, she referenced how her lack of skills is a barrier to using blogs and digital tools:

> *They need an iPad or something to write on and they need access to that. So that's something I think we have enough iPads now for a class to engage. I don't know, last year, if we did have them, I didn't fully work out how to use them or how to get the kids working on them. And so what are the challenges that will be just for a digital story, say, and blogs and all that kind of thing. Because I don't do it myself. I haven't really. I've never really done work with kids on how to write emails. I probably should. I haven't though.*
>
> (Fatima. I1)

Rachel elaborated on the issue of access and commented on accessibility as a factor in her school context:

> *Well, one is, you know, access and money; like we're not a very wealthy school, we have 24 functioning iPads that are shared between 15 classes.*
>
> (Rachel. I4)

For Michelle, a teacher in a non-DEIS context, access to digital tools is also seen as a barrier. She mentioned that while her colleagues are making progress in this area, there is a lack of professional development and expertise:

> *And it depends on your location of your school, and depends on the access to facilities such as an iPad and a computer room. We're very lucky we have a big school. So, we do. I know there's other schools that don't have a computer room, or it depends on location, and staff, staff members' skills in that area. And I think we could be better developed first, you know. We're on the road but we're on a very slow road I find.*
>
> (Michelle. I5)

For Anastasia, access is not an issue in her school context (which she had previously described as an affluent context). She described how she considers her school to be fortunate to have laptops:

> *...we're quite lucky that we have, you know, one laptop between two children. So, we're lucky in that regard that we do have access to a lot of digital tools.*
>
> (Anastasia. I3)

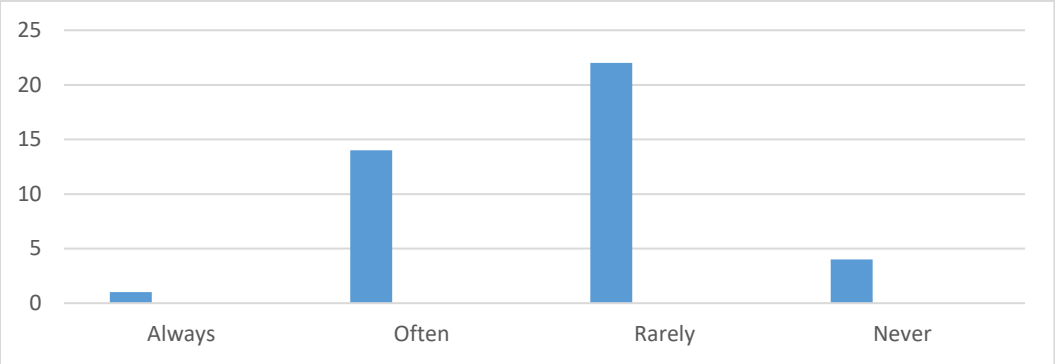
Drawing on the investigation of digital tools in literacy, the initial phase of the research posed questions to participants about the degree to which children were provided with opportunities to present information through diverse modes, such as digitally or visually. Consequently, the subtheme of 'text as text' surfaced. In this context, writing signifies the act of forming and transcribing thoughts onto paper, with digital tools utilised during the writing process's publication stage. This subtheme is further expounded upon in the next subsection.

5.6.2 The digital context as 'other': Text as text

During the initial phase, 22 participants indicated that they rarely used various modes of representation, while four individuals reported never using them. This is illustrated in Figure 5.15.

Figure 5.15

Frequency in Which Children Choose Modes of Representation



The interviewees discussed the challenges involved in choosing modes of representation. For instance, Anastasia, who stated that digital tools are accessible in her academic setting, utilises these tools during the publishing phase of the writing process.

> *But I find that myself, and even, you know, other teachers in the school, actually, the fifth and sixth class teacher is actually quite good at using the digital tools for getting the children for typing, but I feel that that's the route we mainly go down. It's just whatever they've written, they'll type it up, you know, okay. We use the tool standards for typing. It's not for you know, it's not for creating. Well, the odd time to create a PowerPoint, but I've never done it in regards to, you know, the Writers' Workshop. We do a PowerPoint, maybe for, again, disciplinary literacy, if they're doing like, a geography project or history project, we'll get them to do it in a PowerPoint. But I've never really considered using it as part of, you know, of literacy. So, it, we really just use it the tools for typing up.*
>
> (Anastasia. I3)

Anastasia delves deeper into this issue by addressing her unfamiliarity with employing visual and digital resources to convey information. She simultaneously expressed her apprehension about the pressure exerted on students in senior classes to produce written work. She expressed the following concerns:

> *We feel that because they're third, fourth, fifth and sixth (class) that they have to have this really long written piece. You know, you kind of feel that pressure that you have to have some writing, you know…it should be maybe quantity and quality within the writing completely.*
>
> (Anastasia. I3)

According to Michelle, the term "computer time" is used to describe the time allotted to the digital context, where the emphasis is on computer skills rather than digital literacy, and she also mentioned that access is not a hindrance in this regard.

> *So, they'd have computer class, but their skills will be developed from junior infants right through to sixth class. So by the time we get to this class, they know how to do a PowerPoint, it's all about the content and the presentation, the PowerPoint that I need to focus on with them and we're going to focus on advertisements that they would have the skills to do that again, and I'm focusing on the content with them. That would have been taught by the teacher. I feel if a teacher isn't okay with it, then you can be very back to basics when it comes to starting off with the class and getting them used to Microsoft Word or different things like that.*
>
> (Michelle. I5)

The consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on school closures presented an opportunity for enhanced representation of written communication through visual means. As a result of the pandemic, students were expected to submit their assignments to their teachers remotely. This shift in instruction facilitated Sarah's exploration of writing as "typing," which she discussed in greater detail offering how:

> *I felt I wanted to use the Chromebooks more to keep up their skills. So, we did a lot of typing. And we did a geography project. During the home learning, there were about half the kids who preferred to type into Google Docs, then, you know, just having Mom taking a photo and sending it, you know, about half of them in my classroom. We're using Google Docs at some stage in the week, which was great. And some of them were using it regularly, like every day. That's brilliant. We're doing lots of typing.*
>
> (Sarah. I5)

The semi-structured interviews uncovered instances of extensive digital practices in the participants' classrooms. Nevertheless, the participants do not view using tools for production as a form of writing. For example, Rachel uses tools such as podcasts and radio shows to integrate multimodal elements in a reading context. In this context, she thinks of blogs and radio shows as texts for reading.

> *You know, a couple of teachers have been experimenting with using children's podcasts and radio shows, as reading texts. And they have been talking about setting up a little podcast, you know, type thing for the children to compose. And another teacher is doing a lot with Book Creator. So there are a lot of teachers doing different things with, you know, different modes of representation. And but I suppose it's not a widespread practice. Yes, the toes have been dipped in the water.*
>
> (Rachel. I4).

Michelle expanded on this and made a point similar to Rachel's in that she does not consider the production of blogs and videos as writing and discussed how the digital piece is reading:

> *And that was one way, then again, no, in the multimodal way, I would have more focused on promoting reading through multimodal ways, because then I would have gotten to do Animoto videos, and they had a reading blog where they would post and write their opinions or and the wallpaper, one where they do the sticky notes. But in terms of writing, no, that's an area I'd fall in. And I need to look into that more and plan more for that.*
>
> (Michelle. I5)

The notion of digital tools being marginalised in the educational setting is a perception held by the interviewees. These tools are suggested to be primarily allocated to children with special educational needs (SEN) or those considered less academically capable. Whether this classification is derived from a policy or any other authoritative source is unclear. Nonetheless, digital tools are widely perceived to be more accessible. For instance, Rachel pointed out the use of digital compositions as a means for children with SEN to compensate for potential difficulties in producing written texts, in contrast to their peers in the classroom.

> *you know, our writing deficits are huge. And we're saying, should they? Should they be able to, you know, write by hand before or in tandem with other types of technology, and I suppose we were, we're not yet informed enough to know what good decisions are around. Okay. And we don't want it to be, I suppose, it also comes down to sort of the issue of social justice and SEN as well.*
>
> (Rachel. I4)

Anastasia also described how her approach to teaching writing is a workshop approach. She considered how utilising a multi-modal approach may be beneficial for children who cannot write an extended piece of text:

> *I tend to go with the writing piece. So, they either write it in the writers' workshop folder, or they get to type it up on a laptop, so I suppose it's still their typing, or their writing. Yeah, so I've never really thought about the multimodal before. Yeah, I think that actually just thinking about it now …it will be a good idea to actually allow them to drive their explanation. Yeah. No, no, I've never thought about that before. Yeah, even I suppose, you know, like a diagram. So that not all children, I suppose would maybe be able to write a full explanation.*
>
> (Anastasia. I3)

The following section presents a discussion of this theme.

5.5.4 Discussion of Theme Three: Text as Text

Although children are often exposed to multimodal tools, the connection between writing and reading within a multimodal platform can offer a valuable experience in writing for production. As indicated in Chapter Three, multimodal constructs of writing can support multimodal reading comprehension as children work to make sense of various modes working together to construct meaning. Similarly, while reading and writing are distinct activities, they rely on the same cognitive processes. This may also require rethinking digital tools as implements of production to reimagine the digital dimension of writing beyond the publishing phase of the writing process. Focusing on the process of producing writing, rather than just the result, can lead to a renewed appreciation of writing as an interactive, dynamic, and creative activity. This may involve emphasising the communicative purpose of writing in non-traditional forms, and incorporating micro-genres and utilizing digital tools to adapt genres to the twenty-first-century context may aid in multimodal presentations of writing to understand how sub-genres can work together to create meaning (Jocius, 2018; Yelland, 2018)

In endeavouring to discern the variables contributing to teachers' perceptions of writing in the digital age as somewhat detached from pedagogical practices, there are several influential elements at work. At a broader level, this may have roots in how theory has informed the curriculum. For example, integrating two theoretical frameworks, namely the writing process and genres, presents several challenges. Despite the advancements in genre theory, such as the concept of micro-genres and employing multiple tools during the composition process, these concepts are not adequately represented in the available curriculum resources. As a result, teachers may resort to relying on their prior knowledge and experience in teaching writing, which may be limiting. There needs to be a broader, more nuanced definition of writing, and the 21st-century context needs attention. As indicated in Chapter Three, through a review of the literature review on theoretical models and processes of writing, the deictic nature of literacy is an important consideration. Deictic, a term coined by Fillmore in 1966, is defined as “words whose meanings change rapidly as their context changes” (Leu et al., 2013: 1150). The application of this into literacy, or more specifically, a writing context, is important as it acknowledges how quickly writing, in its forms, evolves and how a broader view of writing and writing composition is required to meet these accelerating changes. The internet and digital tools have been redefining what it means to be literate for years, as noted

by Yelland (2018) and the New London Group (1996). According to the New London Group's seminal work, literacies encompass multiple forms of communication and meaning-making, including visual, audio, spatial, behavioural, and gestural modes (Cazden et al., 1996: 64). The reason why this has not been implemented in the Irish context could be attributed to two factors, one being the influence of specific theories like cognitive theory (Berninger & Swanson, 1994) and genre theory on writing pedagogy, and the other being the lack of adequate professional development for teachers in literacy.

One of the reasons why teachers perceive digital technology as distinct from other forms of writing is that the purpose of writing is often determined by genre, rather than the other way around. Consequently, it can be challenging to comprehend how multimodal composition can be utilised effectively when the focus is solely on the genre, rather than the intended purpose. Reframing the approach to writing that encompasses multimodal composition, which involves integrating visual, digital, audio, and textual elements, can result in a more genuine context for conveying meaning, intent, and purpose. As per Flint et al. (2020), incorporating multiple sources such as popular culture and artifacts empowers the writer to produce a new text that includes images and sounds, which are connected and related to other texts (Flint et al., 2020: 241).

Additionally, the sociocultural aspect of writing must be considered, which encompasses the connections between individuals and the construction and reconstruction of meaning through social practices (Barton & Hamilton, 2005).

It is interesting to note that interviewees did not allude to multimodalities in their teacher practices; it is something that is considered when discussing how digital tools could be incorporated. The concept of multimodal composition includes integrating visual, digital, audio, and textual elements to create meaning. Furthermore, it's essential to consider the sociocultural aspect of writing, which encompasses the relationships between individuals and the construction and reconstruction of meaning through social practices (Barton & Hamilton, 2001). Hartman (1995) introduces the idea of intertextuality to explain the interconnectedness between different texts. For instance, as readers and writers, we carry prior knowledge of texts into the creation of new ones. The relationship with text is shaped by interactions with other texts.

One possible explanation for this at policy level, and from my own perspective working in initial teacher education (ITE), is that digital technologies has existed within Science

Technology Engineering and Maths (STEM) education over the past two decades. According to research conducted by Rowsell, Morrell, and Alvermann (2017), one of the challenges in using digital tools is how they are approached within a literacy context, despite the ongoing difficulty in accessing these tools. In summary they note how there is no justification for the disparity in access to digital resources in schools, and we must persist in our unwavering efforts to promote a fair and compassionate distribution of these resources. This may involve securing funding for ongoing professional development for teachers to enhance their digital literacy skills, as well as ensuring that students have consistent and current access to relevant technology tools.

The interviewees in phase two of the study provided a number of examples of rich literacy practices. For example, Fatima alluded to:

> *But I have an idea how to go about digital storytelling, but the actual story they came up with was more where all of us worked together with me up at the top of the classroom, because it was just way too broad. It ended up being a puppet thing. So a puppet workshop came in with us. So we ended up writing the script for that and it was a great opportunity. But now I was being dragged along by these experts. And what we came up with wasn't brilliant, but we at least engaged with it. We shared our results and we gave it a go.*
>
> (Fatima. I1)

It is evident from Fatima's comments that writing across modes *is* happening. However, it was deduced that this 'composing' or text production is not necessarily viewed as writing.

Similarly, Michelle refers to rich digital literacy experiences. For example, she referred to Animoto videos and blogs and using these tools in a reading context.

> *And when it comes to writing, at certain times we would pick to write and publish on computers, so they would take their computer time. And that was one way, then again, no, in the multimodal way, I would have more focused on promoting reading through multimodal ways, because then I would have gotten to do Animoto videos, and they had a reading blog where they would post and write their opinions or and the wallpaper, one where they do the sticky notes. But in terms of writing, no, that's an area I'd fall in. And I need to look into that more and plan more for that.*
>
> (Michelle. I5).

There is evidence here, that digital literacy practices are taking place. Writing, however, is referred to as publishing on the computers. Upon reflection on this, Michelle added how:

> *you could get stuck in your own ways or routines. Yeah, I think it's really important to go forward because everything is about images and multimodal in their phones. So, I think we do need to spend more time on that*
>
> (Michelle. I5).

As discussed in Chapter Three, tools for writing and means of production (Kress, 2004) are vital considerations that need to be incorporated into pedagogy. While this is alluded to in the curriculum documents, it is evident from the findings how the digital dimension and using different modes of representation is ‘othered’.

A reframing or reimaging of these tools as implements of production is required to reimagine the digital dimension of writing beyond the publishing phase of the writing process. Further to this is a movement beyond the mechanics of writing to the production of writing. This would require a reframing at department level also. As discussed in Chapter Three in the discussion on how writing is contextualised in the Irish context it was noted that there are no large scale studies on writing pedagogy in Ireland, and the only evidence on how teachers are using these tools in writing come from the observations from the Chief Inspector’s report (DES, 2022) that gives insight into the classroom practices that happen in schools. For example, the most recent Chief Inspector’s report, a report from Whole School Evaluations and Incidental school visits, observe an ‘insufficient use of technology in the ‘revision’ and ‘editing’ stage

> However, in some instances, insufficient systematic planning hindered the incremental approach required for teaching the writing process, or limited the writing genres with which the pupils engaged in primary schools and special schools. Inspection findings also indicated that insufficient use was made of digital technology to facilitate both the revision and editing stages of the writing process”
>
> (2022: 113)

The argument can be made that department inspectors, who view writing as solely a tool for the publishing phase, limit the prospects of teachers to some extent if that is how writing pedagogy is viewed in Irish classrooms. Further to this is a sense of how teachers expressed a desire to have tangible results or a published piece after a period of several weeks. This was prevalent as interviewees expressed noteworthy opinions concerning a feeling of 'pressure' associated with crafting a lengthy written piece. There is a considerable focus on producing a tangible and finished product, especially for senior-level students who require something to 'present' following several weeks of instruction.

This was alluded to by Anastasia who remarked on how ‘pressure’ to produce writing is a factor:

> *You know, you kind of feel that pressure that you have to have some writing, you know, it's kind of that it should be maybe quantity and quality within the writing completely*
>
> (Anastasia. I3)

The view of writing as “text” may be exacerbated by the perception that digital contexts are easier and simplified, as evidenced by interviewees referring to using digital tools to assist children with special educational needs. For example, when commenting on the inclusive dimension of digital tools Rachel offered how digital tools are perceived as ‘easier’:

> *So if you're, if you want to be totally inclusive, then your ambitions have to be that the SEN children are capable of achieving, like the other children. So, there's also that fear that, you know, the use of technology will become something that's given to the SEN children to do, because it's perceived to be a bit easier and not as challenging.*
>
> (Rachel. I4)

This perception implies that writing with digital tools is less effort, which is in contrast to the traditional "paper and pencil" approach that is often seen as laborious and time-consuming, resulting in children producing writing as text.

A broader perspective on writing is necessary to consider its deictic nature and make it more inclusive of different modalities and contexts. The introduction of the new curriculum, the Primary Language Curriculum (2019), provided a chance to embrace a more modern view of writing. As previously discussed in this chapter, the policy influences and reactive nature of the curriculum, coupled with the lack of literature review to inform senior primary literacy, constituted a missed opportunity. One potential consequence of implementing rigid genre pedagogy is the erosion of the social dimension. As Muntigl (2006:234) argues, a rigid view of genre fails to consider the social dimension, as "in many social interactions, narratives, explanations, or procedures rarely stand alone; social activities tend to precede and follow these elementary genres.” Additionally, researchers Beach et al. note that "writing is a socially constructed practice. Writing is influenced by social and cultural factors such as lived experience and context. Therefore, writing should be viewed as 'a social event involving the construction of that event and relationships with others'" (Beach, Newell & VanDerHiede, 2016: 89). Adopting a more comprehensive understanding of writing that can accommodate the diverse experiences and contexts in which it is used is essential. This idea is consistent with Jones and Derewianka's observation that genre theory has not yet fully addressed the identification of phases and subgenre and their application to multimodal and digital contexts.

The contribution of macro level genre is important is making distinctions between genre and how the linguistic features work together in making meaning within a text that goes beyond the boundaries of a specific genre.

5.6 Summary

The main findings of this study, organised into three themes, have been presented and discussed in relation to the relevant literature identified in Chapter Three. The first theme highlighted the uncertainty among teachers caused by rapid curricular reforms and the implementation of a new Primary Language Curriculum (2019). Although there was a language-focused aspect of the curriculum, the pedagogical supports for writing were emphasized. Through interviews, it was discovered that teachers' past experiences and professional development played a significant role in shaping their teaching practices, rather than the curriculum contents. Previous professional development programs, such as the *First Steps* programme in low socioeconomic contexts, were found to be highly influential. Additionally, the Professional Development Service for Teachers (2013) provided a genre-based approach to writing that focused on a step-by-step guide for seven weeks. Overall, this theme emphasised the role of these experiences in shaping the teaching of writing.

This chapter identified the theme, the reification of writing, which emerged as the second prominent finding. Specifically, this finding and the discussion of it explored the manner in which writing is taught as a distinct unit of study over an extended period of time, shaped by professional development and, in some instances, whole-school planning. The finding implies that writing is primarily driven by genre rather than its intended purpose, highlighting the broader issue of teaching writing rather than focusing on the development of the writer. The discussion within this theme delves into the impact of programmes, initiatives, and frameworks on teacher pedagogy, as these influences encourage the fostering of agency.

The third theme identified was 'text as text ' which presented a conventional perspective on writing where digital tools are employed primarily during the publishing and editing stages of the writing process. Although teachers mentioned incorporating digital practices such as using blogs for reading and video, these tools were generally associated with a reading context. The incorporation of multimodalities to support a more comprehensive understanding of writing across various modes and genres has not yet been explored in the Irish context. This may be partly due to the traditional manner in which writing has been

presented in terms of process and genre, as well as the professional development opportunities available for teachers in this area.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Introduction to Conclusion

This final chapter concludes the present study and is organised into three sections. The first section outlines the research questions and explains how the theoretical framework was applied to address them. The second section discusses how this research contributes to knowledge in the field of writing, specifically by addressing the need for national writing assessment and the resulting gap in understanding teachers' pedagogical practices in senior classes. The third section summarises the limitations of the study. To further reflect on the research findings, a self-study approach rooted in the model of reflections was employed. The chapter concludes with key policy and practice recommendations, presented in three sub-sections, which detail recommendations from a professional development perspective, an initiative perspective, and an additional perspective.

Leveraging my personal experiences in low socioeconomic settings, I am eager to ascertain the degree to which the policies of anglophone nations impact policy in Ireland. Two central theoretical frameworks, namely the writing process and writing genres, have played a crucial role in designing curricula for writing. Moreover, these theoretical underpinnings have inspired my second research query, which aims to investigate the influence of these concepts on policy in Ireland.

1. How do Irish primary school teachers approach the teaching of writing in senior classes?

2. What influences teachers' writing pedagogy in the senior primary classes in Irish primary schools?

The substantial curricular changes prompted by Ireland's outstanding performance in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in a particular year are worthy of notice. Observing the substantial transformations within the educational system over several years is noteworthy. Notably, the Primary Language Curriculum underwent two distinct stages of development, accompanied by the professional development of educators through a series of webinars. This led me to contemplate the following:

3. How has policy, specifically the new Primary Language Curriculum, changed/ challenged or influenced approaches to writing in Irish primary schools?

The following section summarises the theoretical framework's role in guiding the study and its application throughout the research process. To address these inquiries, I adopted a mixed methods explanatory approach. This theoretical framework served as the lens through which the findings were examined and utilised to structure the research.

6.2 Framing the research: Utilising the Theoretical Model

In Chapter Three, the theoretical model underpinning the study is outlined in Section 3.3, in which a theoretical foundation for data analysis and interpretation is presented, thereby enabling a deeper understanding of the underlying significance of research data (Kivunja, 2018). This section summarises the theoretical framework underpinning the research and how it was used to frame it, answer the research questions, and identify themes in the findings. It then presents the theoretical framework visually in Figure 6.1 and describes how it was utilised in this study.

The theoretical model drew on cognitive models of writing (Hayes & Flower, 1980; Berninger & Swanson, 1994), Genre theory (Halliday, 1985), and Australian Genre theory (Martin, 2000; Martin & Rose, 2007). Including these theories was deemed crucial as they form the basis of both a process-oriented and genre approach to writing, which is informed by cognitive theories of writing and writing genre theory. This approach is the prevailing theory in the research underpinning the Primary Language Curriculum (2015; 2019) and related curriculum documents, such as the *Support Materials for Teachers* (2020). Furthermore, a genre approach to writing has informed previous professional development in writing pedagogy. This theoretical framework was also guided by past professional development initiatives in teaching writing in the Irish context. Sociocultural influences were informed by sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), with specific reference to a pedagogy of multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996; Street, 1995) and Graham's Writer(s) within Community model (2018). The 'Writer(s)-Within-Community Model of Writing' was incorporated to merge and enhance cognitive models (Hayes & Flower, 1980), genre theory (Martin, 2000; Martin & Rose, 2007), and sociocultural theory. This model encompasses

writing within a community, collaborators' impact, and communication's significance in the writing process (Graham, 2018: 258). Bandura's self-efficacy theory (1977) was also a critical theory underpinning the study, considering the role of self-efficacy in the writing process. Within this self-efficacy theory, I also drew on the affective dimensions of writing, specifically motivation and engagement (Camacho & Boscolo, 2020) and research on the role of interest in writing tasks (Renninger & Hidi, 2020). Critical literacy (Luke, 2018), an extension of Freire's critical pedagogy (1970), was also central to examining relationships of power, interest, and dominant discourses.

Figure 6.1

Theoretical Framework underpinning the study.

Theory	Rationale	Stage of the study
Socio-cultural influences Writing Pedagogy ➢ Evidence-based conditions ➢ Writing Genre theory (Bazerman, 1994; Halliday, 1985; Rose, 2006)	Sociocultural and cognitive influences on writing, the role of collaborators; *Writers Within Community* (WWC, Graham, 2018; Barton & Hamilton, 2001; Street & Street, YEAR; Vygotsky, 1978). Multimodalities and the communicative function of writing (Cazden et al., 1996; Leu et al., 2016) Within this, theoretical models such as cognitive perspectives on writing (Hayes & Flower, 1980; Berninger & Swanson, 1994) Genre theory (Halliday, 1985; Rose, 2006) New developments in genres pedagogy (Derewianka,2015)	Literature review; methodology; analysis; presentation of findings; discussion of findings
Freirean Pedagogy ➢ Critical pedagogy ➢ Critical Literacy (Luke 2018)	Influence of critical pedagogy on the analysis of data study in which issues of power-voices that are missing/silenced/benefits. Interpreting where dimensions of power are visible in curriculum documents and support documents. Analysing where theories and philosophies have become static and where reification has occurred. Understanding whose voices are missing/silenced	Analysis: Policy Curriculum Non-statutory curriculum documents Professional development documents
Motivation and engagement	Theories self-efficacy Bandura (self-efficacy)	Literature review; methodology; analysis; Findings

Bandura (self-efficacy) Motivation and choice (Camacho et al., 2020) Role of interest in writing (Renninger & Hidi, 2020)	 Affective dimensions of writing, such as writing motivation and engagement and the importance of choice To what extent can interest be cultivated	Affective dimensions: Choice, collaboration; control; Choice within multimodalities Children's autonomy

The literature on genre theory, which originates from the Sydney School, traces its origins to genre theorists who identified beyond traditional genre forms of narrative and recount other writing genres identified in primary schools (Martin, 2000; Rose, 2018; Christie, 2013). Later, the work of scholars such as Derewianka (2015; 2016) identified genres beyond these lists to include micro-genres and opportunities for children to write across genres. The work of genre theorists is essential to understanding how pedagogical instruction was taken up in the Irish context, which was informed by this theory and later the *First Steps* programme and associated professional development. The insights of genre theorists, including Martin, Rose, Christie, and Derewianka, aided in answering the inquiry of how genres were adopted in the Irish context to comprehend their evolution since their inception.

Before the late 1980s, a process approach was widely adopted in the Anglophone world (Elbow, 1987; Emig, 1971). However, the work of scholars Murray and Graves (1989; 1994) led to a shift towards a workshop approach, which is now recommended according to the *Support Materials for Teachers* (2020). While the workshop approach has its merits, there are limitations, particularly in its use of inquiry approaches. In the United States, the work of Calkins (1994) has been influential in promoting the workshop approach, which employs a Gradual Release of Responsibility methodology (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983) and emphasises explicit instruction through active teacher modelling and demonstrating. Further to this is the crucial role of grammar, in which it is essential to situate grammar in syntax within meaningful contexts within the writing process, as opposed to the decontextualised manner advocated by grammarians such as Myhill and Newman (2019). It is worth noting that the Primary Language curriculum (2019) places less emphasis on grammar than the English curriculum in the UK, which organises grammar across key stages in primary education.

Researchers such as Graham (2018) have proposed a more contemporary approach to writing that incorporates cognitive aspects and social and cultural elements. While the contributions

of Berninger and Swanson (1994) have been invaluable in shedding light on the cognitive complexity of writing, the WWC model (2018) expands upon this by integrating cognitive models of writing with sociocultural dimensions to present writing that is situated within a community of practice.

The impact of the affective dimensions of literacy, particularly motivation and engagement, has held great personal significance to me as a former teacher. Beyond pedagogical approaches and theoretical perspectives, research on the factors influencing writing performance is particularly interesting. Notably, the work of Camacho et al. (2021) recognises the critical role of choice in facilitating writing in primary classrooms and the importance of engagement and motivation. Moreover, the research of scholars such as Renninger and Hidi (2020) emphasises the central role of interest, including how interest is cultivated and the broader significance of developing tasks for writing that foster interest.

It is essential to differentiate between choice and interest, as two distinct aspects emerge in the workshop approach, as per Calkins (1994). While choice is a fundamental element, it encounters challenges when extending beyond conventional genres such as narrative and recount. The lack of extensive background knowledge hinders the implementation of choice when writing non-fiction. The work of Renninger and Hidi (2020) in devising methods to foster interest is pivotal in understanding how writing can be reinterpreted and incorporated across the curriculum. Similarly, the contextualisation of writing within units of work tends to overlook the role of choice within genres.

According to Bandura's concept of self-efficacy (1978; 1997), which is central to comprehending the perseverance and drive required for writing, personal motivation, feedback, and other affective factors are considered paramount when applied in a writing context. While Bandura's theory encompasses self-efficacy more generally, it is essential to acknowledge the impact of these affective dimensions to provide students with more effective support and facilitation in the writing process.

The Irish context is lacking in the multimodal dimension, which is a critical aspect that has been overlooked. Scholars such as Barton and Hamilton (2001) have made significant contributions to understanding the dynamics of communication and their impact on written expression through their promotion of sociocultural theories and the work of The New London Group (Cazden et al., 1996). Despite these insights, the Irish educational context has not fully realised the importance of the multimodal nature of writing, its production, and its

role in the writing process. This is due to the limited professional development opportunities available to explore this aspect of writing and the traditional presentation of writing in the Primary Language Curriculum (2019). It is essential to address this gap to bring writing beyond its conventional format and fully realise the multimodal dimension of writing.

The crucial aspect, grounded in Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy (Freire, translated by Bergman, 1996), was essential for comprehending dominant discourses and offered a critical lens to how writing has evolved in the Irish context. Critical literacy, an extension of critical pedagogy, was a vital inclusion in this study, particularly the works of scholars such as Luke and the New London Group (1996). These scholars, including Luke, offer a critical perspective on literacy that is rooted in power dynamics. Examining the study through this lens has facilitated understanding the power dimension in literacy, which has always been associated with the consecration of capital and power. In summary, Luke's work provides insight into the monopolisation of literacy and how it has always played a role in power dynamics; that is, those in privileged positions determine and define what literacy is. This study, which identified the reification of writing, also noted how the reification of literacy helps understand the power and the monopolisation of philosophies and associated theories. As the "reading wars" 2.0 gains traction again across the Anglophone world, it is an important lesson to note how the body of research on the Science of Reading may become monopolised. For the Irish context, caution is needed in avoiding pendulum swings and importing debates where they may not be necessary. This point can also be made about the policy piece described in Chapter Two, which is shaped and driven by large-scale international studies. There is a tendency to look at other high-performing countries and emulate policy without considering Ireland’s context.

As I have provided a summary of the theoretical framework employed in this study, I shall now discuss the primary conclusions and recommendations for policy and practice. The ensuing section delineates these conclusions and recommendations.

6.3 Conclusion and Recommendations

The following section presents a comprehensive summary of the key findings of this study and offers recommendations for policy and practice based on the conclusions drawn from three sub-sections.

6.3.1 Conclusion 1: Importing Pedagogy from other Anglophone Countries

The first finding relates to the propensity to adopt teaching methods from other English-speaking countries. As evidenced in the antipodean context, Australian academics have expressed regret over the fact that this approach has led to the uncritical reproduction of pedagogical techniques from other Anglophone nations without considering Australia's distinctive circumstances (Clary & Mueller, 2021). With its complex phonology compared to other languages, the English language presents a comparable situation in some ways. In Anglophone countries, there is a tendency to look towards other Anglophone nations for inspiration and ideas in the realm of pedagogy. Despite this shared linguistic background, it is important to recognise that these countries possess distinct cultural, historical, and political differences that set them apart from one another.

Regrettably, a similar situation, like that in Australia, exists in the Irish context. Although Ireland performs well in international tests (see PISA, 2023; PIRLs, 2023), there is a disregard for the pedagogical practices on the ground without a deeper understanding of why Ireland excels, the existing gaps, and the teachers' values, beliefs, expertise, and concerns. While policymakers and the Department of Education and Skills (DES) may attribute Ireland's success to the *National Strategy for Literacy and Numeracy (2011-2020)*, which emphasised school self-evaluation, structural changes in initial teacher education, and an increase in class time from 50 to 60 minutes per day, there is limited knowledge about the role of teacher pedagogy in literacy. This includes teachers' pedagogical approaches and the factors that have influenced them. Austere policy measures since the economic collapse in 2008 have resulted in resource constraints for schools, such as the absence of a school library grant since that time. To develop effective policy in the Irish context, it is essential to first identify and analyse strengths, weaknesses, and gaps.

6.3.2 Conclusion 2: Accountability

The second conclusion drawn relates to accountability. Unfortunately, the current educational landscape is characterised by a lack of coherence and evidence-based practices. For instance,

the *Support Materials for Teachers* (2020) has promoted practices lacking a solid research foundation. Similarly, the curriculum is built upon the unstable principles of "balanced literacy", a philosophy that became a highly contentious framework in the Anglophone world currently and as previously discussed in this study (p.12).

The second key recommendation is review and accountability. To reiterate the first point, we must cease the practice of importing initiatives from other Anglophone countries. Moreover, it is essential to have teacher expertise. As an individual who holds a neutral stance towards frameworks and programs, it is important to professionally develop teacher knowledge.

The methods and strategies educators employ are informed by their background, expertise, and previous professional development. During the interview process, all teachers discussed implementing a genre-based approach. Evidence shows that they effectively use professional development to teach writing in their classrooms. However, conflicting information has resulted in a hodgepodge of pedagogical approaches. To address this, I recommend establishing a comprehensive professional development framework that enables teachers to expand their pedagogical content knowledge. One of the advantages of the field of literacy research is its dynamic nature and the extent to which new research challenges and updates existing knowledge. While Ireland's current professional development framework may be considered sufficient, there is still room for improvement. Nevertheless, it is important to consider factors such as the budget cuts in education since 2011, which have led to the dismantling of pay structures for teachers with additional qualifications.

Ensuring review and accountability are indispensable components that cannot be disregarded. It is essential to meticulously examine programmes, initiatives, philosophies and theories to guarantee their effectiveness and efficiency. Regrettably, certain aspects seem to have escaped review. Any introduced measures must be thoroughly evaluated and assessed. The absence of professional development may impede teachers' capacity to scrutinise resources critically. Despite the existence of the Primary Language Curriculum (2019) for four years, it has yet to undergo review. Although international tests can offer a momentary glimpse of performance, they can detract from the broader perspective. Political circles may be less inclined to review when test scores are favourable, as it may not be perceived as a pressing issue.

Teachers with specialised knowledge in specific curricular areas must be appropriately compensated for their services. This is particularly important in DEIS settings, as NAMER

2022 (Kiniry et al., 2023) data reveals a disparity between students from low socioeconomic backgrounds and their peers in non-DEIS schools. Ideally, experts in the field of literacy should be leading the way in their own schools. To achieve this, existing professional development frameworks must be dismantled and replaced with school-based opportunities for teacher-led literacy instruction.

Drawing from this research, I have discerned that the solution to enhancing literacy outcomes in the Irish context lies not in drawing upon the existing context but rather in looking to other anglophone jurisdictions and attempting to emulate practices that may not be applicable. This requires understanding the rationale for introducing genres, particularly in DEIS contexts. As Chesterton's fence analogy suggests, I would be cautious in completely dismantling existing practices without first understanding the reasoning behind their implementation. Instead, I would draw upon the Irish context to identify our strengths and limitations and explore potential barriers to progress.

Policymakers, such as the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), should also look at the role of professional development providers and the type of professional development that they are required to deliver. The role of the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) needs an accountable structure or ought to be expanded to adopt a more fluid approach to professional development (PD). Given their extensive school access, professional development providers must engage more actively in the PD process. However, it is crucial that there be accountability for the programs and initiatives put forth. The PDST tends to focus more on programmes and initiatives rather than grounding themselves in research. They should engage more with research and incorporate it into their practices to address this. Nevertheless, this proposal is ultimately contingent upon the willingness of the Department of Education and Skills (DES) to allocate sufficient funding for professional development.

The present discourse encompasses two fundamental aspects: the normative dimension of policy analysis, which entails exploring the attitudes and beliefs of educators, and the educational assessment of the DEIS context, which emphasises the programmes and processes available. Moving forward, it is suggested that professional development for teachers should aim to improve their expertise, and should this decision be made to implement practices from other English-speaking nations, due consideration needs to be given to teachers’ subject competency.

6.3.3 Conclusion Three: Reimagining Writing for 21st Century Classrooms

It is often challenging for educators to remain knowledgeable about the latest advancements in literacy, as professional development (PD) typically concentrates on enhancing programmes rather than imparting subject matter expertise.

It is imperative to abandon complacency with 21st-century tools and acknowledge the necessity of embracing 21st-century learning models. The findings of this study highlight the marginalisation of the digital context, which is perceived as an entity separate from writing. Teachers tend to limit the utilisation of digital tools to the concluding phase of the writing process, which raises several concerns. Recognising the interrelated nature of these issues and implementing comprehensive solutions is crucial. A broader perspective of writing should encompass the multimodal dimension, which extends beyond the boundaries of genre and process and necessitates the provision of professional development opportunities for teachers. Although the Primary language curriculum offers a comprehensive definition of genre, as outlined in the definition from the Primary Language Curriculum (2019: 2), its practical application remains elusive. Genre as outlined in the curriculum, is defined as:

> …a selection of oral and written forms in order to recount, explain, entertain, inform, give instructions, narrate, persuade and justify opinions. Oral forms include, but are not limited to, storytelling, drama, poetry, speeches, debates, film and digital media such as podcasts, videos, advertising, tv and radio broadcasts. More specifically, genres are types of multi-sentence oral or written texts that have become conventionalised for particular purposes. They have expected organisational patterns and language features related to register, for example, narrative, informational, persuasive and multi-genre.

One of the primary reasons for this situation is the fact that teachers have not been adequately exposed to writing genres beyond the traditional forms. Although the curriculum's definition is comprehensive, the necessary professional development to realise this potential has unfortunately not been implemented. Given the prominent role that access played in the interviewees' descriptions of how digital tools are utilised, this concern must be addressed. Unfortunately, the current academic year's budget for technology has yet to be allocated, and schools have not received an Information and Communications Technology grant since late 2021. Therefore, it is difficult to envision how writing can be reimagined beyond its conventional forms without adequate funding for digital technologies. Moreover, it is

necessary to consider how teachers can enhance their own expertise in using digital tools to incorporate the multimodal dimension of writing. For teachers to incorporate the multimodal dimension into their practices, they must thoroughly understand the available tools and their appropriate utilisation.

6.4 Contribution to New Knowledge

This research provides valuable insights into the advancements and influencing factors of writing in the Irish primary classroom, thus enriching the field of writing pedagogy.

While the concept of micro-genres is not novel, the study's findings suggest that a more disciplinary focus, cross-curricular authenticity, and a meaningful experience for the child as a writer can lead to more effective teaching methods. Additionally, the study's emphasis on teacher pedagogical knowledge and understanding of multimodal forms of communication, including images and videos, extends the traditional definition of "text" and adds depth to understanding social semiotics.

From an educational perspective, it is important to challenge the long-standing belief that writing is a process with distinct stages, such as drafting, editing, and revising, widely accepted in many contexts. While it is essential to acknowledge the value of this process, it is equally important to recognise that writing can and should evolve beyond these traditional boundaries. The Chief Inspector's comments (DES, 2022) on the school-wide evaluations of digital tools used in the publishing phase of the writing process reinforced the traditional notion of writing as a linear process. Therefore, it is necessary to reimagine the writing process and writing genres, moving beyond the conventional forms that have reduced communication and expression to six static forms or units of work. This study has made a significant contribution to the understanding of how policy initiatives have impacted on pedagogical approaches and initiatives in DEIS contexts. As discussed previously in this chapter, children in low-SES contexts are underperforming by comparison to their non-disadvantaged peers, as was evident in the national assessments of English reading (Kiniry, 2023). While the focus of this study was not on reading, it is important in understanding policy shifts whereby the approach to improving outcomes for children in low-SES was to implement the *First Steps* literacy programme. The study reveals that merely emulating practices without considering teacher knowledge is ineffective. As previously discussed,

there exists a paradox surrounding teacher agency. On the one hand, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment's Primary Language Curriculum (2019) aims to promote teacher agency by establishing learning outcomes. However, on the other hand, the implementation of specific programs undermines this objective. In my opinion, teachers require a framework or guidelines to refer to when making decisions. The following section outlines the limitations of this study.

6.5 Limitations

The study's sample size was relatively small and conducted on a limited scale due to the constraints imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Ideally, a higher response rate to the questionnaire would have been expected had the pandemic not been a factor. The mixed methods explanatory approach employed in the study presented certain limitations regarding the sample size, specifically with only five interviewees. However, this decision ensured a more comprehensive and in-depth analysis of teachers' beliefs, values, opinions, and professional identity. It is important to acknowledge my own values and biases that may have influenced the data collection process, particularly during the interview stage. The generalisability of the findings may be limited, and caution should be exercised when applying the results to broader contexts. The COVID-19 pandemic posed significant challenges during the data collection phase of the study, hindering the distribution of surveys to schools, and receiving responses. Undertaking a thesis during a pandemic was accompanied by a distinct set of challenges pertaining to the scope of my unrealistic objectives, which I had initially aspired to achieve. Furthermore, the study's objectives experienced alterations, negatively affecting my passion for the subject matter as I had originally envisioned engaging in fieldwork. However, the topic of this study is of professional and personal interest to me and I am grateful to have had the opportunity to gain insight into teachers' pedagogical approaches to writing in the Irish primary context. The following section is a brief outline of what I have learned as a researcher from this study.

6.5 What I have learned as a researcher.

As a researcher, I have acquired several indispensable life-long lessons. Foremost among these is the capacity for perseverance in the doctoral process and the propensity to surmount the numerous obstacles that encompass reliance and motivation during the most trying moments, particularly given the impact of COVID-19 on the study.

While studying at a British university, I have gained valuable insights into the policy process, particularly the economic factors that drive policy (Ball, 2014; 2016). This experience has enabled me to develop critical thinking skills and a deeper understanding of the levers and drivers of policy. Similarly, the significance of the "values" concept in education has always been a crucial aspect of my academic journey. As an educator conducting research, my previous experience as a teacher has been an invaluable asset in this endeavour. I am a firm advocate for the professionalism and dedication of teachers, and I understand the challenges that have arisen in the Irish context due to austerity measures and economic downturn since 2008. These factors have led to significant cuts in funding, which have had an impact on this particular study. As such, it is crucial to be mindful of teachers' experiences and personal identities, and to respect their voice, values, and attitudes in educational research. Undertaking research has equipped me with a range of essential skills, including a heightened comprehension of research methodologies within the educational sphere, the intricacies of data collection and analysis, as well as the stringent protocols that lie in between. By engaging in this pursuit, I have sharpened my capacity for problem-solving and acquired a steadfast approach to the research process.

6.6. Closing Remarks

My professional experience as a primary school teacher in low-SES (DEIS contexts) inspired my motivation for this study. In these contexts, I observed low literacy levels that profoundly impacted children's lives and learning. This led me to reflect on my own teacher pedagogical content knowledge and how I approached the teaching of reading and writing. I have always been interested in how knowledge and teacher knowledge drive pedagogy, and the importance of staying current with research in the field. From my experiences as a teacher, I have witnessed the challenges of implementing initiatives in DEIS contexts, such as a lack of

teacher expertise, teachers' beliefs, values, and previous professional development and experience.

This study represents a significant personal motivational context that has led me to examine the methods teachers use when instructing students in the art of writing and the factors that influence their pedagogical approaches. Through a mixed-methods explanatory study, I aimed to uncover how teachers in senior primary classes approach writing. My findings indicate that writing in the Irish primary education system is still predominantly rooted in a 20th-century model. To understand how this situation has arisen, I have identified policymakers and the manner in which writing is presented in the Primary Language Curriculum (2019) as contributing factors. I hope that a more effective professional development structure will emerge in Ireland that will enable writing to be brought into the 21st century, providing a broader and more engaging perspective on it as a means of communication and making it more meaningful and engaging for children.

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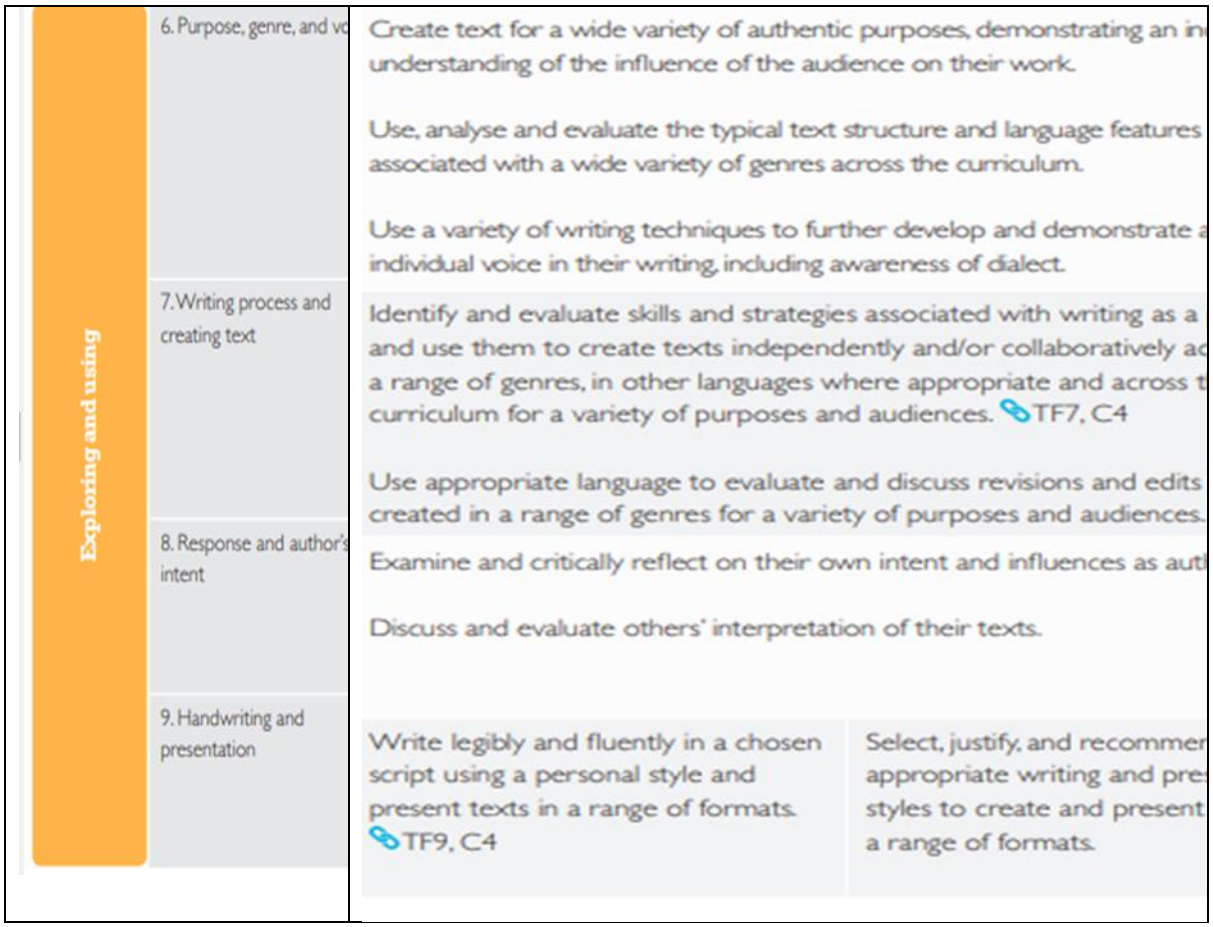
Appendix A



Exploring and using	6. Purpose, genre, and vo	Create text for a wide variety of authentic purposes, demonstrating an in understanding of the influence of the audience on their work. Use, analyse and evaluate the typical text structure and language features associated with a wide variety of genres across the curriculum. Use a variety of writing techniques to further develop and demonstrate a individual voice in their writing, including awareness of dialect.	
	7. Writing process and creating text	Identify and evaluate skills and strategies associated with writing as a and use them to create texts independently and/or collaboratively ac a range of genres, in other languages where appropriate and across t curriculum for a variety of purposes and audiences. TF7, C4 Use appropriate language to evaluate and discuss revisions and edits created in a range of genres for a variety of purposes and audiences.	
	8. Response and author's intent	Examine and critically reflect on their own intent and influences as aut Discuss and evaluate others' interpretation of their texts.	
	9. Handwriting and presentation	Write legibly and fluently in a chosen script using a personal style and present texts in a range of formats. TF9, C4	Select, justify, and recommer appropriate writing and pre styles to create and present a range of formats.

Element	Number and label		
		Examine, select and justify appropriate vocabulary to create text across a range of genres and other languages where appropriate for a variety of purposes and audiences. TF5, C4	Examine, select and justify appropriate vocabulary to create text of increasing complexity across a range of genres and other languages where appropriate for a variety of purposes and audiences. Evaluate the aesthetic, creative, figurative and imaginative dimensions of language in their writing. Evaluate how vocabulary is used in various contexts in their writing.
Communicating	1. Engagement	Engage positively and purposefully while creating text in a variety of genres, other languages where appropriate and across the curriculum.	
	2. Motivation and choice	Use writing as a tool to clarify and structure thought and to express individuality. TF1, C4	
Understanding	3. Conventions of print and sentence structure	Evaluate and critically choose appropriate tools, strategies, content and topics to create text in a range of genres across the curriculum for a variety of purposes and audiences. TF2, C4	
	4. Spelling and word study	Use increasingly nuanced print conventions in their independent writing. Use a variety of simple, compound and complex sentence structures, varying sentence length to suit the audience, style and tone of their writing.	
	5. Vocabulary	Analyse how letter-sound correspondences, common spelling patterns and meaningful word parts and roots impact on spelling, using this knowledge to correctly spell words in their writing. Use appropriate reference materials to independently check and correct spelling. TF4, C4	

Appendix B

Senior Primary Literacy

Information: The projects aims is to investigate teachers' approaches to literacy in the senior primary classroom.

Project Title: Teaching Literacy in the Senior Primary Classroom

My name is Niamh Watkins. I am a doctoral student in the University of Sheffield. I am inviting you to participate in the following questionnaire as part of a project on the teaching of literacy in senior primary in Ireland.

What is this project about?

I am investigating teachers' approaches to teaching literacy, specifically writing, and what informs teachers' approaches to writing instruction in senior primary classrooms.

The survey takes approximately 8 minutes. There are **22** Questions in total.
If you would like more information please feel free to contact me at: nwatkins2@sheffield.ac.uk

How will my privacy be protected?

All responses are confidential
Participation is voluntary. You can withdraw from completion at any point.

Project contact details for further information:
Niamh Watkins **(Principal Investigator)** nwatkins2@sheffield.ac.uk
Rebecca Parry **(Research Supervisor**) University of Sheffield, Western Bank, Sheffield S10 2TN United Kingdom. Email: R.L.Parry@sheffield.ac.uk

Thank you for your time and best wishes for the remainder of the school year

	Click to write Column 1	
	Yes	No
I have read and understood the project information outlined in the section above	○	○
I understand that I have the opportunity to ask questions about the project	○	○
I agree to take part in the project. I understand that taking part in the project will include answering a questionnaire (Approximately 8 mins)	○	○
I understand that by choosing to participate as a volunteer in this research, this does not create a legally binding agreement nor is it intended to create an employment relationship with the University of Sheffield.	○	○
I agree to take part in the project. I understand that taking part in the project will include answering an anonymous questionnaire (25 questions)	○	○
I understand my personal details such as name, phone number, address and email address etc. will not be revealed to people outside the project.	○	○
I understand and agree that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. I understand that I will not be named in these outputs unless I specifically request this.	○	○
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	○	○
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers may use my data in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	○	○

Years' teaching experience (by the end of this school year June 2021)

0-5

6-10

10-15

16-20

20+

My school is...

Rural

Urban

My school is...

Non-DEIS

DEIS

I feel confident in my approach to teaching literacy in senior classes (3rd-6th)?

The Primary Language Curriculum (2019) has informed my teaching of literacy (3rd to 6th class)

Comment on Q3: In what ways does (if any) the Primary Language Curriculum informed your approach to teaching literacy?

The aspects of literacy I am most confident teaching are: (select what applies to you)

- Comprehension
- Fluency
- Vocabulary
- Writing
- Oral Language
- Digital literacy
- Critical Literacy
- Disciplinary Literacy

I follow a programme of work e.g. Starlight/Over the Moon or programmes from publishers

Teaching Writing in senior classes:
Apart from 'free writing' , how often do you explicitly teach writing?

- Every day
- Four times a week
- Three times a week
- Twice a week
- Once a week
- Less than once a week

I use one or more of these approaches to teaching writing:

- Free writing
- Writing genres
- Writers' workshop
- Inquiry/ Project Based Learning

Writing: Topics and Choice:
Children choose **topics** to write about themselves

- Always
- Often
- Rarely
- Never

Writing: Topics and Choice:
Children choose the **genre** in which to write about themselves

- Always
- Often
- Rarely
- Never

Writing: Topics and Choice:
Children plan topics to research and write about in groups

- Always
- Often
- Rarely
- Never

Writing: Topics and Choice:
Children choose to present information across different modes e.g. digital/visual

- Always
- Often
- Rarely
- Never

Writing and Oral Language:
Children discuss topics to write about in groups with opportunities for speaking, listening & collaboration

- Always
- Often
- Rarely
- Never

How often do you explicitly teach oral language?

- Everyday
- Four times a week
- Three times a week
- Twice a week
- Once a week
- Less than once a week

I plan for group work and opportunities to use language?

Everyday	Three times a week
Once a week	Four times a week
Twice a week	less often than weekly

I plan for oracy and talk-based learning in literacy

- Always
- Often
- Rarely
- Never

Senior Primary Literacy

How much do you agree with the following statement:

I am familiar with approaches to teaching 'new literacies' e.g. digital, disciplinary, critical and visual literacy

How much do you agree with the following statement:

I use digital tools when teaching writing and oral language

How much do you agree with the following statement:

I use disciplinary texts when teaching writing and oral language

Standardised tests affect the way I teach writing and oral language in senior classes?

Comment on how Standardised testing affects your teaching

How much do you agree with the following statement:

There's a lot of content to cover or senior primary English

Aspects of teaching literacy I would like to know more about:

If you are interested in taking part in an interview please write your email address below

Appendix C: Informed Consent (Questionnaire)

Senior Primary Literacy

Information: The projects aims is to investigate teachers' approaches to literacy in the senior primary classroom.
Project Title: Teaching Literacy in the Senior Primary Classroom
My name is Niamh Watkins. I am a doctoral student in the University of Sheffield. I am inviting you to participate in the following questionnaire as part of a project on the teaching of literacy in senior primary in Ireland.
What is this project about?
I am investigating teachers' approaches to teaching literacy, specifically writing, and what informs teachers' approaches to writing instruction in senior primary classrooms.

The survey takes approximately 8 minutes. There are **22** Questions in total.
If you would like more information please feel free to contact me at: nwatkins2@sheffield.ac.uk

How will my privacy be protected?
All responses are confidential
Participation is voluntary. You can withdraw from completion at any point.

Project contact details for further information:
Niamh Watkins **(Principal Investigator)** nwatkins2@sheffield.ac.uk
Rebecca Parry **(Research Supervisor)** University of Sheffield, Western Bank, Sheffield S10 2TN United Kingdom. Email: R.L.Parry@sheffield.ac.uk

Thank you for your time and best wishes for the remainder of the school year

	Yes
I have read and understood the project information outlined in the section above	○
I understand that I have the opportunity to ask questions about the project	○
I agree to take part in the project. I understand that taking part in the project will include answering a questionnaire (Approximately 8 mins)	○
I understand that by choosing to participate as a volunteer in this research, this does not create a legally binding agreement nor is it intended to create an employment relationship with the University of Sheffield.	○
I agree to take part in the project. I understand that taking part in the project will include answering an anonymous questionnaire (25 questions)	○
I understand my personal details such as name, phone number, address and email address etc. will not be revealed to people outside the project.	○
I understand and agree that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. I understand that I will not be named in these outputs unless I specifically request this.	○
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	○
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers may use my data in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	○

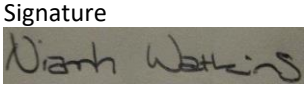
Appendix D: Six Main Wring Genres

- Recount: the purpose is to retell events. Main features of a recount include events in time order, linking words to do with time, simple past tense.
- Narrative: the purpose is to entertain. A narrative tells an imaginative story (some can be based on facts). Main features of a narrative include defined characters, a setting, problem or complication, descriptive language and are usually in the past tense.
- Procedure: the purpose is to tell the way to do things. Main features of a procedure include stating the goal of the procedure, materials, method, evaluation, tense is timeless and use of linking words.
- Report: the purpose is to present factual information on a person, place, animal or thing. Main features of a report include classification, description, summary, subject specific vocabulary and objective language.
- Exposition: the purpose is to persuade. Main features include arguments for/against, evidence, conclusion, mainly timeless present tense and use of passives.
- Explanation: the purpose is to explain how something came to be. Main features include a definition, description of various parts, how or why it works and summary.

Appendix E: Informed Consent Interviews

Teaching Writing and Oral Language in Senior Primary

Please tick the appropriate boxes	Yes	No
Taking Part in the Project		
I have read and understood the project information sheet dated 31/05/2021 or the project has been fully explained to me.	☐	☐
I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	☐	☐
For interview Participants I agree to take part in the project. I understand that taking part in the project will include an interview (45 minutes to an hour in length)	☐	☐
I understand that by choosing to participate as a volunteer in this research, this does not create a legally binding agreement nor is it intended to create an employment relationship with the University of Sheffield.	☐	☐
I understand that my taking part is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time/before 05/08/2021. I do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part and there will be no adverse consequences if I choose to withdraw.	☐	☐
How my information will be used during and after the project		
I understand my personal details such as name, phone number, address and email address etc. will not be revealed to people outside the project.	☐	☐
I understand and agree that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. I understand that I will not be named in these outputs unless I specifically request this.	☐	☐
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	☐	☐
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers may use my data in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	☐	☐

Name of participant	Signature	Date
Name of Researcher Niamh Watkins	Signature 	Date 17/05/2021

Please return to Niamh Watkins:
nwatkins2@sheffield.ac.uk

Project contact details for further information:

Niamh Watkins **(Principal Investigator)** nwatkins2@sheffield.ac.uk +353877476305
Rebecca Parry **(Research Supervisor**) University of Sheffield, Western Bank, Sheffield S10 2TN United Kingdom. Email: R.L.Parry@sheffield.ac.uk Telephone: +44 114 222 8141
Liz Chesworth (Chair of Doctor of Education) University of Sheffield, Western Bank, Sheffield S10 2TN United Kingdom. e.a.chesworth@sheffield.ac.uk

Appendix F: Interview Transcript: Rachel (Interview 4)

NW: Okay, perfect. So, thanks a million for joining me today and giving up your time and summer holidays as well on the 28th of July. If you want to start on maybe a little bit of information about your route into teaching and your interests in literacy.

Rachel: Okay, so when I graduated from my first degree in the mid 80s, I went to teach TEFL around Europe, I taught in Spain for a couple of years, and then I moved to Japan. And I taught there on the JET Program for five for three years. And then I stayed on for another two years working for a and it was called the international exchange, local government exchange program. So that was a program that trained local government workers in Japan who were sessional sister city relationships with overseas cities. So, I worked there for two years. And then I came back and I did my Master's in Applied Linguistics, and then moved to Sweden, and I taught English as a second language in the University of Uppsala. And then I came back to Ireland, and took a position as academic coordinator for English language teaching and learning at the applied Language Centre in UCD. So that was kind of, I suppose, the big movement in the 90s, to bring overseas students in and get their language ability up to, you know, studying through English, as well as commercial programs for English as a second language. And then we moved into teacher education. So, we had a lot of overseas teachers coming from places in Europe, and also Korea, and China, who are now being required to teach English as a subject in primary schools. And that was a source of huge stress to those individual teachers, who didn't feel they had any competence in English. And I was there for 10 years. And it was really through working with those teachers and through my own children entering primary school that I became really interested in primary teaching, and I did a postgraduate and moved into primary teaching them. And I have been a primary teacher since then, for the last 16 years, at different class levels. You know, what I, I've always loved language and, you know, reading and then, you know, my applied linguistic background came with me to primary school, and I suppose I was really interested in language analysis and teaching, the importance of teaching the language, as well as the literature and all the other skills that go with it.

NW: Brilliant. Very colourful. I'm already distracted, now I just want to talk about Japan and Sweden. I'm thinking about the new primary language curriculum. To what extent has it informed your teaching of English?

Rachel: I suppose it has informed mine, more than most because I was seconded to the PDST. I was involved in the teacher education for using the primary language curriculum, then I was team leader for primary literacy there. So I suppose my experience with it and how it informs my teaching might be greater because I've been fortunate enough to have that experience. I found it an extremely useful tool. I've been in the EAL role for the last few years and I just thought there was loads there about language for the first time that was really

helpful. So it was really helpful in terms of looking at a class and looking at where, you know, what kind of approaches would help different people in the classroom. So it does inform us, but to be honest, I think it's kind of more the research and the principles that informed me more than the learning outcomes and the progression continuum if I'm completely honest.

NW: Can you expand on that a bit, the research and the principles may be a little bit.

Rachel: WelI, suppose when like the, the, you know, some of the parts of the curriculum, I suppose that talk about things like inclusion and linguistic diversity and clear and approaches to teaching Irish and English together. And, you know, I suppose the chapter six of the primary language curriculum is more helpful to me. Maybe you know, that's partly because I'm the literacy coordinator as well, that I think it's very useful to look at the learning outcomes. And it's very useful to see the balance of experiences you have to provide through the learning outcomes. But I don't know how practical it is to use all those learning outcomes on a daily basis. Now that I'm back at school, you know, it's definitely helpful when you're thinking about one aspect, to go deeply into that learning outcome and to look at the progression continuum and might this look like, across a continuum? Okay. But it doesn't really help us very much with what this means, like how do we do it in the classroom?

NW: And I understand that your context is a little bit different from having worked as a PDST coordinator, but how has the CPD and the roll out of the curriculum helped your practice?

Rachel: Well, I suppose the initial rollout was very much about oral language development. And I think kind of within the system, I think teachers were really concerned about oral language and vocabulary, even though there haven't been maybe been articulated very well. So I think there was a kind of a sense of relief, because the oral and the CPD for oral language was the one that came out first. So when we talk about the curriculum, when when I was with PTSD, and we were talking about the curriculum, teachers would call it the oral language curriculum, because that was, you know, what all the CPD was about. And that was very empowering for a lot of teachers to almost feel like they had permission to look at language to use talk and discussion as a vehicle for a class. And I think people felt before that they weren't doing real work. If they weren't, if they were, you know, if a lot of it was oral, and then of course, there were links between what was going to happen in the early years. And, you know, the framework for early years instruction, such as Aistear and Siolta, were very much you know, language, oral language is really important important part without them, then that linked for the first time into the first few years of primary, and then when the curriculum came out for the for the later years in primary. And then you can see that methodology is also really important and articulated and being really important in the junior cycle and secondary school. So I think the first time you saw a lot of linking up and features, you know, instead of like I've said before, you could have first class children up telling their

news. And you'd be listening to their news. But you might necessarily be thinking as a teacher, which seems crazy now, how can I teach them to tell their news better? What skills do they need to develop in terms of intonation in terms of body language in terms of the vocabulary they're using in terms of understanding that their news is a type of oral text, and that there might be other types of oral texts that will develop on where, you know, maybe presenting on a farm animal or whatever it might be in the younger years. So, I think that was definitely very empowering for teachers. But the waters were very muddied by some of the messaging around, you know, progression continua, and whether children should be plotted on a scale or, you know, how this is going to look. Across, you know, there was a lot of confusion and fear around just I think it was unfortunate looking back, but I can, I can see why it happened in terms of policy, policy and fear and deadlines, that the dialogue, unfortunately was much more about a very narrow part of the curriculum and not the broad or principles that would support the teachers a bit better.

NW: That sounds pretty good. So, it has influenced the oral language piece, but to what extent do you think it is influenced by the CPD or the approaches to writing or writing instruction?

Rachel: Yeah, I think the writing is the part maybe that in terms of CPD wasn't progressive or we didn't get there in the same way we got there with oral language and with reading so you know in the first row like reading approaches, that were modelled where critical thinking book talk from, from Mary Roche's work on that, definitely helps to put us into this dialogic space for reading and open up. When you know the importance of dialogue in reading approaches as well. So, I think we made big gains in oral language. And we made big gains in how we thought about reading instruction. And phonological awareness and phonics was there for the early years as well, which was great, because that wasn't really there in the 1999 curriculum in a way that would help your classroom practice even though there were great things in the 1999 curriculum. So that the whole system didn't get to do writing, I don't think and, you know, the writing approach was definitely very much writing genre, which, you know, emerged from the use of first steps in the, in the DEIS schools, and then the PDST and other support agencies may be looked at the first step approach, and tells you to be helpful for all schools. So that was the kind of writing education that was very much influenced by that. And I think a lot of people were really struggling with it. And I didn't understand why at the time, but I suppose being a little bit more informed. Now. I see that it really was the whole issue. I think that the writing genre doesn't really fit into the whole dialogic space and putting the child and the child's voice at the centre of things. Bit too formulaic, and you know, you're Shelby are modelling, you're using the Gradual Release of Responsibility. But you really haven't considered motivation and engagement and child's voice and what the child wants to write about the child wants to say, all these, you know, so there was a little bit of a contradiction there. I think I actually, now that I'm thinking about it. So, in the curriculum, we have the Writers Workshop with genre approaches and motivation and engagement all in the writing outcomes. But it's a bit mish-mashy. I don't know if that's actually a word.

NW: But I suppose the kind of maybe some mixed messages in that, you know, it's a few different approaches, but at what point would you use one approach or the other? Or do you teach your genre through a Writer's Workshop? Maybe it's Yeah, a little bit mixed.

Rachel: And then I suppose that's one, that's another weakness of the new curriculum. So the 1999 curriculum came out with the introduction with the red book introduction, which laid out the philosophical underpinnings of the curriculum and how everything linked together. Whereas because of the policy issues that happened here, you know, the new curriculum was forced out for languages, first, primary languages, the deadline couldn't be met. And then, you know, the government or the Minister of Education of the time insisted that it be rolled out, so it was only ready from junior infants to seconds. And then the senior end of the curriculum felt like, Oh, yeah, we have to add this on now and make it as part of a continuum. So, you know, the, the approaches may not be the same for the Jr. Or the emphasis or the focus, being different from third to sixth class. Isn't? It's just not clear enough. And, you know, then if you are looking at a continuum, where then does that continuum apply for a fourth class child, you know, do you go around it for class child or fifth class child with huge phonological deficits? Do you go back to the infant curriculum and deal with the phonological awareness? So, you know, that part of it just doesn't work? For me anyway.

NW: Okay. What kind of approaches are used in your school to teach writing?

Well, again, like our school reflects the confused messages. So we have a lot of disadvantaged children, and we have a lot of children who speak English as a second language or about 50% EAL. So we latched onto genre, thinking that it was going to be a really helpful thing. But there was absolutely no measurable improvement in writing across the school since we started thinking and talking advisors, you know, writing you know, we did introduce or a language pad, you know, we did work on our pedagogy for language very carefully, and we start, you know, over a three year period, and then we went on to reading and, you know, writing just got lost and the quality of the writing was not anywhere like where we'd need it to be and then some teachers were doing a bit of their own thing. We didn't have a sense of a coordinated approach to writing. But we did have in our school to plan the writing genre that would be covered in each term over a two year period. So, you know, we felt that at least then we would be covering different writing genre. Then we were kind of looking at the writing genre from first steps, and then the writing genre from the pdst documents, and they weren't quite the same. And then we were thinking, do we really have to do all these genre? Is there any crossovers but we, I suppose we didn't feel like we had the knowledge to quickly down. And then as we thought, as we started to talk about comprehension strategies, same as many schools, our comprehension strategies were in our school plan to be taught over certain terms. And now, of course, you know, you realize how limiting that is, because which comprehension strategies you deal with depends on, you

know, the type of books you're using what they lend themselves to. And I'm actually this summer in the process of rewriting our English plan, and trying to take all those, you know, untangle all those things out of it, again, and the same with the writing genre. And then we were trying to match the comprehension strategies with the type of writing genre we were doing. And so much of it was wasted work, you know, that we need, we need to think more in terms of principles.

So with that in mind, I attended a DCU write to read series of three workshops for teachers last year, and got to understand more about the Writers Workshop. And I read the Fletcher book, The writing teachers companion, it just started to all make much more sense that we need to take this kind of approach. Children need to be writing more often, they weren't writing often enough. So then I put a zoom session together. And I invited any teachers who were interested in learning about the Writers Workshop to attend the zoom session at the start of last year, and then we were in and out of lockdown. So it was a bit messy. And so we were in lockdown when that zoom session happened, and 11 teachers did it and they had lots of questions about it. And from that, then I asked, Would any of those eleven teachers be willing to pilot the Writers Workshop in their class, when we were back at school, we were scheduled to be back after the Easter break, which did happen. And then three teachers agreed that they would pilot it, the set teachers working with those classes also agreed that they would assist. So we had a junior infant class, a mixed first and second class and third class piloted. And it went really, really well. And quite quickly, the teacher said, Oh, this is actually fantastic. Like, instead of having, you know, on my wall, instead of having the same display by thirty children, I now actually have thirty different pieces of writing. And there was a sense of energy, like the teachers felt energised, because they were reading the children's pieces, and they were enjoying them. And the teacher said that they felt relieved that there was a sense of structure, that they knew what they had to do every day. And that you didn't have all these corrections that we were able to, you know, conference with children and schedule it out in a way that didn't feel because I think teachers often felt that they had to correct everything. And you know, the copies had to look good and look like those teacher feedback. And so that, you know, there was a really good response. And then all of the teachers, all of the other teachers who were in the school, were invited to go and see it in action. And there was a bit of buzz about it. So we're all going to implement it from September now. But then I suppose a few, like some of those teachers have left now, you know, there's been changeover and stuff. And, you know, we're gonna have four new teachers this year. So that I suppose, as a literacy coordinator, something that worries me because, you know, not only do we have to catch up on all we've done in terms of oral language and reading, you have to do it in writing too. And if we don't do it, if we don't include those new teachers in the conversation, it's a loss, you know?

NW: Absolutely. You've mentioned about prior to moving into a workshop approach that you were teaching genre over a year, and how many mentioning… pardon, over two years over two years. So how important was this on the school plan? That you would teach these writing genres over a block of a number of weeks, or how is it decided how many genres would be covered or the length of time?

Rachel: And I suppose that was decided when I was on secondment, so I mean, I had been coming in to do work in the school on oral language. And so the previous deputy principal asked people what they thought, and there were a few meetings about it. And then I think a subcommittee was put together to say this is our suggestion, and then it was approved at a staff meeting. But it would have been a PDST advisor's advice at that time to do it that way.

NW: How or what were the challenges in approaching writing in that way?

Rachel: I suppose the challenges were that people felt they had a structure, and they had a methodology. So, it should have worked that you have the Gradual Release of Responsibility. I suppose the Gradual Release of Responsibility can be problematic for teachers too, because sometimes you do the modelling. And you go too far towards the product, and you miss out on all that sharing and guiding piece. So, I suppose as a PDST advisor, that's what I would have noticed that teachers sometimes feel they don't have a license to spend. I don't know why this is. But teachers seem to feel the modelling stage, and the independence stage are really important. And you should get between the two. So, I think that with the whole sharing and guiding piece, teachers weren't confident in how to do that, or what that might look like. Then it was the sense of, you know, which is always a measure of learning, the engagement wasn't there, right? So, the teacher, you know, had to spend a long time with supporting children, and what to write about and how to write it. And we didn't have this sense of light and energy and something interesting to do.

NW: How often did that take place? The writing genre?

Rachel: Well, it was one writing genre, a term over two years. And to be honest, I think it was once or twice a week in most instances. And that might have been a disadvantage of doing one over a term.

NW: Did the children choose topics themselves in which to write about?

Rachel: I think that varied from teacher to teacher, some children did, and the teacher chose the genre, but teachers reported mostly that they really struggled with the plot to write about for the children when they were picking the genre. Okay, as in the modelling stage, the teacher wouldn't show what it should look like rather, maybe, you know. And I don't think we got the sharing stage right. Or the guided stage right and then I think when you're only doing it once or twice a week then that's your writing. It loses momentum as well.

NW: It's another thing to go back to. Yeah. So definitely, you know, the product then again, more so than the process, something to show after your six to eight weeks.

Rachel: Exactly. And then poetry became poetry had always been something that was really well done in our school, but poetry got thrown in there as a genre that was done once every, you know, writing poetry was done one term every two years, and there was actually a lot more poetry writing happening before we had our everything parcelled up into these blocks. Okay, of course, it was never meant that teachers felt that they only had to do that, that was never meant. But that's an effect of what happened.

NW: I'm just picking up on what you said about choice and moving from a structured genre approach into a Writers Workshop approach. In the workshop approach do children have a choice in what genre to write about.

Rachel: Well, we've only piloted it now for one term. And so, the three teachers, the pilot of this, you know, one started off with a persuasive writing, getting them to write ads, which was really, really the most successful of the three and because I think it was short there. They had loads of different samples from, from videos from, you know, those flyers that come through the door through newspapers through, you know, things that the children found themselves. Like, they did a lot of that of looking at ads and different contexts. And as they were doing that, you could see the children what they responded to, you know, they really picked out things like exclamation marks and questions for adults. Are you tired of your old iPhone three kinds of questions, and they really, intuitively pick those things out. And so yeah, the genre was chosen, but they, they, you know, we were going to do ads, or we were going to do persuasive writing.

And they, you know, really responded well to that. And the teacher in third class, did a narrative. And that was quite successful, because she used stories they've done all year to focus in on different areas of narrative. And then in the junior infant class, she also springboarded from stories that they had done, you know, when they looked at, you know, it was mostly drawing pictures and labelling pictures, and but it was really great to see the emergence spelling skills, even coming through how, I suppose that was where we saw the biggest development. And our biggest weakness in writing was actually done at the junior end, because we were thinking too much about letter formation, and not enough about message, like, What message do you want to give through your writing, the junior infants loved it, and we all have the most trepidation about doing it in junior infants, because, you know, we knew we had a lot more to do in terms of how we were teaching writing. And we had implemented kind of the guided reading approach and senior in the writing approach of composing a sentence in their copy, so they had to try it out page, and then they compose the sentence.

So that was happening in senior infants, but we haven't yet done that in Junior infants. But the junior infants almost leapfrogged the senior infants, you know, I think the power of voice and choice just lifted everything. And I think for a lot of children, writing is actually a way into reading, where we tend to think of it as the other way around, reading is a way into writing. And the reciprocity between the two is so important. So that was a huge leap, that really was a big revelation for us. And everybody was very, very energised by that, you know when they

were, they just wanted to show everybody what they were doing. They were managing their own portfolios and picking out the ones that they wanted to publish. And, you know, we were using See Saw then. So, all of these were going home, and they're getting talked about, and then it was a great chance to do writing in the first language, you know, that we were encouraging the children to write a word or a piece or a paragraph in their own language as well.

NW: Brilliant, brilliant. But I'm thinking again, with the whole choice piece, how challenging is it to facilitate choice across the different genres?

Rachel: Yeah, I have to think about that one now. I mean, I don't think it should be that difficult, because, you know, if you're broad enough, and if the mentor texts you're using are diverse enough, it should just flow from that. I think teachers find it challenging to I suppose this is the biggest leap we made from trialling as in the conversations with teachers. When teachers felt that whatever they were teaching in the mini lesson, didn't have to directly transfer to the children's writing, it was like somebody took a 10 tonne weight off their shoulder. That was, that was the major thing that people talked about after we piloted this. But that doesn't have to be this direct connection between the mini lesson and what appears in the writing. I think that freed people up to be happier with choice to let a child persist with a piece or to start a new piece or to you know, not come back to that mini lesson until they needed it and another piece, and I suppose we have to get better at it. How do you keep all those anchor charts readily available? I saw on Twitter that a teacher has a load of clothes hangers on a coat rail. And they're, you know, the children can actually hanging up the anchor charts when they needed them. So, I thought that's something we might actually think about in the future.

NW: We include the scaffolds and availability of scaffolds as well. And up to what point? Do you still need it? Or at what point do you know that you would need to move on? Yeah. I'm thinking about multi modalities and the use of audio and visual, visual and digital text. Do children have a choice in how they would represent what they have learned through any of these mediums?

Rachel: In our school at the moment, they don't. But it's definitely something I think that the Writers Workshop will enable us to do a bit better. Now. You know, a couple of teachers have been experimenting with using children's podcasts and radio shows, as reading texts. And they have been talking about setting up a little podcast, you know, type thing for the children to compose. And another teacher is doing a lot with Book Creator. Oh, yeah. So there are a lot of teachers doing different things with, you know, different modes of representation. And but I suppose it's not a widespread practice. Yes the toes have been dipped in the water.

NW: What do you think are some of the barriers to being able to use digital tools and in writing?

Rachel: Well, one is, you know, access and money, like we're not a very wealthy school, we have 24 functioning iPads that are shared between 15 classes.

And I suppose there's, you know, there's the availability of the technology, and it's the same, we wanted to do a lot more with audio texts. But then we, you know, you don't have that machine for every child, she can't, you know, you have to do with with one or with tapes. So that's a barrier, I suppose other barriers then are, in terms of writing, you want, you know, our writing deficits are huge. And we're saying, should they? Should they be able to, you know, write by hand before or in tandem with other types of technology, and I suppose we were, we're not yet informed enough to know what good decisions are around. Okay. And we don't want it to be, I suppose, it also comes down to sort of the issue of social justice and SEN as well. So if you're, if you want to be totally inclusive, then your ambitions have to be that the SEN children are capable of achieving, like the other children. So there's also that fear that, you know, the use of technology will become something that's given to the SEN children to do, because it's perceived to be a bit easier and not as challenging. And I think we're all a bit worried about going down that road. It's everything for everybody. Not just something different for the people we think, or might be perceived to not be able to achieve the same as everybody else. Does that make sense? Yeah, that's, you know, the iPads. For the child who has trouble spelling? Yes, it can be a good tool. Or it can also be limiting. Okay.

NW: And on that as well, I'm, we see what our primary language curriculum that we have no critical and disciplinary and digital, visual and you know, these new literacies and we see them and how they've kind of emerged on the PLC, I heard from teachers or plus has kind of emerged from the survey is that it's hard to plan for everything across the week, or it's it's challenging to fit everything in over a week. To what extent Would you agree with that statement?

Oh, I do agree with that statement. I think, you know, it is challenging to fit everything in what you see we're in this weird space between the old curriculum and the new curriculum as well. So we're no longer using the 1999 curriculum. But teachers are still planning the hours for literacy that were outlined in the 1999 curriculum. And now we're using the new curriculum. But there's no guidance in terms of hours in the new curriculum, which I totally support because I think, literally, if we if we really believe in disciplinary literacy and in literacy across the curriculum, and, you know, developing language and concepts, skills and dispositions and other subject areas, then you can't limit it to, oh, this is the literacy hour or this is the, you know, that doesn't work. So I support that, but it leaves teachers in a difficult position, because they still have to reduce the timetable that says, when they're doing Irish and when they're doing English and when they're doing maths. So that's, that's a very hard circle to square. And so, sorry, what was the original question?

NW: I'm wondering now, About the statement, it's challenging to fit everything in over a week and how much would you agree with that statement?

I think those administrative obligations are making it more complicated than it needs to be. You know, and if you're doing a picture book, you know, a really rich picture book with a senior class, you're going, that picture book could be something like, you know, *The Lighthouse*, or *Shackleton's Journey* or something like that. You can also develop geographical skills, historical skills through that picture book. You can also be, you know, using it as a mentor text to writing you can also be noticing features of spelling. Through the book, you can notice aspects of visual literacy, through heavy illustrations that are worked through how the pages are laid out. And so how do you break all of those things that you might do with the high quality picture book into hours? Or 10 minutes of that was geography and seven minutes of that was history and two minutes that was spent like it's just it, I don't think it's the way that the curriculum is moving us, or the research behind the curriculum is moving us. So what it does show a lot, I suppose about how the transition from the 1999 curriculum to this curriculum has not been well managed for teachers.

NW: Do you want to expand on that hope it hasn't been well managed the transition?

Well, I suppose that's just a small example, you know, if there's no longer guidance on time, but you're still working to the 1999 curriculum for all the subjects other than English and Irish. And you still have to hand in your timetable that says, you know, this many hours and this many minutes has been allocated, in these times of the day, to English and Irish, you know, and even that is a question. Okay, so we're developing both languages together, totally getting the transfer of skills. Excellent idea. But, you know, how do you do all that? and define, you know, define it in hours and minutes across the timetable.

So in that way, I just think it's a real example of how policy can get things wrong. And under resourcing, and underfunding of things, I mean, that the literacy and numeracy strategy was rushed out in 2011. As a result of a perceived fallback in results, an international literacy test results perceived that Ireland wasn't doing well, that turned out to be not the right perception. And as a result of that a new curriculum was required. The new curriculum was rushed out by the National Council for Curriculum Assessment, which I think we're really lucky to have in Ireland, because it means curriculum is not political. It's that we have a statutory body that looks after curriculum and, you know, scans the research, but they didn't have the staff to roll that curriculum or to prepare it in the way. I mean, I think there was one director and two education officers charged with putting it all together, excellent people, but an impossible task and to roll out half of the curriculum. Teachers were rightly saying in the name of goodness what is going on here?

There was a real sense of anger. And all of the fantastic messages that are in the curriculum got pretty lost for years because it didn't all come together. So we have the languages curriculum now. But we still don't have a clear path ahead as to what the rest of the curriculum is going to look like. So they're talking about having more integrated subjects at

the junior end. And differentiating at the senior end into different subjects again, but surely to goodness, we should have taken a few extra years to look at the whole picture before we rolled out one aspect of the curriculum for Junior infants to second class. It made people unsure and unfortunately, we're still dealing with the fallout from that now.

NW: And on that I suppose within the integration in your school, are you able to integrate reading writing oral language grammar spelling? over a week? Or how, how is it approached?

Rachel: No, we're not, you know, we talk about doing that. And some of our teachers do it really well. There's a couple of really experienced teachers, one of whom is a writer herself. And she is just her practice is magnificent in that regard and integrating the subjects and, you know, moving forward, but as a school, I can't say that that's what we're doing when we're not there yet. You know, okay.

NW: You've mentioned already about integrating oral language with picture books and critical thinking. And again, it was just around PLC and emphasis on new literacies. You spoke about the challenges with digital, have you? In what ways have you been able to bring new literacies into reading and oral language?

Yeah, well, I suppose we're fortunate in our school that we have a teacher who's an artist, and she did her, she did her MA over two years on visual literacy. And we have a very, you know, our principal is very involved in the arts and drama. And he commissioned, you know, a fantastic artwork, quite an avant garde art work that we have in our school, which is, it's a huge sculpture with different wooden bolts coming down from us, that is Linked into the earth, in our school. So as the earth gets dumper, or drier, it emits syllabic sounds and in response to the earth, so we had kind of gone quite far in terms of developing concepts about art and responding to art through that project.

And I suppose it was also the artist who was trying to represent, you know, the multicultural nature of our school as well. And, you know, we had a lot of what the sounds were like, and, you know, a lot of people, a lot of people loved it, but it's, it's there now. So we springboarded, from bash into visual literacy, when we introduced critical thinking and book talk. And we introduced the use of picture books across the school, so that naturally Linked in. So the visual literacy part is actually going quite well in our school app, thanks to the work of that teacher. And she was very happy to do some training sessions and modelling, and linked in with the work that the teachers were doing in art. So that’s going quite well, I think. disciplinary literacy, cross curricular literacy, critical literacy, where, you know, I think a lot of critical literacy is actually happening through the picture books, but I don't think teachers are aware of critical literacy and critical thinking and what all of that is yet that's a pretty confusing space. Okay. Now, the PTSD did a webinar recently on developing critical thinking skills, and it was really well received by teachers. But maybe it didn't help to demystify the difference between critical thinking and critical literacy.

NW: Okay, perfect. And the last question was around a question that was asked in the survey, which, with the benefit of hindsight, was really perfectly phrased. And it was just around standardized tests. And if standardized tests would affect the time that would be given to teaching Writing and oral language? Or if there is maybe pressure to focus more on the reading. So I didn't have anything really conclusive from that in your experience or opinion. Has standardised tests affected the way that you would approach teaching writing or oral language?

Rachel: I can't say that it does. No. But I suppose maybe there has been a tradition there of focusing on reading more than anything else. Okay. And that read, you know? Yeah, I'd have to think about that Niamh. But I don't think so. I just think about the interconnectedness of everything. You wouldn't really be able to do anything developmentally. What reading without including oral language and writing as well. Hmm. Yeah, maybe? I mean, I haven't considered that question before. But it's something that I should consider, maybe given that our writing is the weakest of maybe the three big skills.

NW: You mentioned Writers Workshop, genre writing, writing in groups, project writing units of work, is that anything that you've approached or considered before?

Rachel: I suppose I haven't considered it as a literacy coordinator, but I have seen, you know, sporadic examples of stuff happening in individual teachers' classes. And I don't think very much collaborative writing happens. And there have been a few projects over the years where, you know, groups would put together especially during the artwork, where they put together kind of, you know, notices for the parents or description of what the artwork was, or an interview with the artists. So yeah, there has been occasional sporadic things that have happened, but it hasn't been and they've always been great. And the children have always responded so well to those projects. But I suppose we haven't transferred that yet into a daily normal practice that's to be discussed in our school.

NW: Okay, perfect. Great stuff. Okay. Thanks a million. And I'm just going to, I'm going to stop the recording and just after that.

Appendix G: 7 Steps to Teaching a Writing Genre

(Adapted from the Professional Development Service for Teachers, 2013:35)

Sample plan for implementation of a genre over a seven-week timeframe

Week 1:

- Familiarisation - showing the children lots of examples of this genre
- Discovery (direct model) - engaging in focussed talk and discussion, questioning, etc.
- Teacher models (teacher writes their own sample of that genre using their own ideas, not the children's)

Week 2:

- Familiarisation
- Discovery (analysing text) breaking down the text into its various subheadings, etc.
- Teacher models - highlighting the structure, the language features, grammar and so on.

Week 3:

- Modelled writing
- Shared writing-teacher writes the children's ideas

Week 4:

- Modelled writing
- Guided writing- using frameworks devised by teacher or the resource book

Week 5:

- Modelled writing
- Independent construction

Week 6:

- Modelled writing
- Independent construction
- to audience (reading it for different classes, hall display, school website, class book, parish newsletter, etc.)

Week 7:

- Independent construction
- Presentation to audience

Appendix H: Support Materials for Teachers

(Adapted from the Support Materials for Teachers, Primary Language Curriculum, 2020:34)

Writing Genres
The teacher should plan approximately 6-8 weeks. Using the writing workshop as an instructional method, the key elements of a genre can be thought in mini lessons (see previous section on writing workshop)

Appendix I: Timeframe for Teaching a Genre

Year 1: Formal	***Revise***	**Year 2: Formal**	***Revise***
Recount	*Narrative*	Narrative	*Recount*
Explanation	*Procedural*	Procedural	*Explanation*
Report	*Persuasive*	Persuasive	*Report*
	(exposition)	(exposition)	